

# **THE USE OF INDIRECT SPEECH ACT AS A FACE-SAVING ACT IN ANGLO-SAXON CULTURAL VALUES**

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## **Abstract**

This report is on the use of whimperatives (directives in interrogative forms) as a kind of indirect speech acts in an event which demonstrates one of important values in Anglo-Saxon culture in showing one's personal autonomy instead of their inhibited self-assertion. This paper is going to discuss the result of an observation of an incidental event which demonstrates the use of indirect speech acts as a face-saving act. I am interested in this topic because it is useful and quite challenging as well in using language appropriately and contextually especially for me as an EFL learner. It is significant to have the ability to choose suitable words and expressions, which are suitable for the context since the cultural differences may create misunderstanding and communication breakdown as well.

**Keywords** : indirect speech, face-saving act, Anglo-saxon, cultural values

## 1. Introduction

It has been known that people's way of using speech acts is highly influenced by their cultural values. Those can be achieved by having a pragmatic competence to help us in exploring the meaning behind the words. So, people, especially those who learn a foreign or second language should understand how to use a language appropriately in a special cultural context.

In this report, I am going to discuss this event in two parts. Firstly, I am going to give a description of my observations which consists of the methodology which I used to collect data and also the script of a conversation in the event which I observed, then followed by the list of behaviours, setting, and the conversational script. Secondly, I am going to discuss some significant issues related with intercultural communication and some theories which I have learned in cross culture pragmatics. I also discuss those values compared to my cultural values as an Indonesian, and relate those to my cultural schema and personal beliefs as well. Finally, I am going to draw a conclusion followed by self- reflection on how that event has given me a good insight on the importance of intercultural competence in building an effective communication.

## 2. Description of project and methodology

The event that I observed was an event that happened incidentally since there was a trigger that caused someone to be annoyed due to the noise made by someone's voice when she answered a call for a long duration of time at the library. Hence, the speaker asked the addressee to go outside the room while she was talking on the phone.

The methodology that I used in conducting this mini ethnography is that I was as a participant observant. I used 'strange eyes', so that I observed that event as an outsider '(the third place)'. Therefore, the analysis of the event in this paper is an Anglo-cultural script seen through Indonesian eyes. I chose this event since it showed some patterns of behaviour and pragmatic elements applied in the communication. However, since this event was an 'incidental event', I could not interview the participants or revisit the event as well.

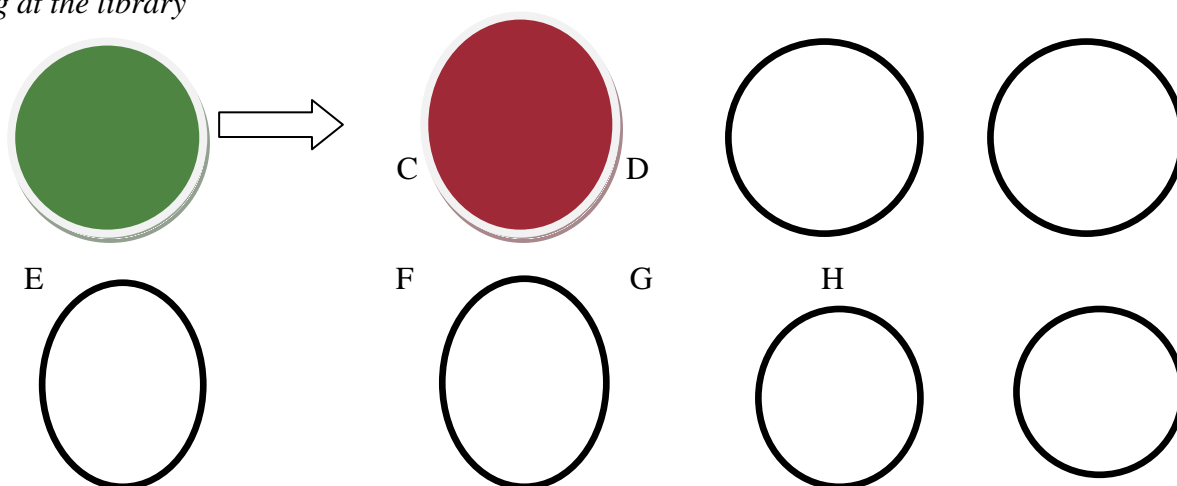
I analysed this speech event by using 'ethnography of speaking' developed by Hymes (1962) in which all speech components (using the first letters of terms 'SPEAKING') are going to be discussed more clearly in this part.

- 1) Setting and scene. The place of this event is at the library in the quiet area (at the third floor). The speaker was sitting near the addressee. This event happened in the afternoon (around 4 pm). The scene is in the sense of seriousness.
- 2) Participants. Two women, both are native English speakers (Australians). I asked them where they come from. Their age is around 35 years old. There were also some students who were reading some books or doing their assignments.
- 3) Ends. The purpose of the conversation is to remind someone not to make any noise at the library since it disturbs other people.
- 4) Act. The speech act used in this event was Indirect speech act as the speaker used whimperative as an indirect command / request. This speech act will be explored more clearly in the critical evaluation part of this paper.
- 5) Key. The tone used in this speech act was ‘serious tone’ because the speaker was a little bit angry at someone who had a phone call for about 5 minutes at the library.
- 6) Instrument. I observed the speech event directly and I used note-taking in my agenda to write important aspects of that speech event.
- 7) Norms. The norm that is applied (in the quiet area of the library) is that people should be quiet, so answering phones inside the quiet area of the library will interrupt others.
- 8) Genre. The speech act used is indirect speech act (a serious tone)

List of behaviours:

Situational Context	Verbal	Non Verbal
There were some people who were studying quietly at the library (at the quiet room area). One of them answered the phone in quite a loud voice for almost 5 minutes).	<p>The Speaker: Why don't you answer the phone outside?</p> <p>The Addressee: Sorry....</p>	<p>Narrowing eyebrows and increasing loud voice (the speaker)</p> <p>Pointing her finger to outside of the room (the speaker)</p> <p>The addressee said 'sorry' while waving her hand.</p>

*Setting at the library*



*Conversation script*

Someone's mobile phone was ringing and the recipient received a phone call for about 5 minutes in a quite loud voice, While she kept talking, B interrupted her)

B :Excuse me, why don't you answer the phone outside ?

A: Sorry..( then she went out the room and received the call there).

### 3. Discussion

The speaker used whimperative (by using interrogative-directive device) as an indirect way to ask the hearer to do what the speaker wanted. According to Sadock (1974 as cited in Hagen, 2011) , whimperative is a kind of indirect speech acts in which the purpose is to get the hearer to do the intended action that actually wanted by the speaker.

The speaker used an attention getter first, " Excuse me". Then followed by by saying " Why don't you answer the phone outside?". In that sentence, there are two parts of meaning:

The locution ( The literal meaning) *Yes/ No question*

The illocution ( the intended meaning) As a polite request, actually the speaker wanted the hearer to go out of that room, or in other words ,the speaker wanted to say " Could you be a little more quiet'

In my opinion, the use of indirect speech act here as a way of face-saving, so that the hearer did not feel that the speaker was angry at her. As it is stated that 'indirect speech acts are used to escape embarrassment, avoid awkwardness, save face, or reduce social tension' (Pinker,

2007). In addition, Yule (1996, p.61) pointed out that a face saving act is used to lessen the possible threat to the interlocutor's face. Therefore, by using the indirect speech act, the speaker helps in maintaining the interlocutor's positive face.

Since both the speaker and the addressee are Anglo- Australians, I observed that most of Anglo cultures encourage people to say what they want to say. As it is stated that in Anglo Saxon culture, someone has freedom to express what one wants to say or thinks (Wierzbicka, 2003, p. 76). However, despite the speakers' self- assertion by saying directly what he/she wants, Anglo Saxon culture also respects the addressee's personal autonomy and social harmony as well. Hopkins and Strambi (2005) argue that 'the public display of negative emotions in Anglo Saxon cultures tends to be socially disapproved of, in order to avoid conflict and embarrassment'. Therefore, in making a request, using an interrogative form is better than bare imperative, since it is considered more polite and less angry. So, instead of saying: "I want you to answer the phone outside", the use of whimperative is preferred by saying: "Why don't you answer the phone outside?".

However, the use of interrogative or semi interrogatives in request is not applied universally, for example in Japan, or other countries, sometimes, the use of direct command is considered more polite. 'Non-imposition based on individual rights is an Anglo-Saxon (or Anglo-American), rather than a universal value' (Matsumoto 1988, as cited in Wierzbicka, 2006, p.77).

I also noticed the use of non- verbal behaviour displayed both by the speaker and the receiver in the gestures, facial expression, and hand movements as well. Understanding non-verbal behaviour is very important in inter-cultural communication, especially in face expression, since the face is considered as the most prominent source in non-verbal behavior (Argyle,1982), Furthermore, some specific emotional expressions could be seen from the facial expression, as it said that " particular facial behaviour are universally associated with particular emotions' (Ekman & Friesen, 1998, p. 70).

I observed that when the speaker spoke to her interlocutor, I saw that she expressed her anger by narrowing her eyebrows, hand movement and with an increasingly loud voice, she pointed her finger to the room outside when she asked her not to receive her call inside. The use of the hand in non- verbal communication is important. Collett (1982) argued that hand movement is significant in communication between people of varied cultures. However, the difference of non- verbal behaviors should also be learned, since despite the similarity of its' use in all cultures, there are some diversities that may create misunderstanding( Argyle 1975 as cited in Argyle, 1982).

According to me, the reason why the speaker used indirect speech to ask someone to do something, by using interrogative-directive form is based on Anglo-Saxon beliefs, in this case Anglo-Australian beliefs that in spite of the respect of 'self-assertion' value, they also consider their addressee's personal autonomy. That is why Anglo Saxons prefer using interrogatives in directives to bare imperatives.

'Being 'nice' is a fundamental value in Australian culture, which translates into an effort to maintain informality as well as to preserve social harmony' (Hopkins & Strambi, 2005). In addition, Hopkins and Strambi (2005) found that Anglo Australian was less inclined to display negative emotions in interpersonal relationship than French and Italians.

Another reason why emotional expressions are easily displayed in Anglo-Saxon cultures is due to the cultural differences in the level of collectivism, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1980 as cited in Wierzbicka, 2006, p.24). Those cultural dimensions impact on people's cultural values and beliefs. Based on statistics data, Australia ranked the second among in the most individualist country ((after the United States of America) (Hofstede 2005, as cited in Mokoginta, 2009). Individualistic people express more emotions than collectivist people, a research study conducted by Stephen, et al (1996, as cited in Fernandez, 2000) found that individualistic people ( USA participants) are more expressive in emotions rather than people from collectivist countries (Japanese, Costa Rican, etc).

Another dimension is since Australia is regarded as a masculine country with the score of 61, it is more accepted to have more assertive and expressive behaviors than countries which are considered as feminine countries (Hofstede 2005 as cited in Mokoginta, 2009). These cultural dimensions create diversity in people's behavior whether in verbal or non-verbal ways. Those differences are based on certain display rules. According to Matsumoto, et al., (1988 as cited in Fernandez, et al., 2000) display rules are social norms in cultural context which influence how to communicate emotions whether in verbal or non- verbal ways.

The final reason why Anglo-Saxons are more expressive in their emotions is based on research conducted by Fernandez, et al (2000). They found that the socio-cultural development fosters the intensity of emotional expression especially the negative ones. Basabe et al (1999 as cited in Fernandez, 2000) support that 'The development of quality of life, privacy, and social resources, related to the level of earning, education and life expectancy, reinforces a more intense emotional experience'.

#### 4. Conclusion and (self)critical observations

After analysing that event, It can be concluded that by having pragmatic competence, people will be more aware of cultural differences among countries, so he/she may put him /herself as 'the third person' who sees the differences from his/her new perspective as a stranger. By comparing those cultures diversity with their own cultures and putting themselves as a stranger looking at a new insight of the reasons why some problems might appear due to the different cultures.

According to Kramsch (1993 as cited in Grossi, 2009) by having good pragmatic awareness, people can understand the difference between cultures , and that intercultural competence help them to see those diversity through ' new eyes'. Therefore, understanding pragmatics is very crucial since it has a wider scope beyond the language itself. As it is stated that 'pragmatic competence is the ability to communicate effectively and involves knowledge beyond the level of grammar'.(Thomas 1993, as cited in Grossi, 2009). Finally, pragmatic competence should be acquired ,especially in regards to people who learn a second or foreign language to improve their cross-cultural communication and avoid misunderstandings due to the differences among cultures not only in verbal ways but also in non- verbal behaviours.

I myself as an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learner hope that by learning cross cultural pragmatics , it will increase my 'meta- pragmatic awareness'. The definition of meta-pragmatic awareness is 'knowledge of the social meaning of variable second language forms and awareness of these ways in which these forms mark different aspects of social contexts'.(Verschueren,2000, as cited in Kinginger&Farrel, 2004).

Therefore, by understanding the use of language forms related with its social contexts, cultural values, and other variables which are prominent 'behind the meaning' or structure of a language. It will help me in using grammar forms which are more appropriate in some specific cultures than I have to transfer my own pragmatic rules structures but they are not acceptable or considered as being rude in other cultures. Nevertheless, we should also relate those values with our cultural schema and personal beliefs whether they are appropriate or not to be applied in our own culture.

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