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Politeness Theory

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Quranic Versa

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

((وَقُلْ اَعْمَلُوا فَسَيَرَى اللَّهُ عَمَلَكُمْ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ))

(سورة التوبة الآية 105)

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

"And say, 'Do your deeds; Allah will see your deeds, and His Messenger and the believers will see them.'"

DEDICATION

To every mother who sacrificed her years and the bloom of her life so that her daughters' lives might blossom and their dreams could rise, I dedicate this work with heartfelt gratitude and deepest appreciation for her endless sacrifices.

To my father's soul, who never witnessed my graduation, yet whose pride walks with me always

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1.1 Introduction

Politeness Theory is a practical framework for understanding how people utilize language to foster social harmony and express themselves more respectfully. The sociologist Erving Goffman introduced the concept of face , which focuses on how people present themselves in public. After that, the theorists Brown and Levinson applied this idea to the notion of 'face' and the two categories negative and positive. Brown and Levinson's theory revolves around the "Face Threatening Acts" (FTAs) which are utterances that naturally infringe on a hearer's need for respect or freedom. To minimize these threats, speakers use specific politeness strategies depending on the social distance between parties, the power dynamic, and the weight of the request. Their framework suggests that we constantly calculate how much "politeness" is needed to get what we want without offending the other person's self-image. While negative face should be unimpeded and free of imposition, positive face should be valued and accepted by others. They then covered four tactics, namely off-record, positive, negative, and bald on-record. Following those academics others such as Leech, built upon this idea in his book 'Principles of Pragmatics which centered on principles, and he outlined six maxims. Lakoff is also a key figure Robin Lakoff was among the first to argue that language is not merely a means of transmitting information but rather a means of interacting and managing relationships. In the end, she established three guidelines for politeness. Knowing these linguistic techniques is crucial for understanding how individuals strike a balance between clarity and social harmony in their daily relationships (Brown and levasoin 1987)

1.2 Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a part of linguistics that takes into account aspects of the meaning and setting of language use or discourse. According to (Siphon,1983)pragmatics is consider of meaning in an expression in communication. Moreover according to (Mey,2006) state that pragmatics is the critical thing of how setting contributes of speech, meaning and the field of consider evaluates how human language is utilized in social exercises, as well as the relationship between speaker and listener. pragmatics is a consider of how language utilizes in communicating between individuals or among individuals Furthermore, pragmatics according to (Suhartono,2020) When pragmatic ideas are combined, then pragmatics basically includes three key words, namely study, meaning, and speech. where "Study" describes the study or branch of linguistics. then "meaning" describes what the speaker wants or wants in his speech or can be constructed through a combination of meaning speech with additional information or information extra linguistic available in context. "Speech" explain in language units or explain certain speech acts, such as restricted speech), hybrid, or oration oblique which represents the directive action. One directive utterance contains one sentence declarative, interrogative, imperative sentence combination of the same type, or a combination of sentences of different types. based on the explanation above, according to Suharto no in his book that basic concepts about pragmatics put forward by experts in general based on these three concepts. Moreover, according to (Rahardi,2019) pragmatics also cannot be separated from the phenomenon of politeness in language. Language politeness have been studied by many people, but also always become an interesting phenomenon to describe because inside politeness is also implicated in the cultural dimensions that characteristic, even noble.

1.3 Erving Goffman

Erving Goffman was a well-known Canadian sociologist and social psychologist best recognized for his significant contributions to our understanding of social interaction and self-presentation in everyday life (Goffman, 1956). Goffman is widely recognized as one of the foundational scholars whose work significantly influenced the development of Politeness Theory. His contribution lies in his definition of the social value a person effectively claims for themselves during interaction as Goffman (1967, p. 5) in *Interaction Ritual*. This highlights the idea that individuals are deeply concerned with how they are perceived by others and actively work to maintain a favorable social image in everyday communication. He argues that social interaction is a delicate and cooperative process in which participants mutually support each other. He explains that individuals generally avoid actions or expressions that may cause embarrassment, loss of dignity, or social disapproval, as such situations threaten the stability of interaction. When this image is threatened, speakers often attempt to repair the situation through apologies, explanations, or other corrective behaviors. This continuous management demonstrates that communication is not merely the exchange of information, but also a social activity governed by unspoken norms and expectations. Furthermore, Goffman introduces the concept of 'face-work' which refers to the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face. He distinguishes between two orientations: the defensive orientation, where a person protects their own face, and the protective orientation, where a person acts to save the face of others. This ritual of interaction ensures that social equilibrium is maintained even when potential threats to one's image arise (Goffman, 1967).

1.4 Politeness Theory

Politeness is key to all of our relationships and plays a fundamental part in the way we communicate with each other and the way we define ourselves. It isn't limited only to conventional aspects of linguistic etiquette, but encompasses all types of interpersonal behavior through which we explore and maintain our relationships and another definition of Politeness is a sociocultural phenomenon that involves the evaluation of others' behavior. (Kádár & Haugh, 2013) Politeness theory examines the ways in which individuals navigate social interactions to avoid offending others and to gain their favor Central to this theory is the concept of face, which refers to a person's self-image and social identity rather than their physical appearance (Yule, 2010). The theory highlights that all interactions have the potential to threaten face, making politeness a universal concern across cultures, though specific interpretations of politeness can vary significantly originally introduced in the late 1970s and further developed in 1987 by linguists Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson the theory differentiates between positive face concerned with validation and social acceptance—and negative face, which focuses on autonomy and the desire to avoid imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Building on the broader understanding of these dynamics Effective communication often involves managing these two types of face, with speakers employing strategies to protect themselves and their listeners Techniques to reinforce positive face include demonstrating interest in the other person, while safeguarding negative face may involve indirect requests or phrasing that minimizes imposition (Leech, 2014) Ultimately politeness theory complemented by Leech maxims, provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complexities of interpersonal communication and the delicate balance of maintaining social harmony (Leech, 2014, p. 85)

2.1 Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory

Brown and Stephen C. Levinson are prominent linguists who, in 1987, introduced a comprehensive framework for understanding how language functions as a social tool centering their entire theory on the sociological necessity of maintaining interpersonal harmony. The essence of their work lies in the idea of "Face," which they describe as the fundamental social value individuals attribute to themselves during an interaction. Following Brown and Levinson (1987), "Face" is the "public self-image that every member [of society] wants to claim for himself" It is an emotionally sensitive property that does not belong to the individual internally, but is rather a social "image" that is constantly at stake during a conversation. Because this image can be easily damaged or enhanced by the words of others, participants must remain highly attentive to it to avoid social friction. The theory further posits that "Face" is defined by mutual vulnerability, meaning that any person's self-image is inherently dependent on the cooperation of those around them. Brown and Levinson argue that since everyone's face is vulnerable, it is in the best interest of all speakers to cooperate in maintaining each other's face (Brown1987) central part of this theory is the Face Threatening Act (FTA) which refers to any communicative act whether verbal or non-verbal that inherently damages the face of the speaker or the hearer. These acts challenge the person's need for respect or freedom. To manage these threats, speakers use politeness strategies to act clearly the type of face according to the politeness theory into two types negative and positive ,Negative face which they define in terms of wants that every person knows eve other person has and knows are in their best interest to, at least partially, satisfy. Tracy(2011) explains "positive face concerns the desire to be appreciated and approved by selected others Negative face concerns a person's want to be unimpeded and free from imposition.

This creates a social contract where politeness is used as a necessary mechanism to prevent embarrassment or loss of face, ensuring that social equilibrium is maintained even when difficult or sensitive topics are discussed.

2.2 Concept Of Face

In their Politeness Theory, Brown and Levinson work on the assumption that every member of society has a public self-image, or 'face'. Their notion of face is based on Goffman (1967), who defines face as 'positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact'. Face can thus be likened to a person's self-esteem (Huang, 2007, p. 116). It represents the way a person is perceived and since it is not a constant value and it continually develops, it has to be attended to in interaction. In the process of maintaining face every person has two aims: saving their own face (defensive orientation) and saving others' faces (protective orientation). Brown and Levinson argue that the cooperation in maintaining face is based on the mutual vulnerability of face (1987, p. 61). Since any participant's face could be harmed by any other participant, it is in everyone's interest to show concern for others' faces and thus help to defend one's own face. The concept of face is clarified and distinguished from other closely related constructs: authority, standards of behavior, personality, status, dignity, honor, and prestige (Hou, 2022). The claim to face may rest on the basis of status, whether ascribed or achieved, and on personal or no personal factors; it may also vary according to the group with which a person is interacting. Basic differences are found between the processes involved in gaining versus losing face. While it is not a necessity for one to strive to gain face, losing face is a serious matter which will, in varying degrees, affect one's ability to function effectively in society. Face is lost when the individual either through his action or that of people closely related to him, fails to meet essential requirements placed upon him by virtue of the social position he occupies.

In contrast to the ideology of individualism, the question of face frequently arises beyond the realm of individual responsibility and subjective volition. Reciprocity is inherent in face behavior, wherein a mutually restrictive, even coercive, power is exerted upon each member of the social network.(Haugh ,Terkourafi,2021) It is argued that face behavior is universal and that face should be utilized as a construct of central importance in the social sciences (David Yau-fai Ho 1976).

2.3 Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs)

It is widely accepted that the concept of ‘face’ was first introduced by Goffman, a sociologist and anthropologist, in 1967 in his book "Interaction Ritual". He anticipated that people pay much attention to their and others’ social image. When people are involved in social interaction, they moderately express their social image and care for their interlocutors’ image whether they are aware of that or not (Goffman1967). In everyday communication, the concept of face is crucial since it represents self-worth, dignity, respect, status and reputation people claim for themselves (Spencer-Oatey, 2000) Goffman’s conceptualization is reinforced by his understanding of face as the positive image people claim for themselves. In a social interaction, individuals communicate to make their interlocutors feel good or bad about their faces. (Goffman,1967) believes that verbal and non-verbal interactions have either positive (having face) or negative (losing face) which effects on the individual’s self-image. Accordingly, maintaining face occupies a sophisticated place in people’s communication. Based on Goffman’s remarks on face work (Brown and Levinson ,1987) developed FTAs in their politeness theory. They characterized positive face to refer to the individual desire to be socially accepted and liked. They, also described negative face to indicate the individual’s desire not to be impeded or forced by others in undesirable situations. (Onebunne,2024) then, use the term FTAs to define verbal and non-verbal acts that

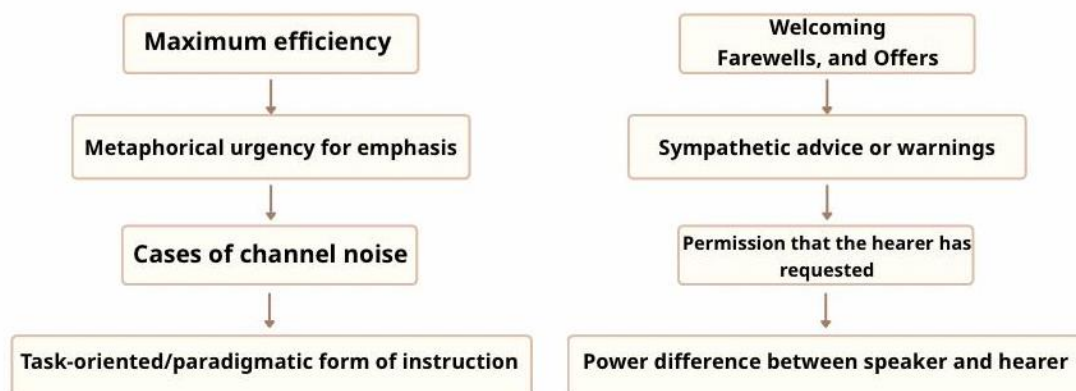
could lead to losing people's positive or negative faces. FTAs relied on three elements: the social distance between the interlocutors such as the distance between people of less acquaintance, the power relation between them (as the relation between the superior and subordinate) and imposition ranking of the imposition (the level of the act determined by cultural values). They presume that everyday interaction includes the use of FTAs which can threaten the addresser and the addressee. FTAs such as advice, suggestions, requests, orders, warnings, and threats can threaten the negative face of the addressee as they put him under pressure to do or not do something. Likewise, offers and promises can also threaten the negative addressee's face by forcing him to accept or refuse positive future actions. Acts that convey the addresser's negative attitude towards his interlocutor such as expressions of hatred, anger, compliments, expressions of envy admiration misuse of honorifics mention of taboo topics disapproval criticism, insults and complaints show a negative assessment of his positive face. However, acts that imply a misbehavior or loss of control of the situation such as confessions, apologies, admissions of guilt or responsibility can threaten the positive face of the addresser himself. Subsequently politeness is a linguistic phenomenon that is employed to avoid or minimize FTAs through various strategies according to the reliability of the context .

3.1 Politeness Strategies

Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 91) categorize politeness strategies into four main types used by the speaker to maintain the hearer's face and minimize the threat to "face" during a conversation. These strategies range from direct acts to complete avoidance of the Face Threatening Act (FTA).

3.1.1 Bald on-Record

In the bald-on record, the speaker never really limits dangers to the substance of the questioner. The justification for its utilization is the point at which a speaker (S) needs to do the FTA (Face Threatening Act) to the fullest productivity is more than speaker needs to fulfill the audience's (Hs) faces, in any event, for any level, live recording system is picked. From the above assertion, the researcher infers that the uncovered-on record system is that the speaker talks honestly moving along (Zarei 2023)



3.1.2 Positive Politeness

Positive Politeness strategy look to limit dangers to the questioner face. This methodology is utilized to help audience members have a positive outlook on themselves, their interests or assets, and is most frequently utilized in circumstances where the crowd knows one another very well. As well as supporting and endeavors to keep away from struggle, some sure graciousness procedures incorporate the proclamation fellowship, fortitude, and praise. Positive pleasantness systems can likewise arise in circumstances where speakers don't have the foggiest idea about one another well. According to Brown, et al (1987:94) Positive Politeness strategy look to limit dangers to the questioner face. This methodology is utilized to help audience members have a positive outlook on themselves, their interests or assets and is most frequently utilized in circumstances where the crowd knows one another very well. As well as supporting and endeavors to keep away from struggle, some sure graciousness procedures incorporate the proclamation fellowship, fortitude, and praise. Positive pleasantness systems can likewise arise in circumstances where speakers don't have the foggiest idea about one another well. According to **Brown, et al (1987:94)** it is divided into 15 strategy

Strategy 1: Notice, attend to H (his interests, wants, needs, goods)

Strategy 2: Exaggerate (approval, sympathy with H)

Strategy 3: Intensify interest to H

Strategy 4: Use in-group identity markers

Strategy 5: Seek agreement

Strategy 6: Avoid disagreement

Strategy 7: Presuppose/raise/assert common ground

Strategy 8: Joke

Strategy 9: Assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants

Strategy 10: Offer, promise

Strategy 11: Be optimistic

Strategy 12: Include both S and H in the activity

Strategy 13: Give (or ask for) reasons

Strategy 14: Assume or affirm reciprocity

Strategy 15: Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding)

3.1.3 Negative Politeness

Negative politeness strategy is a severe activity focused on the beneficiary's negative face: his longing for opportunity of activity isn't frustrated and his consideration isn't impeded. This is the embodiment of conscious way of behaving, similarly as sure affableness is at the center of 'recognizable' and 'kidding' conduct. Negative politeness compares to Durkheim's 'negative custom', the custom of evasion. Where positive neighborliness is free, negative politeness is explicit and centered; it fills the role of limiting the undeniable exceptional inconvenience of the FTA. In our way of life, negative politeness is the most mind boggling and generally customary arrangement of etymological systems for FTA review those are the things that at fill manners books however not solely - positive graciousness stands out. Its semantic acknowledge of traditional aberrance supports on illocutionary power well-mannered

negativity (about the progress of solicitations, and so forth), accentuation on the general strength of H - are intimately acquainted and need no presentation. Notwithstanding, we should underline that what isn't the main inspiration a speaker might have for utilizing the semantic acknowledgment qualities of negative respectfulness. The results are by and large valuable types of social distance (for example, the acknowledgment that positive neighborliness is a type of limiting social distance); subsequently they will generally be utilized at whatever point a speaker needs to put the social brake on his connections. According to Brown, P & Levinson, S. C. (1987:94):

- Be conventionally indirect
- Question, hedge
- Be pessimistic
- Minimize the degree of imposition
- Give deference
- Apologize
- Impersonalize S and H
- State the FTA as a general rule
- Nominalize
- Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H

3.1.4 Off-Record

Off record strategy is an informative activity that has a few goal. Therefore, when the speaker performs off record, it doesn't mean just give data yet the speaker has a few motivations. Other than that, The language utilized in the off record procedure is roundabout language. When the speaker utilizes this technique, he will just give hints, so the audience must should decipher itself. From the assertion over, the researcher presumes that the off-record procedure is the speaker talks ambiguously.

(Culpeper, 2022).

There are 15 off-record strategies:

- Give hints
- Give association clues
- Presuppose
- Understate
- Overstate
- Use tautologies
- Use contradictions
- Be ironic
- Use metaphors
- Use rhetorical questions
- Be ambiguous
- Be vague
- Over-generalize
- Displace H
- Be incomplete, use ellipsis

3.2 Lakoff's Politeness Theory

Lakoff's Politeness Theory is an early and influential approach within pragmatics that focuses on the social dimensions of language use. Introduced by Robin Lakoff in the early 1970s, the theory emphasizes that politeness is a crucial factor in successful communication, as it helps speakers reduce conflict and maintain cooperative social interaction. Lakoff argues that language is not used solely to exchange information but also to manage interpersonal relationships. From this perspective, politeness functions as a pragmatic mechanism that enables speakers to communicate their intentions while respecting social norms and the feelings of others. Effective communication, therefore, requires sensitivity to social context and awareness of how linguistic choices may affect the hearer (Lakoff, 1973, p. 293). While later models of politeness that emphasize strategic face management, Lakoff's method offers a more general and normative view of polite behavior. It underlines the importance of socially accepted conventions and emphasizes that speakers are guided by underlying principles that regulate appropriate linguistic conduct in interaction (Watts, 2003, p. 50). This makes Lakoff's theory particularly concerned with how politeness contributes to social order and cooperation. Lakoff's Politeness Theory is considered foundational in the development of pragmatic theories of politeness. It laid the groundwork for subsequent models such as those suggested by Brown and Levinson and Leech, which expanded politeness research by offering more detailed analytical frameworks. Despite its simplicity, Lakoff's method is still helpful for understanding the role of politeness in maintaining social harmony and reducing communicative tension (Cutting, 2002, p. 45).

3.2.1 Lakoff's Rules of Politeness

Lakoff explains that politeness in language is guided by a small number of general rules that help speakers communicate smoothly and avoid unnecessary tension. These rules are not strict grammatical laws, but social guidelines that shape how people choose their words in everyday interaction. Through these rules, politeness is seen as a way of maintaining cooperation and mutual respect between participants. The first rule, “Don’t impose,” highlights the importance of respecting the hearer’s personal space and freedom. Speakers who follow this rule try to avoid sounding forceful or demanding, especially in situations where there is social distance or formality. As a result, indirect expressions and polite forms are often preferred since they reduce the sense of pressure placed on the hearer (Lakoff, 1973, p. 293). The second rule, “Give options,” focuses on allowing the hearer some degree of choice in the interaction. Instead of giving direct orders, speakers present their requests in a way that leaves room for acceptance or refusal. This makes communication feel less controlling and more cooperative, helping to preserve a balanced social relationship. The third rule “Make the hearer feel good,” emphasizes the social and emotional aspect of politeness. According to this rule, speakers should use language that shows friendliness, respect, and consideration for the hearer. Compliments, supportive expressions, and polite acknowledgments all contribute to creating a positive atmosphere and strengthening interpersonal bonds (Lakoff, 1973, p. 294).

4.1 Leech's Politeness Theory

Geoffrey Leech's Politeness Theory represents an important pragmatic approach that explains how speakers maintain social harmony through polite language use. Introduced in *Principles of Pragmatics* (1983) Leech's model is based on the idea that communication is guided by principles that help minimize conflict and promote cooperative interaction. Politeness, according to Leech, functions as a social regulator that balances interpersonal relationships in everyday communication. Unlike Brown and Levinson's theory, which focuses on face and strategic choice, Leech's approach emphasizes the role of conversational principles that guide polite behavior. Leech argues that speakers tend to minimize expressions that may cause offense and maximize expressions that show respect, approval and consideration for others. This principle explains why indirectness is often preferred in polite communication. At the core of Leech's theory is the Politeness Principle, which complements Grice's Cooperative Principle. While the Cooperative Principle focuses on the efficient exchange of information, the Politeness Principle accounts for the social dimension of language use. Together, these principles explain how speakers manage both meaning and social relationships in interaction. Leech's theory is particularly useful in pragmatic analysis because it provides a systematic explanation of why speakers choose polite forms even when they are less direct or less efficient. By prioritizing social harmony over linguistic economy, Leech's model highlights the importance of interpersonal sensitivity in communication (Leech, 1983, p. 84). Leech's Politeness Theory has been widely applied in discourse analysis, intercultural communication, and translation studies. Since norms of politeness vary across cultures, Leech's framework helps explain how polite behavior is shaped by cultural values and social expectations, making it a valuable tool for understanding cross-cultural communication (Watts, 2003, p. 51).

4.2 Leech's Politeness Maxims

Leech proposes that the Politeness Principle operates through a set of conversational maxims that guide speakers toward polite linguistic behavior. These maxims explain how speakers balance self-interest with consideration for others in interaction (Leech, 1983, pp. 132–139).

1. The Tact Maxim :Focuses on the other by minimizing their cost and maximizing their benefit. It applies to directives (requesting, advising) and commissives (promising).
2. The Generosity Maxim : Focuses on the self by minimizing self-benefit and maximizing self-cost. It applies to directives and commissives (offering, inviting).
3. The Approbation Maxim :Focuses on the other by minimizing dispraise and maximizing praise of them. It applies to expressive (thanking, praising) and assertives (stating).
4. The Modesty Maxim: Focuses on the self by minimizing self-praise and maximizing self-dispraise. It applies to expressives and assertive.
5. The Agreement Maxim: Focuses on maximizing agreement and minimizing disagreement between the self and others to boost mutual understanding. It applies to assertives.
6. The Sympathy Maxim: Focuses on minimizing antipathy and maximizing sympathy/positive feelings between the self and others. It applies to assertives (congratulating, condolencing).

(Leech,1983)

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has explored the evolution of Politeness Theory and its vital role in maintaining social image and interpersonal relationships. The journey of this theory began with Goffman's foundational concept of 'Face,' which was further developed by Lakoff who emphasized that language functions beyond mere information exchange to manage social harmony through her three rules of politeness. Building on these ideas

Brown and Levinson introduced a comprehensive framework centered on Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) and the four strategies: Positive, Negative, Off-record, and Bald on Record providing a practical lens to view daily interactions. Expanding on the human dimension of these interactions, Leech and Lakoff offer deeper insights into why we choose our words so carefully. Leech highlights the 'Grand Strategy' of maximizing benefit to the listener, reminding us that at the heart of every maxim—be it generosity, modesty, or sympathy—is a genuine effort to reduce friction. Similarly, Lakoff views politeness as a bridge to social comfort; by offering options and making others feel good, we transform language into a tool for camaraderie and nurture the emotional bonds that hold our social world together. Collectively, these scholars demonstrate that politeness is an essential strategic tool for navigating social interactions and preserving social harmony

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