

**HOW DOES THE WRITER SAVE THE READER'S FACE?  
(Descriptive Study at Using Face Concept in Politeness Strategy in some  
Notices in Singapore)**

**Siti Suharsih**

(archie.cerah@gmail.com)

State University of Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa Banten

**Abstract:** *Giving command to other people should consider many things: choice of word, context of situation and social context. Those can help us, both as speaker or writer, avoid the rudeness and threaten other's face. This paper is intended to take term 'politeness' into account within some examples of sentences formed in notices. The samples are taken from two different places in Singapore: in a guest house and in mosque. Those notices are analyzed using 'face' concept by showing the strategy used by the writer in both places. The result shows the writers from the two places use different strategy in commanding the reader. At guests house, the writer uses indirectness and give positive face to the reader. In this point, the writer tries to be close to the reader, decrease the distance between them. In the other side, the notices found in a mosque use imperative sentence. This form of sentence contains directive, asking the reader to do something directly. Based on the form and content of sentences in those notices, the readers will be potentially threatened. For that reason, the writer does FTA in most of notices.*

**Key words:** *politeness, face, strategy*

We talk differently to different people in different context, including in making request for others. This is one consideration to be more communicative in doing communication and interaction, both in spoken and written. When we ask someone to do something, for example, we want what we command can be understood easily without giving big imposition to the hearer/reader. In a matter of fact, forming sentences which containing 'politeness' is not easy. The term of 'politeness' is not a simple thing to be defined, since it depends much on many contexts, such as situation context, social context and culture context (Cutting, 2008:50). Last context, that is culture, becomes demanded consideration in communication especially in particular places and settings, such as hotel, hostel and public places. Those are the places for staying for guests who come from different places, different social character and different culture. Because of that, when the hotel or hostel owner puts some notices for the guests containing some rules for instance, the owner should choose the appropriate word when she/he asked the guests to do the rules. The appropriateness of words and sentences can reduce 'the rudeness' of the sentences. The guests will do what the owner wants without complaining and losing hi/her face.

When I stayed couple days in one guest house in Singapore, I found interesting examples of how the owner used his/her strategy to be 'more polite' to the reader in his/her notices. The way the owner used was forming the sentence in declarative, even he/she intended to ask the reader to follow his/her instruction. By using this form, she/he asked someone indirectly to do something so the readers won't lose their face. In the other day, when I had a rest after walking, I read some notices on board. The sentence is formed in imperative, as function to ask the reader directly. Here are I gave two notices taken from two different places. We can see how imperative meaning formed differently:

- a. *"If you are too old enough to travel, then you are old enough to wash your own dishes ;)"*
- b. *"Please remove your footwear here!"*

Vividly, the two notices made in different form but they have same intention. They want the readers understand what the writer asked them. I, as a reader, understand what the writer asked me: *in a*, the writer asked me to wash the dishes after I had meal, *and b*, the writer wanted me to remove my footwear. I enjoy washing the dishes, with little smile on my face; while for second instruction, I remove my footwear as soon as possible as if the writer kept her/his eyes on me. Why the two sentences gave different affect on me? Why I felt there is a big imposition in *b*? Do the writers take account on politeness in his/her sentences? Many questions arise and encourage me to analyze them in term of 'politenesses. I analyzed some notices I found in two different places. I emphasized the analysis on face theory written by Brown and Levinson.

## **SPEECH FUNCTION AND POLITENESS**

Why we should select one way to another to convey our message? Language choice delivered to different forms is one consideration in using politeness. Being linguistically polite is a matter of selecting linguistic forms which express the appropriate degree of social distance or which recognize relevant status or power differences (Holmes, 2001:258). However, there is no clear rule for being polite or impolite in one speech community to another one. Holmes stated that different speech communities emphasize different functions and express particular functions differently (2001:258). In line with that, Wardhaugh added that some languages seem to have built into them very complex of politeness. He gives the best example of Javanese. Javanese is considered as the complex systematic language which indicating the social relationship between the speaker (1986:267).

Cutting sees the term politeness in a pragmatics point of view. it does not refer to social rule of behavior. Politeness refers to choices that are made in language use, the linguistic expression that give people space and show a friendly attitude to them (2008:43). Because of that, politeness is a 'complicated thing' in any language community. It deals not only understand about the language but also understand about the social and culture values in the community.

In fact, being politeness is not giving 'superficial politeness form', such as saying *please or thank you*. Holmes emphasizes the term politeness as taking account of the feelings of others. She then said that a polite person makes others comfortable; using appropriate word when they speak in term to build their relationship (2001:268). In contrary, inappropriate linguistics choices can be considered rude. That's why, Holmes suggested to asses social relationship along the dimension of social distance or solidarity, and relative power or status. One important aspect, we must understand the social values in a society in order to speak politely.

### **'FACE' THEORY**

In order to enter social relationships, we have to acknowledge our awareness of 'face' concept. Brown and Levinson in their book, *Politeness*, analyzed politeness from "face" concept. 'Face' is a universal characteristic across cultures that speakers should respect each other expectations regarding self-image and avoid *Face Threatening Acts* (FTAs). Brown and Levinson said that when FTAs are unavoidable, speakers can redress the threat with negative politeness that respects the hearer's negative face. Another strategy is positive politeness, which attends the positive face. Negative face is a need to be independent, have freedom of action, and not to be imposed on by others. Positive face is a need to be accepted and liked by others, treated as member of the group, and to know one's wants are shared by others (1987: 67-68).

Negative Politeness shows the distance between interlocutors and avoiding intruding on each other's territory. The way the speaker emphasizes the importance of other's time and concerns is by using hesitation, a question, or an apology. The example shows how negative politeness used: "sorry to bother you. Can I use your computer?" or "feel free to ask any question, if you get problem". To minimize the imposition, the speaker can add by giving devices such as hedges or mitigate the imposition. Some hedges or mitigation found in some expressions: 'if possible', 'in a way', 'I wonder', or 'Er.....I think.."

Positive politeness strategy used to save positive face of hearer. Saving positive face of the hearer is trying to demonstrate closeness and solidarity, appealing to friendship, making other people feel good and showing both speakers have a common goal. Brown and Levinson (1987) suggested that doing what the hearer's interests, wants and needs is one of claiming common ground. We use this kind of strategy when we say, " I know you hate talking and sitting in a strange party, but I'll be there too. We will have good time together, come anyway". When the speaker says this, he/she shows her optimistic that the hearer will accept the invitation. What we can say that positive politeness is seeking the agreement and avoiding the disagreement. (Cutting, 2008:46)

In fact, when we say something we are faced with a choice: do the FTA *on record* or *off record* (Brown and Levinson, 1987:68). Someone does FTA *off record* when she/he asks another one indirectly. This kind of strategy is considered as *indirect speech act* (Cutting, 2008:44). *Off record* communicative act indicates the

use of a declarative representative functioning as a question ‘to the speaker itself’, but the hearer should interpret it as directive or a request for help. Indirectness in the form of indirect speech act and cooperative maxim flouting allows a speaker to make suggestion, requests, offers or invitations quite casually, without addressing them to make in particular. The hearers will understand the illocutionary force within the sentence, but they can choose to ignore it (Cutting, 2008:44).

Another choice is doing FTA *on record baldly* or with *negative politeness*. Brown and Levinson divided *bald-on-record strategy with redressive action, baldly or without redressive action* (1987:69). *Bald on record* happens when speaker makes suggestion, request, offer or invitation in open or direct way. Utterances contain *bald on record without redressive action* indicated by using direct speech act and using imperative with no mitigating devices (Brown and Levinson, 1987:69). Cutting claimed that this is the most face-threatening mode of action (2008:44). In other side, *bald-on-record* strategy can save the hearer’s face. For some cases, to be direct is a pleasant way. When someone says, ‘marry me’, the hearer less reluctant to threaten the speaker’s face by impringing through accepting the offer. Brown and Levinson (1987) said that the firmer the invitation, the more polite it is. Brown and Levinson see that directness often indicates a wish to be seen as socially close.

Further, Cutting added some contexts in which influence politeness. First, it is situational context. Cutting explained that politeness is a pragmatic phenomenon that influenced by elements of context. He said there are two situational context factors when we make a request. Those factors are the size of imposition, the routines and reasonableness of task. The other factor is formality of context. (2008:50)

Second context is social context. Cutting said that the choice of formulation depends on the social distance and the power relation between speakers. Cutting formulated about social context influenced in politeness. When there is social distance, politeness is encoded, and there is more indirectness; where there is less social distance, there is less negative politeness and indirectness (2008:50). Last but not least, is that cultural context. From this point of view, Cutting said that culture and language learning is a major variable in differentiating one culture from another along the lines of politeness and saving face (2008:51).

## **DISCUSSION**

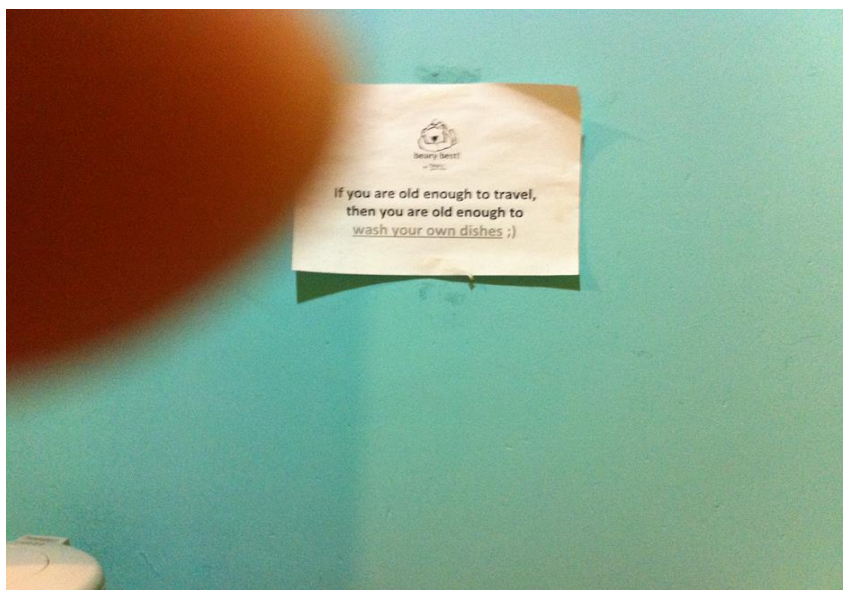
Some notices found from two different places, one is at the guests house and another one is at mosque, and they will be analyzed based on the concept of ‘face’. Here, I only take eight samples from the two of places since I only took eight pictures from the notices I found. Next, I explain how the writer forms the sentences and how the writer uses the strategy.

### **Guest House (Beary Beast Hostel)**

I read different forms used by the writer in this Guest House named Beary Bear Hostel. One used conditional sentence, question, and another is imperative. For conditional and question, both of them containing imperative. However, most of the sentences used indirectness for asking someone else. This indirectness used as a strategy to ask people who stay in this hostel.

1. *"If you are too old enough to travel, then you are old enough to wash your own dishes ;)"*

This notice found in the dining room, placed on the table. Only this room all guests could have their slight breakfast, like some bread, cereal, milk, and tea. All guests were not allowed to eat in their bedroom. First time I read this notice, I smiled. After smiling, then I walk to the kitchen and wash some dishes without complaining. Why I, or other guests, is willing to do what the writer wants in his sentence? The way the writer asked the guests used *off-record strategy*. The sentence uses conditional and declarative form, as his/her indirect command. As Cutting explained that indirectness has *indirect speech act*. By using this strategy, the writer showed his/her closeness and appealed to friendship. The way the writer showed her closeness and appealed to friendship is that by the use of 'comparison style' and the use of smiley symbol in the end of sentence. This sentence is meant to treat all the guests as 'young people' like in a phrase: *'if you are too old enough to travel, then you are old enough to wash your own dishes...'* so, if the readers do not want to treat as an old one, the reader must wash the dishes. This is interesting strategy for asking someone to do something, for people like to be treated as young' not 'old' one. The indirectness, diction, and sentence form indicated the writer showed his/her positive politeness. This smiley symbol put in the end of sentence, showed the writer wanted to be friendly to the guests.



2. *“Ridiculously cheap drinks for sale! Help yourself but please pay at the counter. Thank you Beary much!”*



When I wanted to have iced drinks, I read this sentence on the refrigerator. The writer offered some drinks for the guests. The way the writer offered, the writer used some sentence forms: declarative and imperative. The writer offered the guests to have the drinks by themselves, but the writer asked the guests to pay at the counter. By forming declarative and imperative sentence, the writer showed he/his *on-record strategy*. She/he asked the guests directly by saying, *help yourself and pay at the counter*, but the writer offered the drink by giving the news that the drinks was on sale. However, the writer wanted to show he/his closeness by giving the interesting offer for the guests, and the use of expression, *'thank you Beary much'* we can see that the word 'very' is changed become 'beary'. As we know that the guest house name is 'Beary House.' This strategy gave the reader 'positive face', since the readers were not forced to buy the drinks but they could buy if they wanted to.

3. *“Wish to send a Beary Best memory back home? Feed the postbox with postcards of your wonderful experiences and adventures. We will post 'em for you for free (smile face). Stamps are available for purchase at the counter at \$0,50 each”*



Like no 2, the sentence showed the writer's strategy by giving positive face to the guests. The sentence contained an offer to post a memory or experience during the holiday. In fact, the owner didn't want to send the postcard free of charge because the guests should buy stamps which were available. This indirectness is used to ask the guests to buy the stamps, but it was an option if they wanted to be sent from the guest house. The way the writer chose sentence showed the closeness among them. Word '*them*' is shortened to be '*em*', and it is a fact of using informal expression. Beside, the writer also used 'smiley face' for pointing that the writer as if talked to the reader face to face, or giving a friendly face to the reader. Informal expression is one strategy for being friendly, communicative and appealing relationship.

4. *Please do not choke the sink with leftover food. Please kindly discard them into the wastebin before washing your dishes. Thank you!*

This notice can be understandable as direct speech act. The direct speech act containing direct request: "*don't choke the sink with leftover food. Please kindly discard them into the wastebin before washing your dishes.*" Since the writer used direct speech act, the writer asked the reader by imperative way. This is called *on-bald strategy without redressive*. By the end of sentence, the writer put the phrase, "*thank you*" to minimize the imposition for the reader. The writer hoped that the reader would be happy doing the things asked by the writer.



## **Mosque**

Another place I dropped is a mosque. After walking around Indiana Town, I dropped by one mosque there. I read some notices put on some areas inside the mosque. There many notices there, but I put four of them. This is because the notices I read inside the mosque formed in imperative. From the sentence formation, all the notices I found have *bald-on-record strategy without redressive action*. Brown and Levinson (1987:69) said that the strategy indicated the action is done in the most direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way. Mostly, the sentence says, "Do X!"

4. *"Please do not throw used tissues & sanitary towels here!. Please throw them in the bins provided. Together we can keep the toilet clean"*





Compared with the three sentences, this sentence used imperative. By forming imperative, the reader/guests can easily recognized the intention of the writer. The sentence is started by inserting 'please' but ridiculously, it is only *superficial politeness form* (Holmes, 2003:20...). By giving direct command, it is indicated the distance between the writer and the reader. The use of imperative sentence containing directive can be said as bald-on-record strategy. As Brown and Levinson said, this strategy gives big imposition to the reader. Using this strategy, the reader feel her face is threatened by the sentences.

5. *"Please don't bring any food and drink into the carpeted area"*

Like no 5, this notice is also formed in imperative containing directive. The writer asked the readers not to bring any food or drink when they were in carpeted area. This command delivered directly so that the readers can get the point. By using *bald-on-record strategy*, the writer does FTA and imposes the reader. Based on the situation context, the writer put him/herself as the one who has the authority so that he/she uses the formal language.



6. *“Please remove your footwear here!”*



This is another imperative sentence I found before I enter the room inside the mosque. As the two examples above, the writer give direct request to the reader: *“Please remove your footwear here!”* Using direct request and imperative form, the writer used *bald-on-record strategy* without redress. The reader was reminded to always remove the footwear before entering the room.

7. *Please keep the toilet clean at all times*



This notice found in the toilet. I saw the condition of toilet was really clean. Perhaps, it could be happen since the writer put the direct request there, so the readers felt they were always reminded. By giving direct command, the writer used *bald-on-record strategy*. As other notices around the mosque, it seems that the writer put his/her position as the authority of the mosque or as the guard to protect the mosque. The strategy gives imposition the reader and tends to threat the face.

## CONCLUSION

After reading and analyzing the sentence formed in notice, I come to the conclusion. The term of 'politeness' is not easy to define and it is different in every places. However, there's one similarity of how someone considering 'polite word' in the sentence, i.e. choosing appropriate word. The appropriate word is more than just saying, 'please', 'I'm sorry, etc.,. The forming indirectness sentence, avoiding imperative sentence are some strategies in creating 'politeness'. If we see from the notices taken from the hostel, the writer used many ways and strategy in giving request to the readers. The writer didn't only asking the reader directly, but he/she also asked the reader indirectly. The indirectness used in the notices show the writer used off-record strategy. In the

other place, we can see that all of the requests constructed in direct way, by using imperative. When someone use this kind of sentences (most of all), they tend to make the reader lose their face.

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