

## 9 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

### 9.0 Introduction

This study has set out to investigate face considerations in Bahasa Melayu or Malay. Towards this end, B and L's conceptualization of face as elaborated and revised by O'Driscoll (1996) and subsequent politeness framework were adopted since their view that politeness is motivated by a concern for face is shared by Malay society. This concern for face involves recognizing positive wants – “the universal need for proximity and belonging” and negative wants – “the universal need for distance and individuation” (O'Driscoll, 1996:4). Recognition of positive wants is a means of paying positive face while negative wants are recognized by means of paying negative face. However, individuals do not consciously seek satisfaction of this face dualism since wants dualism (from which face dualism is derived) is in the background of consciousness.

Apart from positive face and negative face, the third type of face is culture-specific face. Culture-specific face exists by virtue of the attributes that people of a particular culture judge as praiseworthy and admirable and that “lead[s] to the bestowal of a good face” (O'Driscoll, 1996:14). Therefore, the constituents of a good face “are a product of cultures” (ibid.). Also, culture-specific face is in the foreground of consciousness since it is based on the value-judgements of people or folk notions of face.

In human interaction, these three kinds of face can be addressed by using politeness strategies. Under B and L's universal theory of politeness, positive-politeness strategies address positive face and negative-politeness strategies address negative face. B and L also posit that politeness strategies are employed when performing face-threatening acts. However, this notion that certain acts are intrinsically face-threatening is not inherent in the concept of face dualism (as revised) and its attendant strategies. This is because positive face and negative face "are in the background of consciousness ... [and] these faces [are] attended to in interaction without the slightest awareness that these were being threatened" (O'Driscoll, 1996:19). Consequently, face redress is conceived as a form of action that addresses face without recourse to the notion that it also addresses threat to face.

This study has examined how FTAs are redressed in BM using B and L's theoretical framework. The following sections contain a summary of the findings and conclusions derived from the findings.

### **9.1 Offers: Linguistic Markers and Strategies**

The speech act "offer" was one of two speech acts chosen for this study of linguistic politeness in BM. The other was requests. In this study, an offer is considered an FTA, specifically a threat to negative face, because it impedes the hearer's/recipient's freedom to decline the offer, if he so chooses. This is so since,

under normal circumstances, an offer is made to benefit H. Also, and this is particular to Malay culture, accepting the offer could result in H incurring a debt. In terms of the level of imposition, an offer is considered of low imposition due to the fact that its benefit to H outweighs its cost.

The level of imposition of an offer and the possibility of incurring a debt with the acceptance of an offer (where both factors are culturally-determined) predict that offers are linguistically realized bald-on-record in order to show sincerity and at the same time, to minimize the threat to negative face. However, a speaker/an offerer also has to consider the sociological variables present during the speech event before making the offer. The sections below present a brief description of the linguistic markers used for the speech act “offer” and a summary of the effects of relative power(P) and relative social distance(D) on the choice of strategy when making an offer.

### **9.1.1 Linguistic markers**

In BM, offers are explicitly realized using the offer words (*kata silaan*) *sila* and *jemput* while invitations are directly performed using the invite term (*kata ajakan*) *mari(kita)*. These words only appear in sentence-initial position. Their use marks the offer as direct yet polite. *Sila* and *jemput* can be described as politeness markers and they are roughly equivalent in meaning to English “please”.

Another politeness marker is the emphatic particle *lah*. *Lah*, when append to *kata silaan*, *kata ajakan*, or the imperative verb (that represents the illocutionary act), functions to “soften” the directness that is inherent in these words. Address terms are also used in offers and invitations to encode deference and acknowledge power differentials. Such use is considered polite within Malay community.

### 9.1.2 *Effects of PxD interaction on strategy choice*

There was a significant difference in the number of offers found for each level of social distance. A large number of offers were made to addressees whom the speaker was close to/familiar with (low D) while a small number were made to unfamiliars (high D).

The strategies chosen to perform offers given low P low D relations showed that the effect of P was not significant. The speaker’s high P, i.e. H’s relative power over S was low, did not cause him to use unredressed bald-on-record offers. Instead, the bald offers were mitigated by the particle *lah* and politeness strategies that encoded S’s sincerity in making an offer. For example, noticing or attending to H’s needs when making an offer (a positive-politeness output strategy) showed that the offer was made to benefit H and is therefore sincere while self-humbling (a negative-politeness strategy) suggested that the offer was small and thus, required no repayment.

The effects of equal P low D relations did not produce a dominant politeness strategy. Any strategy that, in context, encoded and/or reinforced the close ties, i.e. low D, between S and H was used when making offers. Such strategies ranged from bald offers to redressed ones where S asserted or presupposed his knowledge of and concern for H's needs (a positive-politeness strategy) and where S alluded to the ease of the offer (negative-politeness strategy) in order to reduce H's hesitation to accept the offer (and possibly to incur a debt). The use of diminutives and terms of endearment also suggested the emphasis on low D values.

For high P low D relations, the effect of high P was evident in the choice of strategy when making offers. Negative-politeness strategies that addressed H's high P over S were used to redress bald offers. Specifically, S showed deference by self-humbling and by minimizing the imposition (i.e. the degree to which the offer would impede on S's negative face wants). The use of kinship terms that alluded to H's high P was also a means of giving deference.

Offers made to high D individuals were formal across the three levels of P (low, equal, and high). This formality was marked by the frequent use of the offer words *sila* and *jemput* when making "standard" offers. Apart from the use of formality, offers made to high P high D individuals, particularly the "non-standard" ones, were hedged and/or minimized in order to address H's high P over S.

To surmise, the effect of high P on strategy choice for both low and high D values is as predicted. That is, negative-politeness strategies are used to address the power differential. The effects of low and equal P, however, are not as predicted. Given these P values, it is predicted that offers are bald and unredressed. However, the offers made to low- and equal-P individuals incorporate either positive- or negative-politeness strategies. Also, the effect of high D results in offers which are formally-phrased. Such offers also incorporate negative-politeness strategies when they are made to high P individuals.

## **9.2 Requests: Linguistic Markers and Strategies**

A request is a threat to an addressee's negative face because the addressee is expected to respond in some manner to the request and this is usually to comply with it. This expected form of response threatens H's freedom of action and ultimately his negative face. Also, the degree of imposition is considered high because complying with a request will be at a cost to H. For these reasons, the requester will want to communicate his concerns about these threats to face in realizing the request. This can be achieved by using mitigating elements and politeness strategies. This study has examined how politeness is encoded when performing requests in Malay. The next section briefly discusses the linguistic means available in BM to perform "polite" requests followed by a section on how levels of PxD interaction determine the choice of a politeness strategy.

### 9.2.1 *Linguistic markers*

In BM, the surface form of a request marks a request as either direct or indirect. Direct requests are realized by the word *tolong* in sentence-initial position and the particle *lah*, which acts as a mitigator, is usually tacked to it. They also take the surface form of complex sentences. Requests with this structure contain the explicit performative verbs *mohon* and *mintal* and formal pronouns. These linguistic elements render requests formal and polite. Requests can also be realized in an indirect way using a question form. Specifically, the form *Boleh(kah)...?* is used to question the addressee's ability to perform the requested act. This linguistic realization is similar to that of conventional indirect requests in English using "can/could".

### 9.2.2 *Effects of PxD interaction on strategy choice*

Similar to offers, the number of requests made to individuals who share a close relationship with the speaker was more than that made to those who were unfamiliar with the speaker. Requests made to individuals with low D and low P relative to the speaker showed that H's low P was downplayed. Instead, there was an emphasis on low D relations in the use of in-group identity markers and in providing a reason for the request (positive-politeness strategies). The "non-emphasis" on H's low relative P was seen in the use of bald requests that were

“softened” by politeness markers, i.e. *tolong* and *cuba*, although H’s low P predicted that requests were on-record and without redress.

Requests made under equal P low D relations were either bald on record or on record with redress. The bald requests were motivated by face concerns due to their use of “imperatives for actions directly in H’s interest”. The use of this linguistic strategy communicated S’s care about or concern for H which is a means of addressing H’s positive face wants. Other bald requests were marked for politeness by the words *tolong* and *cuba*. Other than face-oriented bald requests, conventional indirect requests were also found under this type of PxD interaction. Such requests were linguistically realized using *bolehkah* and *dapatkah*.

The choice of politeness strategy for high P low D relations did not reflect H’s high P over S as predicted by B and L (1987). Instead, the use of directness in requests for permission and action showed an emphasis on low D. It should be noted that the choice of a direct strategy was due to the low level of imposition inherent in requests for permission while the size of requests for action was small. For large requests, “if” clauses were used. However, this negative- politeness hedge alluded to the request size rather than to H’s high P.

Context played a significant role in determining the choice of a request strategy for low P high D relations. In situations where emphasis was on H’s low P, requests were performed using imperatives and informal forms of address. When



high D factor defined a situation, requests were in the form of explicit performatives and formal address forms were used to address high D.

The effects of high P high D relations were seen in the use of negative-politeness and off-record strategies to perform large requests. Apologies and pessimism (negative-politeness strategies) or hints and association clues (off-record strategies) were used to address H's high P and at the same time, redress H's negative-face want. S also paid H negative face by making a request over several turns. This manner of requesting suggested the difficulty that S was having in making the request in the first place.

To surmise, strategy choice for requests made to individuals whom S is close to/familiar with (i.e. low D) across the three levels of power (low, equal, and high) did not clearly reflect the P-value. Specifically, requests made to close and low- or equal-status individuals were not bald and without redress. These requests were hedged by a politeness marker or redressed by a positive-politeness strategy. As for those made to high P individuals, requests were either direct or redressed by a negative-politeness strategy. When a negative-politeness strategy was used, this choice was due to request size rather than high P. As for low P high D relations, strategy choice was determined by context while that used under high P high D relations addressed high P by the use of negative-politeness and off-record strategies.

### 9.3 Responses to Offers and Requests

This study has also examined how offers and requests are accepted/granted or refused. It was found that offers were accepted and requests granted without delay. This is linguistically realized by words such as *ya*, *baiklah*, and *terima kasih*. One particular response that typifies a Muslim-Malay speaker is the Arabic word *insyallah*. *Insyallah* is used when S promises to accept a future offer or grant a future request. The conditional nature of this preferred response is inherent in the word, i.e. *insyallah* can be glossed as “if God wills it”. Apart from these responses or, in some instances, following these responses, compliments that alluded to the hearer’s generosity in making the offer or apologies that recognized the trouble the offer had caused H were used. As for requests, slightly long utterances involved responding to both literal and intended meanings.

In examining the dispreferreds, it was found that no delays or prefaces were used when an offer was declined. Phrases such as *tak apa(lah)*, *tak payah(lah)*, *tak usah(lah)*, and *tak usah susah-susah* were used to directly decline an offer. The direct nature of these responses is often “softened” by appending the particle *lah* to them. In addition, accounts that redressed the threat to the offerer’s positive face usually followed the declination. Request refusals, on the other hand, were performed on-record with redress or off-record. The on-record positive-politeness strategies included cooperating with H in fulfilling the request by suggesting an alternative, e.g. another person or another time, while the off-record strategies

involved a violation of the Gricean maxim. The choice of strategy is seen to be dependent on the reasonableness of the request more than on the PxD interaction.

Apart from studying how offers and requests were accepted or refused, a study of how a rejection of an offer or a request was 'dealt with' was also conducted. This was done by examining the subsequent versions of the speech act in question. It was found that when an offer was declined, the offerer would make the offer several times and/or give reasons for making it. In Malay society, making an offer several times communicates the offerer's sincerity in making the offer and the firmness/seriousness of it. Subsequent versions of requests were realized by minimizing the weightiness of the requests or by providing reasons for making them. These strategies redress the threat to the requestee's negative face.

#### **9.4 Implications of Findings and Conclusions**

The findings of this study have shown that, in making an offer or a request, a speaker of colloquial Malay of the 60s employs linguistic strategies that address face concerns. The choice of a politeness strategy, as suggested by B and L (1987), is dependent on the weightiness of the FTA which is measured by the interactants' relative power(P) and distance(D) and the rank of imposition(R) of a speech act in a particular culture. Further, strategy choice does not necessarily correspond with the value for  $W_x$ ; the use of a positive-politeness strategy does not, in all cases, indicate that the weightiness of an act is low and a negative-

politeness strategy does not automatically correspond to an act of high  $W_x$ . The authors have also proposed that strategies are distributed over particular types of social relationship (measured in terms of P and D) (see Ch. 5:p. 140). An analysis of the strategies identified from the corpus showed partial support for B and L's patterns of strategy distribution, in particular and their politeness framework, in general.

Generally, the effect of distance(D) on strategy choice was evident from the results of this study. High D relations, in particular, necessitated the use of negative-politeness and off-record strategies. The effect of power(P), particularly low and equal P, was not as evident. The use of positive- or negative-politeness strategies to redress bald-on-record FTAs does not reflect the P value. This then suggests that Malay society of the 1960s is a society where "people feel the closest bonds with those in the same social unit as themselves" (O'Driscoll, 1996:24). For example, the tie between parent-child or employer-employee is strong. This strong tie could explain the need to satisfy positive and negative face of those with low and equal P relative to the speaker with high P.

This study has also shown that FTAs are realized by a mixture of politeness strategies. The mixture of strategies found in the study showed the presence of positive- and negative-politeness elements in bald-on-record FTAs. In examining the use of such strategy mixtures in offers, it can be concluded that this is a result of a conflict between addressing the P or D values and communicating the

sincerity of the offer. Thus, this conflict is resolved by using strategies that address both, i.e. bald on record to encode sincerity and positive or negative politeness to encode the value P or D. As for requests, it is probable that strategy mixtures are employed to display which social variable is given emphasis. An emphasis on P could widen the social distance between interactants while a focus on D could reduce it (B and L, 1987:230).

The use of bald offers to encode sincerity is an instance of culture-specific face. Essentially, a sincerely-made offer is an act that is considered good or desirable in Malay society, not only that of the 60s, but also of the present one. As shown by the analysis of offers (chapter 6), this form of culture-specific face entails making an offer baldly and directly and also repeating the offer several times when it is refused. Apart from encoding sincerity, such an offer also conveys the firmness or seriousness of the said act.

B and L (1987) have suggested that strategy mixtures are a form of exploitation of politeness strategies. This form of exploitation is possible due to the ambiguity resulting from “the compounding of the factors D, P, and R into a single value that measures the weightiness of an FTA (i.e.  $W_x$ )” (B and L, 1987:228). This is ambiguous because it “does not necessarily display which of the social variables is primarily responsible for the assessed weight of  $W_x$ ” (ibid.). This fact constitutes a weakness of the politeness framework.

Taking this into consideration, it is perhaps necessary to go beyond sentence-level analysis, i.e. beyond single acts, in order to examine the motivations for politeness strategies. B and L (1987) have observed that “FTAs do not necessarily inhere in single acts” (p. 232ff). Studying the speech event in which the FTA is performed is one possibility since it allows an analysis of pre- and post-FTA discourse. At the same time, this discourse-level approach would serve as a more reliable tool in identifying the variable that functions most in determining a strategy choice. Usami (1999), in studying the choice of linguistic forms and the behaviour of discourse elements (i.e. speech-level shifts and proportions of topic initiations) to encode politeness, found that the behaviour of these discourse elements clearly reflected the effects of the social variables, namely age and power. A study by Fujita (2001), who also adopted a discourse approach to the study of linguistic politeness, revealed how linguistic markers, sequential factors in discourse, and situational variables interact to encode politeness. This study too has looked beyond single acts to examine the effects of P and D by namely examining how requests are performed over several turns and how subsequent versions of offers and requests are realized.

The application of B and L’s politeness model (as elaborated and revised by O’Driscoll (1996)) to the analysis of how face concerns are linguistically realized in Bahasa Melayu (Malay) has shown the cross-cultural utility of the model. The cross-cultural applicability of the model lies in the broadening of B and L’s positive and negative face constituents and the inclusion of an additional face

aspect to produce three reflexes of face; two of them are universal in nature, i.e. positive face and negative face, and one is culturally-determined, i.e. culture-specific face. These faces operate independently or together in determining an appropriate politeness strategy for a particular speech situation located within a particular language. In this study, recognition of positive face, negative face and culture-specific face is evident in Malay colloquial speech of the 1960s. Further, these face reflexes motivate the politeness strategies used to make and respond to offers and requests.

Generally-speaking, the strategies identified in this study are “positively polite” (O’Driscoll, 1996) where positive wants – the need to have ties and to belong – are addressed. Also, instances of culture-specific face are present in the bald strategies used when making offers since such offers encode sincerity – an admirable trait in Malay culture.

In sum, attention to positive face and culture-specific face characterize colloquial speech of the 1960s. Future research into politeness in Bahasa Melayu could examine the extent to which these faces and also negative face are attended to in ‘real’ talk occurring in ‘real’ time. It is hoped that this study which has examined the concept of face and politeness within Malay culture can serve as a starting point.