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RESEARCH IN IM/POLITENESS ACROSS CULTURES AND CONTEXTS

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Abstract

The research study opines that im/politeness diversity is encoded with socio-cultural and linguistic features and other aspects that can shape the understanding of im/politeness research around the globe. This study's objective is to examine understandings of im/politeness between interlocutors, their beliefs about how they (i) perceive im/politeness, (ii) the methodological developments in im/politeness research, and (iii) the role of ethnocultural styles in im/politeness. The paper overviews the basic theoretical and methodological aspects. In the broadest sense, it covers a wide range of social, and cultural cognition, and identity construction. The importance of this research may likely be highlighted in sociocultural and cognitive aspects in im/politeness across cultures and contexts. The research approach used in the study was qualitative research, based on reviewing literature and multiple case studies on im/politeness across cultures and languages. This research explores the problems encountered by the interlocutors in communication due to the nature of im/politeness. This overview provides a brief introductory concept and seeks to cover these concepts by revisiting comments and a conclusion. It is stated that creating awareness in this direction demonstrates to scholars and learners the differences in im/politeness systems across cultures and a variety of contexts. The authors also observed im/politeness and ethno-cultural communication styles in the Pakistani context. Moreover, this research can help young scholars cope with sociocultural and cognitive aspects of im/politeness across cultures and contexts and its role as a fundamental component in human communication and language.

Keywords: Im-politeness, sociocultural, aspects, contexts, ethnocultural

Introduction

Opening the door for global mobility paves pathways to more intercultural interactions, resulting in more intercultural communication. For interlocutors nowadays, it has become essential to use and interpret messages correctly, as their messages are interlocked and manifested with ethnocultural and linguistic properties of a speech community they belong to. Politeness is studied under the Pragmatics sub-branch of Linguistics. Leech (1983) defines politeness as forms of behavior that establish and maintain comity. Politeness in an interaction can be defined as "*the means employed to show awareness of another person's face or 'face want' of the addressee, which is highly valued in conversation*" (Brown & Levinson, 1987:46). Defining impoliteness varies in degrees of the factors due to social and cultural contexts. However, impoliteness is "*a negative attitude towards specific behaviors occurring in specific contexts. It is sustained by expectations, desires, and/or beliefs about social organization, including, in particular, how one person's or a group's identities are mediated by others in interaction*". (Culpeper, 2011:23). Additionally, the degree of impoliteness is operated by attitudinal, linguistic-pragmatic, social, contextual, and co-contextual factors. The wave of internationalization significantly reflects the im/politeness aspects precisely across cultures and contexts. Differences in communicative behavior can lead to ethnocentrism, ideological conservatism, and negative stereotypes (Brown, 2015; Culpeper, 2011; Mills, 2009; 2017). These may cause problems in a proper understanding of communication and can affect relationships negatively. As Larina (2008) opined differences in culture-specific communication can also lead to problems but also can be perceived as wrong due to their interpretation of communicative intentions. Such situations of unawareness of pragmatic differences cause misunderstandings and provoke conflicts and communicative breakups. The assertion suggests that it is necessary to investigate how im/politeness is understood and expressed across cultural boundaries. Local negotiations of politeness and the identities they create, according to Davies et

al. (2013:271), are significant, but they always take place against the backdrop of societal and cultural beliefs. As Bodric (2008) pointed out, the demand for cross-cultural communication competence is more urgent than before. Various institutions have in-depth explored understanding, shapes, and cultural pluralism, for change that leads to the international promotion of interculturalism. In other words, these assessments do not rely on our personal experiences (Eelen, 2001), the context variability exists across individuals as interlocutors' comprehension of im/politeness is likely to differ of im/politeness. The shapes of im/politeness standards are not universal, and their evaluation differs across cultures, therefore individuals might attach themselves to or detach from the stereotypical norms (Larina, 2015; Mills, 2017; Dayter, 2019). On the other hand, the emergence of various communication platforms such as computer-mediated communication (CMC) has marked a greater swift shift in globalized perceptions of im/politeness (Hernández-López 2019), which resulted in 'togetherness' with culture and other sociological variables. As Parvaresh (2019) pointed out speech acts are suitable for comparative studies, in this line of research, in recent years, a greater portion has been dealing with the understanding of im/politeness norms (shapes) and adopting more creative frameworks. Several problems exist while investigating and understanding im/politeness such as that people are not speaking different languages but rather use them in different ways, with specific linguistic needs, social values and norms, and socio-cultural conventions. Past studies conceptualize im/politeness models that need further understanding across cultures and contexts. In response to the reviewed literature, there is a need to investigate the 'elusive' nature of im/politeness (Culpeper, 2013). The authors of this article seek to examine three interconnected notions of impoliteness and politeness in a variety of social and cultural contexts. First, how different cultures perceive im/politeness. Discuss data and methodological developments in the area and finally analyze culturally specific generalizations used in communication behavior. *Moreover, depending*

on the situation, the term "im/politeness" in this research is used as a substitute or abbreviation for both the concepts of politeness and impoliteness. This study adds to the knowledge of linguistic politeness by looking at sociocultural and cognitive factors in various contexts and cultures.

Problem statement

The dimensions of politeness and impoliteness variations in linguistics may cause problems due to social, cultural, and cognitive factors. Therefore, this research draws attention to the problem of misunderstanding in im/politeness across cultures and contexts.

Significance of the research

The importance of this research may likely be highlighted in sociocultural and cognitive aspects in im/politeness across cultures and contexts. This research contributes to the notion of politeness and impoliteness and the nature of im/politeness in different cultures.

Research Objectives

The research has three fundamental three objectives i. to examine and evaluate perception of im/politeness among interlocutors, ii. developments in data and methods, and iii. the impact of ethnocultural styles in im/politeness.

Research Questions

- i. What is the perception of im/politeness among interlocutors?
- ii. How has the methodological and data advanced since the inception of im/politeness?
- iii. What is the role of ethnocultural in the communicative styles of interlocutors of a particular speech community?

Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that social, cultural, ethnographic, and contextual factors influence the changing nature of im/politeness which makes the communication 'rude' or 'polite' between interlocutors.

Research Methodology

This review research relied on the qualitative approach based on examining literature and case studies on im/politeness in different cultures and languages.

Literature review

Im/politeness perception across cultures

Due to the numerous contributions made by scholars to the theory of politeness, understanding politeness differs across contexts and cultures. Lakoff's (1973) work served as the foundation for the theory of politeness, which she developed with the adoption of Grice's conversational maxims in mind (see also Brown & Levinson (1987); Leech (1983)). In im/politeness, research began from speech acts and remained the focus among scholars. Researching im/politeness speech acts got much attention, as the diversity of notions emerged among researchers of im/politeness. However, contemporary researchers have modeled it from linguistic pragmatics to a variety of disciplines such as sociolinguistics, communication, and discourse analysis. Speech acts have been professed differently across cultures, therefore, shapes in im/politeness occur potentially more. Rightly pointed out by Haugh & Chang (2019) in their studies that after several decades of im/politeness research studies, the research has reinforced the view that cross-cultural shapes and understandings of im/politeness in cross-cultures had remained key motivations for research underlying cultural differences. Locher & Larina (2019) viewed im/politeness research as growing solid and expanding in fields such as sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and pragmatics during the previous four decades, this is not accidental, but rather interdisciplinary approaches to modern linguistics. The distinction between academic and non-academic understandings of im/politeness has drawn greater attention among scholars but arguably scholars profess more focus on im/politeness understandings in non-academic contexts (Locher & Watts 2005; Watts 2003; Haugh 2013; Haugh & Culpeper 2018; Kádár & Haugh 2013). This distinction resulted as an incentive for the reshaping of research in im/politeness, and several studies have been conducted in detailed examples from real-life interactions across intercultural settings (Tzanne & Sifianou, 2019). As Locher & Tatiana (2019) opined the great extent to the contribution of readership and authorship in politeness enhanced the multifaceted Ness of politeness in a variety of languages such as Arabic, English, Greek, Korean, Russian, Spanish, and Mandarin Chinese. Along

with varieties of languages, many scholars have addressed cross-cultural and cross-linguistic points of view. Recent works explored im/politeness in online comments by Swiss and Germans (Locher & Luginbuhl, 2019), whereas Tzanne & Sifianou (2019) investigated understanding of im/politeness in online newspaper articles and their succeeding comments in the Greek context. Moreover, this kind of research study is uncommon because previous studies focused on the East and West (Leech & Larina 2014), compared different forms of address in British English and Indian English (Larina & Suryanarayan 2013), Japanese versus Greek im/politeness (Fukushima & Sifianou 2017) and many others. Im/politeness is constantly changing its shapes of interaction, what other scholars called the 'third wave of im/politeness studies' (Hernández-López, 2019; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich & Sifianou (2019), despite minor differences in scope and approach, most of the scholars consider im/politeness as not an omnipresent phenomenon rather depends on given specific contexts, and of communicators need not display im/politeness only (Spencer Oatey 2000, 2008; Locher & Watts 2005). Impoliteness strategies are part of larger reflexive processes in which language use and context expand identity perception beyond the framework of the interaction (Tetreault, 2015). To examine im/politeness social and cultural elements, most scholars have observed several research studies addressing practices in various settings (see Brown & Ford, 1961; Braun, 1988; Formentelli, 2009; Larina & Suryanarayan, 2013; Soomro & Larina, 2022 to name a few). The studies on address forms as politeness strategies analyzed non-subjective systems of society and culture that reveal symmetric and asymmetric relationships across American, English, Indian, and Pakistani communicators. Such studies validate the claims that im/politeness varies across cultures and contexts. Additionally, some other studies (Wierzbicka 1992; Enfield 2002) examined the influence of culture on linguistic structures and provided insight into a variety of linguistic complexities that are difficult to otherwise explain. Thus, these works pointed out that im/politeness is a culture-bound phenomenon which means the notion is re-

conceptualized. Overall, the domain is thriving to define, reshape, and elaborate the notion of politeness and impoliteness across human languages and communication behavior. After a brief review of cultural and social aspects, the authors shift to advancements taking place in data and methods employed and adopted by scholars in politeness and impoliteness research. ***Developments in im/politeness: data and methods***

Methodological developments of im/politeness range in linguistic pragmatics. When assessing developments in im/politeness Mills (2009) argues that impoliteness at the social level tends to be ideological rather than analytical and focuses on individual interactions. Moreover, ethnography in interaction and discourse has been focused on in the past decade in Haugh's (2013:25) words "*discursive psychology and ethnomethodology*". Discursive approaches derive from the social practice perspective and have origin in Bourdieu's (1977) work theory of practice in the habitus. In addition, discursive approaches to im/politeness in the first wave of Bourdieu or Foucault i.e. theory of practice, the second wave often draws from metadiscourse (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich & Sifianou 2019), whereas, Mills (2009) acknowledges the challenges in data analysis in discursive approaches. Discursive turn differs from the traditional approach such as production-based in linguistic politeness and social pragmatics. A more quantitative orientation emerges based on participant/informant testing and corpus analysis associated with classroom interaction (Culpeper & Tantucci, 2021). In the past decades' studies focused on contexts to explain why and how im/politeness differed across cultures, by drawing attention to the phenomena of a "*radical contextualism*" approach in practice (Parvaresh & Tayebi, 2021:111) is used to discuss how participants can deduct their subjective evaluations of impoliteness. In another study, Kádár & Zhang (2019) moved from dominant interpersonal interactions to the monologic genre in public discourse, and some studies moved from one language to cross-cultural differences while Kecskes (2017) to impoliteness into intercultural communication. The diversity in

the im/politeness since its inception has shown a great number of attentions from the wider scope of data and methods. To sum up, studies on data (from empirical studies) range from interactions, discursive turn (Eelen, 2001; Mills, 2009; Larina, 2013; Kádár and Zhang, 2019), meta discourse, corpus, media (TV, mass, social), and public discourse. The research in im/politeness has advanced, consequently broadening the notion of im/politeness across cultures and contexts.

Ethno-cultural styles in im/politeness

The notion of *communicative ethno-style* was introduced by Larina (2015) and defined as a "culture-specific communicative style", encompassing "culture-specific differences in communication" which are not accidental but rather encompass "systematic and regular use of typical strategies leads to the formation of communication features", and these typical strategies form in totality with culture-specificity in communication. Moreover, it is essential to mention concerning communicative ethno-style that it does consider some generalizations and references "made to a typical speaker of standard language and his/her communicative behavior in interpersonal interaction in everyday situations" (Larina, 2015:197). In addition, Larina's (2015) culture-specific communicative ethno-style directs various choices of languages, thus, to be more successful in this direction, intercultural communication and understanding of the communicative intentions of communicators require more research work. Politeness specificity is demonstrated in behavior patterns of people with peculiarities of a community of speech. Since politeness is not easily defined, an interdisciplinary approach reveals the larger debate about linguistic politeness that is concerned with communication and culture based on socio-pragmatics (Kamehkhosh, 2020). Hypothetical, theoretical, and analytical perspectives regarding im/politeness orientations-tendencies such as indirectness, directness, and imposition attributed dramatically in the field with 'communicative ethno-style' and identity-construction functions of im/politeness (Larina 2006; 2008; Morgan 2010; Grainger & Mills 2016; and Terkourafi 2014; 2019). The variability in interpretations of indirectness across cultures

stressed that understanding it as the 'safest' strategy is effective for narrow socio-cultural speech styles (Grainger & Mills, 2016). Larina (2006; 2008) further distinguished that in cross-cultural communication politeness does not always require indirectness and that directness does not always imply im/politeness. Im/politeness is not always viewed favorably in this field of study (Larina, 2008). Most scholars have drawn attention to addressing practices of certain linguistic forms in languages to evaluate politeness behavior. Following this line of research, the quest for understanding culture-specific communicative ethno-style, cross-cultural im/politeness strategies began. According to Larina (2013), despite im/politeness being a universal phenomenon, different cultural and social structures, norms, and value systems affect how it is conceptualized. Furthermore, data from numerous studies revealed that interlocutors from various cultural backgrounds encountered issues in ways that varied according to social and cultural norms, as well as characteristics of im/politeness in various cultural contexts (Gallaher, 2011; Larina & Suryanarayan, 2013). According to studies im/politeness depends on a variety of expressive traditions and communicative styles that vary across cultures (Larina & Ponton, 2020). Because of this, im/politeness is as intrinsically diverse as humans and has a "culture-specific" phenomenon, according to Kádár & Haugh (2013). The authors observed im/politeness and ethno-cultural communication styles in the Pakistani context. Iqbal et al., (2020) analyzed linguistic politeness strategies in the transactional discourse, their study reveals that frequent use of imperative with kinship terms adopts certain culture-specific values. Similar opinions were shared on im/politeness as a social-cultural phenomenon due to the social norms and values of the speech communities (Yasmeen et al., 2014; Khokhar, 2017; Soomro & Larina, 2022). Pakistani im/politeness follows mainly a variety of address forms adhering to social and cultural values to establish, develop, and maintain relationships. The use of such linguistic practices demonstrates collectivist culture and linguacultural identities are shown in their interactions. Variations in linguistic prestige

and politeness in the gender-based study observed differences in linguistic choice and im/politeness strategy based on social status, intimacy, and power distance (Bashir & Asif, 2021). Some have analyzed doctor-patient discourse to investigate the integration of im/politeness strategies in ethno linguistic communication, hence, doctor-patient discourse resulted in power and dominance in the interactions (Lodhi et al., 2019). To sum up, im/politeness in Pakistani contexts shows the intimacy between interlocutors and a variety of differences observed under the ethno-cultural, and social contexts.

Conclusion

The review aimed to examine the links between im/politeness perceptions, advances made in the data and methods, and ethnocultural styles across cultures and contexts. Tzanne & Sifianou (2019) opined that the perception of im/politeness reflects stereotypical thinking, and is worth exploring because of its underexplored societal nature instead of individualistic shapes of im/politeness. From the above-mentioned instances, it can be summarized that the theoretical and analytical nature of im/politeness ranges in widespread applicability in pragmatics, mainly a kind of communication behavior in human language and society. In closing, im/politeness research demonstrates the dimensions and attention among scholars around the globe since the emergence, however, the focus remained on interactional approaches. Advancements in im/politeness research began from face mitigation, and speech acts to discursive approaches, these developments remind us of the importance and scope of linguistic phenomena. Methods and data range from typical conversational analysis to online discourse, media discourse, medical discourse, and pragmatic discourse. One of the main aspects researched is that ethnocultural styles of communication influence other aspects for comprehending im/politeness. Culture-specificities considerably drive communicative behavior in different languages which resulted in interdisciplinary approaches to linguistic im/politeness. In short, the lesser-studied cultures and languages still need to focus on establishing im/politeness research around the

globe for future studies (Bom & Grainger 2015). Thus, exploring the phenomena of im/politeness can uncover several issues of effective communication and the theory of language due to dissimilarities in situations, contexts, and cultures. The views from society and culture are important elements for reshaping im/politeness and wide research interests.

Recommendations:

- i. Im/politeness research has developed into a comprehensive field in pragmatics, in general, it goes beyond discourse studies, cognition science, and linguistics.
- ii. Im/politeness is researched in both quantitative and qualitative approaches.
- iii. Im/politeness is ethnolinguistic in nature due to social, cultural, and contextual differences.

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