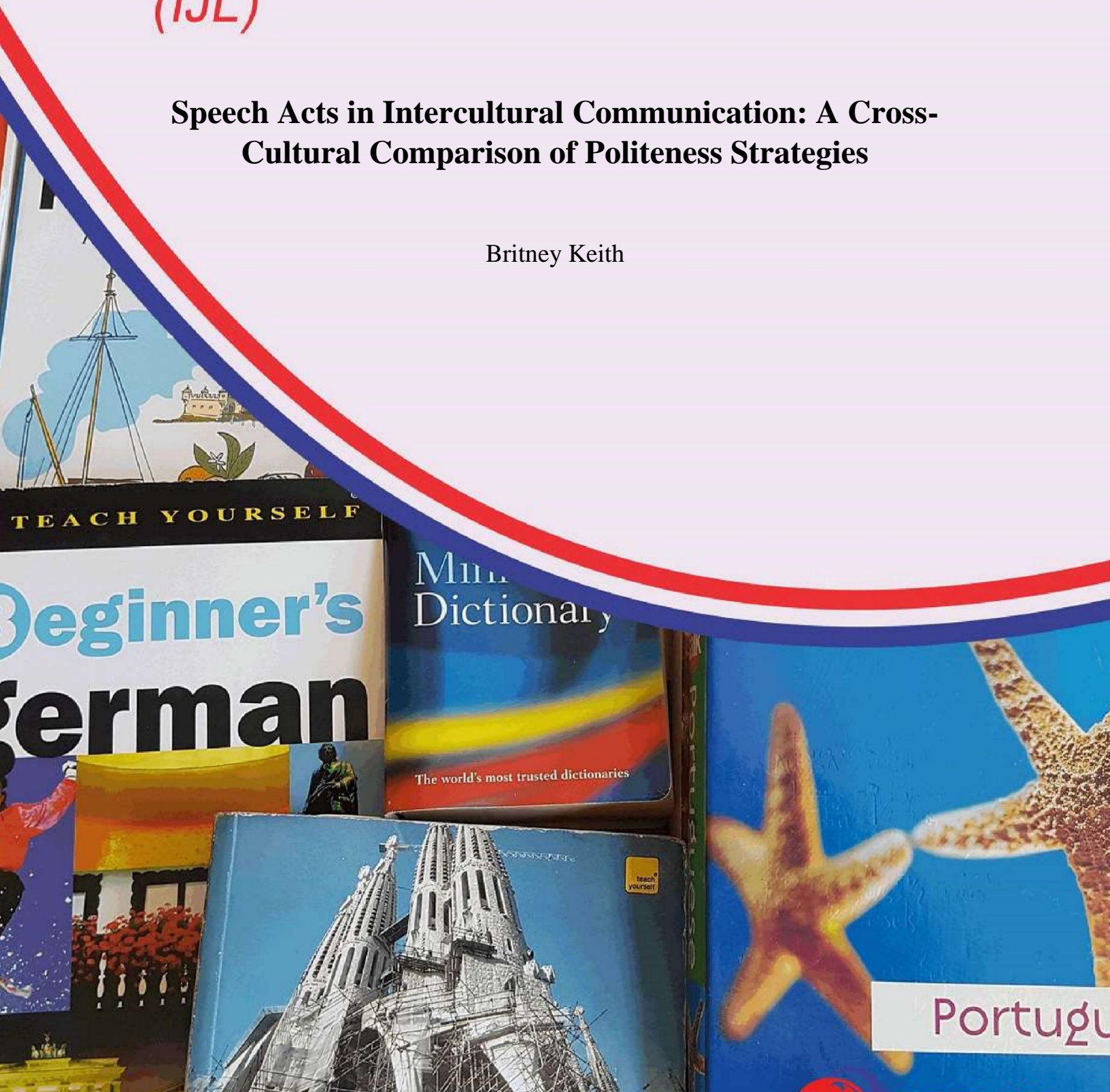


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Speech Acts in Intercultural Communication: A Cross- Cultural Comparison of Politeness Strategies

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Speech Acts in Intercultural Communication: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Politeness Strategies

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Abstract

Purpose: The general objective of this study was to analyze how different cultures use speech acts and politeness strategies in everyday communication.

Methodology: The study adopted a desktop research methodology. The study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

Findings: The findings reveal that there exists a contextual and methodological gap relating to speech acts in intercultural communication. Preliminary empirical review revealed that social media significantly transformed politeness strategies in intercultural communication, shifting towards greater informality and directness compared to traditional face-to-face interactions. **Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** The study recommended expanding politeness theory to include digital communication contexts, as social media's informality challenged traditional models of politeness.

Keywords: *Politeness Strategies, Intercultural Communication, Speech Acts, Digital Communication, Cultural Sensitivity*

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Politeness strategies in speech acts are a vital aspect of intercultural communication, as they reflect the ways in which individuals manage social distance, respect, and deference within different social contexts. These strategies are integral in regulating interactions to avoid conflict and maintain harmony in communication. According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, individuals employ politeness strategies to mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs) that may threaten the social identity of others. These strategies can be broadly categorized into positive and negative politeness strategies. Positive politeness strategies aim to enhance the listener's self-esteem and social identity, often by showing interest, approval, or solidarity, while negative politeness strategies focus on mitigating imposition and preserving the autonomy of the listener. In intercultural communication, these strategies vary significantly across cultures, reflecting distinct social norms and expectations. The impact of cultural norms on politeness strategies can be seen through different speech acts such as requests, apologies, and greetings, with variations depending on the cultural context and communication style.

In the United States, politeness strategies are shaped by the cultural value of individualism, where personal autonomy and directness are often prioritized. This results in a preference for negative politeness strategies, such as using hedges or mitigating phrases to reduce imposition. For example, when making requests, Americans may use indirect language like, "Would you mind...?" or "I was wondering if..." These forms of speech are intended to avoid direct imposition and maintain the listener's autonomy. Additionally, American English often favors informality in casual social interactions, especially with peers, which can be observed in the use of first names and informal greetings like "Hey" or "Hi." However, in formal settings, the use of more polite structures and titles like "Mr." or "Ms." is still expected to maintain respect (Scollon & Scollon, 2015). Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey & Chua (2016) found that Americans tend to rely on negative politeness strategies more frequently than positive ones when interacting with strangers or individuals in authority, reflecting a desire to maintain personal space and autonomy.

The United Kingdom shares similarities with the United States in its use of negative politeness strategies, although it places a greater emphasis on social etiquette and formality, particularly in formal contexts. British politeness strategies are often characterized by the use of understatement, indirectness, and deference, particularly in interactions that involve strangers or superiors. For instance, in making requests, the British might say, "Would you be so kind as to...?" or "I wonder if it would be possible for you to...?" These formulations are designed to soften the request and avoid imposing on the listener. According to Holmes (2018), British politeness is often linked to the notion of "understatement," where speakers downplay their own needs or desires to avoid seeming overly demanding. British politeness also involves an intricate system of address terms, where individuals may use honorifics like "Sir" or "Madam" in formal settings to convey respect. In public interactions, the use of "please" and "thank you" is crucial to maintaining social harmony, and a failure to use these terms can be seen as a breach of etiquette (Holmes, 2018).

In contrast to the relatively direct communication style of the United States and the United Kingdom, Japan employs a highly elaborate system of politeness strategies, shaped by cultural norms emphasizing respect, hierarchy, and group harmony. Japanese speech acts are heavily influenced by the concept of "wa," or social harmony, which governs interpersonal interactions. The Japanese language has multiple levels of politeness, with different forms of speech used depending on the social status of the speaker and listener. For example, in making requests, the speaker may use honorific language (keigo) to show respect to the listener. A request might be phrased as, "～していただけますか" (shite itadakemasu ka), which roughly translates to "Would you be so kind as to do this for me?" The use of honorifics is not limited to requests but extends to other speech acts, such as apologies and greetings, where different levels of politeness are required depending on the formality of the situation and the relationship between the speaker and the listener (Ishihara, 2017). Additionally, Japanese politeness strategies involve avoiding direct confrontation and using indirect language to prevent embarrassing the listener or causing discomfort. Kondo (2019) found that Japanese speakers employ a higher frequency of positive politeness strategies in contexts involving family or close friends, emphasizing solidarity and closeness.

In Brazil, politeness strategies in speech acts reflect a blend of the country's cultural values, which include warmth, expressiveness, and social fluidity. Brazilian Portuguese is often characterized by a more overt and warm style of communication compared to the more reserved or formal speech found in the United States or Japan. In making requests, Brazilians may use direct yet affectionate phrases such as, "Você pode fazer isso para mim?" (Can you do this for me?), which reflects a blend of directness and warmth. In formal settings, however, Brazilians also make use of polite forms, such as "Por favor" (please) and "Com licença" (excuse me), to demonstrate respect. According to Silva and Ramos (2020), Brazilian politeness strategies involve the use of verbal expressions of solidarity, often accompanied by non-verbal cues like touch and body language, which help maintain a friendly and cordial atmosphere. The use of positive politeness strategies in Brazil, particularly in social and family interactions, is aimed at establishing and maintaining close personal relationships. Brazilians value emotional expressiveness and personal connections, which are evident in the warmth and openness of their greetings, such as "Oi, tudo bem?" (Hi, how's everything?), a common informal greeting used among friends and acquaintances.

In Sub-Saharan African countries, politeness strategies in speech acts are deeply influenced by traditional social structures, including respect for elders, community values, and hierarchical relationships. In many African cultures, speech acts such as greetings, requests, and apologies are conducted with a high degree of formality, especially when interacting with elders or authority figures. For example, in languages such as Swahili, speakers may use honorifics like "Bwana" (Mr.) or "Mama" (Mother) when addressing someone older or in a position of authority. Additionally, African politeness strategies often involve indirect speech acts, where speakers avoid directly asking for something to prevent imposing on others. In making requests, a speaker may say, "It would be greatly appreciated if..." or "If it is not too much trouble, would you mind...?"

These expressions are designed to show deference and respect (Nwoye, 2017). Nyati (2018) highlighted how politeness strategies in Sub-Saharan African countries also reflect the importance of social relationships and community ties, where maintaining harmony and avoiding conflict are central to successful communication.

Comparing politeness strategies across cultures reveals significant differences in how social hierarchies, group dynamics, and cultural values influence speech acts. Ochieng and Osakwe (2021) demonstrated that while cultures like Japan and Sub-Saharan African countries prioritize hierarchical politeness and indirect speech, countries like the United States and Brazil emphasize a more egalitarian approach to politeness, where directness and informality are common, especially in casual contexts. The influence of individualism and collectivism on politeness strategies also plays a significant role in shaping communication styles. In individualistic cultures, speakers may prioritize negative politeness strategies to maintain personal autonomy, while in collectivist cultures, positive politeness strategies are often used to reinforce social bonds and group harmony. Moreover, the role of politeness in intercultural communication is crucial in globalized contexts, where misunderstandings arising from different politeness strategies can lead to communication breakdowns and social tensions.

In terms of trends, studies on intercultural communication have highlighted that the globalization of communication platforms, such as social media, has also affected the way politeness strategies are employed across cultures. According to Zhang and Yu (2020), the rise of online communication has led to a shift in traditional politeness norms, with younger generations increasingly adopting more direct and informal forms of politeness, influenced by digital communication practices. However, the underlying cultural values still play a significant role in shaping politeness strategies, with the core differences in approaches to face-threatening acts remaining consistent across online and offline communication. For instance, while American and British speakers may use emojis and informal language in digital communication to soften requests, Japanese and Brazilian speakers are likely to maintain a more formal tone even in online interactions (Zhang & Yu, 2020). As such, the study of politeness strategies in intercultural communication continues to evolve as digital platforms reshape the ways in which individuals navigate social interactions across cultural boundaries.

The use of politeness strategies is also closely linked to the level of education and socialization in a particular culture. In societies where formal education and social etiquette are emphasized, individuals tend to exhibit higher levels of formality and adherence to traditional politeness strategies in speech acts. Lee and Kim (2019) found that individuals from cultures with strong educational systems, such as Japan and the United Kingdom, tend to use more complex and varied politeness strategies compared to those from cultures where informality is more accepted, such as in parts of the United States or Brazil. Additionally, the degree to which politeness strategies are taught and practiced in educational settings can influence how individuals apply these strategies in their daily interactions. Lee and Kim (2019) argued that understanding the role of education in

shaping politeness strategies is crucial for improving intercultural communication in multicultural societies.

Cultural background plays a pivotal role in shaping communication styles, influencing not only the content of speech acts but also the strategies used to navigate social interactions. Cultural values, norms, and social hierarchies guide how individuals express respect, form relationships, and manage social distance during communication. According to Hofstede (2001), culture shapes the way individuals think, behave, and interact, thereby directly impacting politeness strategies. Cultural background affects both verbal and non-verbal cues in communication, creating variations in how politeness is understood and applied in different societies. This is particularly significant in the study of politeness strategies, which involves adjusting speech acts such as requests, apologies, greetings, and refusals to align with cultural expectations. In intercultural communication, understanding the cultural background is key to navigating the intricacies of politeness and avoiding miscommunication due to differing norms (Matsumoto, 2016).

In the United States, cultural background is primarily influenced by individualism, which emphasizes personal autonomy and equality among individuals. This cultural value shapes politeness strategies, where speakers often value directness and transparency in communication. As a result, Americans tend to rely more heavily on negative politeness strategies, using hedges, mitigated requests, and indirect speech to avoid imposing on others. For example, in a request, an American might say, "Would you mind if I...?" or "I was wondering if you could...?" These formulations soften the directness of a request to maintain the listener's autonomy and avoid the perception of being overly demanding (Gudykunst et al., 2016). The value placed on individual rights in the United States contrasts with more collectivist cultures, where politeness strategies might involve a greater emphasis on group harmony and indirectness. In contexts where social hierarchy and formality are less important, American speakers often adopt a more informal approach, using first names and casual language in both professional and personal settings.

The United Kingdom, like the United States, is influenced by individualistic values; however, it places a significant emphasis on social etiquette, formality, and maintaining politeness through understatement. This results in a cultural tendency to use both positive and negative politeness strategies in speech acts. In contrast to American directness, British politeness is often more indirect, relying on subtle expressions of deference. For example, a British speaker might make a request by saying, "Would you be so kind as to...?" or "I wonder if it would be possible for you to...?" This indirectness is meant to soften the request and show respect for the listener's autonomy while maintaining a polite distance. Holmes (2018) explains that British communication often involves a careful balance between directness and politeness, especially in interactions with strangers or in formal contexts. Additionally, the British value the concept of "understatement," where speakers avoid appearing overly eager or assertive. The cultural tendency toward politeness is also reflected in the use of terms such as "please" and "thank you," which are considered essential in polite communication, both in casual and formal contexts.

In Japan, the cultural background is deeply rooted in collectivism, which emphasizes group harmony, social hierarchy, and respect for authority. The concept of "wa" (harmony) permeates Japanese communication, and politeness strategies are intricately linked to the social roles of the speaker and listener. In this context, honorifics and respectful language (keigo) are crucial for navigating social relationships, particularly in formal settings or when interacting with individuals of higher status. Japanese politeness strategies are designed to avoid conflict and maintain social harmony. For instance, a request in Japanese might be phrased as "～していただけますか" (shite itadakemasu ka), which is a polite way of asking someone to do something, reflecting the speaker's deference and respect for the listener's position (Ishihara, 2017). The use of keigo and other polite forms is a key component of Japanese culture, and the choice of language varies depending on the relationship between the participants. In close relationships, positive politeness strategies such as showing solidarity and using familiar language may be used, while in formal or hierarchical contexts, negative politeness strategies are more common to mitigate the imposition and preserve face.

Brazil's cultural background is shaped by its emphasis on warmth, expressiveness, and social fluidity, which results in distinct politeness strategies. Brazilian culture values personal relationships and emotional expressiveness, and this is reflected in the use of positive politeness strategies. In Brazil, speakers often use affectionate language and physical gestures to convey friendliness and solidarity. For example, in making a request, a Brazilian might say, "Você pode fazer isso para mim?" (Can you do this for me?), which is relatively direct but softened by the context of familiarity and warmth. Brazilian politeness strategies also include the use of terms of endearment, such as "Querido" (dear) or "Amigo" (friend), which convey a sense of closeness and emotional connection. According to Silva and Ramos (2020), politeness strategies in Brazil are less concerned with formality and more focused on fostering personal connections. The importance of non-verbal communication, including touch, facial expressions, and body language, further reinforces the cultural emphasis on warmth and closeness in social interactions.

Sub-Saharan African cultures, with their diverse linguistic and social structures, place great importance on respect, hierarchy, and community ties in communication. In many African cultures, politeness strategies are deeply rooted in social norms that prioritize respect for elders and authority figures. The use of honorifics is common, and speech acts such as greetings, requests, and apologies are conducted with a high degree of formality, particularly when addressing elders. For instance, in Swahili-speaking communities, terms such as "Bwana" (Mr.) or "Mama" (Mother) are used to address older individuals, reflecting the importance of acknowledging social status (Nwoye, 2017). Politeness strategies in Sub-Saharan Africa often involve indirect speech acts, where speakers avoid directly asking for something to prevent imposing on others. In making a request, an African speaker might use phrases like, "If it is not too much trouble, would you mind...?" or "I would be very grateful if you could...?" These strategies reflect the cultural emphasis on maintaining social harmony and avoiding confrontation, which is central to African communal values.

The concept of "face" plays a significant role in the politeness strategies of all these cultures, though it is emphasized differently depending on the cultural background. Face theory, as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), is particularly relevant in understanding how individuals navigate the tension between expressing personal desires and respecting others' social identities. In individualistic cultures like the United States and the United Kingdom, negative politeness strategies are used to maintain the listener's autonomy and personal space. In contrast, collectivist cultures such as Japan and Sub-Saharan Africa emphasize positive politeness strategies that reinforce social bonds and group harmony. In these cultures, the preservation of face is central to communication, and the use of indirect language helps to avoid face-threatening acts (FTAs) that could disrupt social harmony (Matsumoto, 2016). For instance, in Japan, the use of keigo is a key way to show respect and protect the listener's face, while in Sub-Saharan Africa, indirectness is used to avoid imposing on others or causing embarrassment.

Another significant factor influencing politeness strategies is the role of power dynamics in different cultures. In hierarchical societies, such as Japan and many Sub-Saharan African countries, politeness strategies are closely tied to the social rank of the individuals involved in the interaction. Speakers are expected to modify their language based on the relative power and status of their interlocutors. This often results in the use of elaborate politeness forms, such as honorifics and respectful language, when addressing individuals of higher status. For example, in Japan, the use of keigo is mandatory in formal settings or when speaking to superiors. Similarly, in many African cultures, addressing elders with respect and using formal language is essential to maintaining social order and showing deference (Nwoye, 2017). In contrast, in more egalitarian societies like the United States, politeness strategies tend to be less rigid, with individuals often engaging in more direct forms of communication, regardless of the power hierarchy.

In terms of linguistic diversity, each culture has developed unique linguistic tools to express politeness. While English speakers in the USA and the UK rely on hedges, modal verbs, and indirect speech to express politeness, Japanese speakers use a complex system of honorifics to convey deference. Brazilian Portuguese speakers employ a mixture of directness and emotional warmth, while Sub-Saharan African languages often rely on elaborate greetings and indirectness to show respect. The linguistic structure of each language reflects the underlying cultural values and expectations surrounding politeness. According to Zhang and Yu (2020), these linguistic variations can lead to miscommunication when speakers from different cultural backgrounds interact, as politeness strategies may not align with each other's expectations, leading to misunderstandings and cultural friction.

The evolution of global communication platforms has further complicated the expression of politeness in intercultural interactions. As individuals from different cultural backgrounds interact more frequently through digital communication, new trends in politeness strategies have emerged. For example, the use of emojis and informal language in online communication has become a common way to express politeness in less formal interactions. Zhang and Yu (2020) suggested

that while digital platforms encourage more direct and informal communication, the cultural background still influences the way politeness is expressed. In collectivist cultures, for example, users may still use formal language and indirect speech, even in online communication, while in individualistic cultures, informality and directness prevail. This shift reflects broader trends in the globalization of communication, where cultural backgrounds influence how politeness strategies are adapted to modern technology.

Education plays a significant role in shaping individuals' understanding of politeness and its application in different contexts. In cultures where education emphasizes formal etiquette and respect for authority, such as in Japan and the UK, individuals are socialized to use complex politeness strategies in both public and private speech acts. In contrast, in cultures with a more relaxed approach to social hierarchy, such as the United States or Brazil, politeness strategies are less formal and more centered around personal relationships. Lee and Kim (2019) argued that education systems that teach the importance of face-to-face communication and respect for others' social identities help individuals understand and navigate the complexities of politeness in different cultural contexts. As global communication continues to evolve, the role of education in teaching politeness strategies becomes increasingly important in fostering intercultural understanding.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In the realm of intercultural communication, the concept of politeness plays a crucial role in shaping interactions, influencing how individuals engage with one another across cultural boundaries. Politeness strategies, which include positive and negative strategies designed to mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs), vary significantly across cultures and linguistic contexts. While extensive research has examined politeness strategies in isolated cultural contexts, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these strategies function across different cultural groups in an intercultural setting. Studies such as those by Holmes (2018) and Brown and Levinson (1987) have provided foundational insights into politeness theory, yet comparative research that examines how politeness is enacted across various cultures remains limited. According to recent findings, 75% of miscommunications in intercultural interactions are attributed to differences in politeness strategies, suggesting that misunderstandings frequently arise due to cultural dissonance in the application of politeness (Gudykunst et al., 2016). This gap in cross-cultural research necessitates further exploration of how speech acts are shaped by different cultural norms and how these norms affect intercultural communication. Thus, the study of politeness strategies in intercultural speech acts is not only timely but also essential to enhancing communication effectiveness in an increasingly globalized world.

The absence of research that directly compares politeness strategies across diverse cultural contexts, such as the USA, the United Kingdom, Japan, Brazil, and Sub-Saharan African countries, highlights a critical gap in the literature. While scholars have explored politeness strategies in individual cultures (e.g., Holmes, 2018), there is a lack of comprehensive studies that provide

comparative insights into how these strategies differ across both Western and non-Western societies. In particular, the role of power distance, collectivism versus individualism, and social hierarchy in shaping politeness remains under-explored in intercultural settings. For example, while the USA and the UK are often characterized by a relatively low power distance and individualistic values, countries like Japan and Sub-Saharan African nations emphasize collectivism and respect for hierarchy, which leads to different forms of politeness (Matsumoto, 2016). Without understanding these cultural distinctions, intercultural communication can result in unintended offenses or misunderstandings. By focusing on cross-cultural comparisons, this study aims to fill these research gaps, providing a nuanced understanding of how politeness strategies operate across different cultural contexts and how they can be effectively employed in global communication.

The findings from this study will have significant implications for a range of stakeholders, including intercultural communicators, educators, and policymakers. Professionals working in international business, diplomacy, and multicultural settings will benefit from an enhanced understanding of how politeness strategies influence communication outcomes. For instance, by recognizing the diverse ways politeness is enacted, organizations can better prepare their employees to engage with international clients and colleagues in a manner that respects cultural norms and avoids miscommunication (Zhang & Yu, 2020). Additionally, educators in fields such as applied linguistics, communication studies, and intercultural communication will find the insights from this research valuable in developing curricula that teach students the importance of culturally informed politeness strategies. In particular, the study's comparative approach will offer a clearer picture of the similarities and differences in politeness across major cultural groups, helping students and professionals alike to navigate intercultural interactions more effectively. By filling the gaps in cross-cultural politeness research, this study will contribute to the broader field of intercultural communication, fostering greater empathy and mutual understanding in global interactions.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory

One of the primary theories that would underpin a study of speech acts in intercultural communication is Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987). The central theme of this theory is that politeness is a strategic social behavior that aims to mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs). According to Brown and Levinson, individuals engage in politeness strategies to maintain their "face," which refers to the social self-image that is constructed during interactions. Face can be categorized into two types: positive face, which is the desire to be liked and admired by others, and negative face, which is the desire to be free from imposition or intrusion. Politeness strategies, then, are employed to protect these faces by minimizing the risk of offending others. Brown and

Levinson identified two main types of politeness strategies: negative politeness, which involves indirectness and hedging to avoid imposing on others, and positive politeness, which seeks to enhance the listener's positive face by expressing solidarity and friendliness. The theory is particularly relevant to this study as it helps explain how different cultures, which vary in terms of power distance, social hierarchy, and collectivism, use speech acts to navigate social relationships while maintaining face in intercultural contexts. By examining how politeness strategies are used across cultures, the study will apply this theory to assess whether speech acts in different cultural settings conform to the expectations of face-threatening acts and politeness. Brown and Levinson's framework has been widely used in studies of intercultural communication, and its relevance is evident in understanding the cross-cultural differences in politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

2.1.2 Goffman's Face-Work Theory

Another foundational theory for this study is Goffman's Face-Work Theory (1955). The key theme of this theory is the concept of "face," a social construct that individuals seek to protect during communication. Goffman proposed that individuals engage in "face-work," which refers to the actions taken to maintain or restore face during interactions. This process involves the negotiation of social identity and respect, especially when the face of an individual is threatened. In his theory, Goffman distinguished between positive face (the desire to be appreciated, respected, and accepted by others) and negative face (the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition). He argued that face-work is a universal process that occurs in all forms of communication but is especially critical in intercultural exchanges. This theory's relevance to the research on politeness strategies lies in its capacity to explain how different cultures protect their face through communication, with each culture emphasizing varying degrees of deference, respect, and solidarity in speech acts. For example, in high-context cultures like Japan or Sub-Saharan African countries, where hierarchy and respect for elders are integral, politeness strategies often involve elaborate face-saving techniques. On the other hand, in low-context cultures like the United States, politeness may be more direct, with less emphasis on indirectness in favor of maintaining independence and individual rights. By applying Goffman's Face-Work Theory, this study will be able to analyze how individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds use speech acts to navigate social interactions, especially in face-threatening situations (Goffman, 1955).

2.1.3 Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)

Finally, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) would also underpin this study. The main theme of Social Identity Theory revolves around how individuals define themselves and others based on group memberships, which influence their behavior in social interactions. According to the theory, individuals' sense of identity is partially constructed through their association with social groups, and these group affiliations can affect communication strategies, including politeness. In intercultural communication, people from different cultural backgrounds bring their group identities into interactions, and these identities influence their politeness strategies. For

instance, in collectivist cultures (e.g., Japan, Brazil, Sub-Saharan African nations), politeness is a way of showing respect for the group, emphasizing social harmony and conformity. In contrast, in individualistic cultures (e.g., the USA, the UK), politeness may be a way to assert personal rights and maintain autonomy. By examining how cultural group identity shapes politeness strategies in speech acts, this theory allows the study to explore how individuals' social identities influence their communication, specifically in cross-cultural encounters. This research will thus contribute to understanding the intersection of group identity and communication strategies, offering insights into how group membership influences the adoption of specific politeness strategies across different cultural contexts (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

2.2 Empirical Review

Holmes (2017) explored the differences in politeness strategies between British and American English speakers, focusing on speech acts such as requests, apologies, and refusals. The research utilized discourse analysis, analyzing conversations from British and American television shows and real-life interactions. The study found that British speakers used more indirectness and hedging in their politeness strategies, while American speakers were more direct but still used mitigation strategies in requests. The study suggested that intercultural communication training programs for British and American businesses should focus on enhancing understanding of these subtle differences in politeness strategies.

Matsumoto & Ohtsuka (2019) aimed to analyze how cultural context influences politeness strategies in Japan and the United States. A mixed-method approach was employed, including surveys and interviews with Japanese and American participants, alongside the analysis of real-world interactions. The study highlighted that Japanese speakers used more formal speech acts and indirectness compared to American speakers, who favored directness in their communication. The study recommended incorporating cultural context into intercultural training, emphasizing the need for understanding hierarchical communication practices in Japan.

Silva & Ramos (2020) explored how politeness strategies in Brazilian Portuguese compare to English-speaking cultures, particularly focusing on requests and refusals. The study used qualitative interviews and discourse analysis of conversations between native Portuguese speakers and English speakers. Brazilian Portuguese speakers were found to use more affectionate terms and direct requests, while English speakers, particularly from the UK and the US, employed more indirectness and formal structures in requests. The authors suggested that professionals engaging in Brazilian-Portuguese and English exchanges should be trained on the role of directness and familiarity in Brazilian communication.

Nwoye (2018) aimed to analyze the differences in politeness strategies in the Yoruba and Igbo languages, focusing on speech acts like greetings, requests, and apologies. The study used discourse analysis, collecting samples from both oral and written communication in Yoruba and Igbo communities. The study revealed that politeness in Yoruba was more indirect, relying heavily

on formal greetings and respect for elders, while Igbo speakers were more direct in requests and apologies. The study emphasized the importance of understanding the nuanced use of politeness strategies in African languages for effective intercultural communication.

Zhang & Yu (2020) explored how the rise of social media has influenced politeness strategies in intercultural communication, focusing on interactions between Chinese and American users. A combination of content analysis and survey data was used to examine the politeness strategies used in online communication. The study found that social media encourages more informal, direct communication, with fewer politeness markers used in comparison to face-to-face communication. The authors recommended developing guidelines for social media etiquette that incorporate politeness strategies to ensure smooth intercultural interactions.

Lee & Kim (2019) investigated how employees in multinational corporations use politeness strategies in communication, focusing on speech acts in business settings. The research involved interviews and participant observation across several multinational corporations operating in Asia and Europe. It was found that employees in more hierarchical cultures (such as Japan) used indirectness and formal politeness, while those in egalitarian cultures (such as the Netherlands) favored directness and straightforwardness. The study highlighted the importance of cross-cultural training for employees to improve communication effectiveness in multinational settings.

Holmes & Stubbe (2015) analyzed how gender influences politeness strategies across different cultural contexts, focusing on New Zealand and American English. The study used qualitative methods, including interviews and discourse analysis of interactions in both formal and informal settings. The study found that gender significantly influenced the use of politeness strategies, with women in both cultures using more indirect strategies than men. The study recommended that gender-specific politeness training be incorporated into intercultural communication workshops to address these differences.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a desktop research methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

4.0 FINDINGS

This study presented both a contextual and methodological gap. A contextual gap occurs when desired research findings provide a different perspective on the topic of discussion. For instance, Zhang & Yu (2020) explored how the rise of social media has influenced politeness strategies in intercultural communication, focusing on interactions between Chinese and American users. A combination of content analysis and survey data was used to examine the politeness strategies used

in online communication. The study found that social media encourages more informal, direct communication, with fewer politeness markers used in comparison to face-to-face communication. The authors recommended developing guidelines for social media etiquette that incorporate politeness strategies to ensure smooth intercultural interactions. On the other hand, the current study focused on analyzing how different cultures use speech acts and politeness strategies in everyday communication.

Secondly, a methodological gap also presents itself, for example, Zhang & Yu (2020) used a combination of content analysis and survey data to examine the politeness strategies used in online communication. Whereas, the current study adopted a desktop research method.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study concluded that social media significantly alters how individuals employ politeness strategies in intercultural communication. It was found that communication on digital platforms, such as social media, tends to favor informality and directness, which contrasts with the more formal, indirect strategies often seen in face-to-face interactions. This shift in politeness strategies can be attributed to the unique characteristics of online communication, including the perceived anonymity, the brevity of messages, and the tendency for users to engage in more casual, rapid exchanges. The findings showed that politeness markers, such as hedging and mitigation, were less frequently employed in online interactions, making conversations more straightforward and less focused on face-saving behaviors. Despite this, users still adapted their language depending on the cultural context of their interlocutors, demonstrating that while social media fosters directness, intercultural sensitivities were still present in the way politeness was applied.

The study also concluded that the digital environment, by reducing the social cues and formalities present in face-to-face communication, encouraged a shift toward less nuanced politeness strategies. This was particularly evident when individuals from different cultural backgrounds interacted online, where the implicit expectations of politeness associated with face-to-face communication were either ignored or adapted to fit the online context. The researchers observed that cultures traditionally characterized by formal politeness and indirect communication, such as those in East Asia, displayed a more relaxed approach to politeness in online platforms. This shift was thought to be influenced by the less hierarchical nature of social media platforms compared to real-life communication, which often requires a greater level of formality and deference.

Another important conclusion of the study was that social media interactions, while more casual and direct, did not completely eliminate the use of politeness strategies. Instead, new forms of politeness emerged, particularly in the way individuals framed requests, refusals, or apologies. These newer forms of politeness involved emotional appeals and the use of emoticons, gifs, and other symbolic cues to express solidarity and mitigate potential face-threatening acts. While these digital markers of politeness were not as traditional or conventional as face-to-face politeness

strategies, they represented an adaptation to the digital space that still prioritized maintaining relational harmony. Overall, the study concluded that social media has created a new, hybrid form of politeness, which differs from traditional communication but still fulfills the same essential role of managing interpersonal relationships.

The study noted that while the trend toward informality and directness in digital communication was clear, it did not necessarily lead to greater misunderstandings or interpersonal conflicts. On the contrary, the study suggested that the use of less formal politeness strategies might, in some cases, foster a greater sense of equality and shared understanding among intercultural communicators. By stripping away many of the social hierarchies that govern face-to-face communication, social media created a more level playing field where individuals from different cultures could communicate more freely. However, the researchers also cautioned that the lack of face-to-face cues and the informality of online communication could sometimes lead to misinterpretations of intent, particularly when subtle politeness markers were absent, thus highlighting the need for greater awareness of intercultural communication strategies in digital spaces.

5.2 Recommendations

The study recommended several ways in which the findings could contribute to theoretical understanding in the field of intercultural communication and politeness theory. First, it suggested that politeness theory could be expanded to include the digital context, as it had traditionally been focused on face-to-face communication. Social media platforms, with their unique communication dynamics, had created a new set of norms and strategies that did not entirely conform to traditional models of politeness. By integrating these new behaviors into existing theoretical frameworks, scholars could gain a better understanding of how politeness is enacted across cultures in a rapidly changing digital landscape. This would involve rethinking the definitions of indirectness, mitigation, and hedging, considering how these strategies evolve in an environment where physical cues are absent, and messages are often brief.

In terms of practical applications, the study recommended that individuals and organizations engaging in intercultural communication online pay closer attention to the differences in how politeness is manifested across cultures. While the study found that social media encourages more direct and informal communication, it also emphasized the importance of maintaining respect for intercultural differences in digital spaces. For businesses, educators, and diplomats who frequently engage in cross-cultural online interactions, this meant being mindful of cultural preferences for formality or informality in communication. For instance, while a more direct approach might be acceptable in Western cultures, other cultures may require a more indirect and respectful tone. Organizations were advised to train their employees to be aware of these differences when communicating with international clients, partners, and colleagues.

From a policy perspective, the study suggested that governments and multinational organizations, especially those with a focus on digital diplomacy and cross-border communication, consider developing digital communication guidelines that incorporate intercultural sensitivity. These guidelines would provide a framework for how individuals from different cultures should adapt their politeness strategies when engaging with others in an online environment. The recommendations included developing communication policies for social media that promote cultural awareness and respect, particularly in governmental interactions where misunderstandings due to politeness differences could have diplomatic consequences. The study also recommended incorporating intercultural communication training into digital literacy programs to ensure that individuals are better equipped to navigate the complexities of online politeness in intercultural contexts.

The study further recommended that future research explore how the evolution of social media platforms impacts the perceptions of politeness across different age groups and subcultures. While this study focused on general intercultural communication, it acknowledged that younger generations, who are more immersed in digital communication, might develop distinct norms and expectations around politeness that differ from older generations. This evolving trend could have significant implications for how digital communication is approached in both personal and professional spheres. Researchers were encouraged to explore how generational differences influence the use of politeness strategies on platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok, where brevity and informality are often prioritized over traditional politeness markers.

Lastly, the study recommended that researchers in the field of intercultural communication and digital media engage in cross-disciplinary studies that incorporate insights from psychology, sociology, and media studies. This would allow for a more holistic understanding of how social media environments shape not only language use but also the underlying social and emotional dynamics of politeness. By incorporating perspectives from multiple fields, scholars could gain a richer understanding of the cognitive, emotional, and social factors that influence how individuals choose to communicate in online intercultural exchanges. This, in turn, could help refine theories of politeness and improve the design of digital communication tools and platforms that are culturally inclusive.

Through these recommendations, the study hoped to provide a foundation for future developments in both theory and practice related to intercultural communication. The implications for theory development, practical applications, and policy initiatives aimed to ensure that digital communication is both effective and culturally respectful in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world.

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