

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Introduction

This study investigates the politeness strategies employed by a group of family members in naturally-occurring conversations. The aim is mainly to look into the patterns of politeness strategies that emerge among male and female interlocutors.

### 1.2. Background of the Study

In our daily interaction with others, the notion of politeness always occurs regardless of who we are communicating with. According to Wardhaugh (2006: 284), we are able to establish relationships and further maintain the relationships by engaging ourselves in different kind of conversations.

Language is seen as an important tool in communicating with others because language is employed by individuals to maintain their social relationships (Coates, 1996).

However, the degree of politeness varies across cultures as the perception of politeness can be very different. Besides, politeness may have different kinds of impact when family domain is concerned. Thus it is essential for an individual to have a greater insight of the social values within a society in order to be linguistically polite (David, 2008). Politeness is culture-specific as the realization of politeness strategies differ in different cultures (Tian and Zhao, 2006). According to Pan (2007), social factors such as age, rank in-group identity and setting should also be taken into consideration when an investigation on politeness is carried out.

In family discourse, talks or conversations among family members often occur spontaneously in natural settings. Family discourse, as stated by Zuraidah (2006), is particularly essential to make one self prominent as an individual as well as a member of a family. This is necessary because family members may share many emotional moments with each other, thus the process of talking about these experiences defines one's identity as a member in a family as well as an individual. In a family discourse, one may build up rapport with other family members by sharing what he or she has gone through in life.

Family members have a wide range of topics to share and discuss, or even criticize and comment. In the process of sharing and discussing, interlocutors always demonstrate politeness strategies in a conversation, be it to agree or disagree on a particular issue. The demonstration of politeness strategies in conversations may be done consciously or unconsciously (Hoebe, 2001). Thus, it is interesting to investigate conversations that are carried out in family settings because a family is the smallest unit, thus it is the baseline for a particular culture (Kramarae, 1981).

Family conversation is an essential communication tool to develop social skills and a sense of belonging (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1986 in Bordner-Johnson, 1991). Thus, by focusing on family conversations which are part of social interaction, it will provide a better insight of how the interlocutors communicate with each other to maintain good relationship with and keep a conversation going.

The target group of a particular study carried out by Brown (1987) was a Mexican Mayan community, in which he looked into the use of language among women and men. From the findings, she proposes that the social relationship of the interlocutors will affect the employment of politeness strategies in an interaction (Brown, 1987), and

thus reflects the level of closeness and social proximity among the interlocutors when politeness strategies are employed.

Besides that, face-threatening act (FTA) is known to be closely related to politeness, in which certain forms of politeness could threaten rather than maintain face (Goffman, 1967). In the study on politeness, one significant aspect which affects how people engage themselves in social interaction is the face concept (Brown and Levinson, 1978 in Ruhi & Guler, 2007).

The value of face is echoed by Pan (2000) who mentions that

“During face-to-face interaction, these face needs are vulnerable to face-threatening acts encoded in language, which either threaten the involvement aspect of the relationship between the participants or impede the independence of individuals.”

(Pan, 2000: 10)

Based on Pan’s findings, linguistic politeness is vital because it helps in minimising the imposition of FTAs by attending to the interlocutors’ face needs. Thus, politeness is an effective way to save each other’s face so that an interaction will proceed smoothly (Pan, 2000: 10).

Besides, it is interesting and challenging to unravel the politeness strategies employed among family members in the Chinese community because *mian zi* (face) is regarded as an essential aspect to take care of in Chinese social relationships (Haugh and Hinze, 2003). The Chinese community is particularly conscious about saving his/ her own face to show authority in a conversation.

However, politeness strategies (defined in detail in Chapter 2, page 17-31) are sometimes related to power and solidarity which shows closeness among family members. Blum-Kulka (1997) mentions that family talk provides the opportunity for family members to familiarize their children to the politeness strategies practised in their social community. This is because in a family conversation, family members in the Western Countries have the tendency to be more open in expressing their ideas and thoughts. Thus, the politeness strategies employed by interlocutors in different situations and contexts can be distinguished (Blum-Kulka, 1997). When family members discuss about topics that revolve around them, they feel more comfortable in expressing their thoughts and opinions to each other.

A topic in which they share the background knowledge and information can be easily brought up and discussed among family members and so, the politeness strategies that they demonstrate, be it consciously or discreetly, are related to the closeness and solidarity of the family members. For example, positive politeness strategy could be demonstrated by family members while trying to seek agreement or claim common ground from the hearer because he or she would like to be committed in a particular conversation and show cooperation to the hearer.

This study is an attempt to look into how the Chinese community interact with each other in family settings. Lee (1986) who investigated the Chinese cultures and background, describes the hierarchy in the Chinese community and also states that there is a difference in the usage of kinship terms between paternal and maternal side (cited in Kuang, 2008). On the other hand, Ling (1996) indicates that Malaysian Chinese are linguistically more direct and this is supported by several studies in which this trait of

Malaysian Chinese has been highlighted. The above-mentioned studies which involve Malaysian Chinese would be useful in serving as a guide and reference to this research.

### **1.3. Purpose of the Study**

The literature on politeness has been explored extensively by numerous researchers.

However, studies on politeness strategies among family members are rare. Thus, this study is a step towards filling this gap in research.

This study explores and discovers the strategies of politeness that are realised among family members who are biologically related to each other. It will delve into the realization of politeness strategies among family members in casual conversations.

This study is aimed at unravelling the various kinds of politeness strategies employed among family members in casual and naturally-occurring conversations. Based on the aim of this study, two research questions have been designed:

1. What are the politeness strategies demonstrated among family members?
2. How do the interlocutors accommodate face strategies among each other?

Research question 1 examines the patterns that emerge in the politeness strategies employed among members of the families. As the employment of politeness strategies could differ according to individuals, thus it is interesting to explore how politeness is demonstrated in family casual conversations.

Research question 2 will look into how members of the family threaten or protect the face of other family members by employing the politeness strategies.

An investigation in this area is felt to be vital in order to identify the politeness strategies employed among Chinese family members. Though every individual may have different ways in demonstrating politeness strategies in conversations, findings of this study will be a guide in identifying how Chinese demonstrate politeness strategies for the purpose of sustaining good relationship and keeping the conversation going.

#### **1.4. Scope of the Study**

There are three sections in this study. The investigation of the patterns in the employment of politeness strategies is carried out. The subjects who participated in the study comprise family members in the Chinese community and there were 41 of them. The participants were instructed to put their family conversations into recordings for the purpose of this study with preceding consent obtained from the participants. This section which constitutes the major area of the investigation, attempts to unravel the patterns that commonly emerge in the employment of politeness strategies among family members.

Apart from determining the employment of politeness strategies, this study also looks into face strategies employed by members of the family.

The focus of this study is on the realization of politeness strategies among family members in naturally-occurring conversations. In-depth exploration of how the employment of politeness strategies affects the relationship among interlocutors will not be investigated as a detailed investigation on this area warrants a separate study.

Relevant conclusions deduced from the findings will subsequently lead to pertinent implications of the strategies employed as well as recommendations for future research based on the findings of this study.

## **1.5. Limitations of the Study**

### **1.5.1. Subjects**

This study involves 41 Chinese family members from seven families of the Chinese community in Peninsular Malaysia. The families were selected from extended families or families of the researcher's acquaintance. The data comprises seven short naturally-occurring conversations among family members.

### **1.5.2. Data Collection**

The data collection was challenging and time-consuming. Besides that, it took some time for the participants to warm-up and be comfortable with the recording. At the beginning of the recording sessions, some participants were reluctant to have their conversations recorded until they were given the assurance that the recording will be kept private and will only be used for the purpose of this study. Apart from that, the participants were also concerned about what to talk about and how to start off the conversations. Some of them were very self-conscious when the recordings kicked off, but it dissipated after some time. As the number of data collected is not extensive, thus the findings of this research cannot be used as a yardstick to generalise the Malaysian community.

### **1.5.3. Research instruments**

The conversations were recorded with an MP3 player and mobile phone which have the voice recording feature. Before the conversations were recorded, the researcher suggested the family members to carry out the recording with minimal background noise. This was to ensure an audible recording would be obtained. However, background noises like the sound of the car engine, music from the audio player and television as well as sounds from vehicles on the road or outside the house were inevitable as they were beyond the researcher's control. Besides background noises which interfered with the recording, another limitation to this study was the occasional mumbling and unclear utterances of the participants. However, this limitation did not impinge the reliability of this study because the occurrence was minimal.

Although a study of this nature could have been significantly enhanced by the involvement of families from different races and cultures in Malaysia, nevertheless, only seven Chinese families were targeted for this study. Therefore, an investigation of the realization of politeness strategies among family members of other races in Malaysia warrants a separate study and it could be a good prospect to consider for future studies.

### **1.6. Conclusion**

This study was conducted with the purpose of identifying the patterns of politeness strategies that emerge among family members in naturally occurring conversations. As family members maintain their social structure through family talk, it is interesting to explore how these social relationships are maintained in conversations. This study on politeness strategies among Chinese family members in Malaysia would add to the existing studies on family talk.



## **Chapter 2.**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

This section deals with two major parts of the investigation. The notion of politeness and the theoretical framework put forward by Brown and Levinson (1987) will be discussed in the first part of this chapter. Subsequently, face-threatening act (FTA) which is related to the employment of politeness strategies will be delved into to look at how an imposition is minimised to maintain good relationships with other interlocutors.

#### **2.2. Politeness**

Politeness is often regarded as linguistic politeness in the field of pragmatics. Yu (2003) states that politeness is expressed verbally when one communicates with others in a conversation via the employment of language. In the pragmatics field, politeness was not a common area studied by researchers until late 1970s. Some of these early studies in the area of politeness were initiated by Shils (1968) and Lakoff (1973). Few politeness models have been found to be useful for reference and they are the models proposed by Lakoff, 1973,1975; Fraser, 1990; Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Fraser & Nolen, 1981; Leech, 1983; and Green, 1989 (Yu, 2003). Lakoff (1973) was one of the first few researchers to come up with politeness model. The politeness model proposed by him has some similarities with Brown and Levinson's (1987). One of the similarities between these two views is that interlocutors avoid conflicts when a conversation is carried out. Lakoff (1990:34) mentioned that politeness "facilitates interaction by minimising the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in human interchange".

In other words, politeness is supposed to minimise the occurrence of conflicts and disagreements in conversations.

Politeness in the pragmatic field is known as a significant aspect in intercultural and cross-cultural studies (Pan, 2000). Politeness is important in our daily communication as well as interpersonal relationship. This is because it reflects how well we are able to communicate with other individuals by establishing close relationships with them. On the other hand, Holmes (1995) shares the idea similar to Brown and Levinson (1987) regarding politeness. She states that politeness is “behaviour which actively expresses positive concern for others, as well as non-imposing distancing behaviour” (Holmes, 1995: 5).

Next to that, Pan (2000) defines politeness as “human psychological needs, psychological and social identity, as well as interpersonal and social relationships”. She suggests that politeness is regarded as one of the ways to minimise face-threatening acts (FTA). According to Zhao and Tian (2006), politeness should be emphasized in a communication because it enhances relationships among individuals. They regard politeness as a social phenomenon and “a norm imposed by social conventions”, in which an individual in a society has some expectations to meet in terms of how to behave and act. Zhao and Tian (2006) believe politeness reflects whether an individual in the community is cultured and civilised.

Scollon & Scollon (1995) explains that when we communicate with others, the notion of politeness comes naturally. However, how politeness is projected by an individual could be different in another context or culture. In connection to this, it is argued that politeness is not just a set of rules being decided upon. Instead, they are a set of beliefs

that can be helpful in one way or another in providing insights for interpersonal communication (Pan, 2000).

Besides, the context of a conversation should be taken into consideration so that we are able to determine whether an utterance is polite or not. With this, politeness would be an effective tool when we communicate with others. On the other hand, if the context is not taken into consideration, the analysis would be “superficial and insufficient” (Pan, 2000).

Besides, Pan (2008) mentions that when a study on politeness is carried out across culture, a researcher may find it challenging to come up with substantial evidence and convincing comparisons. Pan (2008) argues that politeness is very frequently contextual and subjective. This is because certain kinds of expression are linguistically polite in one culture as it is a norm in that particular culture. However, the same kind of expression may not be accepted in other culture.

Pan (2000) explains that it is quite common that people tend to have a strong believe in their own perceptions. Thus, they are driven to judge what and who is considered as polite or impolite. By believing in their perceptions and using it as a baseline, they have the urge to distinguish what is and is not polite without realising that this may be completely different in another culture.

Matsumoto (1988), Gu (1990) and Mao (1992), and Ide et al. (1992) suggest that the reason behind the difference in politeness behaviour between Eastern and Western cultures is that both cultures share different perspectives regarding politeness. That is why when analyses on politeness are carried out, they should be context-specific and comparisons should be made across situations. Pan (2000) conducted a research study

on politeness in Chinese face-to-face interaction. In her study, she discussed the concept of politeness by making comparisons and providing substantial evidence across different settings and situations. Her studies revealed that positive politeness is dominant in Chinese culture, especially in the home domain. She explains that this is for the speaker to show sincerity and solidarity with the hearer. Based on her findings, she suggested that directness in performing speech acts is also significant in a Chinese family, as it is a way for family members to build rapport with each other and to show mutual understanding and solidarity. Thus, in her data of conversations among family members, politeness hedges were hardly found as family members were direct when they communicated with each other. Pan (2000: 112) also reveals that while solidarity is an emphasis in the family setting, another emphasis is the hierarchical difference, as age and gender have an impact on the employment of face strategies among family members. In other words, senior family members have the tendency to be more direct, whereas junior family members have the tendency to be more respectful of the senior family members. Findings of Pan (2000) are significant to this study as the researcher looks into the employment of politeness strategies among family members.

One of the main approaches in the study of politeness is language-based politeness (Lim, 2000). The language-based politeness is known as one of the areas in pragmatics knowledge and it is the “linguistic realizations of pragmatic rules in communication”. There are sets of rules governing human behaviours; similarly there are also rules related to language use. There are three examples which are often being related to language-based politeness. They are politeness rules by Lakoff (1973), politeness principles by Leech (1983) and politeness model by Brown and Levinson’s (1987). In the politeness model of Brown and Levinson (1987), one of the main concerns is the concept of face. Many anthropologists and sociologists have discussed this to look at

how the concept of face has an impact on interpersonal relationships. Sifianau (1992) and House and Kasper (1981) also conducted several studies on politeness extensively.

### **2.3. Brown and Levinson's Politeness Strategies**

Brown and Levinson (1987) propose that politeness strategies are aimed at “saving a person’s face and minimising the imposition of FTA”. Face is regarded as dignity and it helps an individual to gain respect from others in private or public contexts. Pan (2000) has mentioned earlier that face is a human psychological need and politeness reflects “how human relationships are regarded and how individuals are related to each other in a cultural context”. Therefore, politeness strategies are aimed at dealing with FTAs.

There are two aspects in politeness in which face is involved. They are positive politeness and negative politeness (Brown and Levinson,1978 in Thirumalai et al., 2006).

The politeness model by Brown and Levinson (1987) is divided into four categories:

- a) Bald-on record--- this encourages one to express an opinion or idea explicitly.
- b) Positive Politeness--- this strategy is mainly employed to establish solidarity.
- c) Negative Politeness--- this strategy is employed to express ambiguity for the purpose of minimising the imposition of FTA.
- d) Off-record Politeness--- this is a strategy to avoid explicit utterances so that the hearer’s face is being saved.

In the politeness model proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), there are several sub-categories under each category, and the definition for each category will be briefly discussed.

The demonstration of positive and negative face reflects the paradox of human being's psychological needs of involvement and independence in language use. In Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model, it is mentioned that there is a desire of being connected with others and this is reflected in bald-on record and positive politeness. On the other hand, negative politeness and off-record politeness are related to the desire of not to be impeded.

### **2.3.1. BALD ON RECORD**

The first strategy of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model is Bald-on record, in which "interlocutors are encouraged to practise camaraderie and express ideas explicitly" (Lim, 2000). He also reflects that the interlocutors are encouraged to establish rapport among each other "to the extent that face threatening acts can be ignored".

Brown and Levinson (1987) mention that bald-on record is a way for an individual to express an idea or opinion explicitly. This strategy is commonly used when the interlocutors intends to do the FTA with 'maximum efficiency' rather than satisfying the face of the hearer. One would most probably employ this strategy in a conversation to "embarrass or make others feel uncomfortable" (Brown and Levinson, 1987). On top of that, this politeness strategy is usually employed among people who are close to each other, for example close family and friends (Brown and Levinson, 1987). The examples below illustrate how bald on record strategy is demonstrated (Brown and Levinson: 96):

*Watch out!*

*Your pants are on fire!*

*Don't burn your hand!*

### 2.3.2. POSITIVE POLITENESS

Brown and Levinson (1987) explain that positive politeness is also known as “the desire of an individual to be approved of”. Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that positive politeness is regarded as a positive way to maintain a self-image or personality consistently, in which an individual hopes that the other interlocutors will learn to appreciate and approve this image (Brown and Levinson, 1987 in Pan, 2000). This is mainly because the individual is expecting the acceptance of other interlocutors so that s/he will be included in the group. Therefore, positive politeness reflects that an individual who seeks acceptance to be included in a particular group will find ways to establish good rapport with the other interlocutors.. When an individual has a good relationship with the interlocutors, positive politeness is employed to show solidarity. Below is a summary of Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness strategies for positive politeness:

#### *Strategy 1: Attend to hearer’s needs*

The speaker pays attention to the listener’s condition, for example “noticeable changes and remarkable possessions or anything that reflects as though the listener desires to be approved of or noticed by the speaker” (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 103). The examples below show how FTA is redressed to save face of the hearer:

1. *You must be hungry, it’s a long time since breakfast. How about some lunch?*
2. *Goodness, you cut your hair! (...) By the way, I came to borrow your flour.*

### *Strategy 2: Exaggerate*

This is normally achieved by “exaggerating the intonation, stress, and other aspects of prosodics”. It also includes the employment of “intensifying modifiers”. For example:

1. *What a fantastic garden you have!*
2. *How absolutely incredible!*

### *Strategy 3: Claiming common ground*

Brown and Levinson (1987) propose that the employment of “repetition as well as safe topics as ways to claim common ground” should be included in this strategy.

In a conversation, the demonstration of repetitive words or phrases reflects that one is able to interpret a conveyed message correctly Brown and Levinson (1987). On top of that, repetition is also a way for an individual to express surprise, show agreement or interest, in which s/he is emotionally involved (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

Besides repetition, when one finds a way to agree with the idea of another interlocutor, it is also a way for one to claim common ground. Topics which allow an individual to establish rapport with the others in order to maintain a relationship are claimed to be commonly used when communication with strangers take place (Brown and Levinson, 1987). By generating potential topics which are able to sustain a conversation, it is another way of encouraging an individual to stick to them.

The example below illustrates the use of claiming common ground with the use of repetition :

*Y: I encountered a **robber** last night!*

*Z: Oh God, a **robber**!*



*Strategy 4: Avoid disagreement*

A message conveyed could be twisted by an interlocutor to avoid from being noticed that they disagree with something.

Below are examples by Brown and Levinson (1987: 114) to illustrate how disagreement can be avoided to reduce the impact of FTA:

Example 1

*A: That's where you live, Florida?*

*B: That's where I was born.*

Example 2

*A: What is she, small?*

*B: Yes, yes, she's small, smallish, um, not really small but certainly not very big.*

*Strategy 5: Assert common ground*

General topics are introduced and discussed for awhile before the real conversation takes place. This strategy is usually used to minimise the impact of a request and the speaker needs to spend some time to assert his interest to the hearer, or sometimes give empathy to the hearer. Below are examples of how this strategy is demonstrated (Brown and Levinson: 119):

1. *Oh dear, we've lost our little ball, haven't we, Johnny?*
2. *A: Oh this cut hurts awfully, Mum.*  
*B: Yes dear, it hurts terribly, I know.*

#### *Strategy 6: Joke*

Brown and Levinson (1987: 124) state that jokes are based on 'mutual shared background knowledge and values' and it is considered a positive politeness strategy. This strategy is employed to minimise the FTA of requesting as the speaker does not pose a threat to the hearer. Below are the examples (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 124):

1. *Okay if I tackle those cookies now?*
2. *How about lending me this old heap of junk? (Hearer's new Cadillac)*

#### *Strategy 7: Show concern for hearer's needs*

This strategy is useful when the interlocutors try to show co-operation and support for each other in a conversation. In this strategy, pressure is put on the hearer to cooperate with the speaker. Thus, the speaker asserts concern of what the hearer wants. For example:

1. *Look, I know you want the car back by 5pm, so should I go to town now? (request)*
2. *I know you love roses but the florist didn't have anymore, so I brought you geraniums instead (offer + apology)*

*Strategy 8: Ensure participation of each other*

The 'we' form is employed to include each other in a conversation, even when the speaker means 'you' or 'me' (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 127). This strategy is used to minimise FTAs and show cooperation among each other. Below are some examples from Brown and Levinson (1987: 127):

1. *Give us (me) a break.*
2. *Let us (me) have a cookie, then.*
3. *Let's stop for a bite.. (i.e. I want a bite, so let's stop)*

*Strategy 9: Provide reasons*

A speaker will employ this strategy to explain what is desired and why is it desired. In other words, providing reasons is a way of implying what help is needed (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 128). Example below illustrates this strategy:

1. *Why don't we go to the seashore!*
2. *Why not lend me your cottage for the weekend!*
3. *Why don't you bathe at all?*

### **2.3.3. NEGATIVE POLITENESS**

Negative politeness is "the desire of an individual not to be imposed on" (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Brown and Levinson (1987) stated that this strategy is exploited when the speaker does not have the intention to interfere with "the addressee's freedom of action or freedom from imposition". Negative politeness reflects that the hearer wishes

to be independent and respected. Politeness is regarded as a way to save each other's face and ensure smooth communication among each other (Pan, 2000). According to Pan (2000), although individuals have to establish rapport with the other interlocutors in a communication, s/he needs to be relatively independent too. In other words, face-saving act is important as to not impeding the freedom of imposition of other people.

Below is a summary of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies for negative politeness:

*Strategy 1: Being indirect*

When the speaker wishes to be direct and indirect to the hearer at the same time, this strategy is being employed.

Example:

*He is searching for a printer urgently* instead of *He needs to borrow your printer urgently*.

*Strategy 2: Use of hedging devices*

This is a strategy that is realized via the use words or phrases which make the meaning of an imposition fuzzier or less precise, such as 'quite', 'sort of', 'perhaps' 'I guess' and 'I wonder' (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 155). The examples below illustrate how this strategy is demonstrated:

1. *I am just sad because of it, **I guess**.*
2. *A: Your hair is beautiful!*  
*B: Oh, **perhaps** it is beautiful!*

### *Strategy 3: Minimise the impact of an imposition*

When the speaker intends to minimize the imposition of FTA, this strategy can be employed to save the hearer's face. For example:

1. *I just want to ask you if I can borrow some paper.*
2. *I just dropped by for a minute to ask if you...*

### *Strategy 4: Apologise*

This strategy is used when the speaker is reluctant to impinge on the hearer's negative face, and so the speaker may apologise for doing an FTA. According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 187), there are a few ways for the speaker to show regret or reluctance to do an FTA. The sub-categories are as shown below:

#### A) Admit the impingement

In this strategy, the speaker admits in an implicit manner that s/he is impeding on the hearer's face. For example:

1. *I'm sure you must be very busy, but...*
2. *I don't want to bother you, but.....*
3. *I hope you don't mind me saying this, but....*

#### B) Seek forgiveness

This strategy is used when the speaker seeks forgiveness from the hearer. The employment of this strategy is to minimize the imposition of FTA. For example (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 188):

1. *Excuse me but.....*
2. *I hope you'll forgive me if...*

C) Give overwhelming reasons

This strategy is used when the speaker would like to draw the attention of the hearer to certain matter in a very polite manner in order to minimize the imposition of FTA.

1. *I can think of nobody else who could...*
2. *Can you possibly help me with this, because there's no one else I could ask.*

D) Show reluctance

This strategy is employed when the speaker wishes to indicate his/ her reluctance to impinge on the hearer by using hedging devices. For example:

1. *I hope you don't mind me saying this, but...*
2. *I hesitate to trouble you, but...*

#### **2.3.4. OFF-RECORD POLITENESS**

According to Brown and Levinson (1978), this is a strategy for the speaker not to be accountable for doing an FTA, and let the hearer interpret the message him/herself. This indirect way of conveying a message occurs when one says something which is more general or different from what s/he means. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), this strategy is usually employed when one wants to do FTA but avoids responsibilities. Thus, the hearer will have to decide and interpret the message based on his/her own discretion. Indirectness is employed to save face and establish rapport that comes from “being understood without saying what one means” (Tannen, 1989 in Tsuda, 1993).

Below is a summary of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies for off-record politeness:

*Strategy 1: Provide hints*

Brown and Levinson (1987: 213) mention that in this strategy, the speaker will provide certain hints for the hearer to seek possible interpretation of an utterance. For example:

1. *It's cold in here (Hint: Shut the window)*
2. *This soup is a bit bland. (Hint: Pass the salt).*
3. *What a boring movie! (Hint: Let's leave)*

*Strategy 2: Providing understatements*

In this strategy, the speaker will convey something which is slightly different from what was intended initially. This is a strategy in which one tends to say less than is required (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 218). For example:

*A: How do you like Josephine's new haircut?*

*B: It's all right. (I don't particularly like it..)*

*Strategy 3: Employing contradictions*

In this strategy, the speaker makes it appear as if he is not able to tell the truth by mentioning two things which contradict with each other. When two contradictions occur, the hearer has to find possible interpretations for the two propositions which are contradictory (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 221). For example:

*A: Are you upset about that?*

*B: Yes and no.*

#### *Strategy 4: Use of rhetorical questions*

When the speaker comes up with a particular question but no response is expected from the hearer, this strategy is employed. This is because the speaker “wants to provide the hearer with the indicated information” (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 223). For example:

1. *How many times do I have to tell you...? (Hint: Too many times)*
2. *What can I say? (Hint: Nothing, it's so bad).*
3. *How was I to know... ? (Hint: I wasn't)*

#### *Strategy 5: Vagueness*

When the speaker intends to be implicit while dealing with FTAs, s/he will try to be vague in his utterance for the purpose of avoiding from discussing “who the object of the FTA is, or what the offence is” (Brown & Levinson, 1987). According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 225), this strategy is used to describe the “ambiguity between the literal meaning of an utterance and any of its possible implicatures”. Examples are shown as below:

1. *I'm going you-know-where.*
2. *Perhaps someone did something naughty.*

#### **2.4. Face Threatening Act (FTA)**

As a member of a society, there is great potential for one to maintain and save each other's face in a communication (Brown and Levinson, 1987 in Kitamura, 2001). Kitamura (2001) says politeness strategy is frequently exploited to save other's face and minimize FTA.



Goffman (1959) mentions that “face is a sacred thing for human beings and it is reciprocal” (cited in Zhao, 2010). Face is treated as a basic want in communications because it is regarded as the ‘public self-image’ for one self (Yule, 2000 in Zhao, 2010). It is also mentioned that face is a basic need for human beings to be “appreciated and approved of” (Brown & Levinson, 1987 in Lim, 2000). On the other hand, an individual may also seek for freedom of imposition.

It is suggested by Brown (1977) that individuals are linguistically polite when they show concern about the hearer’s face wants. It is also mentioned by Brown (1977) that individuals are more polite when a communication with their superiors or people whom they are not close to takes place. Politeness is also more likely to be employed when one is involved in FTA in a conversation.

Positive and negative face are closely related to “consciousness and self-awareness” (O’Driscoll, 2007 in Lim, 2000). The expression of solidarity and the desire to be accepted in a group is related to positive politeness, whereas negative politeness is linked to “distance and formality” (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

In the family context, family is “the basic unit of a hierarchical structure” (Pan, 2000). In relation to this, Zhao and Gao (1990) suggest that this hierarchical structure is pivotal among family members because the politeness and face are the main concerns. In the Chinese society, the hierarchical order is distinguished by the “relational pair”. For example, grandfather-grandmother, older-younger, mother-daughter.

Pan (2000) mentions that there are several factors to be considered when determining who is up or down in the family hierarchy. Those factors mentioned include gender, status and age. According to her, age and gender are factors that need to be considered

because they will affect the employment of face strategies when a conversation takes place. In relation to that, in Chinese families, Li (1994) states that there are kinship terms for the younger or junior family members to address the senior or older members of the family. However, personal names will be called upon to address junior or younger family members. The existence of family hierarchy in the Chinese society proves why there are distinctive ways of addressing each other in a family (Li,1994).

## **2.5. Politeness and Culture**

A number of cross-cultural studies which are closely related to politeness have been done and researchers suggest that culture is an important part in determining the different politeness strategies demonstrated in a society (Shameem in David and Kow, 2008).

Scollon and Scollon (1995) introduced politeness in the cultural aspect by explaining that positive politeness strategy is preferred by Westerners, whereas East-Asians like Chinese and Koreans tend to employ negative politeness more frequently. However, this finding is contradictory with those of Wei (1998) and Lee-Wong (2000). The findings of their studies reveal that there is a higher possibility for Chinese speakers to be direct when proposing a request compared to German or English speakers.

Scollon and Scollon (1995) carried out another research, in which they reported that Asians are more likely to “demonstrate close relationship between face concerns and topic introduction”. In other words, the choice of topics in conversations are closely related to FTAs. However, politeness is relatively vital for communication purposes in the eastern and western cultures but is differentiated by its usage in daily communication (Fang, 2007). Although there is a distinction in the employment of politeness strategies in the eastern and western culture, this study by Scollon and

Scollon (1995) is still important to this research as this study looks into the employment of FTAs and reasons behind that.

On the other hand, Lee-Wong (1998) proposed that Chinese particles are regarded as mitigators to minimise the impact of direct requests (cited in Huey, 2005). They also explained that particles are employed to reduce the illocutionary force of an utterance. However, in Huey's (2005) study, she discovered that the meaning of particles might differ due to different setting and context. The use of speech particles is significant to this study as it sets as a platform to explore the use of speech particles among Chinese family members and reasons behind the demonstration of speech particles in family conversations .

Hsu (1981) states that group boundaries is significant in the Chinese society This is mainly because in the Chinese culture, positive face want is regarded as the basis for practising politeness in daily interaction with others (cited in Pan, 2000: 147). As this study focuses on family conversations among Chinese, thus this is pivotal to look into the employment of positive face wants among family members and how they demonstrate it.

Gu (1990) and Spencer-Oatey (1992) focused on the study of politeness. They mentioned that the concept of face as well as Brown and Levinson's (1987) positive and negative politeness are distinguishable across cultures.

Hence, Jandt (2001) states that it is essential to explore and look into experiences which are likely to influence the "family customs, language and gestures, personal appearance and social relationship" of an individual in order to understand the culture better.

## **2.6. Past Research**

Although the politeness model proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) was widely used in past researches, there are numerous criticisms against it.

One of the main critics against this politeness model is the inflexibility of this model which does not allow it to fit into every culture across the globe. Some critics believe that Brown and Levinson's politeness model is unable to provide concrete evidence and that it is inappropriate to be applied universally to all culture and contexts (Fraser, 1990; Lim, 2005; Matsumoto, 1988). This is because there are certain kinds of norms for behaviours which are regarded as rightful and proper, and they often differ across culture (Pillai in David & Kow, 2008). In relation to that, Matsumoto (1988) suggests that although the perception of politeness may vary in every social and cultural group, the ultimate aim of the politeness strategy is to sustain a smooth interaction and establish good rapport among the interlocutors (Pillai in David & Kow, 2008).

In a study conducted by Chen (1993), she revealed that the politeness model by Brown and Levinson (1987) appeared to be insufficient in elaborating and explaining the findings of her study. She studied on politeness strategies American English speakers and Chinese speakers used to respond to compliments. Besides that, she also mentioned that in Brown and Levinson's politeness model, individuals are supposed to accept compliments. This is mainly because they regard compliments as positive politeness and by not doing so, it threatens the positive face of the person who compliments. However, Chen (1993) found that Chinese speakers have the tendency to reject compliments and is usually followed by self-denigration. She also revealed that Chinese speakers demonstrate 'deflection responses'. For example, "Did I really perform that well?" (Rafik-Gaela in David & Kow, 2008). Thus, Chen (1993) proposes the

employment of Leech's Politeness Maxim instead of Brown and Levinson's politeness model, because it was challenging to analyse her data with the latter.

Mao (1994) also criticised the politeness model by Brown and Levinson (1987). In relation to this, he proposed two major arguments. The first argument was the inappropriateness of conceptualising face as a 'self-image' (cited in Ji, 2000). He reckoned this might not be applicable in Chinese culture and claimed that the face concept in the Chinese community was not about individual desires but harmony developed in a particular communication. Thus, it was proposed that face should be a 'public image', and not a 'self-image' (Mao, 1994 cited in Ji, 2000). This finding would be useful to this research in which the aspect of face will be looked into and the employment of FTAs would be a consideration, too.

Mao's second argument against the politeness model by Brown and Levinson was regarding the "concept of face". He mentioned that the face concept postulated by Brown and Levinson should be replaced with *mianzi* or *lian*. According to Mao (1994), the negative face component does not exist in the Chinese concept of face while *mianzi* is closely related to positive politeness, in which one hopes to be included in a group.

Scollon & Scollon (1995) claimed that the politeness model by Brown and Levinson which proposed less politeness is needed in close relationships is less accurate and appropriate. Instead, they suggested it is not that politeness is not needed at all in close relationships, but politeness is manifested differently in this kind of relationship. Thus, Scollon & Scollon introduced a set of politeness systems which they thought would be more useful (Yahya & Azimah, 2010). As Scollon & Scollon argued that the politeness model by Brown and Levinson does not allow 'distinction between solidarity and deference politeness'. In the Scollon's politeness systems, face relationships have been

divided into three systems, namely solidarity politeness system, deference politeness system and hierarchical politeness system.

Notwithstanding the counter-theses by several researchers, the politeness model by Brown and Levinson will be used as a reference and adapted in this study. This is because it is pivotal to mention that the politeness model by Brown and Levinson created ‘an important aspect of face-wants’ (Yoong in David and Kow, 2008). It should not be totally negated as it provides a perspective towards the notion of face, although this may vary across culture.

Face as self-image is imperative as it can be a motivating factor for interlocutors to demonstrate ‘positive or negative politeness strategy in social interactions’ (Ji, 2000). In order to promote politeness, face should be regarded as a self-image when communicating with others. The importance of face is supported by Matsumoto (1988:423) who defines face as a given self-image in a social context. This reflects Brown and Levinson’s notion of face more closely than Mao’s (1994) *mianzi*. Besides, the notion of *mianzi* postulated by Mao (1994) was not substantiated by concrete evidence and thus, its reliability is not proven. Furthermore, negative face cannot be ruled out and neglected in the Chinese culture although the occurrence may not be prominent (Ji, 2000). According to Ji (2000), the positive and negative face which were introduced by Brown and Levinson are justifiable.

Although one may occur more frequently than the other in a specific given culture, so far no evidences have emerged to suggest that Brown and Levinson’s politeness model cannot be identified in a particular culture. Besides, Brown and Levinson’s politeness model is a comprehensive guide because it is substantiated by examples in different contexts. However, it should serve as a reference and researchers should adapt the

model to suit a particular culture. This is because there are certain kinds of norms for behaviours regarded as appropriate, and these norms often differ across culture. (Pillai in David & Kow, 2008). Thus, the model should be adapted differently across different culture. In this research, Brown and Levinson's politeness model has been adapted to accommodate the realisation of politeness strategies among Chinese family members.

Numerous studies have been done on communication among Chinese family members. A study carried out by Kuang (in David and Kow, 2008) appeared to be most relevant to this study. However, this study by Kuang centred on the interaction between grandparents and their grandchildren, whereas this study focuses on interaction among family members regardless of age. The aim of this research was to demonstrate the strategies employed by the grandparents when they were making requests. In her findings based on 13 examples of spoken data, Kuang (2008) revealed that the grandparents tended to use direct requests while dealing with their grandchildren, and face was not a concern in this study because they were dealing with young grandchildren who were unable to comprehend the meaning of 'face saving'.

Findings of this study also indicated that the grandparents employed different strategies in posing direct requests and indirect requests to their grandchildren. Strategies used by them in direct requests include using local particles, avoiding the second person pronouns and story told prior to making a request. On the other hand, strategies used by the grandparents in indirect requests include prefacing request with a reason, using kinship terms to assert authority and inferred requests. This is for the grandparents to safeguard their grandchildren and to ensure that requests are made in a manner which is acceptable by the grandchildren. The difference from this study is that this study

involves family members of any age group, whereas the study carried out Kuang (2008) centred on intergenerational talk.

Another study carried out by Pillai (in David and Kow, 2008) which demonstrates the use of power and solidarity among family members is also related to this study. In her study, one family was recorded over a period of a week, in which the participants consist of three generations. Findings in this study show that directness was a main tool for adults interactants to exerting power on child interactant. FTA was imposed, and subsequently impinging on the child interactants' negative face. It was also revealed in this study that the employment of directness in family conversations did not necessarily mean the interactants were less polite. This was because there were other factors which have to be considered whether the interactant was impolite, for example tone of voice and facial expressions. The researcher of this study also looked into the use of the word *please* and the intonation used. The data of this particular study suggested that intonation is a factor for the mitigation of FTAs, but it has to be studied in greater detail to substantiate initial findings in this study. Although this study done by Pillai (in David and Kow, 2008) was not among Chinese family members, her exploration into politeness among family members is still prominent to this research as she delved into similar areas such as directness and FTAs.

## **2.7. Conclusion**

In this chapter, the main terminology and relevant literature related to the topic of this study has been discussed. Although politeness strategies in conversations is not something new, however there is still to increase the number of research done on to investigate casual conversations among Chinese family members in Malaysia.



In relation to that, works presented by Pan (2000), Kuang (2002) and Lim (2005) prove that the literature on politeness strategies is still growing from time-to-time, allowing new comers to delve into new areas where research on politeness in different contexts and settings is concerned.

## **Chapter 3.**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

This study is carried out to explore the realisation of politeness strategies in naturally-occurring conversations among 41 family members. As this study is a research based on conversation analysis, the main methodology adopted was audio recording and data transcription.

A conversation, as mentioned by Have (1999), is one of the most mundane of all topics. It may be simply for the purpose of talking in order to socialise, or it can be employed to “indicate any activity of interactive talk, independent of its purpose”. People talk to each other for different purposes, depending on the setting and target audience.

Conversation analysis, according to Have (1999:5) is the study of ‘oral communication’, ‘language use’ or how people talk to each other. The major part of this study is the CA transcription. The purpose of this conversation analysis transcription is to analyse what was said and how it was said. The conversation analysis is useful for the researcher to do the transcribing and further analyse the data (Have, 1999:33).

Based on the transcription, which is the conversion of audio recordings into text data (Creswell, 2008), a detailed analysis of the politeness strategies employed by the family members can be conducted. This is because the process of transcribing the obtained data is an analytical tool which is useful in assisting the researcher to have a better insight of the participants’ conduct. On top of that, the transcribed data also helps the researcher

to discover and take note of certain events, and subsequently aids in making a “focus analytic attention on their socio-interactional organisation” (Heath & Luff, 1993: 309).

### **3.2. Theoretical Framework**

This study mainly employs the Brown and Levinson’s framework in exploring the realisation of politeness strategies used by 35 family members in naturally-occurring conversations. This framework concentrates on four aspects of politeness, namely positive politeness, negative politeness, bald-on record and off-record politeness. Although the framework of Brown and Levinson was used as a guide to carry out this study, and subsequently in identifying the various patterns of politeness strategies that emerge, it will not be constrained to the sub-categories and definitions provided in this particular politeness model. This is because it has been proven that this model is not always suitable to be applied in all contexts. On top of that, by not limiting this study to the definitions and sub-categories of the politeness model by Brown and Levinson, it helps to provide flexibility to this study as the data could be analysed “according to its context of occurrence” (Pillai in David, 2008).

### **3.3. Research Design**

In this study in which politeness is closely related to human behaviour, the qualitative research method is opted as the main method to. Qualitative research design has been used to look at types of politeness strategies that were employed by the interlocutors.

The qualitative research is suitable for this research to delve into problems in which the variables are unknown and the literature which might yield little information about the

phenomenon of study. Thus, it is suitable to explore the politeness strategies employed. The researcher aims to acquire an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern human behavior (Source: Wikipedia, 2008). This method will be employed to reveal types of politeness strategies that were employed among the interlocutors and how are they demonstrated.

### **3.4. Participants**

The participants of this study are family members of seven Chinese families. The researcher did not participate in the recorded conversations. The researcher was not present when the conversations took place so that the most natural possible data could be obtained. The researcher was not involved in the conversations in order to reduce biasness of the data findings. This matter has been brought up by Have (1999) as he mentions that researchers should avoid participating in the data they collect because participation will influence how the researcher analyses the data.

Families which were involved in this study were selected randomly, and families are known to the researcher. They are either members of extended families or friends' families.

Conversation code	Number of interlocutors	Participant codes in substitute of names	Length of transcription (approximately)
Set 1	6	F1, F2, F3 M1, M2, M3	60 minutes
Set 2	4	S1, S2, S3, S4	60 minutes
Set 3	5	HC, WF, MM, AL, KK	60 minutes
Set 4	9	NF, AH, BE, NN, KM, MN CC, PP, BN	50 minutes
Set 5	8	PL, MT, ST HB, FT, SB, DL, EH	50 minutes
Set 6	5	CC, AB, TP, SS, SL	55 minutes
Set 7	4	MM, YN, CN, KH	60 minutes

Table 3.1 Summary of conversation recorded

### 3.5. Procedure

Before every recording was made, participants were given a short briefing on how the recording would be conducted. They were encouraged to initiate the conversation every now and then, and be natural in every possible way because recordings should “catch natural interaction as fully and faithfully as is practically possible” (Have, 1999: 48). Have (1999: 48) defines that ‘natural’ recorded conversations should be “naturally occurring, not co-produced with or provoked by the researcher”.

Although the families are known to the researcher, for some families which the researcher were not so familiar with, the researcher did not take the role as an observant in order to minimise threats to obtain a favourable recording. However, for families of close friends and extended families, the researcher took on the role of an observant for the purpose of familiarising herself with the setting in order to have a better insight of

the flow of the conversations and the topics discussed. The role of the researcher as a nonparticipant observer was mainly to minimise the possibilities of biasness when the recording and data analysis were carried out. This role, as mentioned by Creswell (2008), is “an ‘outsider’ who sits on the periphery or some advantageous place to watch and record the phenomenon under study”. However, for families which were not observed, the researcher carried out random interviews with the participants to triangulate the findings.

### **3.6. Data Collection**

#### **3.6.1. Recording**

As this study focuses on conversation analysis, and “conversation analysis requires access to recordings of talk-in-interaction” (Have, 1999), one of the main methods employed for data collection was audio recording. Recording data is considered a pivotal process in qualitative research (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). The conversations were recorded by using an MP3 player and mobile phone with the recording function. This study comprises seven sets of conversations, with each set of the conversation lasting between 50 and 60 minutes. Although some of the participants were conscious about the audio recorder when the recording started, they somehow managed to overcome the nervousness and the recorder was soon forgotten. Everyone was glad that the recordings went on smoothly.

“If there’s a relatively large number of participants who’re ongoing social relationship, they soon forget the tape-recorder”.

( Tannen, 1984: 34)

### **3.6.2. Setting**

As the researcher felt that it was important for all participants to feel comfortable when the recordings were carried out, thus the participants were allowed to set the ambience. When participants are comfortable with the ambience, they will feel more relaxed and will be able to carry out the conversations more naturally. Most data were recorded at their own homes. The recorded data are significant to this study as every matter brought up and discussed in the family conversations was “indefinitely rich in empirical detail which could never be produced by the imagination of anybody” (Sacks, 1992: 419-20).

Before every recording was conducted, verbal consent was obtained from the family members in order to ensure conversations that would be recorded were done willingly without obligations. The researcher also informed and ensured the participants that the recorded data will only be used for research purposes in the academic field. The data would not be revealed to any other irrelevant parties and anonymities will be remained. Participants were well-informed that in order to protect their identities, identifying details such as names mentioned in the conversation will be changed. The effort of changing identifying details is necessary and researchers were advised to do so when using transcripts in order to avoid embarrassing situations or being ‘recognised’ by others (Have, 1999).

### **3.6.3. Follow-up Interviews**

After the obtained data has been transcribed and analysed for the emerging patterns, informal follow-up interviews were conducted with the family members who were involved in the study. The main purpose of conducting follow-up interviews in this

study was to probe into areas which were not possible via observation, for example reasons for participants using a particular politeness strategy more frequently than the others, factors that motivated them to speak in such a way and whether they were aware of the patterns they were engaged in. Follow-up interviews like these will help the researcher to obtain further detailed information from the participants. Participants were helpful in providing opinions about their conversations, and their contribution of ideas will be included in Chapter 4 of this study.

### **3.7. Data Analysis Procedures**

This study adapts Gail Jefferson's transcription conventions, with some changes made. As Jeffersonian system is widely and commonly used in conversation analysis, it has been taken up in order not to create a huge difference between the transcripts of this study and those of other conversation analysis researchers. In other words, the use of similar conventions will aid other conversation analysis researchers to comprehend the convention used in the transcription. This, according to Have (1999), is essential for "readability".

For every set of the conversation, transcription will be made according to turns. Turn, is the "basic unit of a conversation, that is, a shift in the direction of speaking 'flow' which is characteristic of normal conversation" (Mey, 2001). Tsui (1995: 7) mentions that turn is "everything one speaker says before another speaker begins to speak". Every turn taken by the interlocutors will be numbered on the left margin of the transcription. The purpose is to enable the researcher to cross-check when a particular section of a conversation is extracted for analysis. Though turn-taking is not an aspect to be



considered in this study, the numbering of every turn is to enable easy cross-reference when the data is being analysed.

As some of the data obtained were not entirely in English, translation of dialects into English is done in italic font. This is essential for “anyone who has to present to an audience who is not familiar with the language used by participants” (Have, 1999: 93), and enables audience from different language backgrounds to understand better.

An example of how the analysis is done is 按时 shown:

(1) SET 2 (LINE 705-708)

Context: Conversation at home. In this example, S3 was talking about the frequent rain in Sabah caused Beaufort to be flooded ( S3 was working in Sabah). (Dialect: Hokkien)

705	S3	Pun tei pun si aneh khuan eh lah <i>It is like that all the time.</i>
706	S1	<i>/Si meh?</i> <i>/really?</i>
707	S3	Sabah always- lork hor eh. <i>it always rains in Sabah.</i>
708	S1	<i>/Si meh? Si ah?</i> <i>/really?</i>

(Example from data: Conversation Set 2)

For the analysis of data, it is primarily qualitative. However, simple quantitative data will be shown to prove some similarities or differences in patterns. The use of quantitative data is useful to reinforce the qualitative discussion.

The data transcription is also useful in identifying the politeness strategies employed by the interlocutors. The findings would then lead to how family members accommodate each other’s face wants in a conversation.

### **3.8. Conclusion**

This chapter discusses the employment of methods, theoretical framework as well as data analysis procedures used in this research. As the researcher was not familiar to all families involved in this research, thus follow-up interviews were also carried out to triangulate the data. In terms of setting where the conversations took place, the researcher gave the participants freedom to choose a location which seemed to be comfortable to them, as long as there is minimum background noise. In conclusion, suitability and appropriateness of methods and procedures used in this research were determined to ensure maximum benefits could be reaped.

## Chapter 4.

### DATA ANALYSIS

#### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter deals with the analysis of transcribed data based on seven sets of recordings. The recordings which have been collected from friends and family members were transcribed following CA convention. This qualitative study was actuated by two research questions as stated in Chapter One. The research questions are 1) What are the politeness strategies demonstrated among family members? How are they demonstrated? 2) How do the interlocutors accommodate each other's face wants in family conversations?

Thus, this chapter analyses the realisation of politeness strategies among family members. Subsequently, the researcher looks into how interlocutors satisfy each other's face wants.

Footnote: The first two sets of data are included in the appendices section as Appendix 2&3. For Access to the remaining sets, please contact Dr. Thilagavathi (email: [thilasha@um.edu.my](mailto:thilasha@um.edu.my))

## **4.2. Analysis of research question 1**

### **Research Question 1: What are the politeness strategies demonstrated among family members? How are they demonstrated?**

This research question aims at eliciting information about how family members demonstrate politeness strategies in casual conversations and how the politeness strategies were demonstrated. Based on the transcribed data, it was found that prominent features that replicate the implicatures by Brown and Levinson are a) Bald-on record b) Positive Politeness c) Negative Politeness d) Off-record Politeness.

#### **4.2.1. BALD ON RECORD**

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), bald-on record is a direct way of saying things and it is employed when the speaker wants to do the FTA with ‘maximum efficiency’ rather than to satisfy the hearer’s face. One would most probably employ this strategy in a conversation to “embarrass or make others feel uncomfortable” (Brown and Levinson, 1987). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), this politeness strategy is usually employed among people who are close to each other, for example close family and friends. From the analysis across the 7 sets of conversation, the discourse features that could be seen to have been employed were like refuting opinions, teases and reprimands.

##### *4.2.1.1. Refuting opinions*

In this study, one of the politeness strategies noticed is refuting opinions. Yoong (2008) mentions that according to Brown and Levinson’s (1980) face concept, disagreement is

considered “positive face threatening because it means that the views of the addressee are not acceptable”. This politeness strategy shows how interlocutors refute their opinions and what are the patterns that emerge.

In set (1) below, the interlocutors were talking about buying a birthday cake. In Line 108 and 109, *Kids would want it (the cake)* and *Got la::! (there are some people who want the cake)* are bald on record responses, in which F2’s utterance in line 107 was refuted.

(1) SET 1 (LINE 107-109)

Context: Conversation at home. Interlocutors were discussing whether to buy a birthday cake or not. F2 is the mother to F3, while M2 is F3’s uncle. (Dialect used: Hokkien and Cantonese)

107	F2	Uu lei larng bo chiak pun la:h <i>Even some of them don't take it</i>
108	F3	Ginna ai er <i>Kids would want it</i>
109	M2	Uu la::! Lo puan lo puan kieou ee tu ai tampuk <i>Got la::! One and a half kg, ask them to make slightly bigger</i>

F3 and M2 employed the bald on record strategy as they thought F2 had no idea that nobody would like to eat the cake. They imposed a FTA on F2’s face, leaving no space for F2 to negotiate. However, F2 did not take any actions to defend the situation or refute the opinions of M2 and F3. This is in line with Blum-Kulka’s (1990) findings that less mitigation is needed in family situations, and he actually mentions that “unmodified directness is neutral, or unmarked, in regard to politeness” (Bulm-Kulka, 1990: 269).

In example (2) below, the interlocutors were refuting each other's opinions by employing bald on record responses. It was done by exclaiming something which each of them thought was true.

(2) SET 2 (LINE201-203)

Context: Conversation at home. S2 and S1 are husband and wife. They were talking about how near/far Taj Mahal is from New Delhi. (Dialect: Hokkien)

201	S2	/Kin kin nia lah, bo york hui nia lah! <i>/It was nearby only, not very far lah!</i>
202	S1	Hamik bo hui! Chee meh eh huey chia loh! <i>What do you mean not far! One night journey by train loh!</i>
203	S2	Bo lah! <i>No lah!</i>

In this example, S1 and S2 were arguing about the distance between two destinations in India. S2 stated her opinion that the two destinations were very near to each other. S1 rebutted by saying *what do you mean not far!*, and it took them one night's journey to reach by train. When S1 uttered *what do you mean by not far*, it was not a question but a way to refute S2's opinion by not giving S2 any opportunity or space to negotiate. S1's *what do you mean by not far!* was implying to S2 that *it was far!*. S2 in return rebutted S1's claim by saying *No lah!* What S2 meant here was *No! it was near! It was not far*. As S2's face has been threatened, therefore she employed the bald-on record strategy and imposed a FTA on S1 by replying with a blunt *No lah!* In a follow-up interview, it was understood that as S1 and S2 were husband and wife who have been married for more than 20 years, they found this kind of communication not offensive at all and it was a way for them to communicate their ideas and opinions explicitly. However, they did mention that if they were to communicate with other people, it would be slightly different and less direct because they would take others' feelings into

consideration. This is in line with Pan's (2000) claim that hierarchical order between a relational pair will make a difference in the way they communicate with each other in the Chinese society.

#### 4.2.1.2. *Gossiping*

Pilkington (2004: 205) states that the basic function of gossips can be seen as signifying group membership. This also applies to family members who gossip about other family members in order to obtain opinions and thoughts regarding certain issues. It was stated that gossip in the family usually occurs when family members look for “exchanges in information” about non-present others (Blum-Kulka in Coupland, 2008).

In example (3) below, the interlocutors were gossiping about a niece who was getting married to an Indian from Southern India. This example showcases how bald on record was employed in gossips.

#### (3) SET 2 (LINE 812-815)

Context: Conversation at home. Interlocutors were talking about a niece who was about to get married to an Indian from Southern India. (Dialect: Hokkien)

812	S4		<i>/Ah Chye eh cha bor kia ka eh tua chiak kuey ee lo! /Ah Chye's daughter looks bigger than him!</i>
813	S2		<i>/Haloh /Yes.</i>
814	S1		<i>/Ng nyah lo! /Really!</i>
815	S2	<i>Oh! Tua chiak kuey ee lo? Oh! She's bigger than him?</i>	

In this exchange, S4 commented that their niece is bigger in size than her fiancé. The particle *lo* used by S4 in line 812 intensifies the urgency of the problem. It was used by

S4 to provide some additional impact on the earlier utterance *Ah Chye's daughter is bigger than him (the fiancé)*. In a follow-up interview, S4 revealed that she was implying that their niece was plump and she was huge compared to her fiancé. In her opinion, females should be relatively smaller in size compared to the partner. That was why S4 made it an issue in her conversation.

This example illustrates the use of *ng nyah lo (really!)* in requesting for confirmation about a piece of information when gossiping takes place. This politeness strategy could be seen in line 814 where S1 employed it to request confirmation about what S4 has mentioned. According to the interlocutors in a follow-up interview, the employment of this politeness strategy is to express disbelief and at the same time maintain the flow of the conversation.

Similarly in example (4), the use of bald on record strategy is as shown in line 816 and 819 when the interlocutors gossiped about other members in the family.

(4) SET 2 (LINE 816-819)

Context: Conversation at home. Interlocutors were talking about their niece who looks older than the fiancé. (Dialect: Hokkien)

816	S4	Kar lao kuey ee guk ((giggles)) <i>She also looks older than he does ((giggles))</i>
817	S1	/Ng nyah lo! <i>/really!</i>
818	S2	/Lao kuey ee ah? <i>/older than him?</i>
819	S4	Khua liao kar lao kuey ee lah ((laughs)) <i>Looks older than him ((laughs))</i>



In line 816, S4 further commented that this niece of theirs looks older than her fiancé. This direct comment on someone's appearance could be very difficult to handle by the recipient, even though the laughter softened the impact of the bald-on record in line 817 in which S1 employed to express disbelief. However, this bald-on record strategy without redressive action could have probably been employed because the niece was not around when the conversation took place.

S4 revealed in a follow-up interview that she felt more comfortable coming up with such a remark (line 816) without having to consider the niece's feelings as she was not around. However, the situation could be different if the niece was there to join the conversation. In line 819, S4's utterance demonstrated the use of bald on record strategy. S4 commented on how his niece *looks older than him (her husband)* in a direct manner. This statement supports Blum-Kulka's statement that family discourse 'indeed offers many instances of gossipy talk about children' (cited in Coupland, 2000: 228). Brown and Levinson (1987) state that one of the ways to demonstrate politeness is through gossiping. In this study, it was found that family members are more likely to employ the bald-on record strategy when they gossip about their family members.

#### 4.2.1.3. *Teases*

Mann and Kreutel (2004) mention that background knowledge of the speaker's intentions, thoughts and cultural assumptions are needed in order for the hearer to understand the message conveyed behind the act of teasing. In family discourse, teases are used to show solidarity and build rapport among family members. The hearer will not be offended because he or she understands the intention of the speaker.

Example (5) below showcases the employment of bald on record strategy when teasing occurs. In this example, HC, father to MM, was very direct in teasing her daughter by using words like *crazy*.

(5) SET 3 (LINE 313-317)

Context: Conversation at home. HC was teasing his daughter, MM, when she used the wrong term to actually say she was involved in the St. John's.

313	HC	/Crazy one ah ambulance. Play with ambulance ah, how you play? Uu ah uu ah ah? ((laughs))
314	MM	/((laughs))
315	HC	((laughs))boy! Boy! Ambulance.
316	MM	/ ((laughs))
317	HC	Crazy one. Crazy. Eh mei ah, mei!

MM was telling her father that she played badminton with her friends in school, besides *playing with ambulance* (as mentioned in line 306). HC was surprised when his daughter mentioned that she played with the *ambulance*. However, HC mentioned in a follow-up interview that he managed to grasp what MM actually meant was St. John Ambulance Uniform Unit which she was involved in. This is in line with Mann and Kreutel's (2004) statement that background knowledge is needed for the hearer to understand the message conveyed behind the teasing. This bald-on record strategy without redressive action (line 313) has imposed an FTA on MM, leaving her no space to refute or negotiate. HC teased MM in line 313 by saying *Crazy one ah ambulance. Play with ambulance ah, how you play?* He also turned to his son to tease his daughter in line 315. In this instance, HC revealed in a follow-up interview that he did not think face redress is necessary as MM (10 years old) was his daughter and he had the rights to tell her in a direct manner that she had used the terms wrongly as the conversation took place at home. MM stated in a follow-up interview that she lost her face-wants here but she was not offended and instead laughed at her own ignorance. MM also revealed that

she was aware she was being teased, but was not sure what was wrong with the term *ambulance*. HC ended with another bald remark in line 317 with the use of *crazy*. This example illustrates that elder family members are comfortable with teasing and imposing a FTA on a younger family member, without any redressive actions been taken.

Example (5) above illustrates how an elder family member teases another younger family member. In the following example below, it shows how a younger family member, MM demonstrated bald on record strategy while teasing her father, HC.

(6) SET 3 (LINE131-138)

Context: Conversation at home. MM was teasing her father, HC, who mentioned to his children that he scored zero in his examination during his school days.

131	MM		/No lah! You: you: zero point lah ((laughs))
132	HC	Who said zero point! How bout you, mei?	
133	AL		/bluff:!
134	MM	Eighty: eighty	
135	HC		/Eighty-
136	MM		/fi:ve point
137	HC	Eighty five point?	
138	MM	No:	

MM teased her father in line 131 by saying that her father scored zero in his examinations. The use of *No lah!* was straightforward. Although being the youngest in the family, MM (10 years old) still teased her father and claimed that her father *bluffs* when he said he did not score zero for his examination. MM did not take any redressive actions in saving her father's face in this instance. If MM were to speak to a stranger who is older than her, she revealed in a follow-up interview that she would probably response differently in order not to hurt other people's feelings. This is probably because people of the younger generation are expected to maintain politeness while

communicating with other elder family members. This example shows that although teases and laughter can be face threatening, it establishes proximity and solidarity among family members which enables them to have a good rapport among each other. This example supports Brown and Levinson's (1987) statement that bald-on record politeness strategy is commonly demonstrated among close family members and friends for the purpose of embarrassing them.

Similar to example (6), example (7) below shows how a younger family member, SS (the daughter) teases the father, CC, about the amount of food he was able to take in at that moment.

(7) SET 6 (LINE 554-556)

Context: Conversation at a Pizza Hut outlet. SS, daughter to CC, was teasing her father about the amount of food he was taking in. (Language: Mandarin)

554	SS	/Ni puk yao kern wo chiang chirk puk warn loh! ((giggles))
		<i>/Don't tell me you cannot finish the food!</i> ((giggles))
555	CC	/(giggles)
556	SS	Cherk yarng shao park liao
		<i>This amount of food is so little only</i>

In this extract, SS (aged 25) was teasing her father, CC (aged 57) regarding his food intake. SS mentioned it in a straightforward manner to tease her father in line 554 (*Don't tell me you cannot finish the food!*). SS was putting some pressure on CC to finish his food and assumed that CC would be able to clear his food. SS was imposing FTA on her father without any redressive action being taken.

In the Chinese community, children are expected to respect parents as filial piety is seen as an important aspect in a family. Though being the daughter, SS did not hesitate

to make such a direct statement. In a follow-up interview, she mentioned that CC was her father and she was quite sure her father would not be offended by the way she made the statement. Things would not be the same if she were to speak to a stranger who was elder than she was. SS revealed that she would change her choice of words to make it a less face-threatening statement in order not to offend the hearer or impede the hearer's space. In line 556, SS again was imposing an FTA on CC by teasing CC that *This amount of food is so little only (so you should finish it)*. This example illustrates that SS, the daughter, was comfortable with using the bald-on record politeness strategy to tease her father, CC because they were very closely bonded and SS knew that CC would not be offended by her utterance in any way. CC just laughed off SS's remark in line 555 because he knew SS did not have any intention in making him lose face.

#### 4.2.1.4. *Directness*

Directness is employed when one gives out orders or instructions for the hearer to carry out. According to Pillai (in David, 2008), directness in speech is a tool to exert power. Besides, it is also a sign of intimacy and solidarity (Brown and Levinson, 1987). In a family discourse, directness is commonly demonstrated when the elder family members need the younger family members to do them a favour. Pan (2000) mentions that directness in a speech act creates camaraderie, enhances mutual understanding and solidarity when a conversation takes place.

In example (8) below, HC (the father) demonstrated directness in questioning his daughter's ability. Similarly, the daughter, MM, replied in a direct manner.

(8) SET 3 (LINE 256-259)

Context: Conversation at home. HC showed concern about his daughter's lost in one of the badminton tournaments she participated in.

256	HC	Is it? Cannot play ah? Why why? Why cannot play? Why? (0.1) No stamina. (0.1) Or, cannot run!
257	MM	No:: lah!
258	HC	/Or opponent too good?
259	MM	((laughs)) no:: lah!

HC was asking her youngest daughter, MM about her badminton tournament. In line 256, HC asked MM in a direct manner as to why she lost the game. He demonstrated the use of bald on record strategy by posing a direct question, *cannot play ah?* He was asking MM reasons why she was not able to play well. However, MM who realized the imposition of FTA on her, quickly replied in a direct manner by saying *No:: lah!* In a follow-up interview, MM revealed that she was defensive in providing her direct answer because she wanted to save some face for herself. HC went on to ask question her in lines 258 and 260. This example showcases the directness in conversation, in which HC (turn 256) did not show redressive action in questioning her daughter's ability.

While example (8) above dealt with directness in questioning, example (9) below illustrates the use of directness in requesting, in which CC requested for some candies from his niece, MN.

(9) SET 4 (LINE 148-152)

Context: Conversation at home during Chinese New Year. MN was offering sweets to BE(aunty), AH(elder cousin) and CC (uncle). (Dialect: Hokkien)

148	MN	/chee ley si ang choe, chee ley si geng geng /this one is red dates, this one is longan
149	BE	/Eih one thing it's not too sweet
150	MN	/Chee ley /this one
151	AH	/haloh haloh haloh
152	CC	<b>Lai! Nor liap! //(laughs)</b> <b>Come! Bring two! //(laughs)</b>

In this example, bald on record strategy is demonstrated in line 152, as CC posed a direct request (*Lai! Nor liap!* Which means *Come! Bring two (candies for me)!*) to MN. CC was showing power in conversation when he instructed MN to give him two more sweets (turn 152). As CC is MN's uncle and is obviously older than she was, there were no constraints when he requested his niece to bring him some sweets. According to Lariana (2005), this kind of direct request appeared to be like a command (cited in Kuang, 2008). Although this direct request by CC seemed demanding on the surface (turn 152), it had been softened by his own laughter at the end of his utterance to make the situation less threatening. This example in turn 152 illustrates that a direct request which appeared to be demanding was softened through the use of laughter.

In example (10), bald on record is demonstrated with the use of directness in giving instructions.

(10) SET 4 (Line 156-160)

Context: Conversation at home during Chinese New year. CC and AH are father and daughter. They were offered food by MN (AH's cousin), and NF(AH's cousin, older than MN) instructed MN to leave the food there. (Dialect: Cantonese; Language: Mandarin)

156	CC		/try khua /try and see
157	AH		/shuang shuang tui tui! /double happiness!
158	CC	<b>Nah, fang ching chik</b> <b>Nah, put inside.</b>	
159	NF		/Muan! <b>Fong khuai!</b> /Muan! <b>Leave it there!</b>
160	MN	Har	

In line 158, CC employed the bald on record politeness strategy again by directing MN to put the sweets into a container. The local particle *Nah* had been employed by CC without redressive actions being taken and it had imposed a FTA on MN. This was followed by NF directing MN to place the container on the table. Utterances like *Put inside* and *Leave it there!* bring about the imposition of FTA on MN as she was expected to do that without giving excuses or rejecting. By giving instructions to MN, CC and NF were trying to show authority and power as they are older members in the family. This supports the idea of Pan (2000) who suggests that senior family members have the tendency to show power and authority.

Example (11) below shows the use of directness in conversation with the use of vulgar words. The employment of this strategy shows that family members can be direct in their utterances, in this instance, to show power and solidarity.



(11) SET 4 (LINE 370-373)

Context: Conversation at home during Chinese New year. Interlocutors were discussing how to make sure NN (aged 93) will not make mistakes when she gives out the red packets during Chinese New Year. (Dialect: Cantonese and Hokkien)

370	BF	mou or nei korng ngo ee lee kuai nei ee lee kuai <i>No you should say I distribute some, you distribute some</i>
371	AH	/A::r
372	CC	<b>Mai, mai! Boe lard lo, boe lard.</b> <i>No, no! Very difficult.</i>
373	BN	<b>Mai lei. Luang tieouk ai chey larng khua tiaoo ee eh</b> <i>[vulgar]. You all have to make sure more people safeguard her.</i>

In this extract, BF was giving suggestions to his father (BN) and uncle (CC) on how to distribute red packets during Chinese New Year as they had many family members and his grandmother, NN, could easily get confused as she was already quite old (aged 93). CC rejected BF's idea in line 372 in a direct manner by saying *No, no! Very difficult*, CC had impeded BF's space and imposed the FTA on BF, not allowing BF any chance to negotiate. Bald on record strategy is demonstrated here. In line 373, BN had used a vulgar word (*Mai lei*) at the beginning of his sentence and directed his children to keep an eye on NN when she distributed the red packets the following day. BN expressed his desperation towards NN by uttering a vulgar word although NN was there (NN was around, but did not join the conversation at that particular moment) when the conversation took place and it had definitely imposed the FTA on NN, although NN was his mother and his speech was within hearing. This supports Bergvall and Freed's (1998) claim that the employment of less prestigious language is common among men. CC and BN were seen to be showing power in their utterances, probably because they

were older and wanted to impose power in their utterances to take control of the conversation.

In example (12) below, it showcases the employment of bald on record strategy in providing advice. MM (the mother) was advising his son, KH, about road accident matters.

(12) SET 7 (LINE 714-718)

Context: Conversation at home. MM (the mother) was advising his son, KH, to be careful and not to give out his number to other people unnecessarily. (Dialect: Teo Chew)

		/lu lu lu, buey sai hor shou chee eh number.parn yehk ah, shou tao
714	MM	shor mork cherk yarng terk tien huak, mai khi thia, mai khi chai ee. Larng ei chuok nung eh lu chai ah, tien ua buey
		sai tiam tiam kar narng korng number
		<i>/you you you, <b>must not give him</b> your mobile number. What if you receive crank calls, <b>you should not listen, you should not bother.</b> people can fool you, you know. You <b>must not</b> simply give away your mobile number.</i>
		.
		.
		.
716	MM	buey lah, ik pai khuai tuo iao lah. <i>No, hundred ringgit is a lot already.</i>
718	MM	siao sing ah, yao kharn hou mien terk shir hou. Ai khoi hoe hoe lah <i>be careful when you want to reverse. Look nicely.</i>

In this extract, MM advised KH not to give out his mobile number to other people for fear they would make crank calls and disturb him. MM told KH that *You must not give him your phone number. Later he'll make crank calls.* MM used the pronoun *You* to refer to KH, and not anyone else involved in the conversation. She was trying to make it clear to KH that she was serious about the matter. MM had also used *Buey sai* (*must not* in Mandarin) to express her concern to KH about this matter. In line 714, MM emphasized the idea of not giving away mobile numbers to strangers again. Words and

phrases like *Must not give him your mobile number, you should not listen and you should not bother* were employed by MM to direct KH what to do in such circumstances. MM ended her turn by putting forward a strong reminder for KH, *You must not simply give away your mobile number*. In line 718, MM puts forward another reminder by saying *be careful when you want to reverse. Look nicely*. MM put forward her utterance in a direct manner to ensure KH received her message clearly. This example illustrates that in a mother-son conversation, the mother tends to use bald-on record strategy while pinning down mistakes which her son had done and to ensure the same mistake will not reoccur in future.

#### 4.2.1.5. *Reprimands*

Similar to directives, the act of reprimanding occurs quite frequently in a family discourse. This is especially true when parents are not in favour of what their child has done. This is normally done in a straightforward manner to show power and authority to the child.

In example (13), bald on record strategy was demonstrated when PL (the mother) was scolding her son for being *naughty*.

(13) SET 5 (LINE 634-640)

Context: Conversation at a restaurant. HB and PL are husband and wife, while MT and FT are PL's parents. They were educating PL's son, DL, who was misbehaving.

634	PL	<b>Naughty! Naughty!</b>
635	MT	Look at mummy's face!
636	FT	cannot like this one.
637	PL	You still ngam ngam charm charm is it?
638	HB	Cannot beat mummy:
639	PL	Look here!
640	HB	Look at mummy:

PL commented DL (her son, who did not appear to be in the conversation, but was listening) for being *naughty*. The word *naughty* was repeated by PL taken because she was scolding her son and her son was expected to listen without retaliating. In this context, PL, MT and FT were direct in reprimanding EH and DL because they misbehaved. According to PL in a follow-up interview, to employ other politeness strategies in handling them might not have an impact on them because they were not matured enough to interpret hidden meanings and implied messages. Thus, PL, MT and FT had to be direct in scolding DL and EH for their wrongdoings. . Blum-Kulka mentioned that parents will normally employ bald-on record in exercising parental power and to “exclude children from a given exchange” (cited in Coupland, 2000: 225). This also supports Kuang's statement that directness works more successfully when communicating with younger speakers (cited in David and Kow, 2008).

On the other hand, in example (14), reprimands were given out with the use of directives. HB was reprimanding his son, DL, and showed firmness in his tone of voice.

(14) SET 5 (LINE 638-642)

Context: Conversation at a restaurant. HB and PL are husband and wife, while MT and FT are PL's parents. They were educating PL's son, DL, who was misbehaving.

638	HB	<b>Cannot beat mummy:</b>
639	PL	Look here!
640	HB	<b>Look at mummy:</b>
641	PL	/Look here, or tonight you sleep with dinosaur. D:
642	HB	<b>Look at mummy::</b>

PL and HB showed authority as parents by employing directives in their utterances. In this exchange, it was realized that HB's direct requests were different from PL's. In line 638, 640 and 642, the impact of HB's direct requests was reduced by the prolonged intonation at the end of the word *mummy*. PL also threatened DL in line 641 by telling DL that if he did not comply her request to look at her, he would have to sleep with the dinosaur. This was because DL is afraid of the dinosaurs, and so PL employed this method to make DL apologise. This example supports Snow et al's (2002) findings that direct requests which are related to family rules are commonly not mitigated, and bald-on record is commonly used.

Similar to example (14), example (15) below showcases the use of bald on record strategy in reprimands with the use of directives.

(15) SET 5 (LINE 643-647)

Context: Conversation at a restaurant. ST, who is PL's sister, was trying to make DL (PL's son) apologise to PL.

643	PL	Look at my face, look at mummy's face. Okay then you sleep with sea lion loh. Hior?
644	ST	<b>Say sorry mummy:</b>
645	PL	/You want to sleep with sea lion or not?
646	DL	on arn.
647	PL	/Har, look at mummy. Look at mummy.

In line 643, PL was communicating with her son, DL. In line 644, PL's sister, also joined in the conversation by giving directives to DL to *Say sorry mummy*. Although ST's direct request seemed demanding (line 644), the utterance was softened by her prolonged intonation at the end of the word *mummy*. In a follow-up interview, ST mentioned that though it was not done on purpose, it was meant to save EH's face and not to be too harsh on EH. This example illustrates that when parents and elders reprimand and scold a child, they demonstrate the use of directives in getting the child to do something to rectify the situation. In this example, ST's request for EH to apologise to his mother was a way to "exert social power and dominance by teaching them the norms of politeness" (Snow et al, 2002 in David and Kow, 2008). The employment of this politeness strategy is also for parents to show power and authority when educating children who are young and immature. The child might feel unpleasant and uneasy being scolded, but they do not understand the imposition of FTA on them. On the other hand, if an adult had done something wrongly, the method of telling off this person would be different to minimize the imposition of FTA. This example is supported by Pan (2000) who claims that "age is a vital dimension in the hierarchical

structure in the home domain”. In this example, ST and PL have a higher status in the hierarchical structure compared to EH.

Example (16) below illustrates how the father, HB, employed the bald on record strategy to reprimand his son, EH, with the use of directives and the word *doi!*.

(16) SET 5 (LINE 138-140)

Context: Conversation at a restaurant. HB requested his son, EH, to pass him some tissue paper.

138	HB	Gia gia- gia ( <i>Bring</i> ) tissue lai. Har har har, use- wipe, wipe, wipe your hand nicely. Wipe a:l over, EH. Wipe nicely, dry. EH. EH, mark hao lai EH. EH. (0.1) Give me one tissue also EH.
139	EH	Tia:o!
140	HB	No give me one ne:w one lah doi!

In this exchange, HB started by giving EH instructions in English. However, HB switched to Mandarin to send out the same message to EH, which was also to tell EH to *wipe properly*. In a follow-up interview, HB mentioned that the switch of language in giving instructions was done with the purpose of making things clear to EH in all languages which he understood. The usage of *wipe*, *wipe properly* and *EH (name)* had been repeated in HB’s utterance. Utterances like *wipe nicely*, *give me one tissue and mark hao lai (Mandarin: wipe nicely)* showed that HB was showing power and authority when he was giving instructions to his son, EH. EH gave HB the tissue which HB had taken for him earlier. Irritated by this, HB uttered *No give me one new one lah doi!* In a follow-up interview, HB mentioned that the word *doi (dumb)* was used to reprimand EH because he did not pass him the tissue paper. From the follow-up

interview, it was understood that HB used the word *doi* because he thought EH was too young to understand the meaning and thus, would not be offended. However, it would be different if HB were to deal with an adolescent or adult who understood the meaning of *doi* and would probably be offended by the use of this word. Besides, the use of *doi* on an adolescent or adult will impose a FTA on the hearer and causing the hearer to lose face. Thus, in this extract, HB the father was imposing an FTA on EH but it was taken by EH as an instruction to do something and nothing else. This example illustrates that HB (the father) demonstrated the employment of bald-on record strategy in giving instructions to his son and commenting on the mistake his son had done.

In example (17), PL employed the bald on record strategy to reprimand her son, DL. She threatened her son in a firm tone that if he did not listen, uncle (SB) would scold him.

(17) SET 5 (LINE 560-565)

Context: Conversation at a restaurant. PL was scolding her son, DL, as he placed the sweets given to him on the floor.

560	PL	<b>Hm, har you do like that uncle scold har!</b>
561	EH	Uncle scold har.
562	DL	I wa::nt
563	PL	Nothing, just the table only.
564	DL	I wa::nt
565	EH	Wouh wouh wouh!

In this example, PL and EH were reprimanding DL (EH's younger brother) not to put the sweets given to him by SB on the floor. They were threatening DL if he were to put the sweets on the floor, uncle (SB) would scold him. DL, who was 18 months old understood the instructions given to him and stopped playing with the sweets on the



floor. In this example, PL the mother had employed bald-on record strategy to do the FTA efficiently (Brown and Levinson, 1987). This is most probably because indirect requests may not be effective to the hearer as they are way too young and inexperienced to interpret the message conveyed (Kuang in David and Kow, 2008).

#### **4.2.2. Positive Politeness**

Brown and Levinson (1987) explain that positive politeness is referred to “the desire of an individual to be approved of”. Brown and Levinson (1987) Positive politeness is regarded as a positive way to maintain a self-image or personality consistently. In other words, an individual hopes that the other interlocutors will learn to appreciate and approve this image (Brown and Levinson, 1987 in Pan, 2000). Lean states that this politeness strategy commonly occurs when the interlocutors know each other very well and is normally used to minimize the distance between the interlocutors (cited in David and Kow, 2008).

##### *4.2.2.1. Attending to Hearer’s Needs*

In this strategy, the speaker pays attention to the listener’s condition, for example “noticeable changes and remarkable possessions or anything that reflects as though the listener desires to be approved of or noticed by the speaker” (Brown and Levinson, 1987). The hearer shows commitment and interest in a particular topic and s/he pays attention to what has been said to show co-operation (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 103).

Example (18) below showcases how M1 and F2 attended to the needs of M2 by responding to M2’s utterance and repeating what was mentioned.

(18) SET 1 (LINE 438-440)

Context: Conversation at a home. In this example, M2 was explaining to F2 (M2's cousin) and M1(M2's uncle) the location of his workplace. (Dialect: Cantonese, Hokkien)

438	M2	/Kooi ping- kooi ping lou , kooi ping lou ko siong huey /Kooi ping- further down from Kooi Ping Lou.
439	F2	//O::: O::
440	M1	//O::: Kooi ping lou hor pe:ng //O::: somewhere near to Kooi Ping Lou restaurant.

In this extract, M2 answered M1's question of where his workplace was located by informing it was somewhere near a restaurant called Kooi Ping Lou. F2 and M1 answered simultaneously by providing a same response, which is *O:::*. This F2, M1 and M2 share similar background knowledge about the place and they immediately knew the location of M2's workplace when M2 provided a landmark (that is Kooi Ping Lou restaurant) in his conversation (line 438). In a follow-up interview, F2 and M1 mentioned that this kind of response was meant to show M2 that they were listening to him and they were paying attention to what M2 was saying. This example shows that interlocutors attend to hearer's need by responding to and repeating what has been said.

As a continuation to the above situation, example (19) below similarly shows that F3 was attending to the needs of F2 by repeating her utterance.

(19) SET 1 (LINE 442-444)

Context: Conversation at a home. In this example, M1, F2 and F3 (father, mother and daughter) were trying to figure out the exact location of M3's workplace. M3 is M1's nephew. (Dialect: Cantonese, Hokkien)

442	F2	Phoenix, Phoenix.
443	M1	/Phoenix.
444	F3	<b>/O::, Phoenix ho:r?</b> <b>/O::, Phoenix is it?</b>

The use of *O::* and the repetition of words (*Phoenix*) was demonstrated by F2, F3 and M1 in this extract. This illustrates that F2, F3 and M1 were paying attention to M2. However, F3 revealed in a follow-up interview that her utterance in line 444 was not a question requesting an answer. It was a statement in a question form to seek agreement and assurance. This was supported by Pan (2000) who suggests that solidarity and closeness among family members are pivotal. Thus, in this extract, positive politeness strategy had been employed to establish closer relationship among each other and keep the conversation going.

In example (20), interlocutors employed the strategy of attending to hearer's needs by using 'hmm' and 'hor'.

(20) SET 2 (LINE 974-977)

Context: Conversation at home. In this example, S1 is the brother-in-law to S3, while S3 and S4 are husband and wife. They were discussing how loyal S3's employer was.

974	S1	Hoe liao pun lo ee hor? Tui ee, ee tui ee eh bor <b>hor</b> ? <i>He's also quite loyal isn't he? Towards, towards his wife hor?</i>
975	S3	<b>Hmm:</b>
976	S1	Chin nyah faithful <b>hor</b> Very faithful <b>hor</b>
977	S4	<b>Hmm:</b> Ee eh bor, tak- tak tak nee choe, choe kee eh tiam sia ee tieouk ai kuey khi. <i>Hmm: On his wife's death anniversary every year, he'll surely go.</i>

In this extract, S1 was talking about S3's employer who had been remaining single after the death of his wife many years back (line 976). S3 agreed with S1 in line 975 by uttering *Hmm:* to imply *Yes, he is loyal to his wife*. When S1 again sought confirmation in line 976 to say that S3's employer was a loyal person, S4 showed agreement by starting his utterance with *Hmm:*, followed by some explanation. Although the use *Hmm* could be ambiguous at times, S3 and S4 revealed in a follow-up interview that the *Hmm* employed here was to show agreement with S1. They also mentioned that this was done to show cooperation in a conversation as they considered it a form of politeness. Although S3 and S4 did not agree with an explicit answer like 'Yes', the elaboration given by S4 in line 977 was to add on to the statement *Yes, he is loyal*. This example shows that the interlocutors showed cooperation and displayed interest in the topic discussed by using 'hmm' and 'hor'. It was a way of acknowledging the speaker (S1) about his/ her desires to be noticed (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

Example (21) showcases the use of *O::h* by AH when NF was complaining about something to her. AH was attending to the needs of NF by uttering *o::h* repetitively to sustain the conversation.

(21) SET 4 (LINE 1067-1070)

Context: Conversation at home. In this example, NF was complaining to AH (NF's cousin) about how irritating it can be when people seek donation from house-to-house and she wondered how trustworthy they are.

1067	NF	/Mei you thar mern lai chuen chien terk <i>/no those people who come ask for donation</i>
1068	AH	<b>/O::h</b>
1069	NF	/you shir hou ah <i>/sometimes</i>
1070	AH	<b>/O::h o:h</b>

In this example, the interlocutors were discussing whether to trust people who asked for donation from house-to-house. In lines 1068 and 1070, AH responded to NF's utterances with *Oh::* with the purpose of showing interest to the topic discussed. This, according to Brown (1980), is because most of the time, women appear to be more sensitive to satisfy other people's positive face wants. Hence, the employment of positive politeness among women is significant. AH's in line 1068 and 1070 in relation to NF's explanation about those people who ask for donation. In a follow-up interview, AH revealed that it was important to show support of what had been said in order to keep a conversation going. Otherwise, others might think that she was not paying attention to what had been told. This supports Jones' (1980) statement that women are usually involved in conversations to show solidarity and support (cited in Coates, 1996).

This example also reflects the importance of attending to hearer's needs in order to keep a conversation going and ensure the flow of a conversation.

In example shown in set (22), it is an illustration of how interlocutors attend to each other's needs by completing other interlocutors' utterances. This is a way for them to show support for each other.

(22) SET 5 (LINE 183-188)

Context: Conversation at a restaurant. In this example, FT (male) and MT (female) as well as HB (male) and PL (female) are husband and wife. PL is FT and MT's daughter. They were talking about the health situation of a relative.

183	MT	/But ee eh case si like- like-
184	FT	/Getting worse already ah
185	MT	The airway, muscles, all tightening up already.
186	HB	Ya:
187	PL	((coughs))
188	SB	Not- not er, functioning well ah.

In this extract, MT was telling her other family members how ill her sister was. In line 183, MT was trying to describe the condition of her sister but she paused by repeating the hedging word *like*. In a follow-up interview, MT mentioned that she had difficulties in proceeding with her utterance because she was not sure how to describe the situation of her sister which was not optimistic. She found it too harsh to say it out. This is in line with one of Coates' (1996) statements that hedges are employed to negotiate sensitive topics and to encourage others to participate. This is applicable in this example because FT (MT's husband) helped her out and completed her sentence by saying that MT sister's condition was *getting worse already ah* in line 184. FT showed cooperation and support for MT by trying to complete her sentence by informing the rest that MT sister's

situation was worsening. In line 185, MT went on further to describe her sister's condition in which *the airway, muscles, all tightening up already* to indicate the slowdown of her sister's body system. This example shows that showing interest and support in other's utterances (line 186 and line 188) is a way to satisfy the speaker's face-wants, in which Brown & Levinson (1980) mention that this is due to the fact that human beings like to be appreciated (cited in Lim, 2000).

In example (23), the employment of politeness strategy was demonstrated in which the hearers (YN and CN) showed responses to KH's utterances in order to show support and solidarity.

(23) SET 7 (LINE 616-621)

Context: Conversation at home. In this example, YN (female), KH (male) and CN (male) are siblings. (Dialect: Teochew; Language: Mandarin)

616	KH	/Liao koe hm chai har mik su wor <i>I was still not aware about what's going on</i>
617	YN	Liao lu chao luk lai ah? <i>then you ran down ah?</i>
618	KH	Wa boe chao luk lai ah, wa toe hm chai har mik su <i>I didn't, I didn't know what was happening.</i>
619	YN	boe larng chao ah? <i>nobody ran ah?</i>
	.	.
	.	.
	.	.
621	CN	Kar liao larng lork lai eh? <i>everyone came down?</i>

In this extract, KH was telling his family members that there was tremor when tsunami occurred a few weeks prior to this recording. Being aware that KH was trying to narrate

further, YN showed interest in KH's new topic by posing him a question. In line 616, KH mentioned that he was not aware of what was going on when he felt the tremor. YN showed support to KH again by posing another question in line 617. CN, KH's younger brother, subsequently chipped in to join the conversation (line 621) by asking KH whether everyone came down from the condominium. CN was trying to include himself in the conversation. This example illustrates that CN and YN employed the positive politeness strategy to show interest and support to what KH has mentioned. This is a way of developing good rapport among siblings in order to get the conversation going. This is supported by Brown & Levinson's (1980) claim that human beings like to be appreciated (cited in Lim, 2000).

#### 4.2.2.2. *Repetition*

This is a strategy employed by interlocutors with the purpose of claiming common ground. Brown and Levinson (1987) mention that the use of repetitions and the act of agreeing with the hearer are ways of claiming common ground by the interlocutors. Repetition may go back and forth for a few conversational turns to express surprise, approval or disapproval (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

In this example below, repetition is used as a way to show support and solidarity in a conversation.



(24) SET 1(LINE 58-60)

Context: Conversation at home. In this example, M3 and M1 were discussing what drinks to get for an upcoming birthday celebration.

58	M3	Bey, bey, sarsi kar pehk chui kao liao lah! Bey chee harng chui sar see siao loh! <i>buy, buy, sarsi and mineral water will be good enough. Buy three to four cartons for each type of drink.</i>
59	M1	/Sarsi, pehk chui. Supermarket pun ei lah <i>/Sarsi, mineral water. Can get them at supermarket too.</i>
60	M3	Ha:::r! Har, lu supermarket- <i>Yes! You supermarket-</i>

In this exchange, M1 was seeking M3's opinion on what drinks to buy for F1's birthday celebration. In line 58, M3 suggested to M1 to buy *mineral water and sarsi*. In line 59, M1 backchannels by mentioning *mineral water* and *sarsi* in order to ensure that M3 has got his message correctly. M1 also mentioned that he could get the drinks from the supermarket. This was followed by M3's response which showed agreement with M1 (line 60). Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that repetition could be employed to stress emotional agreement in an utterance in order to ensure one has heard a message correctly. This example shows that the repetition of words among the interlocutors was a way for them to seek agreement in the topic discussed.

The following example showcases the employment of positive politeness strategy with the use of repetition of the word *si meh (really?)*.

(25) SET 2 (LINE 705-708)

Context: Conversation at home. In this example, S3 (male) was talking about the frequent rain in Sabah caused Beaufort to be flooded ( S3 was working in Sabah), while S1(S3's brother-in-law) responded to his utterances. (Dialect: Hokkien)

705	S3	Pun tei pun si aneh khuan eh lah <i>It is like that all the time.</i>
706	S1	<i>/Si meh?</i> <i>/really?</i>
707	S3	Sabah always- lork hor eh. <i>it always rains in Sabah.</i>
708	S1	<i>/Si meh? Si ah?</i> <i>/really?</i>

S3 was talking about the flood which affected Beaufort, Sabah. S3 explained in line 705 that it had always been like that in Sabah and it appeared to be not surprising that flood occurred in Sabah. In line 707, S3 explains that it rains frequently in Sabah. In lines 706 and 708, S1 and S3 replied *si meh?* (Hokkien: really?). In a follow-up interview, S1 mentioned that the repetition of *Si meh?* in lines 706 and 708 was to show surprise towards S3's utterances. However, he was not really expecting an answer from S3. It was a way to keep the conversation going and for S3 to know that S1 was listening to what he said. This strategy has been employed to address the face wants of S3, besides maintaining the flow of the conversation. This extract shows how the use of repetition by interlocutors is important to show interest and keep a conversation going.

Example (26) below shows the use of repetition in the employment of positive politeness strategy. The use of repetition in this example shows that the hearers, AH and BE were trying to claim common ground.

(26) SET 4 (LINE 1066-1073)

Context: Conversation at home. In this example, BN (male) was talking about people who asked for donation from door-to-door. AH (BN's niece) and BE (BN's sister-in-law) responded to his utterances.

1071	BN	puk shirk shuo wo mern puk her- puk kei thar ni yao ma, you shirk puk chir tao thar shirk chern terk chia terk <i>it's not that we don't want to donate but we're not sure whether they're genuine or not</i>
1072	AH	<b>/Tui oh tui oh! Ha::r</b> <b>/True true! Ha::r</b>
1073	BE	<b>/Ha::r si loh si loh</b> <b>/Ha::r true true</b>

In this extract AH and BE were responding to BN who thought it was not secure to donate money to unreliable sources. AH responded by saying *Tui oh tui oh!* (Mandarin: *Correct correct! Yes!*). AH used the word *har* to agree with something that had been mentioned earlier. In line 1073, BE also agreed with BN's opinion. The usage of words like *Har* and *Si loh* (*Correct*) showed that BE was supportive of BN's view. These two words when combined together have a stronger impact on the hearer because *har* means 'yes' while 'si loh' indicates 'correct' or 'true'. When these two words are used together in an utterance, they reflect support and solidarity in a conversation. The use of repetitive words is one of the ways for the speaker to claim common ground and agree with the hearer (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

In the following example, the use of *ha::r* was a way to show agreement to the speaker's utterance and at the same time establish solidarity among family members.

(27) SET 4 (LINE 291-295)

Context: Conversation at home. In this example, AH, BE and BN were talking about ways to ensure NN (the grandmother, a septuagenarian) does not get confused when she distributed the red packets during Chinese New Year. (Dialect: Hokkien; Language: Mandarin)

291	AH	Terng siak, lu chai lah ginna, wah! Keh chee pao koe kar shiok! <i>You know kids, wah! They'll be happy to get an extra red packet!</i>
292	BE	<b>/Ha::r!</b> <i>/Yes!</i>
293	BN	/Ee koe pao chey pao <i>/Besides she has wrapped many packets</i>
294	BE	<b>/Ha::r!</b> Mien hor lah <i>/Yes! Don't let her distribute</i>
295	AH	Si loh! <i>Exactly!</i>

In this exchange, the interlocutors were discussing ways not to allow NN distribute the red packets to her grandchildren and great-grandchildren on Chinese New Year because she had poor memory nowadays and was not really aware of her surroundings anymore. They feared she would not be able to distribute the red packets properly, thus discussed whether to let her distribute the red packets herself. In line 291, AH mentioned that if NN happened to distribute red packets twice to the same kid, the kids would be more than happy to receive because kids do not understand so well that they should not get a red packet twice from the same person on Chinese New Year. BE agreed with AH by responding *har!* (line 292) *Har* in Hokkien means *yes, true, or exactly*. BE was trying to claim common ground and establishing solidarity with AH by agreeing with her. BN further explained that with NN's situation like this, NN should not be allowed to distribute the red packets because NN had prepared many packets and might get

confused herself. BE was again trying to fit herself into the conversation and provided her views in line 294. She used the word *har* again in line 294 to show solidarity and further added that NN should not be allowed to distribute the red packets herself. This move implies that she wanted to be accepted to the conversation and build rapport with the other interlocutors. AH also agrees with BE and BN by saying *si loh* which meant *yes, true, or exactly*. This example illustrates that BE and AH provided responses like *har* and *si loh* to show support and solidarity for each other in the conversation.

#### 4.2.2.3. *Compliments*

Compliments are normally uttered to make other people feel good (Wierzbicka, 1987:201). Wolfson (1983:86) states that compliments are regarded as “social lubricants which create or maintain rapport” among interlocutors. Besides that, compliments are also used to express solidarity and appreciation as well as positive evaluation (cited in Holmes, 1995: 121). However sometimes, it is employed to provide encouragement to the hearer rather than offering solidarity (Holmes, 1995: 119).

Example (28) showcases the use of compliments in demonstrating positive politeness strategy. MT, the grandmother, complimented her grandson for behaving well.

(28) SET 5 (LINE 42-44)

Context: Conversation at a restaurant. In this example, MT (the grandmother) was complimenting her grandson for behaving well.

42	HB	Halah. .... Fajar.
43	MT	<b>Clever boy eat like this ma::</b>
44	HB	/KL one the Fajar also like this ah. Pandan indah.
45	MT	Ng nyah ar?  <i>Really?</i>

On another instant, MT was complimenting EH for having good table manners (Line 43). As an adult and grandmother to EH, MT mentioned that it was essential to provide emotional support by giving compliments so that EH felt appreciated and being given the necessary attention.

Compliments are employed to express positive evaluation (Holmes, 1995: 121) as it is a platform for children to sustain their good manners because they know that they are being appreciated. From this example, it is distinguishable how HB (male) and MT (female) expressed compliments. HB was quite reserved in complimenting EH; on the other hand, MT's compliment was forceful and effective. In a follow-up interview, MT revealed that she complimented her grandson in order to make sure he gets the encouragement and sustains his good behaviour.

#### 4.2.2.4. *Questioning*

In a discourse, the act of questioning is used for different purposes in different contexts. Fishman (1980) mentions that questions and answers are related to each other in a conversation, in which questions require a response from the addressee (cited in Coates,

1996). In the effort of establishing good rapport with family members, questioning can be a good strategy to elicit more information from the other party and keep the conversation going.

Example (29) below showcases HC, the father of MM, posed her questions to find out why she lost in the recent badminton tournament.

(29) SET 3 (LINE 258-265)

Context: Conversation at home. In this extract, HC (the father) was communicating with his daughter, MM, reasons of her loss in a recent badminton tournament.

258	HC	/or opponent too good?
259	MM	(laughs) no:: lah!
260	HC	Nevermind lah! Just tell. Why? I-
261	MM	/I- I- I cannot play
262	HC	I know because you- You cannot play. So now you change to what? What game?
263	MM	Har? Er change ah? Change to: others liao
264	HC	/What what what's it?
265	AL	/Aerobic! /Aerobic.

In line 260, HC communicated with MM in a direct manner but his utterance was tinged with a softener *Nevermind lah, just tell*. HC's utterance in line 260, according to MM in a follow-up interview, had made her feel more comfortable that she eventually admitted that she could not play (line 261). This example illustrates the use of positive politeness strategy by HC, the father, to find out reasons his daughter, MM did not perform well in the badminton tournament. This politeness strategy had been employed by HC to make his daughter at ease and not feeling embarrassed to discuss about the matter. This

example illustrates that the use of questioning is a way to sustain good relationship among interlocutors and establish solidarity among each other.

Similarly in example (30), HC (the father) employed the questioning strategy while communicating with his other daughter, AL.

(30) SET 3 (LINE 119-126)

Context: Conversation at home. HC (the father) was asking her daughter, AL, how she fared in the recent examination.

119	HC	/Okay. Eh ling ah ling, how your results today? How your results?
120	AL	Wo::uh, e:xcellent!
121	HC	/Excellent ah, how? In the class, what position?
122	AL	Number o::ne? The fi::rst
123	HC	Huh?
124	AL	I got fir::st in cla::ss
125	HC	How the average?
126	AL	Eighty one point nine.

In this extract, HC was concerned about his daughters's examination results. He was asking his daughter, AL, how her results were. AL responded in line 120 by saying *Wouh, excellent!* AL was straight forward to inform her father that she had done well in the examination. In this exchange, AL who was in her Form 5, was not shy of revealing her results to her father. However, she answered by using the word *excellent*. In a follow-up interview, it was understood that AL was seeking her father's attention and expected her father to enquire more details about her actual results. HC showed particular interest when AL mentioned that she had obtained excellent results in her examination. HC had employed the questioning strategy by asking *Excellent ah, how?* HC was satisfying AL's positive face-wants and expected AL to reveal the status of her results in detail. HC went on probing by putting forward *In the class, what position?* HC hoped to get a more detailed answer from his daughter regarding her results, and



thus he put forward the latter question as a guide for her daughter to describe how excellent her results were. HC provided further support for her daughter and tried to show appreciation for her in the examination. This illustrates that HC satisfied his daughter's positive face-wants by posing her questions to show particular interest in the subject matter. Research findings reveal that questions are usually employed overwhelmingly in a conversation by powerful participants (Harris in Coates, 1999). In this example, HC is the more powerful participant as he carried the role of a father.

In example (31) below, MM (the mother) employed the questioning strategy to demonstrate positive politeness while communicating with his son about accident matters. Similar to example (30), the senior family members pose questions to the younger family members to seek clarifications regarding certain matters.

(31) SET 7 (LINE 654-663)

Context: Conversation at home. MM (the mother) was communicating with KH (the son) regarding the minor accident he encountered with, just a few weeks before the recording was done. (Dialect: Teo Chew)

654	MM	/sin chia ah? /new car?
655	KH	Ku chia ah old car
656	MM	Har har, ku chia lai hor? I see, an old car?
657	KH	Hm:
658	MM	Siang kar larng arng harn eh nia hor? Sunny ah? is it like ours? Sunny?
659	KH	Boe lah, wai kuok cher lai, toyata eh no, it's an imported car, Toyota.

660	MM	toyota. Liao, ee narng pun boe arng chua ah? <i>Toyota. So, was he unhurt?</i>
661	KH	Bor ah <i>Unhurt.</i>
662	MM	Thar chu ren chai mah? <i>was the car owner there?</i>
663	KH	Chai ah. Tuey wa ao buey ma <i>Yes, he was tailing me.</i>

In this example, the interlocutors were discussing about KH's encounter on a minor accident weeks back. KH explained that he encountered the minor accident when he was about to park his car somewhere. KH explained that as other person's car was dented, so he paid the guy RM100 as compensation. Subsequently, MM started to question KH for the details of the accident occurred in an interrogative style. Questions which MM posed to KH were like *to what extent? (was the car dented), new car? (was it a new car or old car?), was the model of the car like our old car?, So was he (the other person) unhurt?* and *Was the owner of the car there (when you hit that car)?* MM has employed the interrogative style to seek answers from KH. In a follow-up interview, it was revealed by MM that the purpose of MM questioning KH was to get KH to tell more details about the accident he encountered, and was not to impose FTA on him. By posing some questions, MM was trying to allow KH to hold the floor and show that she was concerned about what had happened to him. Besides, according to MM, this form of questioning strategy was by MM to allow rapport to develop because KH is her son and KH may perceive his mother as caring and concerned towards his life and safety. Thus, this example illustrates that questioning strategy is used to maintain rapport and encourage the flow of the conversation among interlocutors.

#### 4.2.2.5. Jokes

Jokes appear to be useful when the speaker would like to put the hearer at ease for the purpose of redressing the imposition of FTA on the hearer. However, jokes are usually being demonstrated when the speaker and hearer share mutual background knowledge and values (Brown and Levinson, 1987). This is useful in breaking the monotony of the situation and making the hearer more comfortable. However, according to Crawford (1996: 131), when a humour is inserted into a conversation, one can choose either to ‘collaborate or resist’. One could establish solidarity by participating in the humour, or keep a distance by resisting the humour with a serious response (Crawford: 1931).

Example (32) shows the use of jokes in the employment of positive politeness. In this example, HC, the father, was asking his youngest daughter why her pet hamster, Fatty had died.

(32) SET 3 (LINE 321-329)

Context: Conversation at home. In this example, HC (the father) was discussing with his daughters, AL(elder daughter) and MM (younger daughter), why MM’s pet hamster died.

323	HC	Why why why why your fatty lie- die? Why?	
324	MM		/Er: very: my fatty very:: cold!
325	HC	Cold. You never put blanket, blanket, cover it with a blanket (laughs)	
326	MM	/Cold	/((laughs))
327	AL		/((laughs))
328	MM	Put in the box.	
329	HC	No: la: not because cold la: I tell you lah, you never give the food never give the food.	

In this example, MM and HC had some shared background knowledge because Fatty was known to MM and HC that it was MM's pet hamster. If a stranger were to join the conversation, s/he would not understand the context and what Fatty was. MM mentioned in a follow-up interview that she was aware that her father was just teasing her and he knew why Fatty did not survive. She cracked a joke by saying that it died because of coldness. HC tried to soften the impact by saying it must be because she did not cover her hamster with a blanket (line 325). Instantaneously, AL, MM and HC laughed as all of them revealed in a follow-up interview that they knew it was merely a joke. As HC and MM were father and daughter, they merely laughed it off without getting embarrassed or offended. This supports Lean's (2008) findings which revealed that two people who share a close relationship will not be offended by each other even if an FTA has been imposed (in David and Kow, 2008). HC, the father, was seen to be cracking jokes and accommodating to his daughter's joke in order to show solidarity and enhance their father-daughter relationship.

#### 4.2.2.6. *Giving Advice*

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), advice is regarded as "intrinsically threatening to negative face wants", which is the desire to be unimpeded. Sometimes, advice messages can be regarded as impeding if the goal of the adviser is to interfere and 'being nosy' (Knapp and Daly, 2002), and indirectly threatening the positive face of the hearer. This kind of unsupportive advice which is face-threatening, is found to be less effective, argued Goldsmith and Fitch, 1997 (in Knapp and Daly, 2002).

Example (33) below showcases how good rapport among interlocutors can be established by providing advice. The employment of positive politeness is realised here.

(33) SET 4 (LINE 982-96)

Context: Conversation at home. BN (male) and CC (BN's brother) were talking about precautions to take while driving on the road. They were giving advice to PP (BN's son). (Dialect: Hokkien)

982	CC		/lu tiouk ai choo ee loh! <i>/you have to be careful!</i>
983	BN	Teng jit wa chut khi, tua hospital tui bin, hor peng chia charm ui oh, ee larn karn lorng khi kar liao oh! <i>the other day I was around the hospital area, there was a car which bang into the street lights!</i>	
984	CC	If lu huar chia siou sim eng kai boe har mik su eh lah <i>if you drive carefully shouldn't be a problem</i>	
985	BN		/Ha::r <i>/Yes</i>
986	CC	Motor kar ui hiam kuk <i>driving a bike is even more dangerous</i>	

In line 984, CC provided some emotional support for PP by saying that *if you drive carefully shouldn't be a problem*, and this was supported by BN with a reply *Har*. In this exchange, BN agreed with CC's advice that PP would be safe if he practises safe driving. It shows closeness and solidarity between CC and BN when BN agreed with CC in line 985. This example illustrates how politeness strategy had been employed by the elder family members in giving advice and supporting each other's opinions to create awareness on the road. This kind of constructive and supportive advice is not only effective on the hearer, but also creates solidarity and rapport among family members.

The following example in set (34) projects the use of providing advice to demonstrate positive politeness. Elder family members would give advice to younger family members regarding important matters.

(34) SET 4 (LINE 972-976)

Context: Conversation at home. In this conversation, BE, CC and NF were trying to advise PP (NF's younger brother) how to practice safe driving on the road. (Dialect: Hokkien)

972	BE	<b>Tuang kim ah lu drive, lu bey ai korng straight road nia tiouk liao eh lo</b> <i>when you drive nowadays, it doesn't mean you're safe if you're on a straight road</i>
973	CC	<b>/Huar motor bo siang hua chia eh ah</b> <i>/driving a bike is different from driving a car</i>
974	NF	Tiouk ai khua eh <i>you have to be alert</i>
975	BE	<b>/Ha::r tiouk ai khua eh ah!</b> <i>/Ha::r you have to be alert!</i>
976	CC	Har, lu eng kai guide tiao <i>Yes, you should guide him</i>

In this exchange, BE (line 972) and CC (line 973) were providing advice to their nephew PP, who had just started to learn driving. This can be seen as BE and CC were providing suggestions to PP about how to be careful on the road. In line 972, BE provided PP a constructive advice to remind him that he needed to be extra careful while driving on the road. At the same time, CC also provided a supportive advice in line 973 to create awareness in PP that driving a car is different from riding a bike. The advice given by BE and CC were not face-threatening to PP. This supports Goldsmith's (1994) statement that advice with mitigation strategies to minimize the imposition of FTA is more effective and is perceived as *higher in quality* (cited in Knapp and Daly, 1997: 398). In a follow-up interview, PP revealed that the advice was well-received because he felt comfortable and at ease. However, he mentioned that if the advice was delivered in a harsh manner, he could have rebelled.

### 4.2.3. NEGATIVE POLITENESS

#### 4.2.3.1. Hedging

The purpose of hedging, according to Holmes (1996: 74), is a way of attenuating the impact or intensity of an utterance. Hedging devices are employed to minimise the imposition of FTA on the hearer and avoid the possibilities of offending other family members. As mentioned by Holmes (1996), the employment of hedges hugely depends on the context as it may contribute different meanings in different situations.

Example (35) shows that MM was teasing her father, HC in a non-direct way for keeping long hair during his younger days.

(35) SET 3 (LINE 769-774)

Context: Conversation at home. In this example, MM (the daughter) was teasing her father, HC, for keeping long hair when he was young.

769	M M	<b>I thought, I thought</b> your hair hor, ve::ry lo::ng one lo::
770	HC	No, that time ar: is after form fi::ve. Har, yes lah!
771	M M	/(giggles)
772	HC	Small? Long, ar short. And then, after form five, stop schooling what. Form five, okay keep long h- long hair lah
773	M M	(giggles)
774	AL	/(giggles)

In line 769, MM employed the hedging device “I thought” twice to soften the impact of the proposition. The softening impact was achieved by the accompaniment of *hor* and *lo::* towards the end of the sentence. By adding *hor* and *lo::* in the sentence, it makes the utterance sound less threatening. MM revealed in a follow-up interview that the use of ‘I thought’ was to show uncertainties about the fact that her father kept long hair. She

used it twice to make the utterance less direct because she found it weird for a guy to keep long hair. The employment of this hedging device is to minimise the imposition of FTA on HC. The employment of the hedging device shows that MM was concerned about her father's face-wants and tried to take redressive actions to satisfy her father's negative face-wants.

Similarly in set (36), the use of hedging device *I thought* was used to demonstrate positive politeness. However in this example, the use of *I thought* was to show uncertainty.

(36) SET 6 (LINE 503-508)

Context: Conversation at a restaurant. In this example, AB (the mother-in-law) was telling her daughter-in-law, SS, to inform the waitress that they served the wrong dish. (Dialect: Hokkien)

503	AB	Daging ah? <i>Beef ah?</i>
504	SS	/Har.
505	AB	/Oh.
506	SS	I think should be ah
507	AB	I thought wa khua tieouk chicken, thar ma eh. <i>I thought I saw it as chicken just now.</i>
508	SS	Kieou ee ua ah <i>Ask them to change</i>

In this extract, the interlocutors were discussing whether SS's order had been taken correctly. This was because the food that was served did not look like what she had ordered in the menu. In line 506, SS used the hedging device *I think* as she was not certain about whether the meatballs served for SS was beef or chicken. She was trying to satisfy SS' face wants by agreeing with them that it *should be* beef in line 506. SS's



reply was followed by AB's *I thought I saw chicken in the menu*. Like SS, AB employed a hedging device *I thought*. In a follow-up interview, it was understood that SS and AB employed hedging devices like *I think* and *I thought* in expressing their views, in case they had remembered it wrongly. This example illustrates that SS and AB employ the hedging device to indicate that the particular proposition *cannot be asserted with complete confidence* (Holmes, 1996: 79). This could be a way for the interlocutors to leave space for negotiation in a conversation.

Example (37) below illustrates the use of hedging devices *ha::r* in demonstrating positive politeness strategy. The use of *ha::r* in this instance was for the purpose of saving face.

(37) SET 3 (LINE 232-237)

Context: Conversation at home. In this example, HC (male) was communicating with his children AL (elder daughter), KK (only son) and MM (younger daughter).

232	MM	Hm::
233	HC	/Mei mei, how bout your ba- badminton?
234	MM	Ha::r? Oh er lost already.
235	HC	//(laughs)
236	AL	//(laughs)
237	KK	//(laughs)

In line 233, HC was concerned about his daughter's badminton tournament. He asked her daughter, MM, how her badminton tournament turned out to be. MM, who was 10 years old, replied in line 234 by saying *Ha::r? Oh, er lost already*. MM used the hedging devices like *har?*, *oh* and *er*. The *ha::r* was dragged a little in the response as she was trying to drag her time in revealing her answer. In this instance, MM revealed

that she felt bad as it was not a good news to announce to everyone as she had lost the game. Thus, the employment of hedging devices by MM shows that she was trying to take some redressive actions to save her own face when threatened by her father.

Set (38) below is another example which demonstrates the positive politeness strategy with the use of hedging devices.

(38) SET 1 (LINE 318-320)

Context: Conversation at home. In this extract, M1 (the father) and F2 (M1's daughter) were talking about the neighbour's daughter, who was not adapting well in the kindergarten. (Dialect: Hokkien; Language: Mandarin)

318	M1	But ee toe uu khi: nursery and all that, should be okay lah. Thar you chik puk shirk? <i>But she goes to nursery, should be okay. She goes, doesn't she?</i>
319	F2	You. <i>Yes.</i>
320	M1	<b>/Har. Then should be okay lah. Ee mother tiouk kia lah, maybe.</b> <i>/There, then should be okay. Maybe her mother had a shock.</i>

In this example, M1 was expressing his concern about a neighbour's daughter who was not adapting well in the kindergarten. Hedging devices like *then* and *maybe* had been employed by M1 even though the neighbour was not present in the conversation. M1 was trying to soften the impact of the matter by using words like *maybe* and *should be*. In a follow-up interview, it was understood that M1 was trying to be optimistic about the situation.

Example in set (39) illustrates the use of hedging devices to soften the impact of a proposition.

(39) SET 7 (LINE 703-706)

Context: Conversation at home. In this extract, MM (the mother) was seeking further information about how much KH (the son) compensated in an accident he encountered with. (Dialect: Teo Chew; Language: Mandarin)

703	MM	Gor lark charp khou pung ei iao, meng hor ik pai. <i>fifty or sixty ringgit is good enough, don't have to give hundred ringgit.</i>
704	KH	Gor lark charp khor:: hernah! Cincai ah <i>Fifty or sixty ringgit. Yes! But nevermind</i>
705	MM	/tai tuo, ik pai hern tuo, hao siang. <i>/too much. Hundred is a lot, it looks like.</i>
706	KH	Ee tar nar kornng boe kao si barlu khar hor wa. Tapi boe khar hor wa. <i>he said he'll only call me if it's not enough. But so far no news from him.</i>

In this example, MM was trying to tell his son KH that the compensation of RM100 was too much. She was trying to tell KH based on her own previous experience. In line 705, she ended her utterance with the hedging device *it looks like*. In a follow-up interview, MM mentioned that she was in no doubt that KH had paid too much than what was needed. In this instance, MM revealed that she was not trying to display uncertainty, but rather to soften the impact of the proposition and make KH feel more comfortable. However, the employment of *it looks like* as a negative politeness here does not reflect powerlessness in MM, although negative politeness is commonly employed by participants to mitigate negative affect towards the less powerful (Holmes, 1996: 94).

#### 4.2.3.2. Tag Questions

According to Coates (1989: 116), a tag question commonly occurs at the final part of an utterance; however, it may also appear in the middle part of an utterance (cited in Holmes, 1996: 80). It is possible to identify the primary function of a tag question if meticulous attention is given to context (Cameron et al., 1989 in Holmes, 1996).

This example below showcases the use of tag questions in demonstrating the negative politeness strategy. The employment of tag question in this example reflects uncertainty of the interlocutor regarding a particular matter.

(40) SET 1 (LINE 316-319)

Context: Conversation at home. In this extract, M1 (the father) and F2 (M1's daughter) were talking about the little girl who lived next door. (Dialect: Hokkien; Language: Mandarin)

316	F3	Mien korng ah! Within- before one year old pun: <i>Needless to say! Even if when she's within one year old</i>
317	F2	/Ha:r. Si loh. <i>/Yes, true.</i>
318	M1	But ee toe uu khi: nursery and all that, should be okay lah. Thar you chik puk shirk? <i>But she goes to nursery, should be okay. She goes, doesn't she?</i>
319	F2	You. <i>Yes.</i>

In this situation, M1 and F2 were talking about a girl who lived next door. They were talking about this girl who was a slow learner. In line 318, M1 ended his utterance with a tag question *She goes to the nursery, doesn't she?* The use of question tag here infers M1 was not so sure whether the little girl next door was attending the nursery or not. In this instance, M1 projects uncertainty in this matter by using the question tag. This

example illustrates that although M1 was F2's father and was supposed to have more authority, he showed deference when dealing with matters which he was uncertain of. On top of that, F2 tried to minimize the imposition of face acts towards M1 by using the *har, si loh* (line 317).

#### 4.2.3.3. *Avoidance of Using the Pronouns*

When a speaker discusses about another family member who is involved in the conversation, sometimes he or she avoids the use of pronouns or names to refer to that person. This is an act of trying to save the person's face and avoid embarrassment. However, the interlocutors will need to have background knowledge regarding the topic discussed to fully understand what is being discussed.

Example shown in set (41) illustrates the avoidance of using the pronouns for the purpose of saving one's face as a sign of respect.

(41) SET 1 (LINE 132-136)

Context: Conversation at home. In this extract, F2 visited her grandmother (who was experiencing a slight decline in memory) whom she had not seen for months. As her grandmother took quite a long time to recall who F2 was, the interlocutors in this extract were talking about it. (Dialect: Hokkien)

132	M1	/Ha:r! Pua tiam cheng liao <i>/Yes! It's already half an hour</i>
133	F2	/tharm mah siao bo tiouk wa![laughs] <i>/ couldn't recall who am I just now [laughs]</i>
134	M2	/ee ko siao bo khi ee! <i>/She still couldn't recall!</i>
135	M3	Ai:yoh! Luan si er! Tak tak jit <i>Ai:yoh! Very disturbing! Everyday.</i>
136	F2	((giggles))

In this example, F2 was mentioning about her grandmother who could not recognize and recall her name earlier on. In F2's utterance (line 133), pronoun was not used to refer to her grandmother because her grandmother whose hearing is slightly impaired, was around. This, according to F2, was because she was trying to save her grandmother's face by minimising the imposition of FTA. F2 mentioned in a follow-up interview that she was aware that her grandmother had hearing impairment and hence, was not offended by why her grandmother could not remember F2's name. Instead, F2 mentioned that she avoided the use of pronoun to show respect to her grandmother, who is a septuagenarian. This example illustrates that F2 (the granddaughter) avoided the use of pronoun (line 133) because she was trying to save her grandmother's face.

Another similar example for the avoidance of using the pronouns is shown in set (42), in which it was also accompanied by giggles and laughter to ease the tension.

(42) SET 1 (LINE 1353-1356)

Context: Conversation at home. In this extract, M1 and M2 are brothers and they were discussing the birthday celebration for their mother. F2 (daughter of M2) also joined in the discussion. (Dialect: Hokkien, Cantonese)

1353	M1	Ngo oi too <i>I want to celebrate for you</i>
1354	F2	[giggles] Kong hm: mien lah, tapi: ((laughs)) <i>[giggles] Says no need, but actually: ((laughs))</i>
1355	M2	/hamik hm suoi! <i>/what do you mean by no need!</i>
1356	F1	((mumbles))

In this example, F2 (line 1354) was commenting on her grandmother. Her grandmother told them a birthday celebration was not needed, but her sons (M1 and M2) revealed in a follow-up interview that they knew that she actually longed for it. In a follow-up interview, F2 revealed that though not being told, she knew her grandmother's wish to have a birthday celebration because she knew her grandmother well. In this example, F2 employed the negative politeness strategy by avoiding the use of pronouns. In line 1354, F2 did not mention who, but it was understood by other family members (M1 and M2) that she was referring to her grandmother. F2 mentioned that this was because her grandmother was around, so she thought it would not be good to mention. In this instance, F2 was minimising the imposition of FTA on her grandmother. The giggle and laughter in this proposition reflect that F2 took redressive actions to save her grandmother's face.

#### 4.2.3.4. Indirectness

Tannen (1989) states that indirectness could be employed to minimise the imposition of FTA on the addressees' and/or addresser's positive or negative faces besides increase politeness between the speaker and the hearer (Pillai, 2008). For this example, indirectness is employed with the purpose of avoiding a particular topic. Indirectness is normally employed to save face and establish rapport that comes from "being understood without saying what one means" (Tannen, 1989 in Tsuda, 1993).

The following example in set (43) illustrates the employment of indirectness to avoid a particular topic.

(43) SET 4 (LINE 208-212)

Context: Conversation at home. In this extract, NF (elder cousin sister) was asking AH (younger cousin sister) when AH was leaving for Kuala Lumpur. (Language: Mandarin)

208	NF	Li pai chiu huey chik liao lah? <i>Going back on Sunday?</i>
209	AH	/Hm::
210	NF	puk shirk sai cher sai tao parn sir? <i>isn't the traffic jam going to be bad?</i>
211	AH	Hope:fully:: hen tuo ren nar pai ik lah. Ing wei pai ik shirk federal territory day mah. <i>Hope:fully:: more people take Monday off. Because Monday is Federal Territory's day.</i>
212	NF	O::r

In this extract, NF had employed the negative politeness strategy by posing an indirect question in line 210, leaving some space for AH and not impeding her freedom of speech, although anyone knew that traffic would be bad on the last day of holidays. In



response to NF's question, AH had opted for an indirect way of replying instead of a *yes* or *no*. Instead, she expressed her hope and did not answer NF's question. In a follow-up interview, AH revealed that she had chosen to be optimistic about the situation and thus, avoided answering NF's question. This strategy was being employed, in a way, to avoid from discussing that she might have made a wrong decision to leave on Sunday. This example illustrates that indirectness is employed when one tries to avoid a particular topic, as mentioned by Tannen (cited in Tsuda, 1993).

#### **4.2.4. OFF-RECORD POLITENESS**

This is the final politeness strategy outlined by Brown and Levinson. Off-record politeness showcases the use of indirect language by the speaker to avoid the imposition of FTA on the hearer.

##### *4.2.4.1. Contradiction*

Brown and Levinson (1987:221) mention that the use of contradictions is a way to demonstrate off-record politeness. According to them, when two things contradict with each other, the utterance may not be the truth. It is noticed in this study that when one is being indecisive, there is a tendency for the interlocutor to come up with contradictory propositions. It could be because the speaker is not able to tell the truth, and thus expecting the hearer to interpret and make a decision for the speaker.

(44) SET 2 (LINE 53-56)

Context: Conversation at home. S3 and S4 are husband and wife. S2 (S3's younger sister) visited S3 and S4, and was offered a drink by S4 (S2's sister-in-law). (Dialect: Hokkien)

53	S4	Ei, chiak chui chiak juak eh chiak leng? <i>Ei, do you want cold or hot drink?</i>
54	S2	Ah::
55	S3	/Ai ai- <i>/Want want-</i>
56	S2	/Cincai lah. Beh iao kin lah, mien chiak lah! <i>/Anything. Nevermind, no need lah.</i>

In line 53, S4 was asking S2 what drinks she would like to have. As the host, S4 mentioned that it was important to serve guests with drinks. That was why S4 started by asking whether S2 preferred cold or hot drinks (line 53), instead of asking whether she wants a drink. S4 presuppose S2 would have some drinks. S2 was caught by surprise when S4 posed that question and her response was *Ah:::*, not mentioning whether she wanted it cold or hot, or whether she wanted a drink after all. S3, the husband of S4, insisted S2 to accept the offer in line 55. In line 56, S2 responded *Anything. Nevermind, no need*. This contradicting response of S2 showed that there was a conflict in herself whether to accept the offer or not. Due to this ambiguous response, S3 and S4 mentioned in a follow-up interview that they were confused whether S2 wanted a cold or hot drink. In a follow-up interview, S2 mentioned that she felt shy to accept the offer for fear it would be inconvenient for S4 to prepare her drinks. Thus, the use of *Ah:::* was to pause and hesitate for awhile as she wasn't able to make a decision. Thus, after accepting the offer by saying *anything*, she retracted by saying *nevermind, no need*. This, as suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987), is employed when the speaker is not able to come up with a truth or decision, thus leaving the hearers to "look for an interpretation that reconciles the two contradictory propositions". In this instance, S2's

contradictory propositions show that she was not able to make a decision, thus was expecting S3 and S4 to decide for her based on the response given.

In the following example, KH (the son) has employed the use of contradicting responses in his conversation with his mother, MM.

(45) SET 7 (LINE 701-704)

Context: Conversation at home. MM and KH are mother and son. MM was asking KH about what had happened when he met with an accident recently. (Dialect: Teo Chew)

701	MM	Ee boo kuey iao ah? <i>did he repaint his car?</i>
702	KH	/parng gee eh chart lai <i>/cheap paint</i>
703	MM	Gor lark charp khou pung ei iao, meng hor ik pai. <i>fifty or sixty ringgit is good enough, don't have to give hundred ringgit.</i>
704	KH	Gor lark charp khorr:: hernah! Cincai ah <i>Fifty or sixty ringgit. Yes! But nevermind</i>

MM was telling KH that the compensation of RM100 he has given to the owner of the car which he banged into is too much. MM suggested to KH that an amount of RM50 or RM60 would be good enough to compensate the other person's loss. In line 704, KH came up with a contradicting response by saying *Yes! But nevermind*. He was trying to satisfy his mother, MM's positive face wants by saying *Yes!* (that he should have given RM50 or RM60 instead of RM100 to that person). On the other hand, KH was avoiding the responsibility for doing FTA by saying *But nevermind* (what to do? it has been given to that person). He revealed in a follow-up interview that he found it difficult to totally agree or disagree with his mother. This was because in his own

opinion, he didn't mind paying more as compensation as he was at fault. However, at the same time, he tried not to offend his mother or go against her idea out of respect. Thus, in order to save his mother's face-wants, KH came up with a contradicting response in order not to impede MM's space and freedom. MM went on to express that she still thought RM100 was a lot to be given as a compensation for such a minor accident. This example showcases the use of contradiction in a conversation in order to accommodate other people's face needs.

#### 4.2.4.2. *Being Vague*

When a particular issue is discussed in a conversation, there are occasions when one does not intend to reveal the real situation in order to protect his or her privacy. Thus, vague answers will be provided with the hope that the hearer will be satisfied and will not go on further with more questions. Brown and Levinson (1987: 225) propose that this strategy is used to describe the "ambiguity between the literal meaning of an utterance and any of its possible implicatures". Thus, the intention of a communication is not well-defined and the hearer is left to interpret the message. This off-record politeness strategy is employed "when the speaker intends to minimize the impact of FTA on the hearer" (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Example shown in set (46) illustrates the use of negative politeness strategy by being vague. This is employed to avoid responsibilities regarding an issue and at the same time to save the hearer's face.

(46) SET 6 (LINE 30-33)

Context: Conversation at a restaurant. CC is the father-in-law of SL. CC was asking SL the reasons why her uncle was absent for her grandmother's funeral. (Language: Mandarin)

30	CC	thar, wei shor mork thar mother terk funeral thar mei you huey lai? <i>why was he not back for his mother's funeral?</i>
31	SL	thar puk nerng lai. <i>he couldn't make it.</i>
32	CC	Oh
33	SL	/Personal reason.

In line 30, CC's question posed a threat on SL's positive face-wants as CC was intervening with SL's family affair. SL replied vaguely (line 31) by saying that her uncle could not make it, but not providing the exact reason. In line 32, CC did not request for further details, but settled down with an *Oh*. In a follow-up interview, CC mentioned that he did not ask for further information in order to give SL some space and freedom for not revealing the reason of her uncle not coming back. SL later revealed in line 33 that her uncle was not back because of some *personal reasons*. By providing this explanation, SL was expecting CC to understand that she was not in the position to reveal the actual reasons. SL provided vague and unclear answers due to constraints, but maintaining the conversation by providing a short explanation in response to CC's question. This example illustrates that SL, the daughter-in-law of CC, had employed the off-record politeness strategy by making an understatement and being vague in response to a question which was face-threatening because she did not want to offend her father-in-law in any way but at the same time maintaining her positive face-wants.

Besides that, vagueness in a conversation can also be demonstrated with the use of laughter or giggles. In example (47) below, the use of laughter by AL and MM (daughters of HC) was to save HC's face.

(47) SET 3 (LINE 124-129)

Context: Conversation at home. HC (the father) was communicating with two of his daughters, AL (elder daughter) and MM (younger daughter). He was boasting to them how excellent his results were when he was in school.

124	AL	I got fir::st in cla::ss
125	HC	How the average?
126	AL	Eighty one point nine.
127	HC	Eighty one point nine. Last time daddy! Okay, Ninety one point five lor!
128	AL	// ((laughs))
129	MM	// ((laughs))

HC asked her daughter, AL's average marks in her examination (line 125). Upon hearing that her daughter's average point was eighty one point nine, HC cracked a joke by saying that he used to obtain ninety nine point five (line 127). In this example, HC's children mentioned in a follow-up interview that they knew that HC was pulling their legs and the fact that he obtained ninety nine point five for his average marks when he was in school was not true. Thus, MM and AL burst into laughter simultaneously without enquiring for further details. The laughter implied that they do not believe HC's words and they were aware that he was just joking.

#### 4.2.4.3. *Giving Hints*

When a speaker does not state something explicitly, s/he invites the hearer to make a possible interpretation on the message conveyed (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

Example shown in set (48) showcases the employment of off-record politeness strategy by not mentioning something explicitly, but instead to just give some hints regarding a particular matter.

(48) SET 6 (LINE 549-552)

Context: Conversation at home. CC and SS are father and daughter. They were having lunch at Pizza Hut Restaurant. Both CC and SS ordered different flavoured pizzas and they were negotiating how to share their portions. (Language: Mandarin)

549	CC	wo mern liang kerk tou shirk ik yarng ah? <i>are ours the same?</i>
550	SS	mei you, ni yao try kher yi. Terng siak ik parn ik parn loh. <i>No, you can try later. Half half loh.</i>
551	CC	Har chirk sien lah <i>Har eat first lah</i>
552	SS	Har, chirk sien <i>Har, eat first</i>

In this extract, CC was asking his daughter (line 549), SS whether his order and SS's order were the same. This was not merely a question posed by CC to obtain an answer from SS as CC was aware of what their orders were. CC was asking SS *Are ours (our order) the same?* to imply that *since our orders are different, we should exchange and try each other's food*. CC was being indirect here because he felt that being the father, it was awkward to ask to try his daughter's food in a direct manner. He was expressing his desire to try out SS's pizza in an indirect way. In a follow-up interview, SS mentioned that she realised her father's question was not merely a question, and that her father wanted to exchange and try out her pizza. SS replied her father in line 550 as she was trying to satisfy CC's positive face. This example shows that although CC was SS's father and he had more authority than SS, he still demonstrated the off-record

politeness strategy in expressing his wish and desire for the purpose of satisfying his own face-wants.



### 4.3. Analysis of research question 2

#### **Research Question 2: How do the interlocutors accommodate each other's face wants?**

As a member of a society, there is great potential for one to maintain and save the face of each other in a communication (Brown and Levinson, 1987 in Kitamura, 2001). Kitamura (2001) says why politeness strategy is frequently exploited to save other's face and minimize FTA.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), competent adults in a society will “have strong interest in maintaining each other's face while communicating due to its vulnerability” (cited in Kitamura, 2001). In this matter, face is important because human beings like to be included in a group (Brown and Levinson in Lim, 2000). Besides, Goffman (1959) mentions that “face is a sacred thing for human beings and it is reciprocal” (cited in Zhao, 2010). Face is treated as a basic want in communications because it is regarded as the ‘public self-image’ for one self (Yule, 2000 in Zhao, 2010).

While face want is a universal phenomenon which people from different cultural backgrounds try to *observe and maintain*, it is closely related to the politeness strategies. Brown and Levinson (1987: 62) proposed that the components of face consist of a) negative politeness, and b) positive politeness. Negative politeness is the desire of an individual to be unimpeded; positive politeness is the wish of the interlocutors to be accepted and included by other group members. Thus, Brown and Levinson (1987) claim that face should be treated as basic wants, in which “every member knows every other member's desires, and which in general it is in the interests of every member to partially satisfy”. However, face can be ignored under the

circumstances of urgent co-operation or maximum efficiency (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 62).

This is the second part of the research, in which the researcher looks into face strategies employed by members of the families to accommodate each other's face wants. This is because face strategy is closely related to the politeness strategies, thus it is interesting to delve into how members of the family communicate with each other. As suggested by Pan (2000), face strategies have a close connection with interpersonal relationships, and this aspect in the hierarchical structure in a home domain should be given emphasis.

#### **4.3.1. USE OF LOCAL PARTICLES**

Lee-Wong (1998) mention that Chinese particles are regarded as mitigators to minimise the impact of direct requests (cited in Huey, 2005). They also propose that particles are employed to reduce the illocutionary force of an utterance. However, in Huey's (2005) study, she found out that the meaning of particles might differ due to different setting and context. Face redress is deemed not necessary when 'maximum efficiency is very important' (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Example shown in set (55) shows the use of particle *loh* as a way add force to an utterance, and at the same time establish rapport among family members.

(55) SET 1 (LINE 81-85)

Context: Conversation at home. M1 and M3 are brothers, who were discussing the size of the cake to buy for their mother's birthday celebration. (Dialect: Hokkien)

81	M3	Cake- chuan kei si: lo pua: <i>Cake- one and a half kg will do.</i>
82	M1	/Hmm <i>/Hmm</i>
83	M3	/toe hoe liao! /Mai keh liao! <i>/Good enough! Not more than that!</i>
84	M1	/hm:: <i>/Okay.</i>
85	M3	Nu teng jit wa choe kao sar lo loh! <i>There the other day I ordered three kg loh!</i>

In this situation, M1 and M3 who were brothers, were discussing on what type of cake to purchase for F1's birthday celebration. M3 initiated (line 81) by mentioning it was good enough for them to get a cake weighing 1.5kg for the celebration. The employment of the speech particle 'loh' by M3 (line 85) was to express disappointment for ordering a 3kg cake for the previous year. As M3 uttered it in a harsh manner (with his intonation being raised), this shows that M3 (elder brother) did not take any redressive action when conveying the message to M1 (younger brother). In a follow-up interview, M3 revealed that the use of 'loh' did not affect their relationship in any way as it was a way of communicating with each other and showing solidarity among each other.

Another example to illustrate the use of particles in conversation is as shown in set (56), in which the the particles were used to show closeness among family members.

(56) SET 1 (LINE 87-90)

Context: Conversation at home. M3 and M1 were talking about whether to get a 1kg or 3kg cake to celebrate their mother's birthday. (Language: Mandarin)

87	M3	/Chee park khor. Hor! /one hundred ringgit.
88	M1	Mie:n lah! <i>No need so big lah!</i>
89	F2	/Har lei tua liap eh hor? <i>/Is that a big one hor?</i>
90	M3	Sar lo, sar lo choon kar liao tua hor peng bo larng chiak! (Mai lei), cake- ginna: ai nia <i>Three kgs, three kg is too much. It was just left there and nobody ate it!(vulgar) Cake-only kids will want them.</i>

As a continuation to set (55), M1 responded by intruding into M3's space by saying *No need so big lah!* (line 88). The use of the speech article 'lah' here was an exclamatory sentence as the intonation went up towards the end of the sentence. M1 was trying to remind M3 that they did not need to buy such a big cake. M1 employed a FTA, in which M3's negative face was affected. M1 might have responded differently if his addressee were to be a stranger, as he would want to save the other person's face. Or else, M1 might have hurt his addressee's feelings and subsequently causing the relationship to turn sour. However, in a follow-up-interview, it was understood that as M1 and M3 are siblings who are close to each other, they were not offended by the exchange. This proves that face-threatening acts appear to be less significant when one intends to gain support and solidarity from the other interlocutors (Lim, 2000). Kuang (2002) suggested that local particles are employed to soften the impact of direct requests, and no attempts are made to save the speaker's or hearer's face.

Although the use of particles can sometimes soften the impact of an utterance, example shown in set (57) reflects the use of particle *Ai:yoh* to show disapproval of one's action.

(57) SET 1 (LINE 135-139)

Context: Conversation at home. M3 (M1's elder brother, F2's uncle) was narrating how his mother interferes with their daily routines. (Dialect: Hokkien)

135	M3	<b>Ai:yoh! Luan si er! Tak tak jit</b> <i>Ai:yoh! Very disturbing! Everyday.</i>
136	F2	[giggles]
137	M3	Ee: larnng chia chiak, chut khi. <i>Sometimes they go out after having meals</i>
138	M1	/tsk
139	M3	/Ee: ti ti karm ee chiak. <i>/She is always bugging them to eat</i>

In this example, M1 and M3 were discussing about their mother, F1 (she did not appear in this excerpt but was there when the conversation took place). In line 135, M3 complained about F1 by initiating the sentence with *Ai:yoh! Very disturbing!* M1 also showed desperation towards F1 by using the speech particle 'tsk' (line 138). This was uttered in the presence of F1. In a follow-up interview, M3 mentioned that the use of *Ai:yoh!* was to show disapproval of what F1's actions. M3 also further explained that the use of *Ai:yoh* here reflects how irritated he was with F1. M3, in this instance, was imposing a FTA on F1 by not saving her face in any way. The use of *Ai:yoh* here reflects how irritated M3 was with F1. According to M3 in a follow-up interview, his mother, F1 had always been bringing problems to the family and thus, they were tired of

her already. Although M3 was expected to be polite to his mother, he was complaining about her to other family members. It was inferred that M3 was probably feeling desperate taking care of F1, thus expressing his feelings to inform F1 how difficult it was to handle her. M3 did not take redressive actions to save F1's face, although F1 was his mother.

As a continuation to the example above, in example (58) below, M3 was telling the others (line 141) that his mother would nag a lot if they go out and come home late.

(58) SET 1 (LINE 141-145)

Context: Conversation at home. M3 was telling M1 that their mother had been interfering a lot with their daily lives, and that he found her tiring and disturbing. (Dialect: Hokkien, Cantonese)

141	M3	Khi liao, kar ua tampuk tui, ku::I meh bey: har lei. <i>If they go out and come back a bit later, she also nags.</i>
142	M1	<i>/lu bo lat kar ee ah</i> <i>/you'll get tired of her ah</i>
143	M3	Hee:: yo::h
144	M1	/A:iseh
145	M3	Luan si loh! <i>She's so disturbing loh!</i>

In line 142, M1 responded by saying *you'll get tired of her ah*. The use of the particle *ah* shows that M1 was agreeing with M3. In 143, M3 replied with another speech particle *hee:: yo::h* as a response to M3's utterance in line 141. M1 also showed response by using the speech particle *Ai:seh* in line 144. In a follow-up interview, M3 revealed that he used the speech particle *hee:: yo::h* in line 143 to show impatience as his mother nagged a lot. On the other hand, M1 who used the speech particle *Ai:seh* in line 144

revealed in a follow-up interview that he knew his mother well and was not surprised when M3 mentioned that his mother nagged a lot. The employment of the speech particle *Ai:seh* was a way to show disappointment towards his mother. Based on M1 and M3's responses in line 141 and 144, there was no face redressive action taken to save their mother (F1)'s face. M3's responses like *Hee:: yo::h*, *Ai:seh* and *So disturbing loh!* were straightforward and might be hurtful to F1. However, F1 merely kept quiet and listened. From the politeness theory point of view, this short exchange carries a sequence of FTA (*Hee:: yo::h*, *Ai:seh* and *So disturbing loh!*). The use of particles illustrates that the interlocutors share a close relationship (Lean, 2008) and thus, no redressive action was taken to reduce the impact of FTA. Kuang (2002) states that when local particles are used appropriately, meanings can be conveyed 'quickly and efficiently'. In this example, speech particles were used by M1 and M3 to express impatience (line 141) and disappointment (line 144) towards F1 without using too many words to convey their messages.

Example shown in set (59) showcases the use of particle *Ye:::rh* by AL and MM (HC's daughters) to disagree with HC's decision to keep long hair during his younger days. However, the use of particles were then continued with some laughter to ease the tension.

(59) SET 3 (LINE 775-777)

Context: Conversation at home. HC (the father) was telling his daughters (AL and MM) that he kept long hair in his younger days. AL and MM showed disbelief.

775	HC	But after that, har form six, at the end of the day, keep long hair again lah
776	AL	//Ye:::rh ((laughs))
777	MM	//Ye:::rh ((laughs))

In turn 775, HC (the father) was entertaining daughters, AL and MM, that he used to *keep long hair* after form six. Note that he emphasised this through the use of speech particle *lah*. The use of particles like *lah* has been discussed by Kuang (2002) who suggests that these speech particles ‘help to soften the impact of an utterance’ and a message is conveyed without using too many words. In lines 776 and 777, AL and MM showed some disapproval by saying ‘Ye:::rh’ to show that they could not accept their father did this in her younger days. Nevertheless, AL and MM was not exactly too disapproving because their disapproval was followed by laughter. In a follow-up interview, it was understood that AL and MM was surprised that their father actually kept long hair and they found it disgusting. That was why they responded in such a way. This example is reflective of what Pan (2002) and Brown and Levinson (1987) say about politeness. It appears that there was no politeness showed by the younger girls but this bald-on-record strategy which was to show disapproval was accepted by the father who did not talk about this matter any further. AL and MM also mentioned in a follow-up interview that they felt disrespectful when they responded ‘Ye:::rh’, thus broke into laughter towards the end to make their father feel more comfortable and at ease.

#### **4.3.2. LAUGHTER**

When a conversation is carried out, there are times when one is posed with a difficult question or being put in a difficult situation and he or she finds it challenging to react. Thus, laughter is sometimes being used to break the monotony and redress the embarrassing situation. It is also sometimes being used when one is trying to avoid a particular topic which is not in favour of the hearer. This strategy is effective in saving



the speaker's face and avoiding disagreement among interlocutors. Laughter is sometimes employed by family members in order to soften an impact of an utterance. When laughter follows an utterance, sometimes it is meant as to redress the impact of FTA on the hearer.

An example which illustrates the use of laughter as an act of saving other people's face is as shown in set (60).

(60) SET 3 (LINE 926-933)

Context: Conversation at home. MM (the daughter) was teasing HC (the father) for not wearing his shirt. MM (9 years old) has a very close relationship with her father, HC. AL and MM are HC's daughters while KK is HC's son.

926	MM	((giggles)) Daddy why you neve::r wear your shirt.
927	HC	I never wear because, so::: col:d
928	MM	So col:::d! ((laughs))
929	KK	/((laughs))
930	HC	/Free::zing. Very cold.
931	KK	// ((laughs))
932	MM	// ((laughs))
933	AL	// ((laughs))

In line 926, MM was teasing her father for not wearing his shirt at home. In line 927, HC responded by saying it was because he was feeling 'so::: col:d'. In this instance, HC actually meant he felt hot, but he was trying to save his own face by using humour. In a follow-up interview, it was understood that HC employed this strategy to avoid the embarrassing situation. HC mentioned that he was surprised MM asked him this question, which he found embarrassing. In line 928 and 929, MM (the daughter) and KK (the son) laughed simultaneously after listening to HC's response in line 927. They found this to be funny and thus used laughter to save HC's face. HC further exaggerated

by he was not wearing his shirt was because he was ‘freezing’ and feeling ‘very cold’ (line 930). Upon hearing this, KK, MM and AL all burst into laughter. This example showcases the use of laughter as an effective way to ‘difuse any potential tension between the two’ (Zuraidah in David and Kow, 2008).

In example (61), CC( line 459) employed laughter to respond to his elder brother, BN’s complain about their mother as laughter is seen as a way to ease the tension emerged in a conversation.

(61) SET 4 (LINE 458-459)

Context: Conversation at home. BN was telling his brother, CC, how worried their mother was when BN’s son who’s working outstation would not be coming home anytime soon. (Dialect: Hokkien)

458	B	Wa ka:r ee kornɡ bo tui lai, ee kornɡ cho mik su boe tui lai ni? Har, lu kar ee kornɡ lah lu kar ee
	N	kornɡ <i>I told her he's not coming back, she asked why's he not coming back. Har, you tell her you tell her</i>
459	CC	((laughs))

In line 458, BN was telling CC that their mother would not accept explanations as to why BN’s son was not coming home for Chinese New Year celebration. Their mother was around when the conversation took place, but she kept quiet and did not say a thing. According to BN in a follow-up interview, he knew should show respect to his mother by not confronting her face-to-face. From BN’s utterance in line 458 *Har, you tell her you tell her*, BN told the researcher he was getting more and more irritated as NN would not understand even after he had explained to her. In line 459, CC who was BN’s younger brother laughed in response to BN’s utterance. In a follow-up interview, CC stated that the laughter was to soften the impact of BN’s utterance towards their mother and not to worsen the situation. They did not comment any further because they still

respected their mother, who was a septuagenarian. They saw the need of saving NN's face and not imposing FTA on her.

The employment of laughter may be used to ease tension emerged in a conversation, but in example (62), laughter was employed as a way to avoid challenging topics in a conversation in which the hearers were not sure of how to respond.

(62) SET 1 (LINE 407-411)

Context: Conversation at home. F1 (the mother) showed concern why her grandson has not got any children yet after getting married for a few years. (Dialect: Hokkien and Cantonese)

407	F1		/Ngao toy buey ai suey harn lah hoh /Ngao toy doesn't want kids hoh?
408	F3	Bo, bo ((laughs)) No, no ((laughs)) . . .	
411	F2&F3	((laughs))	

412	F2	Ar buey. Not yet.	
413	F1	Chor mork chua koo liao bo suey harn ah? <i>How come he doesn't have kids yet after so long?</i>	
414	F1&F2	// ((laughs))	
415	M1	// ((laughs))Ee hm chai koo kuk ee ((laughs)) //(laughs)No idea with him ((laughs))	

F1 being the grandmother in the family, was concerned about reproduction in the family. In this example, F1 poses a question in a statement form in line 407. She asked why her grandson, NT, (who did not participate in the conversation) was still not planning to have kids. In line 411, F2 and F3 laughed simultaneously in relation to F1's

question. F2 was NT's sister while F3 was NT's mother. As F2 and F3 took this question as a personal matter and they had no idea when Ngao Toy will have kids, thus they used laughter to break the monotony. F1 came up with a similar question in line 413 asking the reason why Ngao Toy was still not having kids after getting married for so long. F2 and F3 mentioned in a follow-up interview that they were taken aback by this question as they were not in the position to provide assumptions or explanations. They broke into laughter again upon hearing this question posed by F1, as they found it embarrassing because F1 was always asking and they knew the answer would disappoint her. Thus, laughter in this extract, was used to avoid challenging questions which the hearer might not know the answer or was not in the position to provide explanations. This example also illustrates that F2 and F3 who were younger members in the family, showed respect for F1 who was in her 90s by not going against her question but instead used laughter to brush off the topic which they found challenging. This is in line with Kramarae's (1981) suggestion that "women are 'conversation smoothers' to talk in times of perceived tension or uncertainty in order to help put other participants at ease".

In example (63), laughter was employed to ease an embarrassing situation, and at the same time not impeding the space and freedom of the speaker.

(63) SET 1 (LINE 129-136)

Context: Conversation at home. F1 (the grandmother) has not seen her granddaughter, F2, who works outstation for quite a long time. F1 was experiencing deterioration in her memory. She could not recall F2's name until half an hour later. (Dialect: Hokkien)

129	F1	Ah Li:::n! <i>Ah Li:::n!</i>
130	F2	/Ha:::r! <i>/Ye:::s!</i>
131	F3	((laughs))
132	M1	/Ha:r! Pua tiam cheng liao <i>/Yes! Half an hour already</i>
133	F2	/tharm mah siao bo tiouk wa! ((laughs)) <i>/couldn't recall who I was just now! ((laughs))</i>
136	F2	((giggles))

In this excerpt, it started with F1 whose memory was not consistent, remembered her granddaughter, F2's name all of a sudden (line 129). According to the family members, as F1 was showing some symptoms of Alzheimer, she had difficulties in remembering people's names. In this instance, F1 only starts to remember her granddaughter's name after seeing her for half an hour. F1 called out her granddaughter's name, and was followed by her granddaughter answering her *Ha:::r* while giggling. This was followed by F3 laughing after realizing F1 had just remembered F2's name. F2 and F3 had employed the off-record politeness by giggling and laughing as they were trying to reduce the imposition of FTA on F1's face. The imposition of FTA had been reduced to

the minimum in order to ease the tension and not to embarrass F1 who found it difficult to recall people's names nowadays. The interlocutors mentioned in a follow-up interview that they showed F1 some respect by not commenting any further although they found it interesting and funny that F1 called out F2's name all of a sudden. Thus, giggle and laughter have been employed in showing respect for the elders in order to overcome an embarrassing situation.

Similarly in example (64), the use of laughter was to ease tension to avoid embarrassment.

(64) SET 2 (LINE 30-33)

Context: Conversation at home. S3 and S4 are husband and wife. S2 is S3's younger sister. They were talking about the grandchildren of S3 and S4. (Dialect: Hokkien)

30	S4	/Sa lei kaliao tapoh lai ((laughs)) /All three are boys ((laughs))
31	S2	Chee lei ka- siang kah chabo bin tampuk hor? ((laughs))) This one looks more like a girl right? ((laughs))
32	S4	/Ha::
33	S3	/Ha:: Ee eh bin ka- ka ka eh cute nah /Ha:: His face is cuter

In line 30, S4 was proud to say that all the grandchildren he had were boys. After looking at the photos of the babies, S2 raised her curiosity in line 31 by mentioning that one of them looks more like a girl. S2's utterance ended with some laughter to reduce the impact of embarrassment. This is because the baby is a boy but he looks more like a girl than a boy. This sentence ends with *hor* is and this particle used at the end of the question is not really a question but more of S2 seeking confirmation from S4 and S3, who are the grandparents of the baby. This kind of question may not be well-taken by

some people as gender is considered as a sensitive issue and the change of gender may cause some unpleasant feelings in others. Thus, S2 broke into laughter in the hope it will ease the tension and make it a lighter topic. S4, the grandmother, did not seem to be affected because she agreed with S2 by replying *Har* (*yes*). S3 also employed the negative politeness strategy in line 33. He initially agreed with S2 and S4 by saying *Har* but he continued by explaining that this grandson of his is very cute. S3 might not agree in actual fact, but in order to save the positive face of S2 and S4, he agreed first and then provided his reasoning. The *Har* used by S3 turned out to be an ambiguous response as to whether he agreed or it was merely to save the listener's positive face wants. The reasoning of his grandson being very cute was not relevant to S2's utterance that the baby looked more like a girl than a boy. Thus, it was possible S3 was taking redressive action by diverging the topic a little bit. However, in a follow-up interview, S3 and S4 mentioned that they were not offended by S2's remark because they did not think it is a serious matter.

In relation to that, example shown in set (65) shows the employment of laughter by younger family members to avoid disagreements with elder family members.

(65) SET 7 (LINE 705-709)

Context: Conversation at home. KH's mother, MM, was asking KH about the accident he encountered lately. (Dialect: Teo Chew)

705	MM	<i>/tai tuo, ik pai hern tuo, hao siang. /too much. Hundred is a lot, I think.</i>
706	KH	<i>Ee tar nar korng boe kao si barlu khar hor wa. Tapi boe khar hor wa. he said he'll only call me if it's not enough. But so far no news from him.</i>
707	MM	<i>boe kao koe chai khar hor lu kuk ah? he'll call you if it's not enough?</i>
708	YN	<i>/((giggles))</i>

709 KH ((laughs))

In line 707, MM expressed surprise by questioning KH whether it was true that person will call him up to request for money if the RM100 given was not enough. MM was implying that *the RM100 is already more than enough and he might still call you for more?* MM was imposing an FTA on KH and she did not really expect an answer from KH because she was implying KH should not have done that. However, KH avoided replying his mother by just giving a laugh at her question. YN being the younger sister of KH, realized that a FTA had been imposed on KH, giggled upon hearing MM's question. In a follow-up interview, YN revealed that this was done to break the monotony of the situation besides to minimize the imposition of FTA on KH. This example illustrates that children tend to avoid disagreements when communicating with their mother, and that younger family members are more concerned about saving other people's face in an embarrassing situation.

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

The data analysis of this study has unravelled some interesting findings in relation to politeness strategies employed among Chinese family members.

Based on the analysis of the transcription, it was discovered that out of the four politeness strategies, positive politeness strategy was the most frequently used, whereas off-record was the least used strategy. On the whole, the occurrence of positive politeness carries a total of 42.5%, bald-on record 37.9%, negative politeness 10.1%, whereas off-record politeness only carries 9.5%. Surprisingly, findings of this study



showed that although family members were close to each other, they did not always take each other's feelings for granted. This was carried out by analysing the sets of data after transcribing was done.

Family members in this study showed solidarity and closeness by employing the positive politeness strategy most of the time. Positive politeness strategy had been demonstrated in the conversations for several purposes, for example to show interest in a particular topic, showing agreement, to compliment to give advice and complimenting others. The employment of this politeness strategy among family members possibly was mainly to sustain the harmony and solidarity among them. It was also employed by the family members for showing cooperation and providing support in order to keep a conversation going. From the brief interview sessions carried out with some of the subjects, it was understood that they tried to maintain good relationship with other family members and not take their feelings for granted. They realised the importance of showing respect for each other and not hurting each other's feelings.

In this study which involved seven families from the Chinese community, the employment of bald-on record strategy was demonstrated to refute opinions, gossip, tease each other, provide advice and reprimand. This study shows that the employment of the bald-on record strategy showed no redressive actions were taken to mitigate the impact of FTA on other interlocutors. Teasing was commonly used as a way of communication with other family members. A follow-up interview revealed that the interlocutors felt at ease teasing or being teased when they were interacting with their family members. They did not find this rude and impolite. Some of the interlocutors felt that it was rather a way to build rapport among their family member, while some felt it was a way to feel the closeness among family members. It was the special bond they

shared which allowed them to communicate in such a way without feeling being offended. A short interview session with some of the subjects reveal that sometimes they were being direct in their utterances because they would like to show firmness in a decision made (for example in a mom-child conversation), provide advice for the younger ones and also to show power especially when an argument takes place without the intention of being rude. However, sometimes they were not aware of what had been said and it was merely a habit (for example, uttering vulgar words).

Negative politeness was demonstrated with the use of questioning, hedging, tag questions and avoiding the use of pronouns. Negative politeness was less frequently demonstrated in this study probably because the conversations took place among family members and there was no urgency to be too indirect among them. Tag questions, hedging, indirectness and avoidance of using the pronouns were some of the ways of communication in negative politeness discovered in this study. This politeness strategy was more frequently used when one was not sure about something to leave some space for negotiation among each other.

Finally, the least employed politeness strategy was the off-record politeness strategy. This was demonstrated by the family members with the use of contradiction, being vague and giving hints. A brief interview session which was carried out to delve into factors leading to the employment of off-record politeness among family members reveal that they sometimes opted to avoid certain topics although they disagreed with what had been said by other members of the family. They were more likely to be polite when a conversation involved their extended family members. On the other hand, they revealed that they had the tendency to be more direct and straightforward when conversing with their parents and siblings as they knew that their parents and siblings

will less likely be offended. However, they were not always aware about the way they responded to the other family members. Instead, they said it came naturally to them as they were brought up in such a way since young.

As for the demonstration of face strategies to accommodate each other's face wants, it was found that members of the family were very fond of using laughter and the local particles like 'lah', 'loh' and 'liao' to minimise the imposition of FTA on other family members. The demonstration of 'loh' and 'lah' are commonly used in Chinese-speaking families and the purpose of those particles being used was to show closeness and solidarity between the speakers and the hearers. Without the employment of 'loh' and 'lah', the impact of being close to each other is not as significant. In the Chinese culture, filial piety is regarded as a very important value and it is pivotal for the younger ones to show respect to parents and elder members of the family. Hence, the impact of this concept has rooted in the hearts of the younger ones and they are aware of being polite to the elder members of the family. The idea of saving face and minimising the imposition of FTA among family members show that they were concerned about the face needs as well as feelings of other family members.

Laughter was another commonly used strategy to minimise the imposition of FTA. The interlocutors employed this strategy to avoid certain topics, to diverge a particular topic, with the purpose of minimising the imposition of a FTA. This study revealed that the interlocutors were very fond of employing laughter to soften the impact of an FTA because according to the interlocutors, that was a good way to attend to the other family members and at the same time satisfying their face wants. Besides, laughter was also used to show respect to the elder interlocutors as well as to avoid disagreements with

other family members. Laughter was a way for the interlocutors to avoid responsibilities while doing the FTA.

In short, the demonstration of politeness strategies among family members varies across gender and age groups. Nevertheless, family members are able to understand each other better and a good rapport which leads to a harmonious family is established among them.

## **Chapter 5.**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

The first part of this chapter deals with the summary of the major findings of this study, followed by recommendations for the enhancement of certain aspects of this study which appeared to be lacking in one way or another. Suggestions of possible extended research areas are also included. This chapter then concludes with a conclusion based on the findings of this study.

#### **5.2. Summary**

Holmes (2001) states that the employment of politeness may vary according to cultures and custom around the world. This study shows that the subjects who were from the Chinese community appear to also have its own way in demonstrating politeness strategies when communicating with family members in naturally-occurring conversations.

This is supported by Watts (2003) who mentions that politeness greatly depends on experience or habitus (Rafik-Galea, 2008). This also means the notion of politeness could be defined differently for different individuals, depending on the experience one has gone through as well as the social behavior of a person. Thus, the interpretation of what politeness is greatly relies on how a hearer perceives the notion of politeness and evaluates an utterance. This study looked into the patterns of politeness strategies that emerge in conversations among family members by employing the Brown and Levinson's politeness framework as a reference. However, the researcher did not

constrain the analysis of data to the definitions and categories outlined in the framework as a data-driven approach was employed.

From the data obtained, it can be concluded that positive politeness was the most frequently demonstrated politeness strategy, followed closely by bald-on record strategy, negative politeness and off-record politeness. Positive politeness and bald-on record strategy top the list and it can be comprehended that they share close family bonds and see the importance of showing solidarity and support for each other when a discourse takes place. This, as mentioned by Hsu (1981), is why “group boundaries are important for Chinese” (Pan, 2000: 147). The findings of this study reveal that positive politeness has the most occurrence and the subjects demonstrated this politeness strategy most of the time for the purpose of seeking agreement and showing solidarity in order to sustain the flow and harmony of a conversation. This is mainly because in the Chinese culture, positive face want is regarded as the basis for practicing politeness in daily interaction with others (Pan, 2000).

Redressive actions were constantly being taken in observing the face-saving strategy to ensure the imposition of FTA on the elder family members were being minimized as much as possible. This is because junior family members “are supposed to show respect and deference” (Pan, 2000 :112) to senior family members.

The study shows that males were more straightforward and direct no matter who they communicated with and they demonstrated bald-on record strategy more often than females. On the other hand, females were more likely to demonstrate the positive politeness strategy because they see the importance of showing solidarity and support in communicating with others. They employed the hedging devices, provided emotional support in a conversation and seek agreement more frequently than men did. However,

females also did employ the bald-on record strategy when dealing with young children. In this context, they feel there was a need to be straightforward in showing authority while disciplining their children.

This study dealt with the realization of politeness strategies among Chinese family members in naturally-occurring conversations. It is shown that despite the differences in the politeness strategies employed, family members were still able to have a close family bond and establish rapport with one another.

### **5.3. Recommendations**

The 7 sets of data analyzed were sufficient to display the employment of politeness strategies among family members. However, social background and educational background could be taken into consideration as these factors could affect the employment of politeness strategies among interlocutors.

Besides, a more focused study could be carried out. For example, politeness strategies employed in a parents-children conversation would be different from a spousal conversation. However, the context and setting should be taken into consideration too. In this study, the data were collected from family members of various background and even extended family members were involved. Thus, it would be interesting to delve into the realization of politeness strategies among family members in a different context with a more specific relationship being addressed.

This study focused on family conversations among the Chinese community, but a full cross-cultural study was not attempted. In the theory of politeness by Brown and Levinson, the concept of 'total-context' is an essential component. Thus, it would be a

good idea to compare this study with another set of parallel data collected in a different culture, for example the realization of politeness strategies in the Malay community.

#### **5.4. Conclusion**

The employment of politeness strategies may vary according to settings and context. Applying this study in a Malaysian context, it is possible that people tend to be more polite in their conversation with family members in order to establish good rapport and show solidarity for one another.

Although this study cannot be used as a yardstick to represent the whole community, it serves as a guide and reference for future related research. In conclusion, the employment of politeness strategies among family members does help in building rapport and solidarity besides satisfying each other's face wants in the society.