


“Call Me Judy”: Cross-Cultural Interaction in Asian-American Environment

(“Call Me Judy”: Interaksi Lintas Budaya dalam Lingkungan Asia-Amerika)

Palupi Paramarta Effendi 

Master Program in Linguistics, Universitas Airlangga
Dharmawangsa Dalam Street, Surabaya 60286
Tel.: +62(31)5035676
Surel: palupi.paramarta.effendi-2021@fib.unair.ac.id

Received: 10 January 2023

Revised: 15 July 2024

Published: 31 July 2024

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji interaksi lintas budaya dalam film Asia-Amerika tahun 2019 *Always Be My Maybe*. Ciri linguistik penting yang berbeda lintas budaya adalah sistem kehormatan yang sangat bervariasi antara konteks Asia dan Barat. Penelitian ini menganalisis sebutan kehormatan yang digunakan dalam film dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, berdasarkan teori kesantunan Brown dan Levinson. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa meskipun berlatar belakang Asia-Amerika, karakter utama Korea sering menggunakan sistem kehormatan Korea untuk memanggil orang yang lebih tua, sehingga menyoroti pemertahan budaya. Selain itu, penelitian ini menggarisbawahi bahwa akulturasi terjadi secara alami pada individu yang tinggal di lingkungan budaya yang berbeda dari waktu ke waktu. Namun, ditekankan bahwa individu tidak sepenuhnya meninggalkan budaya aslinya atau sepenuhnya mengadopsi budaya baru. Dinamika ini diilustrasikan melalui interaksi karakter yang berpindah antara sistem sapaan Korea dan Barat berdasarkan konteks dan hubungan. Penggunaan strategi kehormatan dan kesantunan memainkan peran penting dalam menghindari kesalahpahaman dan menjaga keharmonisan. Temuan lain penelitian ini yang masih berkaitan dengan temuan pertama menunjukkan bahwa akulturasi mau tidak mau akan dialami oleh seseorang yang sudah lama hidup dalam budaya yang berbeda. Penelitian ini berfungsi sebagai analisis kasus yang mewakili interaksi sistem kehormatan dari dua budaya, memberikan wawasan tentang perilaku sosiopragmatis dalam lingkungan lintas budaya.

Kata kunci: Asia-Amerika, kehormatan, kesantunan, lintas budaya, pragmatik

Abstract

This study scrutinizes the cross-cultural interactions in the 2019 Asian-American movie *Always Be My Maybe*. A notable linguistic feature that diverges across cultures is the honorific system, which varies significantly between Asian and Western contexts. This research analyzes the honorifics employed in the movie using a qualitative approach, grounded in Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. The findings reveal that, despite the Asian-American setting, the



Korean main characters often use the Korean honorific system to address elders, highlighting cultural retention. Additionally, the study underscores that acculturation occurs naturally for individuals living in different cultural environments over time. However, it emphasizes that individuals do not entirely abandon their original culture nor fully adopt the new one. This dynamic is illustrated through the characters' interactions, where they navigate between Korean and Western addressing systems based on context and relationships. The use of honorifics and politeness strategies plays a crucial role in avoiding misunderstandings and maintaining harmony. Another finding from this study, which is related to the first, shows that acculturation is inevitably encountered by someone who has been living in a different culture for a period of time. This study serves as a case analysis representing the interplay of honorific systems from two cultures, providing insights into sociopragmatic behaviors in cross-cultural settings.

Keywords: Asian-American, cross-cultural, honorific, politeness, pragmatics

INTRODUCTION

In an environment where two cultures collide, it is vital to keep a harmonization to maintain eloquent interaction. It is worth to note that to create eloquent interaction, appropriate and suitable approaches are employed where they are needed in certain environment. The approaches that people use in western culture may not be so welcome in other culture and vice versa. Cross-cultural interaction therefore requires extra efforts and works in order to maintain coherent relation between both parties. There are several things that need to be done by both the host and the incomers of the foreign culture. The host culture must have high understanding and tolerance that it is impossible to instantly learn and employ a new culture for incomers. In the meantime, comprehension of targeted culture and society must be grasped by the incomers of a foreign culture.

In the sense of acquiring new foreign culture, some people may leave their origin culture totally and live with the new culture that they have obtained while some others may preserve their origin culture. Although so, it cannot be denied that someone will truly be on one side even they have been living in the new culture for a period of time. In certain aspect of life, some people may still have the tendency to implement the origin culture and in other aspect they prefer the obtained culture. To judge that one culture is better than other culture is never appropriate in the context of cross-cultural collision. Culture serves as identity and uniqueness of one community and it should be preserved and respected. Maintaining and respecting diversity show that the society can tolerate differences and keep harmony despite the diverse beliefs, norms, and values. These are of course easily said than done in real life.

The collision of Asian and American culture is one of the most discussed topics in cross-cultural discourse. Due to several different values that both cultures hold, it is intriguing to observe the interaction between the two cultures. Politeness in different cultures often be examined such as the use of positive or negative politeness when related to certain aspects in cross-cultural context. Several scholars also have discussed how in certain culture the degree of directness may vary due to several aspects and reasons (Marti 2006; Ogiermann 2009; Kerkam 2015). Other scholars observed how low culture comprehension may result several pragmatic failures in targeted culture (Stukan 2018; Ren & Liu 2019; Kecskes 2017; McGee 2019).

Several studies which analyse the cross-cultural interaction have been done in recent five years. Jaeger (2019) examined and compared the trend of linguistic politeness in children movies and

other movie genres. Her research focuses on the use of several politeness markers (*thank you* and *please*) and reveals that in children movies there is higher occurrence of those politeness markers than in other movies genres. Other study related to politeness which also associated to cross-cultural interaction was done by Effendi (2021). She examined the use of politeness strategy and how it is perceived from the point of views of two different cultures, Asian culture and Western culture. Although the work by Effendi does not specifically inspect the honorific system in cross-cultural context in the movie, some of the data are related to the addressing system in Asian culture. Her study revealed that due to cultural relativism, certain politeness strategy could be perceived otherwise in different culture. Other respectively similar study was done by (McGee 2019) regarding pragmatic failure in intercultural interaction. Finding in his research presents several possible ways which can be done to counter the pragmatic failure that occur in intercultural interaction. None of the recent study had specifically scrutinize the use of honorifics done in Asian-American environment.

It is widely known that in Western culture, it is alright to address parents or people who are older by their names. Oppositely, it is considered to be inappropriate to do the same thing in Asian culture. Honorifics system is important to be applied in Asian cultures (e.g. Japanese, Korean, Chinese, etc.). Despite the fact that there are plenty of Asian-American discourses that can be observed regarding honorifics appropriateness, research study which analysed the use of honorifics system in Asian-American has not been done in recent years. There are several movies with Asian-American setting. *Always Be My Baby* which was released in 2019 portrays the cross-cultural interaction of Asian-American setting. Through this chance, this study aims to answer several questions regarding the cross-cultural interaction that occurs in Asian-American environment which is portrayed in a movie called *Always Be My Maybe*, those are: (1) How does the addressing system occur in the cross-cultural Asian-American environment? and (2) How acculturation of the speaker affects the interaction in the movie?

The four bases in politeness theory are very well known to be categorised into two aspects, the face maintaining aspect and the degree of directness. Each of the four strategies has its own purpose which varies and depends on the speaker goal or aim. In the context of face maintaining aspects, there are two strategies that a speaker can do when interacting with the hearer. It is crucial to know that the concept of face deals with the speaker's face and also the hearer's face (Zhang 2019). With the first strategy, a speaker can employ a positive politeness strategy which endows certain purpose. This strategy is commonly used when the speaker wants to keep their own positive image and also maintain the hearer's positive face. When speakers want to keep positive image about themselves, they try not impose and make sure that the hearer perceive a pleasant image about the speaker. Meanwhile, maintaining the hearer's positive face has a purpose of trying to make the hearer pleased, happy, and unopposed. Later the speakers can continue executing their goal to get what they want from the hearer. By using positive politeness, the speakers are aware the hearers' desire need to be respected and the positive relationship between two parties should be well maintained (Song 2012). Negative politeness on the other side hence utilised when the speaker wants to maintain distance with the hearer. Sometimes negative politeness strategy is also utilised when the speaker is trying to attack the hearer's face. Depends on the power relation between the speaker and the hearer, this strategy sometimes also put the speaker's face to be seen as negative by the hearer. When the speaker has high or absolute power relation (position or age), it is less likely that the speaker feels cautious about maintaining their positive face.

The next two politeness strategies, which in regard with the degree of directness, are known as bald record and off record strategies. Bald in German is equally translated in English as 'soon' which is aligned with how this strategy work. Bald record strategy is used when the speaker makes direct, clear, and non-ambiguous statement. This strategy therefore is used to delivering information when stating an information in clear, fast, and direct manner. It is highly predicted that the hearer can grasp directly what the speaker wants to deliver when they are interacting. While bald record delivers information explicitly, on the opposite site, off record delivers information or message implicitly when the speaker says something. The purpose of this strategy can be that the speaker does not want to be too direct and harsh when stating something and also when the speaker wants to avoid imposition in case the hearer does not like what the speaker says. Off record strategy often considered as an ambiguous strategy, since the real meaning of the utterance most of the time only can be grasped by the speaker. This strategy has less optimal result or response from the hearers if the speaker wants something from the hearers.

Still, these four politeness bases are not always the absolute formulas of interaction that occur in real life, especially in non-Western culture. Therefore, the concept of politeness should be redefined on one targeted culture context (Song 2017). Ide (1993) stated that Brown and Levinson overall framework should be applicable where researchers could analyse and interpret language use in both western and non-Western languages. Quantitative scholar has been done regarding the applicability of Brown and Levinson's framework of linguistic politeness in Japanese culture context (Kiyama et al. 2012). They also revealed that in the context of facework behaviour, Brown and Levinson's formula is applicable in Japanese culture. There have to be further inspection and follow up studies to support this notion to show that the politeness framework is really applicable in non-western culture.

A distinctive scholar summed up that being humble, indirect, employing proper honorifics, and respectful when communicating with others are known as the common way of how people interact in Asia (Moon et al. 2019). On the context of addressing, Korean culture is generally similar to Asian culture. Asian culture uses honorific system to address anyone who is older or has higher position. Instead of employing the semantic gender specification, Korean pronouns are classified by the discernment of social relationship and hierarchical difference between the speaker and the hearer (Song 2022). Brown and Levinson's theoretical framework defined honorific as the grammatical codes for social status between the speaker and the hearer. In extend, the use of honorific to refer someone can be done as a tool to construct the speaker's identity (Cook 2011). This addressing system in Korean can be done by using suitable honorific followed by the family name to call the person, such as Mr. Kim, Mrs. Lee, Mrs. Park, Mrs. Choi, and other family name. This system is done when talking directly to the person and also how to refer them when talking with other people. Therefore, addressing someone who is older by their first name is considered to be improper or impolite in Asian culture. By doing this, the speakers are also risking their face as they are seen to be impolite or inappropriate by the society.

As acculturation happens when someone from Asian culture picks up the Western culture, referring someone who is older when interacting with other people by their first name or without the honorific system could mean that the speaker only wants to be respectful towards the referred person when they communicate directly. It could also show that the speaker wants to be less formal by not using the formal addressing system when interacting with someone else. Nonetheless, such interpretation could be relative which makes addressing system as one of the

culturally relative in pragmatic study. Judgements are made based on individual's experience which is also interpreted differently by each individual in terms of their own enculturation (as stated by Herskovits in Brown 2008).

Keeping minimal imposition towards other people is known to be the most employed politeness culture in Asian culture. Such strategy is often done by being indirect when stating something to the hearer. Asian culture underlines the importance of harmony which acts as the tool to smoothen the interactions in society. Harmonious interaction and complementary interaction are considered to be only guidance that can be used for eloquent communication among humans. Chen (2006) summarised that Asians and Westerners are oppositely displayed; While Asians tend to avoid conflict by being less direct, Westerners rely on directness and confrontational in communicating. It can be concluded that Asians opt to use indirect style to maintain harmony as their main goal in interacting. Other preferred strategy is the positive politeness strategy. By utilising positive politeness, interaction between the speaker and the hearer is predicted to be smooth. This strategy also helps with maintaining harmony of relation between both the hearer and the speaker.

In Asian culture, politeness is not just regarded how people use the language skills when interacting as proposed by Brown and Levinson, instead politeness also acts as the everyday concept, the matter of etiquette and protocol (Ide 1993). When analysing the culture of Asian, the notion that linguistic politeness consists of strategies for language use cannot be solely applied. Politeness strategy, linguistics politeness, and the term politeness itself may have distinctive definitions that differ from one another. Thus, choice of honorifics is ultimately decided by the speaker which is also affected by the speaker's language ideology (Okamoto 2011). Interpretation of the respect weightiness in honorific may also vary and depend on the context and situation, therefore diverse, multiple, even ambiguous meaning is feasible.

Pragmatic failure is closely related to cultural relativism. Cultural relativism is defined as the situation where something or an event is valued dissimilarly in two different cultures. The main notion of moral cultural relativism is that the truths of moral are culturally relative (as stated by Herskovits in Tilley 2017). Hence, defining pragmatic failure actually is not something that is easy to be done (McGee 2019). McGee defines cross-cultural pragmatic failure as the failure that is likely happens when learners or incomers have lower proficiency and less interaction with the targeted society. In order to avoid cross-cultural pragmatic failure, gaining language proficiency and have continuous interaction with the targeted culture are necessary. McGee also suggests that proper contextual background information (e.g., values of the online community, age, gender, and life history) should also be collected in order properly decide whether an individual encounter a pragmatic failure or not. It is need to be highlighted that cultural relativism holds important historical role in encouraging cross-cultural understanding (Brown 2008).

In extend, miscommunication that occurs in cross-cultural environment is considered as pragmatic failure. Therefore, pragmatic failure happens when the speaker gets misunderstood by the targeted culture or community due to the speaker's lack of understanding and comprehension towards the culture and the norm at the society. Great understanding and comprehension towards the appropriate norms and values in a culture is needed when someone encounter new environment. This definition then slightly stretched but still related to McGee's definition of pragmatic failure but closely related to the two categorisations of pragmatic failure by Jenny Thomas. Thomas (1983) identified pragmatic failure into two types, pragmalinguistic failure and sociopragmatic failure. Pragmalinguistic failure occurs when the

speaker states something that is unusual and creates miscommunication in targeted language. This includes failing in employing direct and indirectness strategies, routines, and other variety of linguistics forms that could raise or lower communicative acts (Kecskes 2017). While sociopragmatic failure results when the incomer has done something behavioural (action) which still related with language use that is less appropriate in targeted culture.

METHOD

This research aims to find explanation of how the phenomenon occurs at the observed research object. Therefore, to get in depth understanding towards the objectives of this research study, qualitative research design is employed. The prior goal of qualitative research is a comprehensive summarization of specific phenomenon experienced by individuals or group of people in everyday life (Lambert & Lambert 2012). The objects of this research are the interactions that occur in Asian-American cultural setting which portrayed by the movie *Always Be My Maybe*. The movie tells several characters from Korea who migrated to United States and have been living there for a period of time. The setting of the movie shows how certain culture preserve the origin culture while other character had adapted the new foreign culture.

The data were collected carefully by screening the movie and extracting some interactions that are associated with the cross-cultural encounter. The use of honorific in the interaction was paid extra attention. Instead of doing the manual data transcribing, subtitle of the movie was retrieved online. The data then filtered and extracted into seven samples that could represents the cross-cultural interaction in Asian-American setting. Since the data of this research study are in the form of interaction in written dialogues, discourse analysis method is employed to analyse and break down the cross-cultural interaction that occurs in the movie. Discourse analysis inspects certain pattern of language across texts and take relationship between language and the social and cultural contexts into consideration. It also considers that there are several ways how language is presented and understood differently across cultures (Paltridge 2012). Brown and Levinson's politeness framework is mainly used to analyse the data of this research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this research, seven data had been chosen to provide analysis regarding the cross-cultural interaction between the characters in the observed movie. These data are the representation of each character which shows their stances on applying honorific system. The explained theoretical supports in introduction section are employed to analyse those seven data.

Dialogue 1

Sasha : It smells so good, Mrs. Kim.

Mrs. Kim : Sasha, I've told you a million times, call me Judy.

(*Always Be My Maybe* [00:02:44–00:02:50])

In the beginning of the movie, there is a scene where Sasha and Mrs. Kim were cooking in the kitchen. Since the Tran family is close to Sasha and Sasha's parents were rarely at home, Mrs. Tran invited her to cook and have dinner at their house. Sasha helped Mrs. Kim to prepared the dishes and wanted to give compliment towards Mrs. Kim. In this interaction, Sasha employed positive politeness to give the compliment towards Mrs. Kim. Sasha tried to give compliment to Mrs. Kim by mentioning that the cooking smells good. Instead of responding the compliment that Sasha gave, Mrs. Kim whined about how Sasha kept forgetting how to call her. Sasha as a kid and also someone who is much younger than Mrs. Kim, addressed her using the proper honorific system using the family name. Sasha thought that it was proper for her to call Mrs. Kim using the proper Korean or the Asian honorific and addressing system.

Proper Asian addressing system that was attempted by Sasha in fact got responded unexpectedly by Mrs. Kim. She responded Sasha by reminding Sasha to call Mrs. Kim using his American name and without the honorific system. This could happen since Mrs. Kim has been living in Los Angeles for several years and has picked up the Western culture. This interaction shows that Mrs. Kim preferred to be addressed as *Judy*, her American name, instead of using the Korean honorific system. This acculturation in fact has happened longer before the interaction in Dialogue 1 occurs which can be seen from how Mrs. Kim said “I’ve told you several times.” The fact that Mrs. Kim had been asking Sasha to call her with the American name, it shows that Sasha had been persistence to respect Mrs. Kim by addressing her using the Korean honorific system.

Dialogue 2

Mr. Kim : No way! Sasha Tran!
Sasha : Mr. Kim! Oh, my God. Look at you! You have not changed one bit.
How do you not age?
Mr. Kim : I wash my face with shampoo. [laugh]
Sasha : [laugh]

(*Always Be My Maybe* [00:19:47–00:20:00])

Years passed by, Mr. Kim and Marcus worked as air conditioner technicians in Los Angeles and happened to visit Sasha’s house for her air conditioner was not able to work. Surprised that the customer who ordered the service was the childhood friend of Marcus, Mr. Kim approached Sasha and interaction in Dialogue 2 occurred. In order to make the situation more welcoming for Mr. Kim as the hearer, Sasha gave a compliment towards Mr. Kim here. Giving a compliment towards a hearer is considered as employing the positive politeness strategy. Sasha as the speaker who employs positive politeness wants to maintain positive face by keeping her image virtuous and creating friendly ambience in the interaction. In response, Mr. Kim replied her positive politeness strategy using another positive politeness. Mr. Kim executed a joke that the secret of him not aging is by washing face using shampoo.

Unlike Mrs. Kim, Mr. Kim still values the Korean honorific system which can be seen at the interaction in Dialogue 2. In this interaction, Sasha addressed Mrs. Kim using the proper honorific system and the family name and Mr. Kim did not negate or correct how Sasha addresses him unlike what Mrs. Kim did in Dialogue 1. Also in this interaction, Sasha employed a positive politeness by mentioning that Mr. Kim does not seem to age from the last time she saw him. This compliment that was given by Sasha to Mr. Kim was done to make the situation warm as both of them had not seen each other for years. This is aligned with the purpose of positive politeness which is to keep a positive face and minimise imposition during the interaction. The response from Sasha’s positive politeness is both Mr. Kim and Sasha were bursting into laughter and signifies that her strategy was successfully done.

Dialogue 3

Sasha : Harry seems like he can give care to himself.
Marcus : Yea, but he’s getting older every day, so....

(*Always Be My Maybe* [00:47:53–00:47:57])

Sasha and Marcus were walking in sidewalk of the road and talk abouts Marcus’s father. Sasha was wondering why Marcus has been throwing so much chance to get better profession. Later in the interaction in Dialogue 3, Marcus revealed that he does not want to leave his father to

stay all by himself and worry that something bad might happen to Mr. Kim after Mrs. Kim had pass away.

In this interaction, it can be seen that Sasha addressed Mr. Kim using his first name in American way unlike how she addressed him in Dialogue 2 using the honorific salutation and Korean family name. The shift between these two addressing styles that Sasha had done shows that there was a manner or attitude change. In Dialogue 2, Sasha addressed Mr. Kim directly using the proper Asian honorific system when she interacted with Mr. Kim directly. Meanwhile in Dialogue 3, when talking with another person, Sasha opted to call Mr. Kim using his American name to make the conversation more casual. This was also done by Sasha because he does not need to keep her positive face in front of Marcus since both of them are on the same age and has been friends since they were childhood. Her addressing system towards Mr. Kim shows that she still tried to maintain her positive face in front of Mr. Kim but also adapted the western culture when not directly talking to him.

Regarding the politeness that the characters employed in this dialogue, Sasha opened it using off record by stating her opinion and use the word *seems*. This word signifies that the speaker is anticipating if the hearer might not agree with the statement that they claim. Marcus at first said *yeah* which means that he agreed to what Sasha had said previously, nevertheless he also stated his opinion which is contrasting to the situation that was described by Sasha. Marcus therefore replied also using off record strategy which shows that he did not want to sound rude by blatantly oppose Sasha's opinion. Hence both of the characters in this interaction successfully maintain positive face towards each other.

Dialogue 4

- Marcus : Why are you grunting?
 Mr. Kim : 'Cause I've always had my doubts about Jenny.
 Marcus : What? No, you haven't.
 Mr. Kim : I have. I just didn't wanna meddle.

(*Always Be My Maybe* [00:50:44–00:50:53])

Halfway through the movie, Marcus and Mr. Kim were sitting at their living room and talking about Jenny, Marcus' girlfriend. Jenny and Marcus had never had same mindset, yet they still stayed together. At first, Marcus asked why Mr. Kim was grunting and Mr. Kim replied that he had always been doubting about Jenny. Fell into disbelief, Marcus said that Mr. Kim had not never tell nor express to Marcus about how he doubt Jenny. Mr. Kim then responded that he actually had been doubting that Jenny is the right person for Marcus but he did not want to express it nor meddle with Marcus' decision to date Jenny which can be seen on the last line in Dialogue 4. All lines in this dialogue are employing bald record strategy. Marcus employed his clear interrogative statements in both of his lines, meanwhile Mr. Kim applied the same strategy through his explanatory statements. Mr. Kim's first line in this dialogue shows how he expressed his indirectness about his opinion towards Marcus. Keeping opinion or disposition until someone cannot bear it anymore is known to be Asian stereotypical trait. This act of diminishing imposition is known as how Asian try to keep positive relation towards the people around them. Marcus then in the story decided to end his relationship with Jenny since it was only for Mr. Kim that Marcus tried to date someone.

Dialogue 5

- Marcus : How long has this been going on?

- Mr. Kim : For a while now. We hit it off at the party, and you know how much I love Diana Ross.
Marcus : How come you never told me?
Mr. Kim : I didn't know how you'd react.

(Always Be My Maybe [01:21:15 – 01:21:23])

Marcus employed the bald record strategy twice in this dialogue by uttering two clear interrogative sentences to Mr. Kim. In response, the strategy that Marcus had implemented were exchanged successfully with the needed responses from Mr. Kim. Mr. Kim thus used the bald on record by giving the matching answers and explanations to Marcus. The strategies that both characters applied in Dialogue 5 create a successful interaction since they could receive and deliver clear messages or information towards each other.

Consistent with his indirect style of communication, Dialogue 5 displays that Mr. Kim also had been hiding that he has been dating someone that he knew from a club from Marcus. Marcus was surprised to find his father with a woman at their living room. After asking how long Mr. Kim has been dating with her, Mr. Kim explained that he has been dating the woman for a while but had never told Marcus. Mr. Kim as the speaker here stated that he is scared to tell Marcus since Mr. Kim did not know how Marcus would think of him dating a woman after several years Mrs. Kim passed away. Dialogue 4 and Dialogue 5 show that although Mr. Kim has been living in Los Angeles and Western environment, he is still persistence with his indirectness to communicate with the people around him. This shows that Mr. Kim is persistent in keeping his idealism with the culture where he originally came from and does not see the need to merge with the American customs where he lives on now.

Dialogue 6

- Mrs. Tan : Hey! Your apartment is beautiful.
Sasha : Seriously, you guys didn't have to fly all the way out here.

(Always Be My Maybe [01:26:04 – 01:26:07])

Knowing that Sasha was awarded by a famous media in New York, Sasha's parents flew all the way from Los Angeles to New York to congratulate her. Instead of being delighted by her parents' presence in New York, Sasha mentioned that her parents did not have to give her a surprise visit. Sasha's mother, Mrs. Tran, opened the interaction when they finally meet in person by complimenting Sasha's apartment. Mrs. Tran already knew that Sasha might not be pleased with her parents' sudden visit, so she tried to be friendly to Sasha by doing a positive politeness using compliment. Instead of responding to the compliment that had been given to her by saying gratitude, Sasha directly responded Mrs. Tran using bald on record and negative politeness strategies. She stated that her parents did not have to visit her all the way from Los Angeles which means that she did not welcome her parents' visit. Being direct by employing bald on record is known to be rather too aggressive in Asian culture. Moreover, imposition that is delivered in Sasha's line using the negative politeness also putting her face on risk.

The reason why Sasha was brave enough to reply Mrs. Tran using the combination of bald record and negative politeness strategy because she no longer cared about maintaining her positive face towards her parents. It was later found out that her parents used to abandoned her in her childhood which made Sasha felt powerful and had reason to use the negative politeness towards her parents. Bigger power towards the hearer also allows the speaker to use bald on record. By using the combination of negative politeness and bald record strategies, Sasha made

Mrs. Tran's face attacked. In this interaction, Sasha did not care about maintaining her positive image which shows that Sasha could perform both systems of maintaining and not maintaining her own face to someone who is older than her. Dialogue 1, 2, 3, and 6 prove that relation background with Sasha as the character affects how she acts and chooses which politeness strategy that is believed to be suitable for the hearer and the situation.

Dialogue 7

Mrs. Tan : We heard Food & Wine magazine is giving you a big award, and we wanted to come support you.

Sasha : Wow. That's a first. [chuckles]

Mrs. Tan : Okay, um... we... we know you're mad at us because we weren't around much when....

Sasha : "Much"? You used to leave me home alone for an entire day, Mom.

Always Be My Maybe ([01:26:07 - 01:26:24])

In Dialogue 7, Mrs. Tran explained why Sasha's parents suddenly come to visit her in New York. She explained using bald record strategy by stating that they have heard that Sasha will be awarded by a famous big media and they came to support her. Instead of welcoming Mrs. Tran's generous statement towards Sasha with positive statement, she replied it with a negative politeness strategy using a mockery in her "Wow. That's a first." She stated this since she remembered that her parents were never there for her in her childhood, therefore she mocked Mrs. Tran's positive politeness strategy oppositely using negative politeness. It has been mentioned that in Dialogue 6 that Sasha felt powerful enough towards Mrs. Tran as her mother since Sasha no longer cared about her positive face.

Mrs. Tran's inferiority towards her daughter, which is unusual in Asian culture, can be seen in Mrs. Tran's second line in this dialogue. She admitted that she had abandoned Sasha in her childhood and knew that Sasha is not pleased about it at all. Mrs. Tran dropped her positive face and was expecting that Sasha would brush off their ugly past experience. But instead, Sasha responded on the last line using negative politeness and bald on record and putting her mother's face way more down.

In the regard of this interaction, it shows that age and position aspects that rule the politeness strategy unusually do not apply. Instead, power aspect that rules the politeness strategy between Mrs. Tran and Sasha. In here, Sasha held the absolute power toward Mrs. Tran. This interaction also proofs that Sasha had picked up the acculturation of western culture by standing for herself and not scared to employ negative politeness with her mother. Stereotypically, in Asian culture, this is considered to be inappropriate for someone who is age-wise younger to interact with someone who is older in such way.

Characters' Self Idealism and the Need to Fit In

The interactions between Sasha and the Kims highlight the differing levels of acculturation and the struggle to fit into American culture. Mrs. Kim, having lived in Los Angeles for years, prefers being addressed by her American name, Judy, rejecting the traditional Korean honorifics. Conversely, Mr. Kim values the Korean honorific system, appreciating Sasha's use of it. Sasha's shifting address styles reflect her attempt to navigate both cultures—honouring Korean traditions while adapting to American casualness, especially in interactions with peers like Marcus. Mr. Kim's reluctance to share his true feelings until pressed shows a typical Asian

indirectness, revealing his discomfort with direct communication despite living in a Western environment.

Avoiding Misunderstanding and Keeping Harmony

The use of honorifics and politeness strategies plays a crucial role in avoiding misunderstandings and maintaining harmony. Sasha’s use of positive politeness with Mr. Kim by giving compliments fosters a warm interaction, demonstrating the effectiveness of honouring the listener’s positive face. In contrast, her direct confrontation with Mrs. Tran, using bald record and negative politeness strategies, shows a break from traditional Asian deference due to personal history. Mrs. Tran’s admission of past abandonment and Sasha’s assertive response illustrate a power dynamic shift, where Sasha, influenced by Western assertiveness, prioritizes her feelings over maintaining her mother’s face, challenging typical Asian politeness norms.

In Asian cultures, particularly Korean, honorifics are deeply embedded in communication, reflecting social hierarchy and respect. Korean pronouns emphasize social relationships and hierarchical differences rather than gender, making them integral to respectful interaction (Song 2022). Brown and Levinson’s framework further underscores that honorifics serve as grammatical markers of social status, aiding in the construction of the speaker’s identity (Cook 2011). Addressing someone older or of higher status by their first name is considered improper and disrespectful in Korean culture. Instead, proper honorifics and family names are used both in direct communication and when referring to them in conversation with others, ensuring respect and preserving the speaker’s social standing.

Conversely, Western cultures, particularly American, emphasize directness and individualism. Communication tends to be straightforward, with less emphasis on hierarchical differences. The use of first names is common and often seen as a way to promote equality and friendliness. This cultural divergence can lead to misunderstandings in cross-cultural interactions, where an American might perceive a Korean’s formal address as overly distant or, conversely, a Korean might view an American’s casual address as disrespectful.

Asian cultures also prioritize minimal imposition and indirect communication to maintain social harmony, often avoiding direct confrontation to preserve relationships (Chen 2006). In contrast, Western cultures value directness and assertiveness, even if it leads to confrontation. This fundamental difference can affect interactions significantly. For example, Sasha’s approach to Mrs. Tran reflects Western assertiveness and the prioritization of individual feelings over traditional deference, which contrasts sharply with Mr. Kim’s adherence to more traditional, indirect communication.

CONCLUSION

Applying the appropriate politeness strategy has never been an easy work especially in cross-cultural interaction. Based on the analysis that had been done in this research, it is confirmed that there are several things such as relation and closeness between speaker and the hearer, context, and situation. These aspects need to be considered by the speaker which is adjusted with their needs in order to be able to decide which honorific system that can be utilised in the interaction. The first finding of this research shows that Sasha, as one of the main characters in *Always Be My Maybe*, performed double standards of honorific system and politeness strategy towards people who are older than her due to certain reason. This reason is related on how she wants her *face* to be seen by the hearer. It is also found that the background or pass experience of the character affects the respect that Sasha gave towards the elders.

Further finding based on the analysis that was done reveals that acculturation of Western culture in certain life aspects did not make an individual any less polite when speaking in person to someone who is older and which they respect. Empirical demonstration taken from the movie shows that Sasha was aware of the existence of Asian culture even though the occurrence of the interaction was done in English and in American (Western) culture. Mrs. Kim, on the opposite side, had completely absorb the Western culture in term of the honorific system which is shown how her preference of the honorific system had shifted into the American honorific systems. Individual unique differences also may affect how someone would perform the degree of politeness and the honorific system towards people who have higher position in terms of power and age. The last finding demonstrates that age and hierarchical position does not guarantee the limitation of someone's desire to employ the combination of negative politeness and bald record strategies towards someone who is older. Background experience may result into absolute power that allows someone to break Brown and Levinson's notion of social relation status with the politeness strategy formulation.

In summary, this research suggests that it is not always the case that people from outside the Western culture would leave their origin culture after they have been living in western environment for a period of time. This acculturation also does not make someone totally adopt the new foreign culture that the acquire and exposed to nor totally preserve their origin culture. There are numbers of complex factors such as personal idealism and the need to fit in the new environment that affect the level of acculturation and culture-maintain that someone would perform. Thus, understanding cultural nuances is also essential to navigating cross-cultural environments effectively. By recognizing and respecting differences that exist within Asian-American environment, individuals can avoid misunderstandings and maintain harmonious interactions, balancing the respect for traditional honorific systems with the flexibility required in multicultural settings.

Future research studies need to be done to dig down deeper regarding the use of honorifics system in similar cross-cultural setting. Although cultural relativism will always play strong role when analysing cross-cultural interaction, comparison study of other cultures also can be done which may either strengthen or oppose the notion of the current research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

N/A

REFERENCES

- Brown, Michael F. 2008. "Cultural Relativism 2.0." *Current Anthropology* 49 (3), 363–73. DOI: 10.1086/529261.
- Chen, Guo-Ming. 2006. "Asian Communication Studies: What and Where to Now." *Review of Communication* 6 (4), 295–311. DOI: 10.1080/15358590601014596.
- Cook, Haruko Minegishi. 2011. "Are Honorifics Polite? Uses of Referent Honorifics in a Japanese Committee Meeting." *Journal of Pragmatics* 43 (15), 3655–3672. DOI: 10.1016/j.pragma.2011.08.008.
- Effendi, Palupi Paramarta. 2021. "Crazy Polite Asians: Politeness Strategy And Cultural Relativism in Asian-Western Environment." *Language Horizon: Journal of Language Studies* 9 (1), 70–80. DOI: 10.26740/lh.v9n1.p70-80.

- Ide, Sachiko. 1993. “The Search for Integrated Universals of Linguistic Politeness.” *Multilingua* 12 (1), 7–11.
- Jaeger, Sara. 2019. “Linguistic Politeness in Children’s Movies: A Quantitative Corpus Study of Politeness Expressions in The Movie Corpus.” Bachelor Thesis. Vaxjo: Linnaeus University.
- Kecskes, Istvan. 2017. “Cross Cultural and Intercultural Pragmatics by Istvan Kecskes.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Pragmatics*, edited by Yan Huang. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kerkam, Zainab Mohamed. 2015. “A Comparison of Arabic and English Directness and Indirectness: Cross-Cultural Politeness.” Doctoral Thesis. Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University.
- Kiyama, Sachiko, Katsuo Tamaoka, & Masato Takiura. 2012. “Applicability of Brown and Levinson’s Politeness Theory to a Non-Western Culture: Evidence from Japanese Facework Behaviors.” *SAGE Open* 2 (4), 1–15. DOI: 10.1177/2158244012470116.
- Lambert, Vickie A, & Clinton E. Lambert. 2012. “Qualitative Descriptive Research: An Acceptable Design.” *Pacific Rim International Journal of Nursing Research* 16 (4), 255–256.
- Marti, Leyla. 2006. “Indirectness and Politeness in Turkish-German Bilingual and Turkish Monolingual Requests.” *Journal of Pragmatics* 38 (11), 1836–1869. DOI: 10.1016/j.pragma.2005.05.009.
- McGee, Peter. 2019. “Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Failure.” *Training, Language and Culture* 3 (1), 73–84. DOI: 10.29366/2019tlc.3.1.5.
- Moon, Chanki, Ayse K. Uskul, & Mario Weick. 2019. “Cultural Differences in Politeness as a Function of Status Relations: Comparing South Korean and British Communicators.” *Journal of Theoretical Social Psychology* 3 (3), 137–45. DOI: 10.1002/jts5.40.
- Ogiermann, E. 2009. “Politeness and In-Directness Across Cultures: A Comparison of English, German, Polish and Russian Requests.” *Journal of Politeness Research* 5 (2), 189–216. DOI: 10.1515/JPLR.2009.011.
- Okamoto, Shigeko. 2011. “The Use and Interpretation of Addressee Honorifics and Plain Forms in Japanese: Diversity, Multiplicity, and Ambiguity.” *Journal of Pragmatics* 43 (15), 3673–3688. DOI: 10.1016/j.pragma.2011.06.012.
- Paltridge, Brian. 2012. *Discourse Analysis: An Introduction*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Ren, Dongjie & Zhengbing Liu. 2019. “Chinese People’s Pragmatic Failure in English in Cross-Cultural Communication.” In *International Conference on Literature, Art and Human Developmeny*. UK: Francis Academic Press. DOI: 10.25236/iclahd.2019.063.
- Song, Sooho. 2012. *Politeness and Culture in Second Language Acquisition*. Palgrave Macmillan.

- . 2017. “The Brown and Levinson Theory Revisited: A Statistical Analysis.” *Language Sciences* 62, 66–75. DOI: 10.1016/j.langsci.2017.03.006.
- . 2022. “Analysis of Gender Pronoun Errors in Korean Speakers’ English Speech.” *English Teaching (South Korea)* 77 (1), 21–39. DOI: 10.15858/ENGTEA.77.1.202203.21.
- Stukan, Diana. 2018. “Sociopragmatic Failure: Struggling with Cross-Cultural Differences in Communication.” *Open Journal for Anthropological Studies* 2 (1) DOI: 10.32591/coas.ojas.0201.03027s.
- Thomas, Jenny. 1983. ‘Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Failure’. *Applied Linguistics* 4 (2), 91–112. DOI: 10.1093/applin/4.2.91.
- Tilley, John J. 2017. “Cultural Relativism.” In *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. DOI: 10.1002/9781405165518.
- Zhang, Shu 2019. ‘Differences of Polite Language between Chinese and English from the Viewpoint of Face’. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 294.