

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the Study

Over the last three decades, the study of politeness strategies have become one of the most active areas of research in spoken and written discourse. This phenomenon began when Goffman published “*On face work*” in 1955. This was followed by Lakoff (1973, 1975), Leech (1983) and also Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) who conducted extensive studies on linguistic politeness. These studies indicate that linguistic politeness is generally associated with social behaviour to avoid conflicts. However, a majority of past studies in the area of politeness were on spoken discourse. Nevertheless, many studies recently have shown that it could also be extended onto written discourse.

In 1989 Myers published his article, “*The Pragmatics of Politeness in Scientific Articles*”, and found that the model proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) could also be applied to interpret the culture of scientific writing. Since then many scholars have extended the concept of politeness strategies onto written discourse abroad and locally such as on *current research issues* (Kasper, 1990), *business letters* (Maier, 1992), *written business discourse* (Pilegaard, 1997), *scientific texts* (Kwok, 1997), *persuasion in writings* (Cherry, 1988), *thesis writing* (Faridah Mohd. Noor, 2000), *research articles* (Dahl, 2008), blogs (Thayalan, 2011).

Politeness strategies in written discourse are in line with the demands of the academic community that expects scientific language to be objective and formal. It was found that politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) for spoken discourse can

be applied to interpret scientific culture of scientific writing (Myers, 1989; Kwok, 1997; and Faridah Mohd Noor, 2000).

Brown and Levinson (1987) found four (4) categories of politeness strategies in their study. These were proposed as universals since striking parallels seem to exist between three unrelated languages (Tzeltal, Tamil and English) in terms of the politeness devices used by speakers of these languages. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), while politeness may be expressed differently from one culture to another, the basic hierarchy of politeness strategies is not culture specific.

The present study is interested in studying the kinds of politeness strategies found in journal articles in the field of economics. What makes economics 'special' is that economics is a combination of 'soft' science research issues related to human behaviour and the 'hard' science of mathematical economic models (Dahl, 2009). The language of economics represents the interaction between humankind and markets under specific conditions. The other reason is how economists present their thought in the journal articles they write (Dahl, 2009:2).

Moreover, by applying the politeness theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978) alongside two others studies namely, politeness in scientific articles by Myers (1989) and Mulholland's (1994) compilation of persuasion tactics, this present study tries to focus on the politeness strategies employed by writers of economic journal articles.

The researcher hopes that this present study is able to contribute to the existing pool of knowledge on politeness strategies used in academic writing particularly that in the writing of two identified economic journals: one local and one international publication.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Previous studies have shown that politeness strategies may be applied not only in verbal communication but also through the medium of written communication. Many of these studies were based on Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) theory to explain the nature of politeness phenomena in written communication. Brown and Levinson (1978) constructed a theory to explain the nature of politeness phenomena based on spoken discourse. The theory's major concept is "an arrangement of politeness strategies along a continuum from least polite to most polite".

However, previous studies on politeness in written text have not specifically looked at economic texts. As mentioned by Holmes (2001), the economic field is prototypical of the social sciences which combine both science research issues related to human behaviour and science of mathematical economic models. To engage in the discourse of economic articles in a meaningful and effective manner requires skilful handling of textual strategies. This study has chosen to explore economic journals to explore the types of politeness strategies used by economists when making a claim, maintaining face or employing other kinds of politeness tactics in their journal articles.

In this regard, this study tries to identify and compare the type of politeness strategies employed by writers of economic journal articles of one local and one international economic journal. The major concept of politeness theory as an arrangement of politeness strategies along a continuum from least polite to most polite

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The present study undertakes the task of looking at the use of the politeness strategies employed in economic journals and compare between two economic journals, one local and one international by proposing the objectives below;

1. To investigate the use of politeness strategies in economics journals.
2. To compare the types of politeness strategies employed by journal writers of identified economic journals.

1.3 Research Questions

The present study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What kinds of politeness strategies are employed by writers of economic journals?
2. How are politeness strategies distributed in the different sections of economic journal articles?
3. In what ways are the politeness strategies found to be similar or different in the identified local and international economic journals?

1.4 Significance of the study

Since the early 1980s, the discussion of various controversial issues in the economics discourse community has led to increasing debate among concerned economists about the ways that they communicate with each other, as well as with non-economists (Mc.Closkey, 1986).

In this exploratory study, the researcher chooses to focus on the existence of politeness strategies in economic journals. Hopefully this present study is able to contribute towards obtaining a set of politeness strategies used by writers of economic journals that can be referred to by novice writers in the same field

It hopes to show the kinds of politeness strategies and tactics employed in both local and international economic journals by comparing the choices made by writers of these journals. Therefore, the collection of strategies in this study would encompass all strategies used by journal writers within a span of six (6) years of two identified journals from the field of economics.

This present study also hopes with the analysis of economics text and expanding body of work which in recent times has begun to intersect with the discussions held by linguist (non-economist) the understanding about politeness strategies, especially in the use of strategies and tactics in economic journals can be enhance. Thus, understanding the kinds of politeness strategies and tactics in economic texts could be useful for establishing common ground between language specialists and economists as well as writers from other field in order to fit in with the demands of the scientific discourse community that expects scientific language to be objective and formal (Myers: 1989; Faridah Mohd Noor: 2000).

1.5 Limitation of The Study

The limitations of the present study are:

1. This present study will limit its data to two identified journals published by two economic associations, one local and one international economic association.

2. Only the main text of the selected articles will be analysed. The areas of mathematical languages, formula, as well as footnotes in the articles will not be included in the analysis.
3. This study does not attempt to look at the differences in the style of writing choice of politeness strategies based on gender, age or ethnic background.

1.6 Summary

The focus of the present study is to investigate the use of politeness strategies in economic journals. This chapter presented the objectives of the present study and the significance of the present research in the field of writing discourse. It undertakes the task to identify and analyze politeness strategies employed in the articles and compares two identified journals published by two economic associations, one local and one international economic association.