

POLITENESS AND INFORMATION QUESTIONING STYLES OF CASHIERS AMONG SELECTED FAST-FOOD CHAINS

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Abstract

This study identified the views of politeness and information questioning style of the interaction between the cashiers and their customers. By recording the interactions between the cashiers and customers, the results revealed that the predominant level of politeness was “Don’t impose” while direct order was the frequently used information questioning style. Males were found to be more polite because they frequently used compound request than female cashiers. Hence, this study showed evidence that male crew members were more polite compared to female counterparts.

Keywords: *cashier, crew, customer, interaction, politeness*

1. Introduction

The undergraduate thesis of Unabia and Lim (2010) focused on the Politeness that can be found in the status boxes or the comments in Facebook. In their study, they found that politeness can be applied in online communication. Also, in the study of Gibson (2009), the data she used to analyze the politeness in mixed gender interaction are the questions used by the cashiers in response to an ambiguous question. In this study, the researchers focused on the response of the crew member since the crew members will have to interact with the customers longer than the cashiers. In this study, the interactions between the customers and the crew members of the restaurants are considered the way of expressing politeness of the crew members towards the customers. It is indeed necessary to conduct this present study which focused on the interaction between the crew and clients.

The researchers wanted to determine how the cashiers interact with their clients in terms of politeness. These interactions will be the basis for analyzing the politeness of the cashiers towards the customers. Therefore, this present study focused on the levels, strategies and gender politeness of men and women cashiers towards the customers. This study used the framework of Lakoff (2004) in terms of levels, strategies and gender politeness.

Polite and impolite usage is one of the most researched topics in linguistics specifically in Pragmatics. The researchers decided to study about the levels, strategies, and gender politeness. Individuals can identify whether a person is polite through verbal or nonverbal meaning the notion of face. During the interaction, it is not only important to speak nice and use clear language but must also consider someone’s feeling (Fitriyana, 2007). This study used the framework based on Lakoff’s (2004, in Gibson, 2009) levels, strategies and gender politeness. There are different levels of politeness: being a direct order (e.g. Close the door), being simple request (e.g. Will you close the door?), and being compound request (e.g. Won’t you close the door?). The last example is said to be the most polite as it is phrased as a negative question, guessing that the hearer is going to say ‘no’. Thus, the hearer will be comfortable saying ‘no’ (Lakoff, 2004:51, in Gibson, 2009). In relation to this study, Brown and Levinson’s (1978, in O’Keeffe, A., Clancy, B., Adolphs, S., 2011) model of politeness is compared and contrasted with Watt’s (1989, in O’Keeffe, A., Clancy, B., Adolphs, S., 2011)

by demonstrating key features of these models.

Face is one's public self-image and is divided into two (2) parts: positive face and negative face, both of which need to be protected against face threatening acts (Brown and Levinson, 2004, in O'Keeffe, A., Clancy, B., Adolphs, S., 2011). In any social interactions, cooperation is needed between participants to maintain each other's positive and negative face needs. In addition, positive face refers to one's self-esteem whereas negative face refers to desire not to be imposed upon. Goffman (1967) stated that it is the image of the speaker and hearer that they would like to maintain during interaction.

According to Sperber and Wilson (1995, in O'Keeffe, A., Clancy, B., Adolphs, S., 2011) an utterance is relevant if the hearer has a background knowledge about what a speaker says, and if a hearer can interpret the message in a meaningful way. Messages are the verbal utterances and nonverbal behaviors to which meaning is attributed during communication (Verdeber, 2008:5). Also, Watts' (2003, in O'Keeffe, A., Clancy, B., Adolphs, S., 2011) theory of politeness is alternative to Brown and Levinson. He argues that there is no linguistics structure that can be considered naturally polite; rather, politeness arises from cooperation between single speakers and the context in which the interaction is being done. He identifies politeness as "linguistic behavior which is perceived to be beyond what is expected". In addition, this study addressed the growing literature of impoliteness. Politeness is defined as "a complex system for softening face-threatening behavior" according to Brown and Levinson (1978:59, in O'Keeffe, A., Clancy, B., Adolphs, S., 2011). Brown and Levinson's (2004) model examine Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle and Goffman's (1967, in O'Keeffe, A. et al, 2011) concept of face. To elaborate on the Cooperative Principle (CP), Grice created four maxims: quantity, quality, relation and manner. The first maxim of the CP is quantity: make your contribution as informative as required. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required. The second maxim of the CP is quality: Do not say what you believe to be false. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence. The third maxim of CP is relation: be relevant. The fourth maxim of the CP is manner: avoid obscurity of expression.

Lakoff (1975) proposed that there are two rules of politeness: (1) Be clear and (2) Be polite. Under 'Be clear' there are four (4) Cooperative Principle. The first maxim of the CP is quantity: make your contribution as informative as required. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required. Example speaker A: "Where are you going?" B: "Im going to the post office." In this example, B gives comments to A's statement without adding other information. The second maxim of the CP is quality: Do not say what you believe to be false. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence. Example speaker A: "Why did you come home late last night?" B: "The car was broken down." In this example, B gives the truth that his car was broken down so that he came late. The third maxim of CP is relation: be relevant. Example speaker A: "Where is my box of chocolates? B: "It is in your room." In this example, B's reply relates to the question, not talking about something else. The fourth maxim of the CP is manner: avoid obscurity of expression. Example speaker A: "Where was Alfred yesterday?" B: "Alfred went to the store and bought some whiskey." In this example, B's answer obeys the manner maxim: be orderly because she gives a clear explanation where A was.

Under 'Be polite' Lakoff (1975) devised the 'politeness principle' in three (3) maxims: (1) Don't impose, (2) Give options and (3) Make A feel good – be friendly. Lakoff (1975) suggested that there has to be rules when it comes to considering something to be polite or rude. By looking and seeing how different cultures matching acts are considered polite or

rude. Lakoff (1975) formed three (3) rules of politeness, which are as follows: (1) Formality: keep aloof, (2) Deference: give options, (3) Camaraderie: show sympathy. According to Lakoff (1975) the first rule is about formal politeness that is seen in etiquette books. This rule creates distance between the speaker and the hearer (Kuntsi, 2012). Lakoff (1975) stated that in the second rule, the hearer has the power to decide how to behave and act during interaction. The speaker can fake or be sincere and might use this rule even though he or she knows that making the decision will be entirely up to him/her.

This second rule can be used at the same time with both other rules. As an example, Lakoff (1975) mentions the use of hedges – words that are supposed to tone down the request, and/or indicate hesitancy in speech. However, according to Holmes (1995: 26) hedges are linguistic techniques that “reduce the force of an utterance”. Moreover, according to Coates (1989: 114) hedges are also used to respect the addressee’s face, and in addition, to protect the speaker’s face. Coates (1989: 114) states that hedges are used “not because the speaker doubts the truth but because she does not want to offend her addressees by assuming their agreement” (Kuntsi, 2012).

The third rule presented by Lakoff (1975: 89-90), shows sympathy and cannot be used together with the first rule since both simply rule each other out. When a speaker is using the third rule, he or she is making the addressee feel liked, or part of the same team. In this rule, the speaker let the addressee feel like and welcomed by using conversational or informal language like telling jokes and using nicknames (Kuntsi, 2012).

Brown and Levinson’s (1978, in Cutrone, 2011) theory of linguistic politeness has dominated research in pragmatics for a number of decades. This consists of two parts: a fundamental theory concerning the nature of politeness and how it functions in interaction, and a list of politeness strategies, drawing on examples from mainly three languages (i.e., English, Tzeltal, and Tamil). The basic premise is that politeness in any culture can be explained in terms of a limited number of universal phenomena, namely the construct of face and certain social variables – i.e., differences in power (P), social distance (D) and the relative imposition of particular acts (R). Matsumoto (1988, 1989, 1993 in Cutrone, 2011) argues that the concept of face, particularly that of negative face, is “alien” to Japanese culture, and that Brown and Levinson’s concept of face, based on Anglo-Saxon tradition and individualism, is not suitable to account for polite linguistic behaviour in Japanese.

In relation to this present study, Pishghadam and Navari (2012), they investigated the function of Politeness in Advertisement. They used 100 English and Persian ads from the most popular magazines. They analyzed the data to get the politeness strategy and the subcategory and then their frequencies were computed. The analysis of the result was based on Brown and Levinson (1987) politeness functions. The results pointed out that English Ads made more use of positive politeness strategies while Persian Ads used more of the off-record strategies. In this study, however, the researchers will focus on the functions of Politeness in the verbal interaction of the restaurant crew members towards the customers.

Also, a study of Kuntsi (2012) focused on the politeness and impoliteness in the speech of lawyers. The framework that is used in determining the politeness strategies that are used in the speech is from Brown and Levinson (1987) and for the impoliteness strategies by Culpeper (1996, in Kuntsi, 2012). The study only used a single source for the data and that is from the “the dover trial”. On the other hand, the present study will only focus on politeness and will not anymore delve into the study of impoliteness. The framework that the researchers will use for determining the strategies of politeness will be from Lakoff (2004). The researchers will get their sources of data from the different restaurants.

Furthermore, some studies like Lakoff (1976) and Beeching (2002) have shown that women are more probably to use politeness method than men, though the concrete differences are not clear. Lakoff (2004) claims that young girls are taught to speak and act like ladies, and are reprimanded if they do not. Boys aren't treated so harshly and are not discouraged from using 'rough talk' like girls are, as this behavior is more socially acceptable (Lakoff, 2004 cited in the article entitled "The differences of politeness strategy used by male and female"). She claimed that men are taught to speak more politely with women than with other men, Montgomery's (1998, in Gibson, 2009) theory claiming that both male and female speakers use polite language when speaking to women.

In comparison with this present study, Gibson (2009) conducted a study about politeness. She examined the effect that gender has on polite questioning techniques used in mixed-gender conversation. The data were gathered from 21 fast food retailers and they analyzed the response of the cashiers to an unclear request. The data were rated both holistically and analytically by counting the morphemes used in the question. Lakoff (2004, cited in Gibson, 2009) also claims that women's use of tag questions is a part of speech that makes women sound more polite. But the result of Gibson's (2009) study contradicts such theories because the study was found out that cashiers were more polite to the face of their opposite sex than they are with their same sex. In this present study, the researchers will not just focus on the politeness of gender but also its level and strategies. The subject of the study will be the restaurant crew members and that this will only cover three restaurants. The researchers hope to bring new ideas to the area of politeness and gender. In addition, Cutting (2008, in O'Keeffe, Clancy, & Adolphs, 2011) stated that when people talk about politeness, "people refer to the choices that are made in language use, the linguistic expressions that give people space and show a friendly attitude to them" (p. 44-5).

This study aimed at identifying and analyzing the level, strategies and gender politeness (Lakoff, 2004) between crew members and customers interaction among these restaurants: Hukad, Siam and Casa Verde. This study further attempted to answer the following questions: (i) Which level of politeness is more dominant between crew members and customers interaction? (Lakoff, 2004), (ii) Which politeness strategies were mostly used by crew members during interaction? (Lakoff, 2004), and (iii) Who shows more politeness in gender towards the costumer during interaction? (Lakoff, 2004)?

2. Research Method

This study used a qualitative-quantitative type of research which is dependent on words and sentences from crew member's responses to the customers. The analyses focused on the levels, strategies and gender politeness. The data were gathered, classified and analyzed through the interaction between the crew member and the customer.

Research Environment

The study was conducted in Ayala Center Cebu specifically to these restaurants: Hukad, Siam and Casa Verde. The researchers chose these restaurants because instead of having the cashier take the customer's orders, a designated crew member will take the orders thus making the interaction between the customers and the crew member longer. These restaurants are often busy since these are known restaurants so the crew members tend to move faster and have to entertain a lot of customers. The interaction of the crew members towards the customers were the data of this study.

Research Participants

The participants of this study were the crew members in the three (3) restaurants: Hukad, Siam, and Casa Verde. There were two men and two women crew members as participants in this study. The participants were chosen depending on who took the orders.

Research Tool

The student-researchers used the application Voice Memo of the iPhone4 and the video recorder of the Samsung Galaxy Tab 10.1 to record the interaction between the crew members and the customers.

Research Procedures

Gathering of Data

The researchers went to the three restaurants, namely Siam, Casa Verde and Hukad. The researchers with their friends ordered from the menu. They randomly asked questions to the crew member about the food. This interaction was recorded by the researchers without letting the crew member be aware of the recording. The recorded interaction served as the data for this study.

Treatment of Data

The sub-problems were all answered based on the theory of Lakoff (2004). The six (6) interactions that were recorded from the different crew members were classified and analyzed to answer the first, second and third sub-problem. From the data gathered, results were tabulated.

3. Findings and Discussion

This section provides the results and discussion on the views of politeness and the information questioning style of cashiers of the selected restaurants in Cebu City.

Views of Politeness

Table 1. Views of Politeness

N= 39

Views of Politeness	Frequency of Occurrence		Total
	Male	Female	
Don't Impose	9	11	20
Give Options	9	10	19
Encourage Feelings of Camaraderie	0	0	0

As shown in Table 1, *Don't impose* is found to be the predominant view of politeness as demonstrated by the selected cashiers. However, this study showed that female cashiers tend to use *Don't impose* and *Give options* more frequently compared to their male counterparts. According to Lakoff (1973 in Shigenaga, 2002), *Don't impose* is used to avoid impeding the addressee's desires or in this situation, the addressee is the customer. *Give options* gives the addressee (i.e. customer) the power to decide or reject the offer made by the cashier. On the contrary, Encourage the feeling of camaraderie was absent in both gender since the cashiers and customers are not close friends.

Extract 1: (Male)

- M6C11 : O Sprite
 M6C12 : Ok Sprite lahat? Isang PM1 at tyakang isang PM 1.5
 (Ok all sprite? One PM1 and one PM 5)
 M6C13 : Then isa ka PM5
 (Then one PM5)
 M6C14 : Wala po kaming PM5. Actually ang available lang po kay PM1 to PM2.
 (We don't have PM5. Actually, only PM 1 to PM2 are available.)
 Wala po kaming PM3 hanggang PM6.
 (We do not have PM3 to PM6)

Extract 2: Don't Impose by the Female Cashier

- FIR16 : You upgrade drinks?
 (Do you upgrade drinks?)
 FIR17 : Freebie?
 FIR18 : No
 FIR19 : Yeah. Pa-upgrade ka?
 (Yeah. Would you like an upgrade?)

In extract 2, the cashier confirmed to the customer that they grade drinks. But again, it is up to the customer if they will accept the offer because the decision is still theirs.

Extract 3: Give Options by Male 5 Cashier

- M5C10 : spicy? Drill?
 M5R11 : Spicy lang.
 (spicy only)
 M5C12 : So PMI. 5. How about your drinks? Coke or sprite?
 M5R13 : Sprite lang.
 (sprite only)

In extract 3, the cashier gave the customer 2 choices of drinks in which to order. You can identify this interaction as a sample of 'Give Options'.

Extract 4: Give options by Female 3 Cashier

- F3R13 : Ah excuse me Miss, pwedi pa add ug ah sundae?
 (Ah excuse me Miss, may you add sundae?)
 F3C14 : Chocolate? Strawberry?
 F3R15 : Strawberry.

In this interaction, the customer wanted to have an additional sundae and the cashier gave an option whether to have chocolate sundae or strawberry.

Overall, the views of politeness that are frequently used the male and female cashiers are 'Don't Impose' and 'Give options'. 1 Encourage feelings of Camaraderie', however, did not occur or was not used because as what have defined by Lakoff (1973, in Shigenaga,

2002). The third type is expected not to be present in this study because it is only applicable between close friends. The cashiers and the customers do not really know each other and does not have any relations at all. Despite the cashiers and the customers do not know each other, there were still a polite interaction going on. Politeness can happen anywhere at any time. In relation with this study, politeness can also be present in the form of asking random questions, or asking of information.

Information Questioning Style

Table 2. Information Questioning Style
N=12

Information Questioning Style	Frequency of Occurrence		Total
	Male	Female	
Direct Order	3	2	5
Simple Request	1	2	3
Compound Request	3	1	4

As shown in Table 2, the data revealed that the dominantly used information questioning style by the cashiers was Direct Order with a total frequency of 5 on both male (3) and female (2) cashiers; *Compound Request* got a total frequency of 4 on both male (3) and female (1) cashiers; Simple Request which was the second type, got the lowest frequency of 3. The data revealed that most male cashiers used 'Direct order' and 'Compound Request' while female cashiers used 'Simple request more when interacting with their customers. Male cashiers gave more direct orders to their opposite sex and were using compound request. Male cashiers are not usually using request, but they usually used compound request, which is simple to be the most polite. Lakoff (2004, in Gibson, 2009) claims that women use more compound request than men, but in this study female cashiers only used compound request once. Male cashiers, however, were fond of using compound request. Compound request is said to be the most polite as it is phrased in a negative way. Thus, the hearer will be comfortable in refusing the request. In this study, the male cashiers often used compound request that were raised negatively. When men talk to women, the majority of them do not recognize the language they are using; they do not become conscious about the things they are saying. This because men are trained to use polite language when talking women than with the same sex (Lakoff, 2004: 5 in Gibson, women question in a more polite manner than men as what was in Gibson, 2009). Therefore, the findings of Gibson's (2009) study seem to agree with the findings this present study that the male cashiers are more polite compared to the female cashiers. Women appear more attentive listeners who are concerned to ensure others to get a chance to contribute. In other words, women are also considered polite since they exhibit negative politeness, they tend to give them a chance by giving them the floor or letting them talk share their opinions. Both men and women are using negative politeness, but men, however, are more competitive compared to women. This is because male cashiers prefer to avoid imposing or presuming, and to give the options. Men talk more than women. This is possibly ones on why men are considered more polite than women. Even though they tend to compete with the others, they also talk more understood or to be socially dominant.

Table 3. Gender Politeness

Variable	Computed t-value	Critical Value	Decision on Ho	Interpretation
Information Questening Style Between Male and Female Cashiers	-0.89443	2.776445	failed to reject the hypothesis	not significant

Using the data analysis tool pak, that is, an add-in statistical tool, a t-test was conducted with the assistance of the statistician, the results show that the computed value is less than the critical value which led to the non-rejection of the null hypothesis. This means that there is no significant difference between the male and female cashiers' use of the information questioning style.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the results, the following conclusions were made. First, *Don't impose* was frequently used view of politeness because of the social distance between the cashiers and their customers. Cashiers only offer options to customers before the latter make a decision on what food they would choose to eat. Second, *direct order* was found to be the predominant information questioning style which is followed by the *compound request*. These results could be attributed to training of the cashiers underwent before they are directly exposed to the clients. These indicate the professionalism of the employees of the said restaurants as they adhere to the standards set by their management and marketing departments.

Based on the conclusions, these are the recommendations: First, future studies could widen the scope of data by adding restaurants and participants with equal number. Second, the recorded data coming from the customers' replies could be included in the future studies. Third, store or restaurant owners should examine the cashier's use of politeness strategies before hiring them to have an effective representation of their company.

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