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**POLITENESS IN DIPLOMATIC TALK : A THAI CASE STUDY**

**Piyanoot Rattananukool**

A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield  
in partial fulfilment of the requirement for  
the degree of Master of Philosophy

**The University of Huddersfield**

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# **Abstract**

## **Politeness in Diplomatic Talk: A Thai Case Study**

This research starts from the assumption that there are goal-oriented politeness strategies in diplomatic talk. The case study analyses Thai-foreign diplomatic events during Thailand's national crisis, the massive demonstrations across the country in the years of 2009-2011, in which the colours of the protesters' clothing signified divergent political allegiances (so-called "colorized politics"). The research aims are threefold: firstly, to characterise politeness strategies in the Thai-foreign diplomatic talks conducted in English; secondly, to examine the extent to which culture-specific values inform the conversational performance of Thai speakers; and thirdly, to explore potential causes of misunderstandings arising from cross-cultural mismatches which occur during these social interactions.

The research data are real-time conversations in courtesy calls and international meetings between foreign diplomatic representatives and the leaders of the Thai state and government agencies. My study is influenced by Brown and Levinson's theory along with intercultural communication theories for analysing the ethnographically observed talk-in-action events and transcribed conversational discourse. The research frames a conclusive argument that the diplomatic speakers use both conventional politeness and unconventional politeness strategies. The latter includes what I term 'lexical politeness', 'interactive politeness', and 'intercultural politeness'. The Thai party's politeness strategies in pursuit of diplomatic goals carry an implication of Thai cultural values, specifically: fun-orientation, interdependence, and non-confrontation. Potential pragmatic failures in Thai cultural-oriented politeness are intimacy and directness. The research reveals the suppositions and entailments of English utterances by non-native speakers (Thais) and develops linguistic politeness strategies from the evidence of the diplomatic conversations.

Keywords: Pragmatics, Politeness, Diplomatic Talk, Interaction across Cultures, Thai

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# **Abbreviations to indicate who is speaking in quoted data**

TH: The Thai leading speaker (representative of the host country)

FG: The leading speaker of the foreign party (FG: foreign guest)

Where necessary, the labels [TH1] , [TH2], [FG1], [FG2] are used to distinguish two such persons.

Abbreviations used in quoted data

[X country]: Name of the state which FG represents (e.g. Germany, India)

[X]: Adjective/demonym of the state which FG represents  
(e.g. German, Indian).

[Y country]: A third state with no representative present at the meeting

[Y]: Adjective/demonym of the third country whose representative  
is not present at the meeting (e.g. German, Indian).

[TP]: First name of a third person who is not present at the meeting.  
Where necessary, the labels [TP1] and [TP2] are used to distinguish two such  
persons.

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“So far, universities have excelled at producing knowledge. However, they have not yet proved their ability to reconfigure knowledge – i.e. to draw creatively upon the entire distributed knowledge system, which is now much broader than the university sector alone. Old and new patterns can be noted. Older patterns can be described in terms of problems being context-specific and disciplinary, requiring homogenous skills, where hierarchical organization is respected, and where knowledge stands alone and is evaluated by peer review. Newer patterns are described in terms of knowledge being produced in a context of application; transdisciplinary in nature; needing heterogeneous skills; organized around flatter and more temporary management structures; more socially accountable and reflexive; and, more reliably assessed by a variety of practitioners (Michael Gibbons, 1998).”

Michael Gibbons,  
Secretary General of the Association of  
Commonwealth Universities, 1996-2004  
(UNESCO 2005:1)

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## I. Problem Statement

Living together in the 21st century, we are in a world of interdependence (Keohane & Nye 1989) which connects people internationally in the course of pursuing their numerous opportunities for education, work, and social life. At the international level, one nation state's acts affect other states by virtue of the close linkages in costs and benefits as a result of connected resources and information. Therefore, the nation state no longer has complete independence of action, for example, to make war or to sanction another, because there is a tight-knit connection with other countries in various areas. This state of living has been greatly developed since the late 20th century as a consequence of advancements in the technologies of transportation and communication accessible by ordinary people. It is predicted that open conflicts between nation states are likely to be avoided because of this condition. However, closer relations and frequent contacts, both at a state-to-state level and people-to-people level, cannot in itself bring harmony; instead, we are divided and realise more about our differences, and often inequalities, as exemplified by clashing of beliefs, conflicts of classes, generation gaps, discrimination against races, genders, minorities, and so on. This realisation can lead to an assumption that the frequency of international contacts and meetings might not lead to healthy relationships between countries. Therefore, it is important to explore language in use in the present. How do people in a community communicate with outsiders? How is English utilised for international understanding? Is it true that the people who work in international relations have communicative competence? These assumptions need to be re-examined while people's participation in the international community is growing.

In the era of globalisation, every nation state has more and more international issues to tackle due to a rising number of people involved in the area of international relations, with issues ranging from minor ones like applying for visas, and foreign marriage registration, to many major issues like war, economic relations, and natural disaster relief. This requires an extension of state services at both central and regional levels. In Thailand, for example, the missions of international relations in the past were restricted to a small group of people—

state leaders and nobles in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since the 1990s, there has been a rapid growth in international relations departments/offices in modern organisations. A significant example is the growing demand for people who have international communication skills in Thai local governmental offices. These people are expected to develop the channels linking their organisations to the outside world. International relations are considered the tool of preference for creating a better organisational image, staff development, and efficiency in problem-solving. However, expanding the work of international relations runs the risk of being superficial, for example, organising a grand reception event without a focus on the content of talk or having unproductive meetings, this thus becomes a wasteful investment of the low-income countries.

Because careless use of language may create greater effects in international relations which may lead to failure of diplomatic work, it is interesting to explore the conversational performance of present-day diplomatic people, those supposed to be educated above all others in the art of conversation and awareness of how to behave politely according to the dictates of courtesy. In face-to-face diplomatic meetings, language is the main instrument for seeking conflict resolution and international cooperation. An unawareness of language use while speaking with particular hearer(s) and unspecified audiences probably worsens international problems. That is to say, working with words to solve a conflict in a meeting can bring about another conflict or provoke further dispute by itself. It is very important that the diplomatic speaker is equipped with constructive knowledge about language mastery which enables them to cope with conversations effectively.

‘Diplomatic people’ today include state leaders in charge for foreign affairs, for example, leaders of government, parliamentary leaders, ministers, and bureaucratic officers in the area of international relations. Instead of assessing their grammatical correctness in conversation, my investigation focuses on politeness strategies and the implication of pragmatic meanings in interpersonal communication between people from different cultures.

Previous research in interaction across cultures, mostly conducted by Western scholars, has discovered a number of aspects of ‘Eastern-style’ communication. Among these are high-context dependence, a concern for the person’s position in the social order, and indirectness (e.g. Bilmes 1999; Qingxue 2003). From these findings, Thai politeness is packed into the same group as that of Japanese and Chinese. While acknowledging these

features, I will develop a further argument about the distinctiveness of Thai communicative values and habits. Thailand is a state that successfully avoided Western colonial power and is now widely recognised as a notable country in Southeast Asia because of its geographic location at the centre of transport for the region, and its prominent role in founding and developing the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Considering Thailand's past success in positioning herself in the world community, the identification of distinct communicative strategies used by Thai diplomatic representatives can have practical benefits, both for the work of the younger Thai generation and also for people from the rest of the world, especially those who are likely to have contact with Thais. At the same time, it is also worth exploring Thai communicative weaknesses in interaction across cultures, since talk in the context of international relations can provide notable examples. My curiosity was fuelled when my Thai friend told me that he said to his PhD supervisor: "I want to talk to you tomorrow", and his teacher, whose mother tongue is English, was dissatisfied with the utterance. Conventionally, polite requests in English are formed through questions, such as, "May I see you tomorrow?" or open statements in the past form like "I was wondering if we could meet tomorrow". From this example, it can be seen that the non-native speakers' limitations of word choice and knowledge of linguistic norms sometimes lead to unintentional impoliteness.

My study aims to clarify linguistic politeness in diplomatic conversations and the impacts of the first language and hhculture on diplomatic English, both positively and negatively. The fact that such English takes place in the spoken medium makes it especially challenging in that the interactants need to respond within a few seconds. Their verbal behaviours are thus probably influenced by their own cultures and the use of past experience automatically; in other words, they transfer the communicative wisdom acquired within their society into communication with foreigners in English. The findings of this research can expand upon current knowledge of diplomatic talk, especially in the area of language studies. This case study not only potentially generalises linguistic politeness strategies used in diplomacy and interaction across cultures, but also provides an understanding of Thai English and Thai cultural perspectives which affect communication with people from different cultures. This study by a Thai researcher who grew up and lives in Thailand will provide an 'inside-out' cultural perspective that might be absent in foreign researchers.

According to my primary survey, there is a lack of systematic knowledge about diplomatic spoken discourse among linguists, along with a wide gap in the current knowledge about politeness and professional practice in a real-time working atmosphere. This study, in seeking an understanding about politeness as strategic communication for achieving work goals, aims to formulate academic principles which could be applied to professional training. The dissertation will be distributed to the organisations participating in this research for the use of personnel development in international communication. Therefore, the analytical scrutiny of the utterances in the diplomatic events is done to elucidate useful politeness strategies in diplomacy.

Instead of making a judgement about politeness of a particular momentary situation, this research is designed to form a general strategic approach from the case study that can be used in other similar situations. Also, academic justifications of potential success and failure are provided. The study of the real-time performance of conversational work in diplomatic events, which directly involves interactions between people from different cultures, can show evidence of weaknesses and strengths in spoken language used in interaction across cultures. When diplomatic conversations are conducted with more knowledge-based understanding, we can hope that the matters concerning international affairs will be fairly negotiable and comprehensible for all parties. If diplomatic communication is developed with support from various fields of academic knowledge, it will be the prominent channel that states choose to solve international problems more efficiently. Otherwise, the military approach will be chosen to end international conflicts. Although the military process takes a shorter period of time for this function, its devastating effects are broader and longer-lived than diplomacy.

## II. Research Scope

This research focuses on diplomatic communication in the mode of conversation in relation with the social contexts which shape conversational directions. This research was conducted in a period where Thailand had a national crisis—the country-wide political protests in 2009-2011. This interesting chaos inspired the researcher to investigate how diplomatic talk related to external incidents and what diplomatic communication strategies

are used during times when a country loses its fame, stability, and international trust. The news of Thailand's colourised political uprisings were broadcast worldwide through the international media, for example, BBC and CNN. Therefore, Thai state and government leaders had to answer a great deal of questions about the on-going conflicts from outsiders. Predictably, diplomatic meetings were an opportunity for the Thai leaders to correct the information that people gleaned from the media, or explain the facts from their perspective. The linguistic techniques these diplomats used in their diplomatic work will contribute to the existing knowledge about linguistic politeness.

The following sub-section provides the contextual background about Thailand's domestic conflict—the persons and the political era, along with how the protests were developed, which facilitates an understanding when some groups or persons are mentioned in the analytical part. The second section introduces diplomatic role or the way diplomacy serves the nation, including important agencies in the diplomatic working area.

## **A.Contextual Background**

The period of 2009-2011 was at the peak of Thailand's political conflict. There were massive political demonstrations across the country, so called "colourised politics"; the colours of T-shirts/dress signified Thai people's political views. The series of protest-related incidents that affected Thailand's international image included the seizure of the national airport (Suvarnabhumi) in 2008, the invasion of the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) summit venue in 2009, the arson attacks on Bangkok's luxury department stores in 2010, and all other tactical protesting activities. The selected strategic gathering venues served the protesters' purpose to attract the global media so that they could increase external pressure on the government. In that period many foreign governments announced that Thailand was an unsafe destination for tourists due to the high risk of violent incidents. In Thais' daily lives, there were protests on the streets and mob gatherings in public places.

The political protest campaign was developed in 2005, and was first launched by the Yellow Shirts (People's Alliance for Democracy). The protest leader was a famous journalist and critic, Sondhi Limthongkul, who was later joined by intellectuals, the middle class, and Thai youths. The Yellow Shirts, in campaigns conducted on the central stage and via TV

channels, criticised Thaksin Shinawatra's government due to his political corruption—the leader shaped his policies to support his business group. A year later, the number of anti-government protesters was dramatically growing; the Thai army staged a non-violent bloodless coup, bringing an end to Thaksin Shinawatra and his fellows' regime. General Sonthi Boonyaratglin, the army chief, declared the peaceful state of the country. He introduced Thailand's democratic reform and committed himself to the general election arrangements.

Many of the corruption charges against Former Prime Minister Thaksin were under scrutiny by the Supreme Court. In 2008, one of the cases was convicted; Former Prime Minister Thaksin was found guilty of a conflict of interest because of his wife's 2003 purchase of land from a government-controlled agency at a reduced price. The Supreme Court of Thailand ousted Former Prime Minister Thaksin, sentencing him to a two-year imprisonment during his living abroad in exile since the 2006 coup, in accordance with Thai law which prohibits political leaders' involvement in the business interests of any particular groups while holding Thailand's political position because their official duty is to execute missions for public interest. However, the complex situation was not easy to judge for Thai people. Former Prime Minister Thaksin and his political team had made outstanding progress for Thailand in the previous six/seven years. Many of his policies and work performance in the position of Prime Minister satisfied the majority of Thais, such as, recovering from the 1997 Asian financial crisis, freeing the country from its debt to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), job creation, support of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), low-cost healthcare, education development, anti-drug campaigns, village funds, and debt moratoriums for farmers. On the other hand, many Thais saw that the policies designed and promoted for Thaksin's achievement of popularity were arguable. Assessing the available information, they found the misconduct and deficiencies which led to benefiting some particular groups in the society. However, Thaksin's political group consisting of many prominent politicians had the largest supporters: business cronies and poor people who associated their hopeful economic condition with the policies, as well as people who appreciated Thaksin's way of developing the country—quick managerial processes and clear concrete outcomes.

After being removed from office and banned from politics by the court, the Thaksin-affiliated politicians continued a series of campaigns, with support from Former Prime Minister Thaksin from outside the country. The relationship between the people and

their politicians was strengthened in polarisation by the Yellow Shirts who launched an anti-Thaksin demonstration. Thaksin's supporters formed a new group: The United Front for Democracy against Dictatorship, or the Red Shirts.

In 2008-2010, the Red Shirts pressured the new government led by the second winning party. They called for the resignation of Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva who came into power by parliamentary vote in accordance with constitutional law, claiming that the government leader lost legitimacy by the majority of votes (voting by people) in the general election in 2007.

Prime Minister Abhisit's coalition government had been formed after the two prime ministers from the first-winning political party, established by Thaksin's group, were removed from office by the Constitutional Court of Thailand. Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej was found guilty of a conflict of interests by taking a salary from a TV show while holding the prime minister position. Next, Prime Minister Somchai Wongsawat was banned from politics because one of his political party members committed electoral fraud.

The Red Shirts presented the evidence geared to an understanding that the aristocratic power, the Privy Council and the judges, might back Prime Minister Abhisit. Then the problems of social justice and fairness were heavily discussed in association with various aspects of Thai people's conditions of life. These political cases were sentimentally presented and attracted more and more people. The campaigns provoked fierce debates in the society, mainly the contest between the Yellow Shirts and the Red Shirts, together with the White, other colours and no colour, varying according to political views. Alternative ideologies about social development were promoted: economic or sustainable, and how to reform Thai politics. A great deal of political information was disseminated; many issues about social fairness were brought to public attention, including the constitutional amendment.

During the national crisis, Prime Minister Abhisit's government lacked stability. There was a consensus that the Thai parliament be designated to find a solution, because the government could not cope with the challenge and irritation from diverse groups of protesters. The political instability caused a pause in international affairs in many government organisations; while the responsibility to answer representatives of foreign countries'



questions about the future of the nation was moved to the Thai National Assembly, or the Parliament of Thailand.

## **B. Diplomatic Role**

According to Hedley Bull (1977:156), the notable scholar in international relations, diplomacy is defined as “the conduct of relations between sovereign states with standing in world politics by official agents and by peaceful means.” Although modern diplomacy involves the extensive role of international organisations in maintaining the world order (those organisations impose regulations to control the nation states for peaceful living conditions in the world community, some of them are governed by nation states for common interests or for help in achieving a particular mission) still, the key actor is the government whose instrument to implement foreign policy is diplomacy, mainly conducted by the ministry of foreign affairs (Satow 1957, Hamilton & Langhorne 1995). Besides government organisations, the democratic state has a judicial body (court) and a legislative body (parliament); these institutions, separated from the government for their role in the check and balance system, can establish international relations via their own routes to serve national interests and organisational functions, for instance, conducting meetings, international training, and overseas study-visits to develop the organisation’s human resources and to build the state’s image (Ray 1991; Fiott 2011). Furthermore, on account of the growing work in international relations at the present time, governmental missions in this field are not completely directed by the ministry of foreign affairs, but partially distributed to its specialist agencies, for example, the Ministry of Commerce deals with trade negotiations, the Ministry of Science and Technology deals with international cooperation in matters of technology and education, and the Tourism Authority is responsible for issues related to tourism and tourists.

My study investigates diplomatic conversation work in a critical situation of the country. Like other kinds of institutional talk (Drew & Sorjonen 1997), for example, the work of a doctor, judge, teacher, diplomatic speakers work in a particular setting and have their own institutional roles in the conversation. Speaking on the behalf of the organisation and the country, the diplomatic speakers can bring their personal identity, occupational identity, and national identity to pursue the goal of their institutional mission (also see Faizullaev 2014).

### III. Research Questions

In working to improve diplomatic staff's conversational capability, my study focuses on the politeness techniques of linguistic modification and conversational management in an intercultural context. Diplomacy is generally recognised as a soft, peaceful approach to resolving international conflicts and pursuing national interests through the art of language use and social etiquette. This study aims to reveal politeness strategies and cultural factors in diplomatic talk in order to support the research objective of developing knowledge for diplomatic staff training. The study aims to answer the following questions:

- 1. What politeness strategies are used in the Thai–foreign diplomatic talks conducted in English?**
- 2. How do culture-specific values support the conversational performance of the Thais working in international relations?**
- 3. How do misunderstandings caused by cross-cultural mismatches occur during social interaction, and why?**

The focal points to explain politeness phenomenon in this study include: speech acts, socio-psychological politeness and politeness as a means for achieving communicative goals. From this angle, the study encapsulates how a capable speaker can control the hearer through their effective use of words, especially the use of politeness strategies, to solve diplomatic problems in the period of the national crisis in Thailand. Furthermore, in pursuit of answers for Questions 2 and 3, the study can offer an explanation of culture-bound politeness capable of creating both positive and negative effects. These findings could create awareness among Thai speakers about cultural influences and create a better understanding among foreigners about the Thai method of communication.

The three research questions above are based on 3 assumptions:

1. There are politeness strategies in diplomatic talk. Identifiable strategies can extend knowledge about politeness.

2. The Thai society has particular cultural norms and conventions of pragmatic modification for conveying politeness. In some acts, it is possible that the Thai speakers transfer those Thai politeness strategies into English since the speakers cannot completely perform the conversation as proficiently as native speakers who acquired their conventional knowledge from an English speech community; pragmatic transfer, thus, is the use of available knowledge about one's own culture to solve communicative problems when interacting across cultures.
3. The culture-bound strategies potentially bring about positive and negative effects when the speakers apply them in interaction across cultures.

In the analysis of selected utterance samples which indicate the speakers' different methods of language mastery, I identify politeness techniques in parallel with diplomatic goals during the national crisis. The study will feasibly illustrate both communicative strategies and communication problems between Thais and people from different cultures.

## IV. Research Contribution

This study aims to reveal the strategies of diplomatic talk in order to create systematic knowledge for supporting diplomatic staff training programs. Practically, this study can present useful linguistic techniques for developing capabilities in diplomatic talk. The knowledge users can be both diplomatic professionals and people who are interested in the relationship between culture and language. This research report is written for knowledge users from different disciplines, and academic readers investigating how knowledge is linked to reality, that is, from the data to the theoretical development, and from theoretical principles to people's communicative improvement. Furthermore, the findings could create awareness among Thai speakers about cultural influences and create a better understanding among foreigners about the Thai way of communicating. Academically, this research develops new strategies for interaction across cultures as well as knowledge about politeness in diplomatic domains and Thai English. The findings could contribute to many sub-fields of politeness: linguistic modification, conversational management, diplomatic politeness, linguistic and cultural transfer, and intercultural pragmatics. Since applied research is concerned with the

complex real-world context, orientation to knowledge users, and creating a workable task for solving a problem or improving a situation in reality, this academic specialisation deserves its own standing. Still, this academic aspect gains very little attention from politeness scholars of the present generation. There is a lack of research in this field which can bridge theoretical development and communicative improvement in the real world.

## V. Thesis Structure

This dissertation consists of seven chapters. The first chapter presents an overview covering the problem statement, research aims, research questions, research scope, contextual background, and research contribution. The second chapter is the literature review which discusses previous studies in four areas concerned: theoretical approaches to politeness, theoretical approaches to intercultural communication, politeness in institutional talk. The third chapter describes the research methodology comprising data collection methods, data analytical methods, data presentation and contextual information. Chapter 4 provides background knowledge about Thai communicative culture and Thai diplomacy for interpretation of the Thai-foreign conversation. Chapters 5-6 are concerned with the data analysis in accordance with the research questions respectively. Chapter 5 elucidates politeness strategies used in diplomatic events. This chapter examines the surface level of utterances and situations, such as, lexical items, the syntactic system, topicalization and turn-taking management, but this section does not involve cultural transfer at the deep level of the speakers' perspectives. Chapter 6 describes culture at a deep level which is the system of values and beliefs that influence communicative behaviours (Thomas 1983:109). It reveals how Thai cultural values relate to diplomatic politeness performed in Thai English. The analysis focuses on Thai speakers' politeness strategies used to accomplish crucial acts in the diplomatic talk during the period of political crisis (in responses to many questions from foreign diplomatic representatives about the political protest). Also, Chapter 6 discusses socio-pragmatic failure, or potential miscommunication about culture-bound meanings, in Thai-foreign interaction. The last chapter summarizes the study and highlights the major findings.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This chapter presents previous studies which closely relate to my study about Thai-foreign diplomatic talk. The academic literature concerned can be divided in four areas: theoretical approaches to politeness, theoretical approaches to intercultural communication, selected case studies of institutional talk in business and political areas which can exemplify the way of speaking for the speaker's benefit in an intercultural context, and Thai politeness studies.

### **I. Theoretical Approaches to Politeness**

This section introduces major theories which can be considered as branches/sub-fields of the areas of politeness. The selection criterion is a large number of citations which indicates that the theories are widely accepted in academia. The ending part of each theoretical section also presents a theoretical critique.

The first part of literature review about politeness theories introduces the core idea of existing politeness theories, that is, face-oriented behaviours, beginning with the theoretical basis of Goffman (1967) which was later applied by several politeness theorists. The aim of this part is to show how face is conceptualised differently by these scholars and to pinpoint how each theory can contribute to my data analysis. The second part focuses on linguistic politeness which shows language techniques in politeness. The third part demonstrates a paradigm shift from form-based politeness to contextual politeness which rejects that a linguistic form does not have a fixed politeness meaning, instead, a politeness meaning is generated by external contextual factors.

#### **A. Face Concepts in Social Encounters**

The term 'face' was originally taken from a Chinese cultural concept which denotes "the respectability and/or deference that a person can claim for him/herself from others, by

virtue of the relative position he occupies in the social network and the degree to which he is judged to have functioned adequately in the position as well as acceptably in his general conduct” (Ho 1976:883). The concept is an aspect of self-esteem in relation to the other’s perception of one’s self. Face is not completely determined by the society or other people; a person can actively manage and control his/her own face—to gain more or less, to maintain, and to prevent the losing of—by behavioural conduct in accordance with social expectations. Of course, to an extent, the other social members use social conventions to judge one’s behaviours. Therefore, the person holding face does not have total freedom to act as he/she wants; only the ability to regulate his/her behaviours according to the social criteria can help him/her achieve his/her face-related aim.

Literally interpreted, the meaning of Chinese face (*lian /mianzi* in Chinese) is close to dignity, reputation, honour, prestige. All of these indicate a person’s value as given by others. Face is a combination of the individual’s sense of belonging as an important and accepted member in the society, and his/her social opportunities, such as credibility and community support. Generally, most cultures, more or less, value this self-concept, but for the Chinese, face is culture-specific due to the high level of concern they have for this issue, as can be shown in a Chinese proverb, “Men can’t live without face, trees can’t live without bark” (*ren hou lian, shu hou pi*). Face is a main theme of Chinese culture; it is “a concept of central importance because of its pervasiveness with which it asserts its influence in social intercourse” (Ho 1976:883). Chinese social members are supposed to learn and abide by face rule. Lin Yutang wrote in his famous book, *My Country and My People*, in describing face as an aspect of Chinese culture to US readers, that face is “abstract and intangible, it is yet the most delicate standard by which Chinese social intercourse is regulated” (1935: 200). In a way, face profoundly involves the person’s sense of existence in society. The rule of this social control is strict as social penalties about face are socio-psychologically severe. Without face, a person feels that s/he loses the desirable qualities of being human; the Chinese traditional insult: “You have no face.” (*mei you mianzi*) is “the most severe condemnation that can be made of a person” (Hu 1944:51-52). In loss of “*mianzi*”, the person is judged as having a blemish on their character; it is impossible for him/her to function properly within the community (Hu 1944). The more face is valued, the more social members behave in accordance with social norms. Sensibly, the more social acceptance the person gains, the more self-stability s/he has; therefore, face is a symbolic treasure that the social members want to own and save because it concerns their self-value. What the society gains from face-

culture are social members who have desirable behaviours. Face in Chinese terms is above the normal level of dignity, reputation, and prestige as generally known in different cultures, in the way that it constructively influences Chinese behavioural conduct in everyday life; actions in public consistently reflect mindfulness of the self and the other and the interrelation of self and society, as evidenced by face-related Chinese sayings and idioms. Most social activities are conducted with face concern (see Gu 1990).

Face was adopted in a scientific explanation of interpersonal encounters by Erving Goffman (1967). In his study, he describes face as an incentive for certain behaviours in social interaction. Goffman examines face on a small scale during talk (me & you), but the Chinese concept is applied in a broader sense (an individual & a community/a society). The Chinese face concept involves the person's pursuit of self-worth by seeking acceptance from others in the same society, whereas Goffman investigates face arising during an interaction within a particular situation. That is to say, Goffman's studies encapsulate a micro view of social actions—how the person seeks acceptance of his/her positive image from another person, while Chinese face-driven behaviours cover many kinds of actions and practices in the long term in order to gain acknowledgement of being a desirable social member of the society. It seems to me that face in Goffman's theory is momentary, but in the traditional Chinese concept, people have a sense of face throughout their life; they behave properly and morally in various social situations. Goffman's conceptualisation of face is an attempt to explore those aspects of a person's identity which are relevant to, and are contingent on, all the circumstances of an encounter, while the Chinese concept of face concerns the person's place in the society—how s/he is judged by the society and his/her mindfulness about actions in social life. Chinese face can exist outside and inside the interaction in which the person is involved.

The Chinese concept of face gives rise to Goffman's dual scientific view: 1) a sense of self-esteem does not arise in an individual independently, but requires the other(s) who plays the role of the audience of a person's self-presentation; 2) the individual has no full freedom of action in social life; the others have an influence on his/her behaviour—we are sensitive to other people's judgement toward us, so we are apt to behave in a way that ensures that the others will approve of us.

Due to face concerns or wanting to be approved of by the other, people control their behaviours to achieve the desired image. Politeness, a concept later developed by politeness scholars, describes what people do to achieve their target face, or a positive social value as perceived by the other. Although Goffman does not scrutinise politeness particularly, his study of social behaviours indirectly suggests that politeness is a subset of all behaviours concerning his theoretical face.

Goffman defines face as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact” (1967:5). From this definition, there are two distinctive aspects of face concerning social encounters. In the first place, face is associated with self-presentation in relation to the other—what one wants to be perceived by the other during a particular contact. The person can claim face for himself/herself only when there is the other(s) in the setting, as Brown and Levinson state, “everyone’s face depends on anyone else’s being maintained, recognised, desired, and honoured” (Brown & Levinson 1987:60). In the second place, face is profoundly interpreted as the symbolic value people desire because it gives them security in their social life. It is noted that face involves people’s sense of worth, dignity and identity (Ting Toomey & Kurogi 1998, cited in Spencer-Oatey 2000:14), which determines how the face holder will be relationally treated by others at a later moment of interaction. Face in Goffman’s concept is different from identity and reputation generally, because of the way that the interactants hold face temporarily; they operate face reciprocally in a particular contact, while identity and reputation can be maintained by an individual independently and more firmly both in and outside the interactional frame (Spencer-Oatey 2007). The term “loan” in describing the individual’s face acquisition —face is “on loan to him from society” (Goffman 1967: 10), visualizes the person temporarily holding face during an encounter situation only.

Goffman’s theory suggests that people claim their positive social values on speculation; they acquire certain assumptions about face sustenance via socialization (Watts 2003), namely, the inputs of social conventions, moral codes, and social ideals. The society equips them with the ability to delineate “an image of self” that, they believe, is consistent with “approved social attributes” (Goffman 1967: 5). Scheff (2001) reflects upon the work of Goffman, suggesting that talk is not only spotted (by Goffman) just on the surface of explicit utterances but also in interior components of “intersubjectivity” between two interactants.



This forefront theory suggests that the mindreading process is going on in parallel to an explicit conversation between interactants.

Simply speaking, the essence of talk is not just explicit utterances, but it includes on-going shared assumptions between two interactants, in other words, it is unsaid that two people share a common understanding. The person directs the conversation in response to what his/her conversational partner is thinking, knows and expects, although s/he cannot completely conceive the other's internal world of thoughts. Expressions and reactions within the conversation are worked out via speculation about the other's emergent suppositions. Without the ability to make this speculation, as well as making the connection between one's and other's mental worlds, the person would be unable to contribute to the conversation properly; s/he can speak to the other, but cannot interact with the other in a conversational exchange. Goffman's conception gives us the realisation that our social behaviour is regulated in relation to other people. This kind of behaviour is not independently self-determined.

Goffman's facework is not an independent act by the individual. It requires the present-and-perceived process of the interactional dyad. Goffman states that face is "not lodged in or on a person's body, but diffusely located in the flow of events in the encounter" (1967:7). According to Holtgrave (1992:142), face in this sense is a social, rather than a psychological construct because it has relevance or meaning only during social interaction. He notes that Goffman was focusing not on "men and their moments," rather "moments and their men" (Goffman 1967:3). From Goffman's perspective, individuals do not have ultimate power to control the situation, but the external factors, i.e., the people and social environment involved, determine how the person characterises social face in a particular social contact. Also, his or her face is developed moment by moment in adaptation to the changing situation of talk (Also see Arundale 1999).

While Goffman argues that individual power is lessened by social constraints during a social encounter, Brown and Levinson's strategic theory implies that the speaker still holds power in an interpersonal encounter in the way that they prefer to pursue their goals. The concept can be understood as if the speaker expresses themselves tactfully, they can control the other, so that they can satisfy their communicative goals—directing the hearer's actions. That is to say, it is possible that the individual can cope with social constraints as far as s/he has the communicative ability to control the situation. Brown and Levinson's theory suggests that individuals can make decisions rationally; the end the speaker aims to pursue determines

the means of his/her communication. People have a “certain rational capacity” (Brown & Levinson 1987:61) to make a decision for their own preference. Goffman’s concept, by contrast, blurs this focus on the individual’s competence to cope with the external reality. Brown and Levinson’s redefinition of face is influenced by linguistic Speech Act Theory which offers an explanation of how to get things done with words (Austin 1962) as shown in their reference list. Without Brown and Levinson’s theory, we cannot see a wide range of verbal choices for individuals in dealing with situations. Goffman’s initial theory indicates that face limits individuals’ behaviours; people have to imprison their “self” because of their face concerns.

“In any case, while his social face can be his most personal possession and the centre of his security and pleasure, it is only on loan to him from society; it will be withdrawn unless he conducts himself in a way that is worthy of it. Approved attributes and their relation to face make of every man his own jailer; this is a fundamental social constraint even though each man may like his cell.”

(Goffman 1967:10, my emphasis)

Goffman presents a primary condition of talk, the means of self-presentation in relation to the other, and individuals’ face concern when facing the other, while Brown and Levinson capture the interaction from a different angle, how competent individuals cope with interpersonal encounters, and how they motivate and entrap the others under the condition that everyone has face concerns. So, the conversation is moved forward by speculation of what the hearer wants. Metaphorically, Goffman explains the rules of a football game, while Brown and Levinson provide tips on how a player can win the game using those rules. From this view, a capable speaker can lessen the social pressure caused by an interpersonal encounter if s/he has techniques of expression.

Brown and Levinson divide face into two aspects, positive and negative, in relation to Durkheim’ s positive and negative rites (Brown & Levinson 1987:285):

**Negative face:** the want of every ‘competent adult member’ that his actions be unimpeded by others.

**Positive face:** the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others.

(Brown & Levinson 1987:62, original emphasis)

They purposefully shift the emphasis from Goffman's facework in the mode of "momentary achievement" (see Arundale 1999) to "face want" which exists more permanently than the moment of contact. Goffman's face arises as an external phenomena during an interaction, whereas Brown and Levinson's face is interpreted as "internal needs, drive or motivation" (Arundale 2006:199) or it is "bestowed from the inside" (O'Driscoll 1996:6). Through this theoretical change, Brown and Levinson can deeply discuss the individual's mental speculation regarding the target outcome of the communication. However, this notion is still relevant to Goffman's aspect of "intersubjectivity" during talk (Scheff 2001)—The mutual mindreading of two or more interactants is going on underneath verbal conversation. Although the definition of face has changed from "the public self-image" that the other perceives at the moment of encounter, into "the basic want" which one needs from the other (Brown & Levinson 1987:63), still, the latter relates to the final desire for security and pleasure in social encounters according to the values of face proposed by Goffman (1976:10).

"Face as wants" enhances the situational observation by linking social rites in sociology to pragmatics in linguistics. The concept underlines the communicative direction of the speaker, i.e., linguistic expression is the vehicle for them, besides non-verbal communication, to pursue their goals with consideration to what the other wants. Brown and Levinson argue that generally, almost all interpersonal communications are potentially face threatening acts (FTA)—for instance, in expressions of thanks, the speaker loses face because he accepts a debt to the hearer. Politeness is explained by Brown and Levinson as the type of language that minimises the FTA. People do not communicate precisely and explicitly, because so doing cannot satisfy the hearer's face wants. The speaker controls their illocutionary force through linguistic modification theoretically termed "redressiveness". Some essences of reality are distorted, concealed, and omitted in communication for the purpose of politeness. Also, some politeness markers, for example, address terms and discourse devices, are added to signify social relations between the speaker and the hearer.

Arndt and Janney's Supportiveness Theory (1985) also views politeness as the orientation to face needs. They propose two sides of face: personal face (autonomy) and interpersonal face (social acceptance). The options of facework vary according to interpersonal distance control and the type of message. Some positive messages, such as admiration and agreement, can support the relationship in themselves. On the other hand,

negative messages such as disagreement, criticism, and imposition, potentially cause interpersonal conflict, so the polite speaker makes a greater attempt to “minimize personal territorial transgression and [to] maximize signs of interpersonal approval” (Arndt & Janney 1985:294).

Arndt and Janney explain that Brown and Levinson’s negative politeness is rooted in the need for personal autonomy; Brown and Levinson’s positive politeness is associated with the need for interpersonal support (1985:293). In formulating the theory, they consider that the display of negative politeness as Brown and Levinson suggest is not effective enough. Besides acting politely in a traditional sense, the polite speaker has to know how to behave for psychological effects; in other words, the orientation to positive face should be consistently demonstrated. If the speaker uses only negative politeness, interpersonal distance still remains.

“Conventions of politeness, as traditionally viewed, are merely the most obvious, socially institutionalized strategies for not imposing on personal face in the sense of Brown and Levinson’s negative face; they are only indirectly related to interpersonal face in the sense of Brown and Levinson’s positive face. Interactional studies show that this second aspect of face is highly important to the maintenance of human relationships, even the relatively transitory ones formed by speakers and hearers in random encounters.”

(Arndt & Janney 1985:293)

The theory posits that politeness is interpersonal supportiveness (1985:282) which is expected to be consistently performed during interaction. In order to deal with potential ego-threats, the interactants’ supportiveness can reduce mutual emotional uncertainty; the relationship needs to be continuously and frequently confirmed.

“In everyday speech, it is not always possible to avoid imposing on other’s autonomy. No matter how carefully a speaker expresses himself...For this reason, the speaker-listener relationship is always to some extent an ambivalent one, and needs continuously to be ratified and renegotiated in response to potential ego-threats and the emotional uncertainty.”

(Arndt & Janney 1985:293)

In a show of politeness, the most attention is paid to the persons' emotive engagement concerning the stabilisation of the interactants' inner state during the encounter—"The main emotive task of a speaker who wishes to keep on terms with his partner is not to behave politely in the traditional sense, but to behave supportively" (Arndt & Janney 1985:282).

Ting-Toomey developed Face Negotiation Theory (1988, 2005) with an emphasis on two sides: self-face and other-face which are captured during an ongoing conversation. Unlike Brown and Levinson's approach, which shows the face-driven utterance within a turn of talk, Ting-Toomey discusses managing self and other face over a dynamic interaction. She defines face as "a projected image of one's self in a relational situation" (Ting-Toomey 1988: 215), and it could be seen as "the identity that is conjointly defined by the participants in a setting" (Ting-Toomey 1988 cited in Ng, 2008). Put simply, face is a constructed identity during an interaction. The theory reinforces Goffman's concept about self-face concern in social encounters:

"Face represents an individual's claimed sense of positive image in the context of social interaction... the concept of face becomes especially problematic in uncertainty situations (such as embarrassment and conflict situations) when the situated identities of the communicators are called into question..."

(Oetzel & Ting-Toomey 2003:600, original italics)

According to this, people try to maintain and negotiate face concerning self and other identities. Conversational studies reveal the consistent control of "self-image"—construction, protection, and repair—in relation to the other's momentarily-changing behaviours. Conflict occurs when the valued identity is threatened by the other. John Ng (2008) states in his study of mediation that Ting-Toomey's facework is a key strategy of conflict avoidance.

### **The Four Faces of Face**

1. Face-Restoration or Self Negative-Face is the need to give oneself freedom and space and to protect one's self from other's infringement on one's autonomy.
2. Face-Saving or Other Negative-Face is the need to signal respect for the other person's need for freedom, space, and dissociation.

3. Face-Assertion or Self Positive-Face is the need to defend and protect one's need for inclusion and association.
4. Face-Giving or Other Positive-Face is the need to defend and support the other person's need for inclusion and association.

(Ting-Toomey 1988, cited in Ng, 2008)

The theory illustrates the perpetual changes of face during interaction. The interactants' utterances are dependent on each other.

Furthermore, Ting-Toomey addresses the issue of facework and cultural differences. One of her studies examined students from five cultures: China, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and the United States. It was found that people from individualistic cultures, American students in this case study, used self-oriented strategies. Their "independent self", the self-construal of individuals who conceived of themselves as autonomous from others, generated independent reactions. Individualistic cultures favour a dominating style of conflict management. On the other hand, people from Eastern cultures or collective cultures prefer other-oriented strategies. They are likely to employ avoiding, obliging, and compromising styles (Ting-Toomey et al. 1991). The sub-strategies are introduced in subsequent research work; for example, self-face approval-seeking strategies, other-face approval-enhancing strategies, self-face autonomy-preserving strategies, other-face non-impositional strategies (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Ting-Toomey's study explains the Eastern characteristic of being sensitive to other-face, e.g., displays of self-abasement, other-elevation, and the use of high-context communication. These techniques of avoiding and distancing maintain interpersonal harmony during an interaction—disagreement should not be obviously expressed; while Western communicative cultures are more oriented towards self-face, for example, through displays of confidence, defending and competing, therefore obliging and avoiding techniques are less used. Because of fewer other-oriented face concerns, Western expression appears to be more direct (See Ting-Toomey's case study in literature review).

In summary, Brown and Levinson's theory shows that politeness involves psychological speculation and there is the need for self-other association and disassociation in social encounters. Also their theory gives the view that individuals have the power to control the situation through effective use of language, while Goffman does not clearly present this

point. Arndt and Janney's supportiveness theory sheds light on interpersonal distance management relative to the type of message. Their theory suggests that positive messages can be intensified by displays of confidence and involvement; whereas negative messages should be accompanied by the acknowledgment of interpersonal face. Apart from politeness in the traditional sense, Arndt and Janney consider interactional politeness the "emotive task" of a speaker used to display psychological supportiveness (1985:282). Ting-Toomey's theory envisages mutual identity management during an interaction and changes of face over an interaction.

The recent critical trend focuses heavily on the need to be free from the conventional paradigm of Brown and Levinson's approach (Werkhofer 1992; O'Driscoll 2007; Eelen 2001; Watts 2003). However, those theoretical critics pay inadequate attention to the strength of Brown and Levinson's theory in clarifying politeness techniques for the benefit of the speaker. Diplomatic talk is an operation for national interests defined by the policy makers<sup>1</sup> (Kissinger 1994; Burchill 2005). Brown and Levinson's idea of politeness rationality fits with the diplomatic mind-set, that is, the goal of diplomacy defines the communicative means. Other theories as presented above will be brought into the data analysis where they can support some situational details that the main theory has limitations in interpreting.

## **B. Form-Based Politeness**

In the first stage of politeness study, scholars in this field paid attention to linguistic forms and how speakers polished verbal expressions to communicate politeness. Generally, people send politeness signals when they add, "Sir", "Madam" "please", "could you please...", or "would you mind if ..." in their verbal expressions. However, politeness

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Kissinger, the National Security Adviser and Secretary of State to President Richard Nixon, is widely recognized as one of the leading scholars in political realism. His book "Diplomacy" (1994) describing diplomatic history from the Peace of Westphalia (1648) until the post-cold war, justifies the historical actions of the states in pursuing their national interests. His perspective of analysis was developed from his diplomatic duties to the state through practical experience. The key word "National Interest" is originally in French, "Raison d'État" (English: reason of the state). "Realism" is the fundamental term in political science, as used by classical scholars, such as Machiavelli, who presents in his book, *The Prince*, that to stabilise power, the state needs to act rationally, including being able to act immorally. This political view then encompasses many state affairs, including foreign affairs.

theorists explain linguistic politeness in a broader sense. Several theorists study linguistic mechanisms in politeness discourse.

Watts (2003) observes that politeness can be examined in two ways: politeness acknowledged by the society (first-order politeness) and politeness judged by theories (second-order politeness). Politeness strategies that people learn through socialization are first-order politeness; studying this category can be done through the hearer-based approach. On the other hand, second-order politeness is based on theoretical judgements. Consider this example: a guy in front of a pub greets a young lady who is passing by:

“Hey sweetie, what’s up?”

Without “theoretical politeness” coined by Watts (2003), people in the society feel reluctant to judge this utterance as polite. Some cultures would judge this as “impolite” as they see that the expression violates the taboo of gender distance, but Brown and Levinson’s theory, for example, explains the use of the in-group identity marker, “sweetie”, as a part of positive politeness (1987:103). In a way, the speaker conveys admiration or a compliment to the lady. Theoretical politeness can describe politeness in casual conversation which laypeople may not sense as politeness. Laypeople who do not learn politeness theories may find that the expression above is impressive and it carries the speaker’s intention of displaying friendliness, but is not polite. However, in theory, the example can be considered as the intention of the speaker to attend to the hearer (Brown & Levinson 1987:103) through a more vivid expression of concern about the other than “How are you?”.

Hence, theoretical politeness, or second-order politeness, is broader in scope than first-order politeness which is recognized by ordinary people in society. Second-order politeness includes the language that signifies interpersonal distance and the language of affection. Brown and Levinson wrote in their conclusion, “...On these lines we constructed an overall theory of politeness, integrating notions of **polite friendliness and polite formality** in a single scheme” (1987:283, my emphasis). Therefore, their theory enables the exploration of politeness in both formal and non-formal speech.

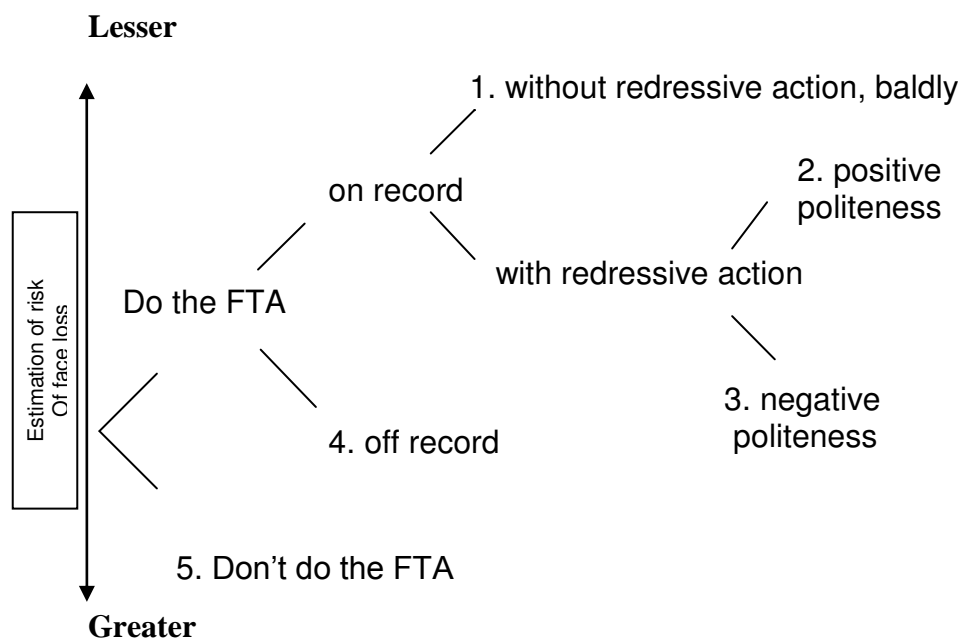


Apart from the face concept, which explains the communicative target and directing conversation, politeness theories introduce a number of linguistic technical terms and methods of linguistic modification in polite language.

## 1. Brown and Levinson

Brown and Levinson (1987) outline the choices of utterance construction in association with face wants. The following chart provides a range of linguistic options. The communicative goal is evaluated in relation to the situational condition, as in the description below.

Circumstances determining choices of strategies



(Brown & Levinson 1987:60)

**Don't Do the FTA (Face Threatening Action)** is the speaker's withdrawal from communicative action because they see that the FTA is too strong; harming the other's face can worsen the relationship. For example, the speaker does not tell his/her friend who is a cigarette addict to stop smoking because s/he probably sees that smoking is a personal issue. Therefore, the speaker would not request the hearer's change of habit, realising that the hearer is governed by other factors—in this circumstance, it is his/her own passion, so the only polite option they can choose is "don't do the FTA". In many cases, the speaker tends to

refrain from a request when seeing that the possibility that the hearer will accept the request is low, or it is clearly trespassing on the other's personal territory. Although the speaker fails to achieve the most desired communicative goal—in the example case, to stop the hearer's smoking, s/he can enjoy the lower-rated goal, that is, face is preserved, no FTA occurs, and the relationship is fostered without suspicion of disapproval between the participants. When evaluating risk, people may not choose to target the top-targeted goal if such a request may potentially put their face in jeopardy. Similarly to financial matters when choosing between keeping money in the bank and investing it in the business / the stock market, a more risky investment may be equally certain of making a high profit or a high loss. Many people choose to keep money in the bank for the satisfaction of financial stability, although this low-risk approach cannot maximise profit.

Brown and Levinson's formula:  $W_x = D(S, H) + P(H, S) + R_x$  (1987: 76) presents the variables for achieving a communicative goal. The weightiness (W) of the face threatening act depends on social distance (D) between the speaker (S) and the hearer (H), (for example, the speaker feels more comfortable when speaking with a family member with whom they have a close relationship than with an unknown person); relative power (P) the hearer has over the speaker; and the rank (R) or the degree to which the act is rated as an imposition as judged in a particular culture. All of these social factors are parameters for politeness judgement and illustrate the evaluative process of the speaker's side in making a decision about communicative choices.

**Bald-on-record** is used when the speaker wants to do the FTA with maximum efficiency more than he wants to satisfy the hearer's face (Brown & Levinson 1987: 95). The hearer can easily recognise the meaning of the imposition; this is commonly heard in the imperative form of English. Brown and Levinson explain that "baldly" is commonly accepted when the message is more important than face (1987:72), for example, somebody may yell "Watch out!" when you cross the road or "Get out of here!" when he finds a bomb under a car nearby.

A bald-on-record FTA, without redressiveness, is the most direct, clear and unambiguous way to express one's wants. Its precision serves the purpose of time saving and signifies the power that one side has over the other. As Brown and Levinson (1987:69)

describe, an FTA will be done in this way only if the speaker does not fear retribution from the addressee, for example, in circumstances where:

- (a) S and H both tacitly agree that the relevance of face demands may be suspended in the interests of urgency and efficiency;
- (b) Where the danger to H's face is very small, as in offers, requests, suggestions that are clearly in H's interest and do not require great sacrifices of S (e.g. 'Come in' or, 'Do sit down'); and
- (c) Where S is vastly superior in power to H, or can enlist audience support to destroy H's face without losing his own.

(Brown & Levinson 1987:69, original italics)

Theoretically, the FTA can be judged as polite so long as the two interactants share the same perception of the situation. From my point of view, the bald-on-record strategy is usually used in interactions between people who have a close relationship because face concern is not very important when we feel secure during the encounter. Politeness communication involves a relationship, the hearer who has a close relationship with the speaker may not expect an utterance with politeness markers, "please" for example; instead, friendly language which stresses the close relationship and self-openness is more preferred. Face is less of a concern when communicating with a person with whom the speaker is familiar. Therefore, the bald-on-record strategy in this case is not sensed as being impolite. Conversely, if the speaker adds a politeness marker, a hearer who has a close relationship with the speaker may interpret it as being impolite or satiric. In talk among friends, people use bald-on-record strategies to show in-group identity, the group members do not find it impolite because in the close relationship; the power is equal and the interactants can maintain psychological stability, that is to say, face threatening acts are likely to be overlooked, less sensed, and less important when both sides feel that the encounter is secured. In cases where the interactants share their perception of the constraints of the external setting, i.e., in an emergency situation, people prioritise physical security above face concerns. Additionally, according to Brown and Levinson's point (c) above, if the speaker and the hearer have the same criteria, so that they accept different power between them in the specific situation, for example, in a job interview, the interviewer holds the power of decision-making

in recruitment. The interviewee is the lower-power person who offers him/herself to be chosen. The interviewer can use bald-on-record phrasing with the interviewee, while the interviewee cannot use this strategy with him/her in return.

Bald-on-record phrasing, in my view, is acceptable as a politeness strategy; it can indirectly serve face wants when the situation allows. Firstly, in a circumstance of urgency when communicative efficiency is required, for example, shouting at the hearer, “Run, fire, fire!”, there remains an attention to the other, in this case, concerning their safety, so the warning to the other indirectly serves a positive face want. Secondly, bald-on-record is a part of casual language which creates a relaxing atmosphere, supporting interpersonal associations. Bald-on-record phrasing is a low-level regulation of verbal behaviour. Brown and Levinson stress that the speaker gets credit for honesty and outspokenness, which avoids the danger of seeming manipulative (1987:72). Therefore, this expression can indirectly support positive face wants. Finally, Brown and Levinson argue that the use of bald-on-record can avoid the danger of being misunderstood (1987:72). This idea is not only useful in the analysis of non-native speakers’ utterances, since they may be able to fulfil the aim of clarity rather than sophisticated politeness, but it also shows that bald-on-record strategies, perceived as being polite, can facilitate power engagement in interpersonal communication. For example, in a situation which embodies a particular social obligation, one side may legitimately make an FTA toward the other and this act will not be seen as a violation of the social norm; put simply, one side can be rude without the cultural judgment of being impolite. The society accepts this norm because it enables the person with power to cope with a complex situation. To illustrate, a boss can speak frankly to his/her subordinate, while the subordinate cannot use the same frankness in return, because the boss has many instances of talk and encounters with many subordinates, while the subordinate is supposed to focus on his/her own task of specialisation. In this unequal relation, it is easy for the boss to get the subordinates under control; whereas it is difficult for the subordinate to challenge the boss because of the obstruction of unequal power—politeness is required when speaking to the boss. Simply speaking, criticising the work of one in a higher social position, face to face, is more difficult than commenting on a task of one in a lower social position. In this chief-subordinate encounter, it is accepted that the boss can use less-modified language. As a result, the boss tends to speak more than the subordinate during any given interactional situation. The privilege to use easy language eases the boss’s getting things done with words, while the subordinate is required by the social norms to modify their utterances when

speaking to the boss. Accordingly, bald-on-record phrasing not only serves the purpose of clarity and time saving, but it also strengthens the speaker's power in some circumstances, for example, in military command.

Brown and Levinson explain that bald-on-record phrasing is not sensed as a face threat when there is mutual anticipation by the interactants of the FTA. These examples of bald-on-record expressions are, for example, welcoming, farewells, and offers, as: "come in," "see you tomorrow," and "leave it to me" (Brown & Levinson 1987: 98-101).

Thomas (1995:170-171) notes that many the bald-on-record FTAs are generally employed in trivial activities when the speaker estimates that the degree of face threat is small and the outcome is predictable. In this research, considering communication with non-native speakers, speaking baldly can be considered polite if the expression maintains a friendly tone, because the speaker may try to adjust their language for the comfort of the other who has lower language proficiency. This could be a sign of approval of the other (also see Giles 1973; Giles & Smith 1979; Giles & Ogay 2007).

**Positive Politeness** is redressive action oriented toward positive face wants. It is clearly identifiable that the speaker has made an attempt to serve the hearer's want to be accepted. I consider Brown and Levinson's positive politeness as an offer of a safe zone for making interpersonal connections. The key points are claiming common ground and conveying that the speaker and the hearer are co-operators. The strategies can be grouped as follows:

**1) Locating the other in the same group:** The speaker assures the hearer of closeness and similarity. Examples of Brown and Levinson's strategies are the use of in-group markers, dialect, jargon, including both speaker and hearer in the activity and assuming or asserting reciprocity.

**2) Treating the hearer as an important person:** The speaker can empower the hearer, giving them courage to get closer, for example, attending to the hearer's face by using a compliment, being optimistic, or assuming that the hearer has the ability and willingness to help. In these ways, the speaker shows that the hearer is the centre of attention.

**3) Creating favourable conditions for interpersonal connection:** The main act in this strategy is not clear, but the speaker approaches the other by representing themselves as a harmless personality and gradually getting close to the hearer. Example strategies are raising safe topics, using gossip and small talk, making jokes, using of deictics to give a sense of closeness—the use of present tense instead of past tense, “this” instead of “that”.

**Negative Politeness** is the mitigation of the face threatening act or a demonstration that the speaker recognises the hearer’s personal territory. According to Brown and Levinson, the user of negative politeness gain benefits in the following ways:

“... he can pay respect, deference, to the addressee in return for the FTA, and can thereby avoid incurring (or can thereby lessen) a future debt; he can maintain social distance, and avoid the threat (or potential face loss) of advancing familiarity towards the addressee, he can give a real ‘out’ to the addressee (for example, with a request or an offer, by making it clear that he doesn’t really expect H to say ‘Yes’ unless he wants to, thereby minimizing the mutual face loss incurred if H has to say ‘No’); and he can give conventional ‘outs’ to the addressee as opposed to real ‘outs’, that is, pretend to offer an escape route without really doing so, thereby indicating that he has the other person’s face want in mind.”

(Brown & Levinson 1987:72)

Negative politeness focuses on interpersonal distancing and mitigating the force of the imposition; the border between the self and the other is underlined. The strategies comprise: be conventionally indirect, question, hedge; be pessimistic; give deference; apologize before doing the FTA; impersonalise the speaker and the hearer, and so on (Brown & Levinson 1987:129-211). The negative politeness utterance is constructed in three ways: 1) making a clear acknowledgement of the hearer’s negative face want by use of conventional politeness markers, for example, apology; 2) reducing the clarity of the FTA by the use of vague, imprecise components, for example, impersonalisation of the speaker and the hearer, being conventionally indirect, hedges; 3) increasing the degree of formality which provides greater interpersonal distance, for example, nominalisation, state the FTA as a general rule, give deference.

**Off Record** is a verbal expression using implicitness and indirectness. Unlike positive and negative politeness, it is hard to identify the speaker’s intention in off record politeness. Rather than making it explicit, the speaker tactfully covers the speech act meaning by using

hints, clues, metaphor, contradictions, irony, tautologies, overstatements, understatement, etc., so “he cannot be held to have committed himself to just one particular interpretation of his act” (Brown & Levinson 1987:211). Off record is the maximum negative politeness and it is a technique of the play-safe speaker, as Brown and Levinson explain, off record payoffs include: “(a) S can satisfy negative face to a degree greater than that afforded by the negative-politeness strategy, (b) S can avoid the inescapable accountability, the responsibility for his action, that on-record strategies entail” (1987:73).

With off record strategies, the speaker signals to the hearer that an inference must be made. For example, the boss and his subordinate are exercising in a fitness centre after work. The boss says, “The music is so loud”. His subordinate thus leaves his exercise equipment, finds the fitness staff, and tells them to lower the radio volume. The boss’s utterance is different from refraining from doing the FTA because the demand for something is shown in the utterance, “The music is so loud”, then left to be interpreted by the hearer. The act of transgression into the subordinate’s personal territory is not clear in his off-record remark, nobody is imposed upon, and there is no explicit demand and specification of the person who should lower the music. The speaker operates by subtly stimulating the hearer’s interpretation relevant to the context: place, on-going activity, and interpersonal relationship—the hearer feels bound to do his serving duty even outside the office.

The weak point of Brown and Levinson’s theory is the concealment techniques which sometimes cannot present politeness. Modification, especially in the off-record category, possibly increases the force of the FTA. For example, a daughter who says to her mother, “Do I have to devote my life to you?” creates a stronger force than the simple expression “Do not control me”. Also, it can be found in the use of figures of speech commenting on the hearer, for example, “Your hair is like a lion,” or “Your thesis is like an academic copy machine”. The modification that opens an utterance to many interpretations may result in a discrepancy between the speaker’s intention and the hearer’s comprehension. Indirectness tends to imply more than one meaning, the hearer may recognise the worse one, while the speaker means the better. Indirectness is not always more polite than directness because an indirect utterance requires imagination to interpret, creating the risk of misinterpretation; whereas the direct speaker may focus on the realistic perceptions of the hearer. That is to say, utterances using avoidance techniques, indirectness, and/or heavy modification of politeness

markers can be sensed as satire, or interpersonal distancing. Therefore, it is not always true that the more the utterance is modified, the more polite it is.

## **2. Arndt and Janney**

Arndt and Janney introduce the use of linguistic devices as signs of politeness. They argue that politeness cannot be fulfilled only by traditional politeness (which is socially institutionalised for non-impingement on the other's personal territory), for example, ready-made expressions like "Could you please...". In their view, politeness, which is regarded as a task of psychological stabilisation during an interaction, requires further linguistic elements beyond traditional politeness signals as generally-known. The theory suggests emotive cues, that is, how the speaker specifically conveys his/her emotional and attitudinal level when speaking with the other. The way to use emotive cues is relative to the kind of message:

"Both positive and negative (verbal) messages can represent potential face-risks for listeners, and that speakers' strategies for reducing listeners' face-risks vary in the two situations. Briefly, positive messages have to be accompanied by displays of confidence and involvement in order to avoid creating the impression that they are not positive enough (i.e., convert threats to face); and negative messages have to be accompanied by displays of lack of confidence and uninvolved involvement in order to avoid creating the impression that they are too negative (i.e., overt threats to face)."

(Arndt & Janney 1985:294, original italics)

Arndt and Janney's socio-psychological study observes the interplay of the verbal, prosodic and kinetic elements of interpersonal communication; however, the latter two aspects are beyond the scope of my study which focuses on verbal pragmatics.

Their idea is useful for the study political and diplomatic conversations. In these topics, besides traditional polite expressions, the speakers use many lexical elements to signal the group to which they belong (taking-sides strategy), and carefully present their attitudes through selective words/phrases in order to prevent potential negative impacts from the conversation, because they act on the behalf of the organisation and the country in the role that they are assigned. The emotive cues, consisting of confidence cues, positive-negative



affect cues, and involvement cues, can support the exploration of conversational language in diplomacy.

- **Confidence Cues**

Arndt and Janney introduce the confidence cue, “First they provide a basis for inferring the reliability, certainty or validity of what is said; second they are instrumental in negotiating the temporary balance of power between the speaker and the listener” (1985:287). Examples of confidence cues are the use of adverbs for emphasis, directness, and the use of the imperative/declarative instead of the interrogative, etc.

“I **truly** agree with you.”

“I will **definitely** see you.”

In the examples above, the words “truly” and “definitely” are added as components to intensify supportiveness in the acts of agreement.

Technically, in positive messages, confidence cues can create an impression of serving interpersonal face needs; it increases the degree of supportiveness. On the other hand, the weight of confidence should be lowered when conveying a negative message, for example, refusal, disagreement, and request.

In these difficult situations, the speaker uses the non-confidence cue to signal a lower degree of territorial trespassing (orientation to the other’s need of autonomy), such as, a little, quite, seem, might be, maybe, somewhat, interrogative form, etc.

- **Positive-Negative Affect Cue**

Developed from the concept of language intensity: “a quality of language that *indicates the degree to which the speaker’s attitude toward a concept deviates from neutrality*” (Bowers 1963: 345), a positive-negative affect cue is a word used to pinpoint the speaker’s attitude towards someone or something during discussing a topic. The pros and cons about the issue can be specified by the selection of one among many choices showing which side the speaker takes/chooses. For example, “He is a dedicated traditionalist” is positively-biased; “He is a conservative” is close to neutrality; “He is a right-wing reactionary” is negatively-biased (Arndt & Janney 1985:289).

Another way in which the speaker can give a sign of inclusiveness in relation to the discussed subject, is, for example, that they can speak less than they are required to when their answer is negative. The technique is flouting the Gricean quantity maxim (Grice 1975) to avoid an obvious expression of a negative attitude. Arndt and Janney state that negative feelings tend to result in more restricted references. Compare the replies to the question, “*How did you like the dinner?*”

A: It was really good.

B: The salad was good.

(Arndt & Janney 1985:289)

Instead of giving an opinion about the dinner as a whole as in Example A, speaker B picks out the quality of the salad only, other comments about the dinner are excluded. Furthermore, Arndt and Janney (1985:290) suggest that people tend to use specificity to present a positive opinion, for example, specifying a persons’ name in an answer instead of using vague words like “the guests/ the usual people”. They also propose syntactic immediacy, which specifies the position in which an item is placed in the sentence: “concepts more important for the speaker tend to occur in syntactically earlier positions than less important ones” (Arndt & Janney 1985:290).

- **Involvement Cue**

Based on the term “verbal immediacy” presented by Bradac and co-authors (1979), the involvement cue signifies the distance between the speaker and the hearer and between the speaker and the issue.

**We** will certainly enjoy the party.

**You and I** certainly enjoy the party.

**I think you** must enjoy the beef Wellington at the party.

(Bradac et al. 1979:262)

The first sentence with ‘We’ implies a closer relationship than the second sentence which contains ‘You and I’; while the last sentence signals a remarkable distance—“enjoying

the beef will be your experience, not mine". The speaker also has a variety of word choices. S/he can choose only one of them to engage interpersonal distance.

I **expect** your cooperation.

I **insist** on your cooperation.

I **demand** your cooperation.

(Arndt & Janney 1985:291)

Involvement and non-involvement cues can be considered as two poles of subjectivity and objectivity. If the interactants have a common attitude toward the issue, their expressions tend to be subjective; a high degree of involvement and positive attitude is exhibited. On the contrary, if the interactants want to display a neutral position or non-involvement toward the issue, they tend to demonstrate an objective opinion and show emotional detachment from the issue.

To sum up, Arndt and Janney study linguistic devices: confidence cues, positive-negative affect cues, and involvement cues and suggest ways to use them to convey politeness effectively. In their approach, politeness is not communicated just because of the speaker following social norms, but also through effects on the hearer from the commutative method the speaker chooses to use.

### **3. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain**

The focus on speaker-side communication and linguistic modification based on speech act theory, which was constructively initiated by Brown and Levinson, was advanced by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984). Their study of two face-risk acts, request and apology, broadens an understanding about techniques of internal modification (the modification of linguistic details inside the head act, such as the use of understating, down-toning, intensifying) and external modification (methods for modifying supporting moves, such as checking on availability, getting a pre-commitment, disarmers, sweeteners, and grounders which are used before or after making a request). Their study reveals how lexical elements and syntax are managed in speaking discourse. Although the focus is mainly at the formulaic level, not on context variation, each modification principle can be applied to various

situations of the same or similar categories, for example, friend-to-friend talk, family talk, talk at work, etc. This area of study deserves particular attention from researchers because the speaker who is equipped with various linguistic techniques has more choices of strategies to use. Also, it will be interesting to seek more principles of modification which can be applied to more than one situation and one person for practical usefulness in research, especially as my research explores politeness modification strategies which are used in communication across cultures.

## **C.Function-Based Politeness**

In the later trend of politeness studies, there is a shift of emphasis from a form-based approach to a language-in-function approach which gives more attention to contextual analysis or external evidence which shapes the conversation. The new paradigm is developed from a new perspective that meanings are not static or determined by linguistic forms. The new-trend scholars question the ultimate role of the speaker in communication. They urge for studies of dyadic communication or interaction. Also, the search for hearer feedback for confirmation of politeness effects as well as politeness norms of a particular context, a speech domain, a speech community, and a specific culture is strongly recommended.

### **1.Watts**

Watts (1992, 2003) argues that previous politeness theories disregard situational contexts. He challenges Brown and Levinson's major theory, on the grounds that politeness meaning is not inherent in linguistic forms. Words have no fixed meaning. The meaning of spoken language depends on the context. Formulaic expressions or many conventional politeness patterns as suggested in Brown and Levinson's approach can be tactically used to signify the meaning of satire in some situations. Watts explains that strict forms of linguistic politeness may not be appropriate for all hearers and all situations. So, some polite expressions as suggested by Brown and Levinson are not always polite if they are not compatible with the social context. No word/syntax/sentence can wholly present politeness

until social contexts are brought into the analysis. Watts' approach has two distinctive features:

### **1. The proposal of a revolutionarily analytic paradigm about politeness study.**

The study questions the validity of the major findings of Brown and Levinson (1987) which indicate that specific discourse devices can signify politeness without regard for contextual variables. This approach is supported by Holmes's conclusion, "There is nothing intrinsically polite about any linguistic form" (Holmes 1995:10). Brown and Levinson's study of conversational language was made in a vacuum of context. As a result, the study classifies linguistic politeness in generalisation; the theorists do not describe specific details about the situations since they assume that readers understand from their own common sense and past experience. However, their main task is done in the explanation of how the speaker achieves his goal in association with Speech Act Theory. On a contrary, Watts advocates the exploration of politeness meanings in specific contexts. His approach fundamentally recognises that conversational discourses do not completely present semantic meanings, for example, we should remove the politeness meaning embedded in "please" or "kindly" in analysis. The meaning of utterances does not only rely on the external context of the situation – involved variables about "who", "when" and "where" – but they are also presented within the frame defined in the study as the structures in which the participants share a common set of assumptions (Watts 1992; Tannen 1993; Coupland & Jaworski 1997). Therefore, oral communication has a high degree of distortion and implication within meaning, since the nature of verbal pragmatics is shaped by the context of the encounter (in which the speakers may not say everything they think because of a consideration of appropriate behaviour and existing assumptions shared by the interactants— e.g. presupposition and schemata). Watts rejects linguistic politeness devices, such as, "please", "sir", and other formulaic expressions as signs of politeness until they are interpreted specifically within the particular situation. In context-dependent communication, those linguistic forms can be used for diverse meanings in different situations. Watts proposes that politeness should be considered beyond rigid formulaic expressions, as in his example of a conversation in a theatre where the speaker requests the following from the occupier of his seats, "I am sorry to bother you, but would you very much mind vacating our seats?" This expression sounds over-polite or unlikely to be judged positively by an ordinary hearer (Watts 2003: 258).

## 2. The denial of the individual's complete power in situational control.

Locher, one of the prominent scholars in Watts's approach, states that conversation has the nature of two-way communication. Conversational discourse is produced by a two-sided interactive transaction (2004: 50). The speaker utters in the context of being with another person; politeness is not performed as an independent one-man show; rather, the conversation is gradually constructed by a two-sided adaptation to each other. From this viewpoint, interactants have to cope with continuous changes of context. Put simply, once one speaks, the utterance immediately creates the new context for the other's next turn of talk. This approach creates the view that the conversational situation is unstable and the utterances are constructed in mutual dependence between two interactants; there is no ultimate freedom for the individual to achieve their communicative goals without the role of the other, no matter whether s/he speaks out in response or not. The speaker in conversation is struggling over the inconsistent structure of discourse and re-negotiation of meanings with the other. Watts' study addresses the argument against Brown and Levinson's approach which presents a simplification of firmly static interpersonal circumstances in which the individual can easily engage the situation to achieve a communicative goal. Watts's approach suggests the evaluation of the hearer's reaction, the effect of the linguistic behaviour after it has occurred in a real situation, that is, the role of the hearer in judging or reacting which affects the speaker; this is why the context of the situation becomes so important.

According to Locher and Watts's illustration of "Relational Work" (Locher & Watts 2005:12), politeness is the demonstration of making an effort in one's linguistic expression that fits the situation and conforms to politic behaviour (social practice). It falls onto the scale that consists of the following qualifications:

- **Positively Marked:** The use of an irregular/extra form, which indicates the effort made.
- **Appropriate:** The expression fits into a particular situation, for example, "Hey... pen." is appropriate in conversation with a close friend.
- **Politic:** The utterance is linguistically correct in respect to social conventions. According to Watts (2003:135), politic behaviour is a product of a process of socialisation from biological into cultural being.

Consider my summary of Locher and Watts' s analytical presentation (2005:15-16):

(1) “**Lend me your pen**” – very direct, but not necessarily impolite, is appropriate in general situations.

(2) “**Could you lend me your pen?**” – politic, using first-order politeness which is generally accepted as a polite expression, most people would not feel that (2) is polite, but merely appropriate in a given social context.

(3) “**Oi! Pen!**” – appropriate in the case that the interactants have a close relationship; however, it is not seen as polite because the speaker shows no extra effort toward the hearer.

(4) “**I wonder whether you would be so very kind as to lend me your pen?**” – in many social contexts, (4) is clearly inappropriate and is likely to be classified as over-polite, ironic, etc.

Politeness covers three scales: positive markedness, politic behaviour and appropriateness. Politic and appropriate expressions which are unmarked do not reach the higher quality of politeness because they do not represent an extra effort of communication to the hearer. Politeness in Watts' s concept is an expression with special effort over-and-above what is politic; yet the utterance still fits in the given situation, generates interpersonal recognition, and complies with social norms.

As I see it, it is interesting to use this theory to assess whether special efforts made by non-native speakers of English, who do not completely acquire the linguistic norms of the English speech community, could elicit negative reactions from the native-English-speaking hearers. The survey of foreign hearers' feedback can fulfil the study. In interaction across cultures, there is a possibility that special effort or markedness can be perceived as positive or negative; the use of markedness that violates the hearer' s norm, intentionally or ignorantly, runs the risk of misinterpretation; it can be judged “inappropriate”, “over-polite,” or “impolite” by the hearer.

According to Locher and Watts, the study of conversational discourse should “**look at all forms of verbal interaction in their own right**” (2004: 29, my emphasis). The interpretations of meanings vary according to the situation. The form-based study fails to assess conversational discourse which is dynamically shaped by changing external situations and the structure of thoughts in which interactants share assumptions. Politeness meaning is

negotiable rather than static. To understand this, the researcher should be able to bring details of the situation into the discussion as well as to observe the reactions of the hearers. This idea will enrich the findings about politeness signifiers. For example, Locher (2005: chapter 5) presents how “well”, “just”, “uhm”, “but”, and modal auxiliaries, are used in specific ways in facework.

The theory would have been more convincing if there had been adequate empirical research about the diverse meanings of a formulaic unit applied in various situations, including substantive academic proof of the validity of the paradigm that there are no fixed meanings for linguistic forms in conversational discourses. Watts’s claim that politeness is not inherent in language overlooks the fact that people acquire interpretative perceptions from their past experiences and they apply formulaic expressions to signify politeness for the purpose of clarity and time saving. Indeed, there are very few cases for the unusual interpretation of formulaic politeness, for example, “Please take a seat”. Brown and Levinson’s discourse, without explanation of the situational context, carries pragmatic meaning about the context, because the reader can easily imagine a familiar situation relating to those politeness expressions. Eelen’s critique of politeness theories (2001:74-75) shows that we can reject politeness meaning in thanking and greeting in rare cases. It would be interesting to research further how commonsensical discursive forms, which generally signify politeness, are used in unusual ways.

Moreover, the argument that politeness “goes beyond the normal usage [of language] as socio-culturally constrained forms of politic behaviour” (Watts 1992:52) is not substantially supported by other research.

“As [it] appears from the ordinary speakers’ rating in Ide et al. (1992), the Japanese commonsense notion of politeness is more closely associated with appropriateness (fit in situational and relational patterns) and casualness than with considerateness and friendliness. What is more, friendliness is even negatively correlated with politeness. Since Ide et al. (ibid.) associate friendliness with volition, it would appear that for Japanese ordinary speakers, volition is less closely associated with politeness than discernment, i.e. exactly the opposite of Watts’ theoretical classification.”

(Eelen 2001:75)



As an example study, ordinary people tend to judge politic behaviour as more polite than the ‘extra-friendly’ style or extra effort of considerateness toward the hearer as Watts suggests. In hierarchical politeness systems, in which conventional politeness is strictly required to signify the rank and duty of the participant within the social structure as well as the relationship between the speaker and the hearer, it is accepted that within the society, formulaic expressions and conventional politeness devices are necessary. So, the negotiation of meanings is not likely to happen in such circumstances. Furthermore, Watts’s theory is unable to explain politeness in formal situations as it is argued that politic behaviour is impolite on the grounds that formality signifies distance—“a person can be perceived as formal and at the same time as impolite” (cited in Locher 2004:87; Sifianou 1992:80). Formality is usually applied in specific events which, of course, require distance, e.g. a courtroom, a committee meeting, or a democratic assembly (Holmes 1995:19; Brown & Levinson 1987:70).

When formalisation is used in the wrong situation, the communicative effect can be negative (Locher 2004). The theory strongly suggests that social appropriacy should be taken into account apart from linguistic form. However, the argument that there is no inherent politeness meaning in linguistic form suffers from the fact that some linguistic devices are regularly used together restrictively. In formal situations, the meanings cannot be negotiated to a great degree, and the patterns of formal language required in the situation allow one side to exercise power over the other at a high level. That is to say, formality stabilises the interpersonal unequal relation, for example: the judge and the criminal, the doctor and the patient. In these situations communication tends to be clear and static, rather than being relationally manageable as with the politeness theory of “relational work”. For these reasons, attentions should be drawn to both form-based and context-based interpretations. Therefore, I use Watts’s theory as the supporting concept rather than the main one in this study, since its concept of politeness judgment may have problems if the theory is fully applied to formal events. In such cases, special efforts above politic behaviour and appropriateness can be judged as impolite. However, Watts’s theory raises an awareness of context-dependent meanings, which is useful for the consideration of some linguistic details.

Watts’s theory was well-designed to urge more analyses of Brown and Levinson’s approach. However, Watts’s idea is considered as an unfinished theory; some theoretical weaknesses in applicability remain. The research into this approach has not been carried out

since the theory provides only definitions. The theory requires a number of supporting studies of contextual and situational models. Without a clear direction and objective criteria, the researcher would get lost in analytical identification, for example, what is the discourse surplus with extra interactional effort?, what is beyond politic behaviour and, still, it is not considered over-polite? Watts himself intends to keep the approach low-objectivity as he explains below:

“[t]here is simply no objective means to measure our feel for politic behaviour, which of course makes it as open to discursive struggle as the term (im)polite itself... The evaluation remains individual and can at best become interpersonal and intersubjective, but can never be objectively verifiable.”

(Watts 2003:164)

“there are no objective criteria for determining politic behaviour... There are also no purely subjective criteria since social practice is always and only interactive...there can be no objective criteria for deciding on what is or is not politic behaviour except for the past experiences of the individual and the perception of similar experiences in the interactive partners.”

(Watts 2003: 166–167)

For this reason, Watts’s statement that “linguistic ‘payment’ in excess of what is required is open to interpretation as polite” (Watts 2003: 161, cited in Terkourafi 2006:420) is debatable, because the hearers may not feel the same. Some people think that a more-than-merely-appropriate expression which surprises them during an interaction sounds odd and less polite than the politeness signs that they are accustomed to. All of these could be clarified by more specific linguistic and situational examples in the theory. This weakness results from inadequate theoretical guidelines about interpretation and judgment for the research followers. The evaluation, which is highly dependent on the individual—a researcher or a hearer—tends to be subjective and serviceable for understanding those specific past moments rather than formulating a new model to predict the result in similar situations. However, Watts’s theory brings an awareness of meanings in varying contexts and the notion that not all politic behaviours can be interpreted as polite—in his view, politeness is a subset of politic behaviours. His argument about the characteristic of interactive discourse can create a broader repertoire of politeness strategies; it suggests that there are more politeness signifiers than the forms that we usually know as presented by Brown and

Levinson, and suggests that conventional forms of linguistic politeness must be examined with mindfulness because those forms do not denote politeness in every situation.

#### **4.Kádár and Mills**

The new approach which is geared to uncover newly emerging politeness conventions, politeness in a specific context, and politeness in interaction, not only politeness from the speaker's side, was constructively developed by Kádár and Mills (2011; Mills 2011; Mills 2013). They set the direction of politeness studies with several points of analysis as follows:

1) **Present the complexity of the interaction:** Many interactional resources should be drawn into consideration, such as: class, gender, identity, performance, non-verbal actions, etc. The analysis can then focus on how many of them function together, or on the highlighting of one particular element and a demonstration of how it works in interaction.

2) **Move away from linking language form and function:** Mills and Kádár suggest a departure from semantics. Politeness study should be geared for finding context-generated meanings. That is to say, there is no static meaning for a word. Mills (2013) demonstrates that 'sorry' can signal "Hey, you are wrong", as well as functioning as a means of apologising, according to Brown and Levinson (1987).

3) **Analyse conventions in the local way:** This considers how conventionalised politeness is used by an individual for a localised meaning in a specific situation.

4) **Focus on instability and potential interpretations:** The researcher should present changes over an on-going interaction, and interpret the potentiality of the meanings.

5) **Emphasise what people do with politeness:** The central focus is neither face nor socially-accepted politeness. It is important to seek various ways of how politeness is located within a particular context. For example, to yell "pussy off" is considered as a request for one driver to give way to another driver when both are in a traffic jam. In this outdoor busy-road context, the speaker does not abide by the rules of formality.

6) **Call for more attention on new focuses of data:** In a long series of interaction fragments, the researcher must seek the hearer's evaluation to identify effects, as opposed to using the traditional approach which focuses on the speaker's intention—the researcher should not presume that a particular utterance would have a particular effect on the hearer.

7) **Explore sub-cultural conventions:** Challenging Watts's concept of appropriateness as I described earlier, Kádár and Mills suggest, "Within particular communities of practice, the rules of appropriateness are often up for negotiation, and when the 'rules' of the group are perceived to have been flouted, they may be explicitly discussed by interactants" (2011:34). Kádár and Mills present the decline of national culture. They argue that the studies of national culture at the macro level (country unit) cannot truly represent politeness conventions because of tremendous social changes since the globalisation era, which resulted in a high degree of cultural hybridisation within national societies. It is noticeable that the new conventionalisation of politeness has formed according to, for example, the high ratio of immigrants, or so called "new people" in American society, is now part of American conventionalised politeness. Politeness reflects the modern society where lifestyle is shaped by technology and the speed of interaction tends to value privacy and quickness over building long-term relationships. For these reasons, many new patterns of politeness communication have developed, for example, the acceptance of internet language, directness, irrelevance, distancing, and anti-formality, depending on the situation and the relationship between interactants (see Lakoff 2005; Truss 2005, cited in Kádár & Mills 2011).

The approach is "'non-systematic' and 'destructive' in comparison with traditional 'normative and prescriptive' (Watts 2003: 53) theories" (Kádár & Mills 2011:8); it is explained by Mills in response to a question about the missing theoretical model in their theoretical formulation, that:

"Discursive theorists are not necessarily attempting to construct a model of politeness to replace Brown and Levinson's, since they recognise that constructing such a model would lead to generalisations which are prone to stereotyping. These stereotypes of general politeness norms are generally based on the speech styles and ideologies of the dominant group (Mills, 2003). Instead, discursive theorists aim to develop a more contingent type of theorising which will account for contextualised expressions of politeness and impoliteness, but these positions will not necessarily come up with a simple predictive model."

(Mills 2011: 34–5, cited in Kádár & Mills 2011:8)

However, the rejection of the link with semantics (lexical items and function) can make the analysis of non-native speakers' utterances problematic. Generally, most non-native speakers tend to stick to on-record directness and conventionalised politeness to create a conventional meaning, rather than using non-conventional meanings because of a lack of knowledge about colloquialisms and their efforts to avoid miscommunication. Also, in some cultures, playing with words can be considered disrespectful and ineffective when communicating with a senior or superior person. It is likely that this rejection does not fit studies of formal situations where the speakers are not allowed to be verbally playful and politeness is communicated in the conventional way. In some contexts like diplomatic talk, national culture at the macro level still plays an interesting role, because the interactants are the representatives of nations, not a sub-cultural group. In most cases, the knowledge of national culture is necessary for the speaker who is interacting cross-culturally, for example, in a working context, the foreigners know the coordinator as a Thai, not a Thai Southerner, because the latter is a redundant or secondary option in a conversation during a meeting for working purposes, while the first is essential for speculation about politeness conventions the coordinator may use. However, it does not mean that we should not assess how sub-culture functions in this type of talk, for example, why the speaker uses the dialect of the hearer's hometown in some acts. Furthermore, another relevant 'sub-culture' to consider is the community of practice of international diplomacy.

Since Kádár and Mills' approach demonstrates neither a parameter of assessment nor an analytical model which leads to judgement, the researchers have to find an alternative explanation of politeness. Kádár and Mills declare it to be the post-Brown and Levinson approach (Kádár 2013; Mills 2013); however, addressing this new approach, though many points are weighty, can misguide many researchers through motivating them to 'leave the classic theory and do something new'. I consider that it is worth keeping Brown and Levinson's theory alive and re-constructing it as graceful vintage art surviving in a modern time. Those points that Brown and Levinson miss should be fulfilled. Kádár and Mills' new approach provides the additional points to be aware of in my analysis. Still, a key theoretical tool is required for unfolding the interactive system and the laws of utterance production in a particular context. In my consideration, Brown and Levinson's rational approach is relevant to diplomatic talk in which the speaker is expected to decide on a strategy which best benefits their side. This represents the speaker's professional aim. Conversation for diplomatic

missions is a mystery in the academic world of politeness as there has been no test of Brown and Levinson's theory in diplomatic speech domains before. In this area, the stakes of conversation for the speaker's party are high, so factors of communicative speculation by the speaker should be constructively examined. For this reason, my neo-Brown and Levinson approach has the potential to produce new findings, because particularities of career, culture, politics, and situational contexts typify the politeness features which no other research has ever presented.

## **5. Spencer-Oatey**

Spencer-Oatey (2002, 2005, [2000] 2008) establishes the theory of rapport management with the target of assessing intercultural interaction. That is, the theory was designed for the investigation of politeness phenomena in authentic conversational exchanges in which the interactants are from different cultures.

Spencer-Oatey explains that the new theoretical construction is essential because Brown and Levinson's theory (1987) is problematic in the following ways:

- 1) The concept of face threatening acts is invalid.
- 2) The proposed two aspects of face are excessive; "negative face issues are not necessarily face concerns at all" (2008:13).
- 3) The classic theory relates politeness to linguistic modification only.

To support these key points, she explains that some acts suggested by Brown and Levinson cannot be regarded as face threatening acts, for instance, the act of requesting can give the hearer a feeling of honour rather than constituting a territorial threat—"it shows trust in our abilities and/or acceptance as a close friend. In this case, the request can 'give' us face" (2008:19). Furthermore, she draws attention to the fact that Brown and Levinson's face is not accepted by scholars of culture-specific politeness (e.g. Matsumoto, 1988; Ide, 1989; Mao, 1994 cited in Spencer-Oatey 2002, 2008). A good example is Gu's study of Chinese face which shows that offers and invitations can be viewed as intrinsically polite rather than as face threatening acts (1990, cited in Spencer-Oatey 2002). In identifying what is polite, Spencer-Oatey encourages looking beyond linguistic modification. Rather, she shows a number of elements which can be politeness indicators, for example: discourse structure and timing: "building up to a major request is less blunt than asking it immediately, and asking

sensitive questions shortly after meeting someone is more blunt than waiting until you know the person well” (2008:30). In her perspective, more external factors outside the utterances should be taken into consideration, such as the activity type, participants’ social roles, culture-specific communicative style, the hearer’s reaction and feedback and non-verbal behaviours.

Spencer-Oatey presents a new approach called “rapport management”. It is defined as “the management of harmony–disharmony” (2008:13) among interactants. Rapport orientation is divided into four types:

- 1.) Rapport enhancement orientation,
- 2.) Rapport maintenance orientation,
- 3.) Rapport neglect orientation, and
- 4.) Rapport challenge orientation (2008:32).

It is suggested that the negotiations of interactional meanings take place over time.

Besides utterance analysis, her model comprises three dimensions, five domains, and various factors influencing rapport strategies.

The three dimensions consist of face, social rights and obligations, and interaction goals. Spencer-Oatey associates face management with Goffman’s theory (1967, cited in Spencer-Oatey 2008:13) and also with the work of Ting-Toomey and Kurogi (1998, cited in Spencer-Oatey 2008:14) as those theories concern face arising over interaction.

“...face is associated with personal/relational/social value, and is concerned with people’s sense of worth, dignity, honour, reputation, competence and so on. Sociality rights and obligations, on the other hand, are concerned with social expectancies, and reflect people’s concerns over fairness, consideration and behavioural appropriateness. Interactional goals refer to the specific task and/or relational goals that people may have when they interact with each other.”

(Spencer-Oatey 2008:13-14, my emphasis)

The five domains for justifying politeness encompass illocutionary domain, discourse domain, participation domain, stylistic domain, and non-verbal domain (2008:21).

The theory explains that contextual variables as well as pragmatic principles and conventions affect rapport management strategies. The contextual variables consist of participant relations, power, distance, number of participants—for example, in some cultures, being criticized in front of other participants is more embarrassing than without other participants (2008:36), cost–benefit considerations—“costs of time, effort, imposition, inconvenience, risk, and so on” (2008:37), social/interactional roles and activity type, which determines conversation performance, such as, allowable contribution and selected topics. These contextual features “play both a ‘standing’ and a ‘dynamic’ role in influencing language use” (2008:39). The factor of pragmatic principles and conventions concerns communicative norms and pragmalinguistic conventions in different cultures.

Importantly, Spencer-Oatey places emphasis on the hearer interview. Her approach seeks to confirm the importance of first order politeness (Watts 2003), that is, whether laypeople perceive the utterance as polite or not. This approach can be seen in her own research practice and her comment on another study as below:

“Cheng (2003) is a case in point. Focusing on intercultural conversation, she provides very detailed analyses of a range of pragmatic features in her corpus of intercultural discourse, **but none of her participants were asked to comment on their subjective experiences.** From a practical applications point of view, **I believe this is a serious weakness**, because we cannot explore how interactionally significant or otherwise given language use is... I believe that politeness is concerned with (dis)harmony in social relations and **that people’s perceptions of this are subjective social judgements. It is therefore essential that researchers gather data on people’s reactions to language use, in addition to the discourse data itself.**”

(Spencer-Oatey 2005:344, my emphasis)



In conclusion, the theory is a guideline for the investigation of politeness in dynamic interactions between participants from different cultures. It strongly suggests that studies of interactional politeness should not be oversimplified; various elements concerned should be taken into account before making a judgment about politeness. In relation to my research, the theory helps position my focus, as well as sharpen the interpretation because the context of talk involves many domains and the researcher must be able to clarify the complexity. Following the steps made by Spencer-Oatey, my research also stresses the importance of the observation method. Although my research does not analyse only one single event, moment by moment, some selective parts of particular moments will be discussed in more detail.

Rapport Management Theory has some strengths in terms of its capability to be used in interactional events (authentic conversation)—the theory is concerned with physical observation (participants and non-verbal behaviours)—and face which occurs during interaction in Goffman's theory—and its relation to interactants' cultures which can play a significant role in the interaction. Spencer-Oatey's theory suits an investigation of a conversational event in which the academic observer can present various details of the conversational atmosphere, including knowledge about cultural differences and various sub-linguistic areas involving language in use.

Considering the discussed weaknesses, it is unclear whether the theory can perfectly support the analysis of a cultural clash in interaction, since very few researchers have sufficient knowledge to interpret the cultural meanings generated by all parties in the event. Using this approach, the research can show communicative problems and miscommunications between the interactants from different cultures (e.g. Stadler 2011 in Literature Review), that is, the answer to “what”, but very little advancement has been made in answer to “why” and how to improve competence to intercultural interaction. Spencer-Oatey and Franklin (2009) make a good start in pushing the cultural approach to be more empirical. However, regarding cultural studies in the Humanities, only empirical surveys are not satisfactory. An acceptable discussion requires a profound knowledge of the target culture from a secondary source—for example, the key books domestically read in the society which affect the social members' perception, and primary sources—real experience about the target culture, including authentic experience of interaction in the target society. Experience of social insideness—familiarisation with the same occurrences, together with an understanding

about the society's social history and social bonds, relates to a recognition of cultural meanings and the ability to capture minor details of utterances and behaviours, including the emotional engagement and emotional effects of people from a particular culture.

Furthermore, in applying Rapport Management Theory, the scale of study would be very wide. Some proposed aspects for analysis deserve an in-depth investigation. Each domain of analysis requires constructive knowledge and, sometimes, the two aspects can play contrastive roles, for example, the theoretical face that Goffman suggests and the cultural face as perceived by the Chinese participants. This is why my research subscribes to Brown and Levinson's theory which can explain a smaller scope, what the speakers do, not what the hearers judge. So, the central domain of my work is how to deal with illocutionary force and how the first language culture involves those modification techniques of politeness performed in English by the non-native speakers (Thai). Ultimately, we cannot copy discourse from one context or situation to another. The study cannot form knowledge which fits all contexts. What academics can do is provide some guiding principles for the knowledge users' adaptation to similar situations. For this reason, I chose to collect modification techniques found in the utterance samples within a broad scope of contextual components rather than attempting to judge the politeness of a particular situation by relying on individual participants' views.

Brown and Levinson's theoretical grounds do not completely decline, despite being challenged by Spencer-Oatey, if we consider the following questions:

1) Is it true that negative face has no worth in politeness studies?

Although the positive and negative aspects of Brown and Levinson's face share the same purpose of fostering social relationships, they are different methods of facework which target different effects in interpersonal relations. In Note No. 8, Brown and Levinson explain, "The notions and labels for positive and negative face derive ultimately from Durkheim's 'positive and negative rites' (in *The Elementary Form of the Religious Life*, 1915), partially, via Goffman" (1987: 285, original italics). So, it is not the two theorists' misconceptions about Goffman's face. Partially influenced by Goffman, Brown and Levinson clearly redefine

“face as wants” to support the study of strategic politeness (1987:62). Consider an explanation about Durkheim’s negative rites by Holtgraves:

“Goffman (1967, 1971) provided several conceptual distinctions regarding face-work. Foremost here is the distinction, derived from Durkheim (1915), between **avoidance rituals**, or the **avoidance of impinging upon another** (Durkheim's negative rites), and **presentational rituals, or the presentation of appreciation for and solidarity** with another (Durkheim's positive rites). Avoidance rituals proscribe what one should not do. For example, **one should not call attention to another's faults, introduce threatening or personal topics, restrict another's movements, or in any way violate the other's territory** (or face). Presentational rituals (also termed "supportive interchanges"; see Goffman 1971) are approach-based; they are the ritualized offerings (e.g., salutations, compliments, invitations) made to others as a means of affirming and supporting the social relationship.”

(Holtgraves 1992:142, my emphasis)

As can be seen, the concept of negative face involves being mindful of the other’s personal territory. A study which disregards this concept may fail to explain distancing from the other for the purpose of politeness in interpersonal communication.

2) Is it an absolute conclusion that the hearer interview is required for politeness research?

In principle, laypersons’ opinions serve as a justification of first-order politeness (Watts 2003) or politeness which is recognised by social members in a society. However, the question is whether a group of laypeople can represent politeness in a particular society or not. In fact, it can be age, career, education, or economic class which distinguishes a person from others in the same society. Therefore, these empirical data should be analysed with caution taking into account many aspects of culture. Accordingly, we cannot simply generate findings from those opinions, except when the research goal was particularly set for seeking the participants’ perspectives and reactions.

The opinions of laypeople may partially reveal the matter of cultural face; however, cultural face does not equate with Goffman and Brown and Levinson’s theoretical face which is the symbolic instrument of analysis. Therefore, as long as the researcher uses theoretical

face as a parameter, the laypeople's opinions hold the status of being a supporting source for consideration, not the key indicator of politeness.

Brown and Levinson's face as a "basic want" of human beings (1987:62) can be claimed to exist at a psychological level rather than a social level, though these two levels can be linked in analysis. The effects on a psychological level are hardly explained by laypeople since some stress from a social encounter is almost unnoticed or undetectable. Imagine when we pick up a glass of water to drink, or when we see a visitor at the door and automatically say "Hi". These actions were easily taken without awareness. This implies that a standard reaction to the situation is fixed in the human brain—by learning by social experience or through reacting on impulse to biological needs, such as being thirsty. Laypeople cannot describe those moves in a systematic way, or step-by-step through profound observation as the researcher can. Indeed, an action like picking up a glass of water needs a certain level of intelligence and physical force; it is not easy at all for little children and patients. However, laypeople do not pay much attention to how their actions and behaviours are regulated. Similarly, many verbal impositions and face threatening acts are not obviously sensed by laypeople. Because of this, obtaining participant feedback does not always indicate research quality.

### 3.) Can Brown and Levinson's theory assess interactions?

Brown and Levinson's theory, though its focus is on linguistic modification for the speaker's benefit, can be applied in authentic interaction analysis. This point is clearly explained in their book, in the section entitled *The delicacy of the interactional balance* as follows:

"...the linguistic realizations of positive- and negative-politeness strategies may operate as a social accelerator and social brake, respectively, to modify the direction of the interaction at any point in time. Interactants, in any situation where the possibility of change in their social relationship exists, are constantly assessing the current 'score'—the mutual-knowledge assessment of D and P, for example, and may make minute adjustments at any point in order to re-establish a satisfactory balance or to move the interaction in the desired direction toward greater closeness or greater distance."

(1987:231)

According to the above description, the use of the theory is not limited to one turn of talk only. A researcher can use the classic theory to assess interaction as far as s/he has the same area of interest as the two theorists.

## **5.Terkourafi**

Terkourafi's politeness studies (2001, 2004, 2005a, 2005b) uses data from a simultaneous spoken Cypriot Greek corpus in her test of Brown and Levinson's formula,  $W_x = D(S,H) + P(H,S) + R_x$  (See Section: Brown and Levinson), and postulates a frame-based approach fundamentally developed from the concepts of "habitus" (Bourdieu 1990) and "face-constituting" (Arundale 1999). Her study generates a new paradigm for politeness studies in the following aspects:

1.) Terkourafi rejects of Brown and Levinson's speaker focus and the formula for politeness prediction (1987). She proposes that the replacement of the power and distance variables in the classic theory with specified factors, such as gender, age (2005a:131) and "the negotiated rights and obligations" (2005a:124, also see "Conversational Contract" by Fraser & Nolen 1981; Fraser 1990) in the analysis can give a more accurate prediction.

2.) Emphasis on the hearer's interpretation. Terkourafi reveals a cognitive process for conceptualising utterances in particular situations. It is proposed that the hearer employs schemata shaped by past social experiences. Thereby, the speaker communicates in a way in which s/he foresees that the hearer will comprehend the implication. Speaking to the other is "supra individual" (Terkourafi 2005a: 254); one cannot direct the utterance independently; instead, the speaker's expression has to fit the hearer's cognition as shaped by societal inputs.

3.) Terkourafi looks at politeness beyond a particular group of expressions and linguistic signs with inherent politeness meanings, and rather considers politeness as an act expected by the hearer and unmarked in accordance with social practices. In her view, people do not learn language by storing form-based meanings (from a dictionary); in fact, individuals acquire this knowledge through experiencing interaction, using extra-linguistic features in relation to conceptualised situation, then situation-generated meaning is stored in memory.

Considering Terkourafi's theoretical test, there are the points to re-consider. The test can give the results in statistic number, but it is not enough to confirm the theoretical flaws.

- **The use of Cypriot Greek corpus data presents exactness from one culture.**

From her data, Terkourafi found that conversation in the office is as casual as in the family. An analytical point about cultural preferences is missing. Some cultures are likely to prefer causality (being as you are is accepted) than formality (honouring the other is expected). Caution in communication is not customarily mandatory in a culture where power and class differences are not strongly sensed. Power is an important factor in a society of unequal relationship which expects permission from the other before action, for example, from a parent or an employer. Self-presence is also more considered in a collective society where paying attention to each other and long-term relationships are valued.

- **The use of a low-risk situation in the assessment of Brown and Levinson's theory.**

Politeness is not the case in the low-risk situations selected for Terkourafi's theoretical test. Making a costly request can illuminate the importance of interpersonal power and distance. In our everyday life, politeness can be automatically expressed without plotting or planning in advance unless we aim to control the end of a conversational situation, for example, we expect that permission will be granted after we make a request about marriage to our parents. It is interesting to examine politeness in the lens of Brown and Levinson in situations of fear or uncertainty, for example, a negotiation for an increase of salary, or a meeting with the Prime Minister who clearly has power to exercise. Like other cultures, the Greeks may prefer direct, easy communication in their everyday life, but in crucial situations, power and distance can become more significant when people must cope with uncertainty through communication. This human behaviour is universal, though each society invents different linguistic devices for the situation.

- **A numeral study of gender is not appropriate for testing power and distance.**

To interpret power and distance from the variable of sex needs specialised knowledge. For example, there are many kinds of power involving gender within a situation, such as, finance and attraction. Also, it is questionable from Terkourafi's test whether or not same-sex

interlocutors indicate a close-distance relationship; this cannot explain some situations in which women use friendly politeness with men more than their same-sex friends. This becomes more problematic when dealing with a third gender, for example a kathoey who exclusively uses women's linguistic politeness particles. So, this large corpus has only a limited capability to reveal complex power and distance between men and women.

The corpus results, which show that women request and use T-imperatives to each other more than in male-to-male interaction, cannot make a declination of Brown and Levinson's theory, the bald-on-record speech, or non-redressiveness, may signify "honesty and outspokenness" (1987:72) which can develop the sense of closeness in women's relationships. This finding, if age is a controlled factor, reflects the fact that women's management of their conversations with men are based on vertical relationships because they can control their communication more effectively in this way.

Brown and Levinson attempt to explain politeness by pointing out the speaker's incentives; people speak out for their own benefit, which can include the gaining of mutual trust and enjoying talk. The speaker's benefit does not mean the loss of the other or "one exploits the other". A win-win situation also serves the speaker-benefit purpose. This point allows us to investigate the goal of the speaker in a specific situation. Face-oriented behaviour is a means to achieve the end. Terkourafi, on the other hand, gives a mirror for an aspect that individuals are not independent agents, but make moves using their schemata as structured by the society; the desire and the language are not completely ours, no more authorship. So, it is not required in her approach to explain individual subjects' incentives because those incentives and intentions are socially construed. It is not a weakness that this supra individual approach refrains from accounting for the refinement of language use at an individual level.

A frame-based theory does not fit my data analysis because its application to interaction across cultures requires a clearer analytical model for identifying the interpretative process. In Thailand, for example, people of my generation learn politeness in foreign languages by remembering form-based meanings more than situation-based conceptual meanings, because actual meetings with foreigners seldom happen. There are many cases where the frame from previous events is unavailable, so the interlocutors use politeness according to their knowledge about form, for example, Mr. + last name means being polite

when addressing the other. This is why I consider that a form-based approach is still useful for considering language used by a non-native speaker.

## **D. An Analysis of Critiques against Brown and Levinson's Theory**

Brown and Levinson's theory, postulated in 1987, is widely accepted as much as criticised. However, it is one of the major politeness theories in the field of speech-act pragmatics. Many scholars find its weaknesses, and later draw the conclusion that the theory is not suitable for the study of language in function—the theory is questioned in terms of de-contextualisation, formulaic emphasis, and incapacity to explain some specific situations and cultures (Eelen 2001; Watts 2003; Mills & Kadars 2011). Nevertheless, I consider that the application of Brown and Levinson's theory is still challenging, if the politeness outlook is based on Brown and Levinson's concepts, which those theoretical critics disregard, i.e. politeness that is viewed as a tool to accomplish the speaker's goal.

Studies using this approach focus on the speaker's attempt at language mastery; no matter whether an individual hearer perceives it as politeness or not, politeness which is conducted and performed by the speaker is the object of study. To ignore this angle among modern-day researchers may bring about an imbalance in the development of politeness sub-areas. In this section, I present the weak points of Brown and Levinson's theory, which the users must be aware of, and a re-consideration of the critiques of Brown and Levinson's theory to confirm some weaknesses of those critiques.

- **The theory inadequately explains politeness in interaction.**

Brown and Levinson analyse one-way communication from the speaker to the hearer, in their uni-directional model, so their theory is incapable of assessing the hearer's reaction. Therefore, it loses sight of recipients' interpretational behaviours. Nor does the theory deal with normative analysis. However, many scholars apply the theory because it is workable in explanation of language users. Holtgraves considers that the theory works as a justification of the speaker's politeness behaviour.



“The major unit of analysis in Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory is a single turn at talk. However, as many authors have noted, face-work often is accomplished over the course of an interaction, through a series of moves and counter-moves. Although sequential patterning is not well captured in Brown and Levinson’s model, many of the conversation regularities that have been uncovered by conversation analytic researchers may be interpreted in terms of face-work and hence politeness.”

(Holtgraves 2005:79)

- **The theory does not take sufficient account of context.**

From the perspective of social discourse, a meaning is not inherent in a linguistic form, but the form varies in meanings according to the context (See Watts Section). So the redressiveness sometimes does not fit the situation and hence it does not always present politeness meanings in a particular place and situation. This draws attention, as Watts suggests, to appropriateness in language use.

One can defend the omission of contextual descriptions in Brown and Levinson’s theoretical presentation because the two theorists present polite language in a general way, that is, in situations where the research authors, research subjects, and readers share common experiences. In those examples it is not too difficult to imagine the actions a person might take and what the person would say in such a situation. The sufficiency of contextual content is determined by the necessity of shaping the reader’s comprehension of that context and presenting adequate reasoning regarding how it relates to the utterance. A short contextual description is sufficient for general cases in which the researcher does not aim to discuss a complex situation. If one applies the theory in an unusual context, more details of contextual factors should be brought into the discussion.

Indeed, the theory does not completely reject the function of context, as shown in Brown and Levinson’s formula:  $W_x = D(S, H) + P(H, S) + R_x$  (1987: 76) which suggests that interpersonal distance and power must be taken into account. Also, one must consider the rank (R) or the degree to which the act is rated as an imposition as judged by a particular

culture. To interpret a phenomenon by using this formula, it is impossible for Brown and Levinsonian scholars to ignore the social context. The theory achieves its purpose of explaining the rules of politeness in general, and is accepted as a notable theory in this field, and in the Humanities. It is theoretically fallacious to expect that those proposed politeness rules will exactly fit every situation and person.

- **The identification of face is problematic in application.**

There is a possibility that an utterance involves both positive and negative face, and this explanation should be allowed in theoretical use. The separation of the two faces may weaken the interpretation of complex meanings; the modification of a face type can serve both face needs, for example, in making joke, perhaps, the speaker is trying to distance him/herself from the hearer as well as creating a sense of camaraderie; Deference can be positive politeness because it shows admiration of the hearer in terms of giving them a higher social status. Therefore, a clear analysis of the content and the situation is required for specifying face.

- **Bald-on-record and Off Record can be tentatively interpreted as impoliteness.**

The Bald-on-record strategy can be perceived by the hearer as an ‘impolite’ strategy, though the speaker uses it only in emergency situations and where “face is not important” as Brown and Levinson suggest (see Srisuruk 2011). Furthermore, the use of off record strategies potentially increases the force of the FTA. For example, a daughter who says to her mother, “Do I have to devote my life to you?” creates a stronger force than the simple expression “Don’t control me”. Also, it can be found in the use of figures of speech commenting on the hearer, such as, “Your hair is like a lion,” or “This thesis is like an academic copy machine”. The off-record modification that opens an utterance to many interpretations may results in a discrepancy between the speaker’s intention and the hearer’s comprehension. Indirectness is not always more polite than directness because an indirect utterance requires imagination to interpret creating the risk of misinterpretation; whereas the direct speaker offers fixed meanings which the speaker and the hearer can share an understanding about. Utterances with highly technical modification can be sensed as satire or

interpersonal distancing. Therefore, it is not always true that the more the utterance is modified, the more polite it is.

Brown and Levinson's theory is widely and heavily criticised by contemporary academics; however, those criticisms should be re-considered in the following aspects.

## **1. The mismatch between theoretical face and cultural face**

The face-as-want concept suggested by Brown and Levinson is socio-psychological. Theoretical claims about universality are beyond the level of the facts about norms or community practice that social members acknowledge. Considering the theorisation, Brown and Levinson imply that discursive knowledge is exploited by the speaker to serve individual purposes; the interactants rationally follow those social rules only when they can satisfy the ends of communication.

Many studies present the discrepancy between theoretical face and cultural face, finding that Brown and Levinson's face is non-existent or cannot explain emic behaviours in their cultures (e.g., Wierzbicka 1985; Fraser 1990; Gu 1990; Ide 1989; Chen 1993; Mao 1994; Matsumoto 1989; Meier 1995; Nwoye 1992). The results of these comparative studies cannot significantly challenge the major theory because cultural face and theoretical faces exist in different forms. The first is constructed and developed by people in a society, while the latter is formulated by theorists to explain the individual's strategic acts of politeness communication. Theoretical face carries the psychological meanings of individual human beings' universal wants relating to their social life. Seeking and identifying cultural face can support the interpretation of politeness in a particular situation and context, but cultural face and theoretical face should not be viewed as the same type—imagine how to compare fruits and vegetables. Theoretical face should not lose its properties when being applied in comparison to cultural face. In identifying the relationship between psychology and culture, I advocate O'Driscoll's perspective (2007) which calls for examining how the positive face and the negative face exist in each culture. This idea is the same as Ji's perspective on Brown and Levinson's psychological face: "although the two types of face may play an unbalanced role in a particular culture, there has been no evidence that they can not be identified in that culture" (2000:1061).

## **2. The problematic test of politeness prediction formula**

The empirical findings in the test of Brown and Levinson's formula  $W_x = D(S, H) + P(H, S) + R_x$  (Brown & Levinson 1987: 76–77) do not confirm the validity of the formula (Terkourafi 2004). In my perspective, it is a normal feature of Humanistic theories that applicability in all cases is impossible. The classic theory just provides a guide in a broad sense. Later, when it is tested, researchers can generate new findings, including the suggestion of more variables or other politeness indicators. Importantly, the variables in the formula should be interpreted in orientation to the speaker's psychological state. The test of this theory should account for the possibility of the speaker's communicative situation and decision making. For instance, dealing with a powerful person or the setting of official workplace becomes the critical situations for the speaker more than normal, everyday-life situations. When the speaker strongly senses that the interaction is unsafe because the hearer can exercise power over him/her, politeness is displayed with high caution. The weightiness of the face threatening act involves socio-psychological issues, not merely sociological issues

## **3. The aim for replicability more than establishing different areas of emphasis**

Politeness studies, indeed, consist of many schools of thoughts: utterance production, utterance interpretation and reception, social appropriateness, interactive discourse construction, normative approach and so on. Formulating a new theory to replace an older one may create a situation where some sub-areas of politeness are left undeveloped because each theory, if widely accepted, has its own strengths in some way.

The use of Goffman's approach in politeness may miss the fact that politeness is a strategic act. Goffman describes the encounter as a situation for saving the face existing between interactants—"we can never get away from negotiating facework" (Watts 2003: 259). Goffman's argument can support politeness studies in the sense that people regulate their behaviours when they are perceived by the other entering a social setting. On the one hand, the trend to move back to Goffman's face (Watts 2003; Locher & Watts 2005; Arundale 1996; Terkorafi 2001) can increase the theoretical capability to examine going-on interaction. On the other hand, Goffman's perspective about interaction is broader than

Brown and Levinson's. Brown and Levinson focus on polite behaviour, while Goffman explains social behaviours—the first is the subset of the latter. This is why Brown and Levinson specify the aspect of two faces in their analysis since not all of facework can be counted as politeness.

## Reviewing the key theoretical strengths

Brown and Levinson present several valuable aspects which can become the sub-areas of politeness studies as follows:

### **1. Linguistic Modification**

The strength of Brown and Levinson's theory is an offer of practical methods in linguistic modification to satisfy interpersonal belonging/safety needs and to acknowledge the hearer's personal territory (distancing). This approach requires further development in strategic formulation. Brown and Levinson emphasise the utterance production side (speaker) to control the perception of the other as shown by the evidence of linguistic modification in their speaker-oriented mode of analysis. Inside a conversational sequence, we can identify how the speaker handles the role of in/effective communication. When applying Brown and Levinson's face in a dynamic interactional process, though the original theory is applied with the single act. The crucial point of treating the other verbally is still workable in identifying acts of politeness from the entire conversational series or over the course of interaction, if the study focuses on politeness attempts from the speaker's side.

### **2. Empowering individuals**

Brown and Levinson's theory shows the individual's power over society—although social members gain the same inputs in a society, they do not always use politeness in the same way. It is possible that the higher language ability a person possess, the more s/he can control the other and the situation of talk. There are differences in styles and levels of politeness among individuals, that is, people cope with communicative situations in different ways. Some people can perform politeness more sophisticatedly than the other to seek benefits. Brown and Levinson's theory implies that individuals can control the situation if

they are equipped with knowledge and skills of language. This departs from the sociological viewpoint, initially suggested by Goffman, that individuals are conditioned to conform to socially-agreed codes of conduct because of the concern about their public image during interaction. Brown and Levinson's theory has a room in pragmatics and interpersonal communication, and this creates lasting theoretical value since other newly-formed politeness theories tend to give weight to social determination (sociological politeness)—individuals are controlled by society. The classic theory illuminates that the individual is not the controlled agent. The speaker has some freedom (choices of politeness actions) to behave within the rules of the game. Apparently, social members may have similar repertoires of politeness knowledge, but there are many situations when people pick out strategies to use differently because levels of individual ability in language mastery vary.

### **3. Politeness as a means to achieve communicative goal(s)**

Another strength of Brown and Levinson's theory is the explanation of politeness as a means to achieve communicative goal(s). The goals of communication can be multiple in any one occasion. For example, the speaker aims to control the hearer's behaviour and maintain a good relationship. Face is neither a condition of the interaction nor the goal of action. Actually, face is the instrument to classify politeness methods and how to treat the other strategically. Facework in this sense functions as a psychological technique rather than being a communicative goal which can be used to change or sustain the external situation.

Although other theories, such as the discursive approach (Kádár & Mills 2011; Mills 2011; Mills 2013) and conversational contract (Fraser 1990), share similarity in an attention drawn upon how culture/norms are dynamically localised by individuals in an interaction, still, the behavioural incentive is not justified as clearly as in the classic theory. Regarding the motive of actions, no matter whether the agent exactly realises it or not, politeness is expressed for the sake of the targeted goal. We take verbal action, investing time and effort, because we want a desired external circumstance to happen. Other theories based on pro-social determination underrate this notion.

The speaker's rationality, choosing a choice of means which most satisfies the end, should not be viewed in a pessimistic way—the win-lose situation. There is a wide range of

benefits the speaker can achieve, including pleasure, happiness, internal comfort, and peace. The speaker may sacrifice material or concrete benefits for those abstract benefits. The more we understand the speaker's traits, cultural values, and the complicated situational context, the more we are able to pinpoint what the communicative target is in the particular moment. Brown and Levinson's theory is useful in business and political talk in which the speaker wants to control the effects which benefit his/her own party.

While Brown and Levinson's theory has many weak points to be aware of when the theory is applied, it offers various politeness-related concepts which diversify new research focuses. Developing the theory requires a good link with interdisciplinary and intercultural approaches for deepening and broadening the findings in Brown and Levinson's politeness sub-field.

Ultimately, the strength of Brown and Levinson's theory always remains in essence that we cannot deny the human behavioural incentive; politeness is communicated for a purpose, like a baby cries out for a reason. Politeness in my study is viewed as a utility for practical application. Despite the fact that Brown and Levinson's approach is speaker focused, (and is criticised because of its theoretical bias to the speaker's side without considering the hearer and contextual variation), we should not label this theory out-of-date because it is able to assist in figuring out how the speaker tactfully uses a particular strategy to achieve a goal. The theory can also show how the speaker masters the language, disregarding ready-made expressions. It is impossible that a piece of research can represent all the dimensions of politeness, but it should be able to explore some truths from its own scope of specialisation and the available data.

## II. Theoretical Approaches to Intercultural Communication

My study aims to reveal politeness strategies in interaction across cultures. The accomplishment of the research task requires supporting knowledge about intercultural communication. The studies selectively mentioned in this thesis relate directly to my research questions thematically and contemporarily. This group of major theories provide a key delineation of cultural barriers which can become the main cause of communicative

problems. They also describe how one's first language culture (L1 culture) can be a part of those pragmatic meanings, including emic politeness in conversations between interactants from different cultures which can account for the discrepancies between conveying by one side and interpreting by the other.

## **1. Hall**

In the area of intercultural communication, previous studies demonstrate different communicative styles between Easterners and Westerners. Hall (1976, 1990, 2000) introduces the terms "low-context" and "high-context" communication. The first describes the communicative culture in the US, Canada, Germany, Scandinavia, Australia and New Zealand, the latter mainly refers to the communicative culture in Asian and Arab countries. Wurtz (2005) gives a precise explanation of this concept:

"low-context communication occurs predominantly through explicit statements in text and speech – the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code. High-context transactions are the reverse. This context involves implying a message through that which is not spoken; messages include other communication cues such as body language, eye movement, para-verbal cues, and the use of silence"

(Wurtz 2005)

The different characteristics between the "high-context" and "low-context" cultures are summarized by Beer (1997) as follows:

### **High Context**

- Less verbally explicit communication, less written/formal information
- More internalised understanding of what is communicated
- Multiple cross-cutting ties and intersections with others
- Long term relationships
- Strong boundaries – who is accepted as belonging vs. who is considered an "outsider"
- Knowledge is situational and relational.
- Decisions and activities focus on personal face-to-face relationships, often around a central person who has authority.



## **Low Context**

- Rule oriented, people play by external rules
- More knowledge is codified, public, external, and accessible.
- Sequencing, separation of time, space, activities, and relationships
- More interpersonal connections of shorter duration
- Knowledge is more often transferable
- Task-centred. Decisions and activities focus around what needs to be done, division of responsibilities.

### **1. The Structure of Relationships**

**High:** Dense, intersecting networks and long term relationships, strong boundaries, the relationship more important than the task.

**Low:** Loose, wide networks, shorter term, compartmentalised relationships, the task more important than the relationship.

### **2. Main Types of Cultural Knowledge**

**High:** More knowledge is below the waterline, implicit, patterns are not fully conscious, and are hard to explain even if you are a member of that culture.

**Low:** More knowledge is above the waterline, explicit, consciously organised.

The theory suggests that communication will be more effective when the speaker realizes what the other prefers, and has been communicatively habituated to his/her society. Also, Hall's findings can justify a situation where the communicative engagement from one side does not meet the expectation of the other or causes considerable confusion to the hearer.

## **2. Ting-Toomey**

An important theory of interpersonal communication between people from different cultures is formulated by Stella Ting-Toomey (1985; 1988; 2005; 2009; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi 1998; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel 2003). Her Face-Negotiation Theory mainly differentiates between collective cultures and individualistic cultures in communicative methods. The findings explicate Eastern communicative culture, which can form part of the supporting information for my research about Thais whose cultural roots are Chinese and Indian, known as the "Indochinese culture".

Ting-Toomey's collectivist culture focus group was the Chinese, the Japanese, the Taiwanese, the Korean, and the Mexican; her individualist culture focus group was the American and the German. It was found that individual cultures are likely to use self-face concerns, while collective cultures are likely to use other-face and mutual-face concerns, as termed "I-identity" and "we-identity" orientations, respectively (Ting-Toomey 1985, 1988, cited in Ting-Toomey & Kurogi 1998:189).

To engage in an interpersonal conflict, members of an individual culture (the American respondents) use directness and a dominating conflict style; members of collective cultures (the Taiwanese and Chinese respondents) use indirectness and avoiding, obliging conflict styles (Cocroft & Ting-Toomey 1994, cited in Ting-Toomey & Kurogi 1998:193; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel 2003:139). Discrepancies can occur when values are in contrast. According to Ting-Toomey, the literature suggests that the US culture, which represents individualistic values, considers obliging and avoiding styles as "negatively disengaged", whereas collectivistic cultures which focus on "relational facework" prefer avoiding and obliging styles, and consider that a compromising style satisfies the expectation of relational, identity-based respect and considerateness (2005:80-81). It can be connoted that the use of a dominating style by a speaker from an individual culture is potentially judged as negative by a conversation partner from a collective culture because the dominant speaker fails to save the other's face or mutual face during an interaction. These discrepancies can justify misunderstandings and dissatisfaction which subtly occur in international negotiation. Conversely, as I see it, if the different styles are managed properly, they can create a positive result like magnetic attraction; for example, when a dominant speaker meets with a speaker who adopts an obliging style.

Based on Hofstede's cross-cultural survey of power distance (1991), Ting-Toomey reveals different power distributions during interaction. Members of large power distance cultures, like those from Eastern Asia, accept unequal power distributions. They are reliant on hierarchical roles. One's social position determines one's power for rewarding and sanctioning the other. Members of this type of culture are familiar with vertical facework interactions which characterise their verbal etiquette in society (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi 1998:190).

Facework in large power distance cultures is described as follows:

“...individuals are concerned with vertical facework interaction (i.e. maximizing the respect-deference distance via formal interaction). In initial conflict situations (i.e. low salient conditions), high-status power individuals may use indirect conflict strategies...By occupying high-status positions, high-status individuals are assumed to have “big face” and they can afford to be benevolent to the subordinates...In high salient conflict situations, however, when high-status members feel compelled to confront low-status members directly, it means that the conflict situation is beyond “face tolerance” threshold level. The direct confrontation between the unequal status parties signals that the conflict situation is urgent and volatile. High-status members in large power distance cultures would tend to use identity and relational shaming styles to induce compliance. Low-status members or subordinates would tend to use obliging, avoiding and neglecting conflict styles more than their cohorts in small distance cultures.”

(Ting-Toomey & Kurogi 1998:195-196)

The explanation above can be bridged to my study of Thai culture which is classified by Hofstede as a large power distance culture. Furthermore, as shown at the end of the passage, other-face conflict styles are socialised within a society with a large power distance culture. When people in this society communicate with others who have higher social statuses and higher power, known as “upward communication” (Simpson 1959), they communicate indirectly to cope with the unequal power, rather than putting communicative effort into explicating their own perspectives or demands clearly. Such emic politeness of large power distance cultures can possibly be transferred when the person deals with communication in interaction across cultures.

Considering timing—when a face-saving act occurs in a conflict situation, Ting-Toomey (2005, Ting-Toomey & Kurogi 1998) detects facework in two aspects: preventative facework and restorative facework. Preventative facework strategies are actions aimed to “hide, soften, ward off, prevent, or block... and to control the occurrence of future events that one expects will foster an appearance of weakness or vulnerability, particularly when it is

presumed that such events will impair one's image or the image of those whom one represents" (Brown 1977:278-279, cited in Ting-Toomey & Kurogi 1998:191). A restorative facework strategy is an action aimed at "repair[ing] damaged or lost face occurring in response to events that have already transpired. Thus, it is past-oriented and defensive. It reflects action designed to re-establish or reassert one's capability and/or strength after one feels they have been damaged" (Brown 1977:281, cited in Ting-Toomey & Kurogi 1998:191). In a cultural comparison, Ting-Toomey discusses that individualists tend to use restorative strategies, while collectivists tend to use preventive strategies because of the difference between "I-identity" and "we-identity" values (2005:79-80).

The theory proves that culture shapes the way a person masters utterances and conducts conversational behaviours. The individualists are not constrained by interdependent self-concepts; expressions about relationship concerns are less expected than in collective cultures whose members are mindful of presenting their positions in relation to the others and keeping interpersonal harmony. Face threats are avoided and deference is shown to underline unequal power. Still, in cases where power between interactants is not significantly different, I put forward the view that the collectivists value similarity, 'associating oneself to the other' more than being seen as 'someone among the others', by their nature of giving priority to group/mutual interest over individual interest, so expressions of disagreement are mitigated, or silence, as a method of reaction, is used to cover different perspectives. Ting-Toomey's findings indicate that the collectivists' facework is future-oriented. The user of a preventive strategy is conscious of the predictability of communicative results and sequences; hence, they engage to block anticipated acts of face attack. My study will further assess this collectivistic facework in the Thai case.

### **3.O'Driscoll**

O'Driscoll (2007) suggests the applicability of Brown and Levinson's theory in intercultural pragmatics. He demonstrates this using the example of everyday expressions from a grocer to customers at the checkout counter: "Anything else?" (More?) and "Is that all?" (Finished?).

“At first, imagine that the customer is accustomed to MORE?. (In my experience, this is the case with British and Greek customers.) If s/he gets asked FINISHED? instead, s/he may suspect s/he is being insulted. Is the shop worker implying a wish to be rid of me? How rude! Now imagine the customer is accustomed to FINISHED? (very common in Flanders and, I am told, in Portugal). If s/he gets asked MORE? instead, s/he is likely to feel uneasy at this apparently unwonted salesmanship and consequently imposed upon.”

(O’Driscoll 2007.:476)

The “move forward” according to the feature of Brown and Levinson’s positive face attending, and the “move away” according to the feature of satisfying negative-face wants, can occur in reverse between the speaker’s intention and the hearer’s perception—the intention to convey positive-face concern is perceived by the other as a negative-face transgression, and the intention to convey negative-face concern is interpreted as neglecting a positive-face appealing act. This face mismatch concept illustrates how misunderstandings between people from different cultures can occur, as O’Driscoll (2007:475) exemplifies the FTA in the given situation:

“...whenever the “unexpected” alternative is used, the relevance of the positive-negative distinction as formulated here reveals itself. The customer who expected MORE? but gets FINISHED? experiences a threat to positive face; the one who expected FINISHED? but gets MORE? feels a threat to negative face. Thus an FTA emerges. But this FTA is not inherent to the speech act itself; rather it depends on the customer’s emotional response.”

Face mismatch can lead to the interpretation of im/politeness because the FTA is sensed by people from other cultures who do not understand the politeness-signalling discourses and rules of behavioural conducts in the particular society.

Although the original presentation merely exemplifies the very simple point that norms of behaviour for specific situations vary across cultures, the positive / negative face mismatch is valuable in this study of intercultural communication. O’Driscoll describes that (1) this parameter is free from culturally-based values about politeness judgment and (2) it is not the complete Brown and Levinsonian concept of positive/negative (1987) but rather a simplified one that operates on only one parameter of the relationship. In my study of interaction across cultures, I apply this concept in a different manner. The production and interpretation of the utterances in the case study are not totally free from the first-language

culture. People use the resources of their own social values acquired from past experience to assist their communication.

In connection with this fundamental concept, Nishida (1999) explains that people use the pre-acquainted knowledge of their own culture to process the perceived new information in interaction across cultures. Since people repeat the schema-based behaviour in their culture—one interacts with the other in the same pattern—the cultural schema is stored in their memory. This past experience is applied to determine the meaning when entering a familiar situation. From another perspective, I argue that in the situation of encountering a person from a different culture, the interactants find many interactive cues foreign to them, so they engage in their communication—resolving ambiguities, organising the language of transmission, conducting appropriate behaviours—through borrowing the knowledge of their first-language culture, but this cross-cultural adaptation can succeed or fail in coping with those conversational situations. The face mismatch between intention and reception can happen in relation to cultural influences.

#### **4. Žegarac and Pennington**

In their review of studies about pragmatic transfer in interaction across cultures, Žegarac and Pennington (2008) state that ‘pragmatic transfer’ concerns “the projection of existing knowledge to new situations of communication” (2008:161). It is noted that the transfer is done by way of adaptation or modification rather than a fixed, rigid use—“the reliance on existing pragmatic knowledge in solving new communication problems leads to modifications of that knowledge” (2008:161). What can be culturally transferred to new situations can include value judgments and pragmatic conventions—the expression of a particular act accepted by people from a certain culture. The two theorists state that unlike grammar or semantic knowledge, culture is not self-contained knowledge; it tends to be integrally applied and is dependent on other knowledge.

In a similar way, Nishida’s Cultural Schema Theory in the area of cross-cultural communication (1999) explains that people use their acquired knowledge of their own culture to process perceived new communicative situations in interactions across cultures. Since

people repeat the schema-based behaviour of their culture—when one interacts with the other in the same pattern, the cultural schema is stored in their memory. Past communicative experiences are applied to conceptualise what is going on when entering a familiar situation. However, Nishida defines a broad concept about cultural transfer which covers many kinds of culture-related communication behaviours, while Žegarac and Pennington specify ‘pragmatic transfer’ which defines a smaller scope for linguistic studies particularly.

Žegarac and Pennington suggest that cultural transfer, a type of problem-solving behaviour in communication (2008:158), is divided into negative and positive aspects. These two aspects are not classified by communicative effects—whether they indicate miscommunication or success. Negative transfer describes “an unwarranted generalization from L1 pragmatic knowledge to a communicative situation in L2. Negative pragmatic transfer thus leads to imperfect pragmatic competence in L2, but imperfect pragmatic competence does not necessarily cause communicative failure” (2008:144). Positive transfer is not easy to identify because there is no obvious evidence of it in linguistic form. However, it can be evinced by pointing out the indicators that “some aspect of a learner's L1 pragmatic knowledge is relevant to performance in L2...[thus] it is reasonable to assume that the learner's knowledge about communicating in L1 has contributed to his/her ability to communicate in L2” (2008:145).

Žegarac and Pennington explain that pragmatic transfer can be investigated empirically. In a quantitative approach, patterns of pragmatic transfer can be explored through a statistical analysis, while in qualitative approach, “the meticulous description and explanation of a sample of naturally occurring data from a small number of individuals, sometimes only one” (2008:144) is the indication of how pragmatic transfer occurs in relation to the speaker’s first language culture.

In answer to whether Thai communicative culture supports or obstructs politeness displays in diplomatic talk, my study investigates the verbal acts used by Thai speakers to accomplish crucial acts relating to the protection of their national interests during the period of political crisis. Cultural implications in Thai politeness performance are discussed in reference to previous findings about Thai communicative culture in both linguistics and the socio-psychological field. Knowledge of pragmatic transfer is combined with the face

mismatch concept (O'Driscoll, 2007) which can determine the feasibility of politeness miscommunication—the intention to form an interpersonal connection is perceived as a territorial intrusion, for example.

## 5. Giles

Communication Accommodation Theory by Howard Giles (1973, Giles & Smith 1979; Giles & Ogay 2007) investigates the linguistic accent adaptation process in interpersonal communication. Although my study is not sound and accent research, Communication Accommodation Theory can be a guideline for capturing interpersonal adaptation during interaction. According to Giles' theory, an interactant can take one of three directions with respect to his/her use of language forms to gain approval or to show distinctive interactions with others:

- **Convergence:** This is defined as “the process whereby individuals shift their speech styles to become more like that of those with whom they are interacting” (Giles & Smith, 1979:46). Convergence is found in the speaker who wants cooperation and approval from a conversational partner. Convergence features can be speech rate, accent, simplification, and/or the use of key words in the partner's language.
- **Maintenance:** The speaker maintains his/her speech characteristics.
- **Divergence:** The speaker uses his or her distinctive communicative style more than usual, for example, when members of minorities stress their accent in public to make an impression about their identity.

Besides the small scope of accent study, the theory can be applied to explore other elements of interpersonal adaptation. In my research, it is necessary to observe how the interactants converge to each other as a way to satisfy face wants, for example, code-switching into the language of the hearer, the adjustment of talking speed and speech style to show recognition of the non-native speaker's identity.



## **6.Critique of Cultural Studies**

Oishi et al's study(2005) presents comments about cultural studies in threefold. Firstly, the differentiation between individualism and collectivism are simplified. The recent findings confirm that these concepts are actually multi-faceted. Research subjects from collective societies appear to be individualist in many situations. Secondly, statistical results are not sufficient to pinpoint what culture is individualist and which is not. Lastly, social changes have become more internationalised in the last three decades, which means that those differences between cultures according to individualism and collectivism concepts are not absolute.

Oishi et al. also discuss the deviations found in the research which measured the differences in individualistic values and collective values in order to test those major findings about individualism and collectivism. However, it was concluded that the new findings could not confirm their validity to reject those major theories. The research teams pointed out that it “might be in part due to methodology limitations” in those tests (2005:303)—for example, the variations in the findings were caused by different sub-groups within a country. Moreover, in the studies of talk in a working context, it is found that differences in negotiation styles are consistent with the major theory (See Literature Review). Most importantly, there is no need for this research to reveal those sub-groups. Primarily, the research mission is serving diplomatic jobs which represent the state and government. Therefore, the scope is to describe culture at a national level with an understanding of the role of cultural socialisation by the state.

I put forward a view that more attention should be paid to descriptive qualitative methods, because attempts to measure a culture may lead us to nowhere as long as political and historical factors are not taken into consideration. Also, we have to be more aware that the science of humanities is flexible by nature. It is also time to find research alternatives to cultural studies which highly depend on the opinions of subjects from different groups. These studies tend to jump to conclusions that people from that culture behave the same way in different situations and contexts, without adequately discussing the social atmosphere those subjects live in and how it influences their behaviour.

The differentiation between individualism and collectivism is still valid if we accept the importance of influence of cultural roots and how they have survived in the globalised era. Root-culture enforcement against internationalisation has to be maintained because its

function is the political control of the society and it is a tool used by the community itself to seek opportunities in modern mixed-culture environments.

Furthermore, I put forward a conclusive view that culture may not perfectly suit a quantitative approach. The expectation of achieving accurate cultural findings is faulty due to the nature of human sciences. Culture can be measured if the issues to be measured are precise; minor context details and other variables are well-controlled. However, insight in cultural studies requires descriptive capabilities and a variety of materials to study, rather than high dependence on subjects (what people say can present truth about them). Culture researchers with high interpretative abilities may have to access to various supporting cultural sources, such as historical books, contemporary media, festivals, architecture, etiquette of a particular society, and then offer a sensible, resourceful explanation of those relations based upon the evidence.

To clarify Thai culture, which is one of my analytical themes, my study offers a broad picture of Thai culture acquired from a collection of previous primary research from a critical, inside-out perspective. Many of the concepts about Thai culture are subtly interpreted by the researcher who presents a relation of the available evidence. Validating previous studies is not my key concern because they present truth and originality to some extent. Cultural study is a soft science with its basis in contextual flexibility, not statistical results; it is academically visible, but the visibility by scientific method is limited by its nature. Therefore, this research presents the jigsaw of previous findings at the level that fits the research scope and research aims.

### III. Institutional Talk in International Setting

My survey of literature focuses on case studies of talk/speeches/negotiation in business and diplomacy because they directly involve communication across cultures and speaking for the benefit of the speaking side which are the two themes of this research. While conversations in other careers, such as medical and legal work, mostly involve the speaker's obligation and duty, rather pursuing the interests of the speaker's party—businessmen aim for profit and business alliances; politicians and diplomats aim for power. The findings from business talk can contribute to diplomatic conversational studies in terms of negotiation

strategies, communication in official settings, and the role of the speaker in the representation of the organisation. The business speakers seek the company's best interests and work within the constraints of the company's policies, whereas diplomatic speakers pursue national interests and their work serves the state and government institutions. The previous studies show characteristics of the communication in those speech domains, as well as addressing communicative problems for further study.

Diplomacy has been bridged with interaction studies in the research area of media interviews about international issues. The studies show that there is a characteristic of non-straightforward interactive communication (Bavelas et al 1990) in relation to face concerns, such as, avoidance strategies or distancing from the involved person and incidents (Janney 1999), evasion (Harris 1991; Bull 2003a), and equivocation (Bavelas et al.1990; Bull et al. 1996; Bull 2000; Bull 2003b). Anchimbe (2009) studied how the country leaders, Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister, and Jacques Chirac, the French President, managed their conversation in a media interview regarding the reason for the invasion of Iraq which was launched by the US and its military alliance, the data was acquired from CBS, CNN and BBC broadcasts in 2003. Extending the knowledge of politicians' face on TV (also see Bull et al. 1996), Anchimbe explains that in the interview about international affairs, the politicians engage a four-layer face: 1) his own face, 2) the party face, 3) the country face, and 4) the international alliance's face. The last one is needed for international support, the third party or the supporting alliance is mentioned carefully to avoid dissatisfaction. The avoidance strategies presented by Anchimbe (2009) are valence strategy, generalisation strategy, specificity strategy, correction strategy, non-committal strategy, and evidentiality strategy. Answers which are highly dependent on the immediately-posed questions clearly evidence the concept of co-constructed meaning between two interactants—the questioner and the politician. For example, the politician reduces the statement's precision; he corrects and changes the words used by the TV host which can change the audience's perception of the situation, from severe into normal, from specific into general, which motivates the audience to support the speaker and perceive his/her intention of politeness. For example, when the TV host indirectly questions the legitimacy of making war with Iraq because "They [the American spy satellites] don't seem to be picking any mass weapons up or anything other" (Anchimbe 2009:107, original italics), in his answer, Blair replaces the TV host's strong word "mass weapons" by "material" which is a vague, less specific word. "Material" which is a euphemism for "mass weapons" is used for reinforcing his support of the proposal

concerning the warfare: “Well, they are picking up certainly movement of material and one of the thing that Colin Power was talking about yesterday was the movement of material shortly before an inspection took place...”(Anchimbe 2009:107, original italics).

According to Bull’s study about media interviews (1997), the statistical result shows that politicians give evasive answers more often than other public figures, such as, Diana Princess of Wales and Monica Lewinsky. His research does not provide constructive reasoning for the statistical findings which show the amount of times each speaker made evasive answers. As I see it, there are factors in political work which can clarify why the politicians in the case study equivocate more frequently than the others. Firstly, the political speaker does not mainly talk about his/her personal issues and factual sequences. Monica Lewinsky, for example, replied to 89 per cent of questions posed by Jon Snow, in an interview concerning her affair with President Clinton (Bull, 2000); and only 11 per cent of her responses were classified as a “non-reply”— the interviewee does not answer the questions, although some explanations are given. In contrast, leading politicians, for example, Margaret Thatcher replied to less than half of her questions and gave direct answers to only 39 per cent of questions (Harris 1991, cited in Bull 2003:593). In comparison with Monica Lewinsky who was questioned by the media in a manner similar to the law court—to show factual accuracy and to provide proof, the politicians can make higher evasions than Lewinsky because their answers are based on reported information about social issues more than the speaker’s direct experience as in the Lewinsky’s case. The political talk concerns issues concerning others more than the politician, or the politician’s personal life. Thus, the content of political talk contains many social issues with a degree of assumption and prediction, for example, the speaker aims to legitimise their decision-making about a policy; so, the information to transmit is not a plain factual report, but a justification of decision-making, that is, a presentation of vision and a speculation about social expectations. Also, face concern which indicates political image determines political success. This is why the talk is not developed like a courtroom conversation as in Lewinsky’s case. An in-depth discussion about the institutional context in the political talk, if the previous studies had made one, would have effectively revealed the complex scenes of the case study.

Media interviews about international affairs have been extended into cross-cultural studies. Weilin, Xiaoying and Clark (2008) compare evasion strategies between two cultures: the observation of the state leaders from China and the USA in answer to questions about

North Korea's nuclear test in press conferences. Their findings show that the US leaders tend to use overt evasion strategies, namely, declining to answer, attacking the question or the journalist, questioning the question, stating or implying that the question has already been answered, and apologising; on the contrary, the Chinese leaders mainly use covert evasion strategies, such as, making political positions or points, giving incomplete replies, and ignoring questions.

Besides the conclusion of communicative dissimilarities regarding cultural differences, the study by Weilin et al. (2008) could have been better fulfilled by the addition of a comparative analysis regarding institutional roles and diplomatic aims—tasks, missions, policy, and international environment—between the two countries. The Chinese leaders cannot pro-actively show their political standing against North Korea, since their relationship with North Korea is far more intense than with the US, especially since they have shared ancient historical experiences and formed the pan-communist countries in the Cold War. Moreover, the “far” and “close” distance of the country's border should be considered. North Korea is very close to China, the border connection is like a conjoined twin, one having the other in mind in speaking is inevitable because the relation is inseparable; what one says could create a butterfly effect on the other. Making an offensive statement about North Korea, or making an open declaration of an adversarial position could put China at risk of an unnecessary diplomatic incident and security problems if the two neighbouring countries were clearly in a state of distrust. All of these are institutional contexts that should be brought into the discussion of the study of institutional talk.

My research is different from the previous studies mentioned above because its data are not derived from media interviews with a large attending audiences. The investigation of bilateral diplomatic meetings in this study can reveal politeness strategies for speaking with the diplomatic representatives of the other country as the target hearers in a closed reception room at the office building. Thus the speakers have less concern for third parties or overhearers (Goffman 1981) than in the conversational situations featured in the media, as in the previous studies which investigated televised events, where the speakers handled both interpersonal communication and mass communication at the same time.

Burhanudeen (2006) examines linguistic choices in diplomatic speeches delivered by the heads of states and international organisation leaders at international conferences. This

research identifies the characteristics of speech in the diplomatic domain. Diplomatic speech is goal-governed; the speech is directed to serve diplomatic goals. Some forms and vocabularies are frequently used in this field, such as, assist, peaceful, resolution, fairer, unity, collectively, reaffirm, the emphasis of “we”, “us” and “our”, and conventional politeness markers, in order to promote international relationship, world peace, and cooperation. “Such linguistic norms and values force diplomats to communicate amicably despite the issues of ethnolinguistic vitality, cross-cultural differences, as well as soften sharp differences in opinions” (Burhanudeen 2006:50). The show of cordiality varies by cultures in details, although the speeches are conducted in English. Burhanudeen shows that the speeches of the leaders from Muslim countries are composed outside the normal conventions of English. The rhetorical style is more creative and may sound foreign to an English-speaking audience. Salutations used by Muslim leaders in an international conference are more precise to the addressees—the saluted persons are identifiable rather than vague, for example, an Afghan speaker salutes: “Our gracious host, Honourable Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, Chairman of the 10th session of the Islamic Summit Conference”, “Your Majesties, Your Royal Highnesses, Your Excellencies, Brothers and Sisters, Assalam o Alaikum (Peace be upon you.)” (Burhanudeen 2006:41), instead of “Mr. Chairman, meeting participants”, or “Ladies and Gentlemen” as in the greetings by the leaders of English-speaking countries. Furthermore, Muslim speakers frequently add close-relationship signifiers, such as, “fraternal”, “warm” and use a greater variety of rhetorical styles.

Considering the speech scripts presented in Burhanudeen’s article, I found that the linguistic choices that the Muslim speakers used could have a significant emotional effect on the audience, more than adherence to the formal conventions of English for public speaking as we have generally experienced before. This technique makes the speeches more remarkable and impressively existent in memory. Muslim English exalts the value of the audience and sublimely describes the speakers’ experience beyond a simply realistic sense. The effects of their well-composed speeches can be as high as a beautiful song. It can be inferred that Muslim countries’ communicative style in diplomatic speaking is not based on accuracy of information and reasoning based on realistic views. The evidence as shown in the above examples, and high-frequency of uses of words for emotional effects in the speeches, indicate that the diplomatic relationship is highly valued. Their task of diplomacy is complexly built upon forming close relationships and mutual trust. Their diplomatic speech is highly based on the inside world—perception, feelings, and beliefs, to create a preferable

global condition. This approach is not soft and submissive, but an actively motivated through the consistent reminder of a strong sense of solidarity in fighting together for peace—the repetition of “we must...” (Burhanudeen 2006:49), “we must stick to our original resolve to speak **in one voice**” (2006:48, my emphasis); the application of military vocabularies and the authoritative speech style (2006:48), such as, “our **obligation** to **defend** what we stand for requires that we reassert and vigorously **defend** our **commitment** to the peaceful resolution of international conflict” (2006:45); the enormous feeling and absolute terms are marked, such as, “...we would like to express our **conviction** that...” (2006:43), “my **most** sincere thanks...” (2006:43, my emphasis). These word and phrase choices show that diplomatic communication is not always soft and compromising.

The argument that cultural differences affect the outcomes of diplomatic negotiations is evidenced by Cohen’s study (1991, 1997) which examines cultural barriers in diplomatic communication, influenced by Hall’s concept of high-context and low-context communication (1976, 1990). Cohen asserts that failure to capture and appreciate the culture of the conversational partner can bring about serious consequences to talk.

Cohen’s book *Negotiating Across Cultures: Communication Obstacles in International Diplomacy* (1991), in a summary by Glaser (2005), shows differences in negotiation styles. It is found that high-culture negotiators tend to be context-sensitive; their interpretation is fixed with the presented utterances. The acquired meanings is far beyond the evidence which appears in language forms. The messages imply interpersonal relations and contextual meanings. In contrast, the negotiators from individualistic cultures de-emphasise their contextual involvement and personal relationships. They have a central focus on the task to accomplish or working scope. The communication is more direct and explicit. They have little patience with rhetoric, allusion, or complex etiquette. Low-context negotiators regard the issues as separable from their personal relationships; communicative efficiency is prioritised; their method is “getting to the point” in the early stage and guiding the other to see concrete outcomes. This may seem foreign to people from collective cultures that place the primary value on relationships, so they tend to prolong the stage of relationship establishment in conversation.

Additionally, there are discrepant senses of time. It was found in Cohen’s international negotiation study that individualistic cultures tend to have time concerns in

conversational conduct. Focusing on schedule; the low-context negotiators see that there is a time limit for each activity. On the other hand, in collectivist cultures, a time frame for each activity is not strictly fixed. Time is independent from the sense of being. Past, present and future, are perceived as connected and united rather than divided. For high-context negotiators, the sense of being is not in an urgent, temporary time, but circled and more permanent. Consequently, their negotiation process is quite slow. The point of the issue is not developed very clearly because their conversation is not geared for efficiency and time-saving. Their utterances lack the quality of precision. The conversational moves are likely to deviate from the sole focus; the conversation is moved in multiple directions with a holistic perspective towards the issues, i.e., a tendency to perceive a connection of many issues.

High-context negotiators devote more time to building relationships; they take a long view in the cultivation of the relationship for the present and future relational work. Their positions are not declared clearly; showing disagreement is avoided. In contrast, low-context negotiators focus more on clarity of expression and scope of issues separate from personal relations. Their negotiation is developed in relatively objective ways.

In terms of motivation instrumentality, the low-context negotiators are familiar with the “factual-inductive mode of persuasion”—presentation on the basis of facts and logical argument; the high context negotiators tend to use the “axiomatic-deductive mode of persuasion”; they tend to raise the absolute truth which is accessible by intuition or the truth above explanation by physical senses. These different communication styles can lead to unintelligibility in cross-cultural encounters since factual details are not detected by the high-context negotiator, while the low-context negotiators find facts and logical arguments more persuasive. They may deny absolute truth which needs no challenging questions in other cultures, and gear the discussion towards an empirical proving process.

Considering Cohen’s findings about methods of persuasion, we can foresee communicative obstacles in the meetings of negotiators of different kinds. It is probable that a high-context negotiator will interpret a get-to-the-point style as neglecting the value of building a relationship; while the low-context negotiator may find the counterpart’s communication confusing because many irrelevant issues are raised, the expressions are unclear, the intentions are not understandable. I visualise this comparison of thought processes as the express train and the normal train. The express train symbolises low-context



communication, it runs to the destination as quickly as possible, while the normal train symbolises high-context communication, it stops at many stations to pick up the passengers. The speaker is thinking about many factors during utterance production.

Furthermore, Cohen adds that in international negotiation, appealing to national pride and giving equal treatment are necessary for people from every nation. Some negotiators are sensitive to the mention of history which inflicts national suffering from an international conflict in the past. Recalling such incidents may lead to interpersonal dissociation.

Lastly, there are different interpersonal communication management styles for how the relationship is defined. Negotiators from hierarchical cultures consider the relationship as that of subordinate to superior, which is influenced by the social values in their societies, so they see that it is appropriate to make one-sided demands; the stronger party is expected to have a moral duty in providing support and assistance. On the other hand, negotiators from egalitarian societies, for example, The United States or Germany, favour equality in a relationship, so they react more independently with less concern for power differences between the encountering persons. This difference in perspectives about relationships also affects the selection of topics, which potentially causes conflict in talk. For example, representatives from North American and Northern European countries often raise the issue of human rights—freedom of expression according to democratic law, whereas this concept is not completely accepted by the counterparts from hierarchical societies where respect and obedience are foremost.

All in all, Cohen broadly presents the differences of Eastern and Western cultures in negotiation styles. Although there has been a growth of international negotiation studies in the following years, some of them analyse on a minor scope, nation by nation, or analyse differences within groups from Western cultures, but still there is a lack of analysis in politeness, especially linguistic modification in negotiation (Brett et al 1998a, 1998b; Morris et al 1999, 2004; Gelfand & Brett 2004).

With regard to cross-cultural communication in a business context, Spencer-Oatey's research (2007, 2009) addresses the issue of face expectations—"a mismatch between the attribute claimed and the attribute perceived" (Spencer-Oatey 2007:644). Her case study (2009) reveals the contrast of social values surrounding hospitality in British and Chinese

cultures, which influenced the judgment of the situation and the utterances. Her approach is not language-based, but it is an investigation of overall behaviours in rapport management in an intercultural encounter. She explores many components of the event, including conducting introspective interviews with the Chinese audience after a business speech delivered by the British Chairman. The speaker's confidence about his company's achievements in business, displayed positive attributes, "I am not weak and incapable", this went against what the Chinese audiences expected. The speech was judged as unsatisfactory by many Chinese hearers. They revealed that the British speaker missed the key point of expressing gratitude for the Chinese company which had provided financial support. The British speaker, on the contrary, aimed to make an impression in terms of his company's creditability and proficiency in the pursuit of social approval for himself and his own company.

The different speech values presented show a communication gap in intercultural communication. The level of intelligibility is not just on the language level—it is also a matter of the hearer's cultural interpretation of what is said. Collective cultures value people with the capability to harmonise with others, for example, able Asian students do not like to "stand up and speak out"; they avoid over-dominance in the classroom, and tend to praise other classmates' ability (Rojjanaprayon 1997; Chaidaroon 2003). Of course, some able Asian students do not follow this norm, but the social friction for being different is high. The individualist society advocates courage in one's social life, being the centre of attention; expressing self-confidence is encouraged—to be someone among the others. People from a collectivist society, in contrast, are instructed to act as "no-one among the others"—the person is expected to harmonise with other people and the social atmosphere. Humility and self-degradation is always displayed to win social approval.

Spencer-Oatey identifies the relation of face and identity. She suggests that facework is dynamically handled with multi-facets of identity over the interaction. While face is temporarily diffused in the frame of the interaction; it is associated with positively evaluated attributes that the claimant wants others to acknowledge (Spencer-Oatey 2007:644). Identity, or the attributes that help an individual locate him/herself in the social world, is more permanent (2009:140), for example, a person has the national identity of an Indian, both inside and outside of his social interaction, but this identity can involve facework only when the interactional opportunity opens for him to show this. People have multi-aspects of identity, for instance, the person considers himself a man, a father, a capable guy, a sporty

man, a manager, middle class, a Christian, a kind middle-aged man, and so on. Spencer-Oatey argues that each facet of identity as mentioned is selected to present in association with the threat/loss/gain of interactional face; similarly, Schlenker and Pontari's study (2000) suggests that people try to control information about themselves in face-to-face communication.

The mismatch of identity shown can be problematic in interaction across cultures. Usually, the speaker unconsciously brings their cultural face—what to express and what to suppress about identity in their social norm—into the situation of an encounter with people from a different cultural background; the claim of face, hence, fails because the other does not conceive this intention. Spencer-Oatey's interview data reveals the prioritisation of Chinese face-sensitive traits in self-presence; face-driven conflict is likely to occur when the set of social values are adopted in the evaluation of identity claimed by the other who does not share the same cultural background:

Chen: One thing is that we should not let people say we are stingy; secondly, we should not give the impression of being too weak; thirdly we should negotiate in a friendly manner.

(Spencer-Oatey 2009:149)

The Chinese informant uses “we” in his explanation of what is accepted in his society—“we” refers to most Chinese including him. O'Driscoll (1996) states that culture-specific face is a cultural construct; it is not the same as Brown and Levinson's dual face (1987) which is an individual's psychological desire in relation to the conversation partner. Culture-specific face “exists by virtue of the value-judgements of other people” (1996:14). Culture-specific values, as in the example above become the indicator or the criteria for judgement because the social members are guided about how one should behave by the social rules developed by other social members, which differs from personal value-judgements in Brown and Levinson's approach (individual's goal-govern politeness). This personal satisfaction includes an individual's preferences which are independent from what the society dictates and the social values that the person has rational reasons to follow.

Spencer-Oatey (2009) investigates the conflict between a Chinese and a British company at a business reception. The visitors, representatives from a Chinese company

which is a business partner, requested to stay in the UK longer than the scheduled two days. After the reception activity, a British staff member who took the role as the host and reception organiser gave an interview about the dissatisfaction of the British party:

Tim: Well, I had some advance warning um of their demand, yes, I wasn't unhappy, but I felt, um, there were two concerns for me, one I wanted to make sure that they, when they left English, they had a good impression of our company, so that was important. But secondly, it was also important to us, to our company that we didn't get involved in any additional expenditure.

(Spencer-Oatey 2009:151)

Spencer-Oatey states that Tim's comment illustrates the British's long-term goals. Tim needs to consider not only his goal in the current situation, but also his company's long-term business goal (2009:151). Spencer-Oatey's conclusion is reasonably accurate in a British cultural frame, but the weakness is the superficial analysis of the Chinese side.

In the case study, the Chinese informant said: "One thing is that we should not let people say we are stingy." It is generally known that paying for a meal for the other is part of Chinese culture which serves as a symbolic act to strengthen the relationship. The refusal of the British to serve their guests to the best of their ability must seriously threaten the Chinese face. This refusal could be interpreted through the Chinese cultural norm as "you are not important to me" and "there is no special relationship between us apart from one of duty/business". On the other hand, the Chinese guests would target a long-term relationship. The request to stay longer was made without any monetary concerns, and they would expect willingness and generosity according to the value of other-benefit which sustains peoples' connections in collective societies. The refusal of their request in this situation, even done politely, could cause face loss because the Chinese expect and believe that they deserve extra hospitality—they should be treated as important persons in the same way that they treat foreign guests in China. The British, though, in reality, omitted mentioning their money concerns in speaking to the Chinese guests, but explained the company's policy of not involving in additional expenditure. However, the interpretation by the hearers is not limited to utterance layer, but cultural perception. It is possible that the Chinese guests view this refusal as "stingy", so they feel this refusal more strongly than people from another culture because the Chinese culture values giving and self-sacrifice to the other.

To explain the Chinese mind-set which leads to the cultural conflict as aforementioned, I consider that the by-product of the acceptance of this request, if the best possible hospitality had been given, would have been a longer-lasting benefit than the budget within a fiscal year. Business relations for the Chinese value the gaining of long-term support. The Chinese collective culture emphasises the virtue of self-devotion to the other which indicates self-worth—the giver is perceived as the one with ability and morality. Customarily, Chinese people show how much of this quality they have by their willingness to give, usually by voluntarily offers to pay for the other; the relationship is more important than money—the wealth of friends is worth more than the wealth of money; their tradition against Capitalism which supports the competition and success of individuals is well-preserved. Until the present, China is governed by the Communist Party of China. The communist government still plays a key role in the socialisation of Chinese cohesion; regular social gatherings are organised. In a rational outlook, beyond the psychological security of living with friends, one is always available to help his/her friend at any time and in any place, when money cannot. Predictably, Tim's reluctance to provide the best hospitality brought about misgivings among the Chinese business guests because of their familiarity with the virtue of giving, which indicates how much quality the person has. The evaluation of personal attributes and working life is parallel in Asian business; according to Cohen (1997), the two boundaries of personal relationships and business relationships are highly interfaced in collective cultures.

One of the studies in Kádár & Mills' (2011) book *Politeness in East Asia*, is an article by Stefanie Stadler, which discusses oriental politeness in an intercultural setting. It questions and deconstructs the stereotypes of Eastern Asian culture as usually presented by the media and cultural research. She examines the stereotypes in travel guides and tourist websites, business and management literature, pedagogy, and research on East Asian politeness. The study collects the myths about politeness reproduced in the media and in academic research on the one hand, and searches for information from the reality of practice on the other, using two particular meetings, along with checking the hearer feedback. The study does not focus only on conversational language; rather, it encompasses all activities of rapport management.

### **Situation 1**

The British host serves the Chinese visitors tea as part of the hospitality extended to the visitors. Knowing about the Chinese preference for Chinese tea, the host offers the visitors green tea. With long-standing relationships to China and regularly welcoming Chinese visitors, the tea that is served is in fact a gift given to the British host by another Chinese visitor in the past. The Chinese visitors drink the tea, and then the most senior person says: ‘This is very good quality Chinese tea, [name of British host]. Shame it is stale though. You should get some fresh tea the next time. I will bring *you some when I come back.*’ The British host does not respond to the visitor’s remark, but carries on with the negotiation.

(Stadler 2011:110)

### **Situation 2**

The secretary comes in and offers everyone tea, bringing one cup for each person (though rather small, delicate, British-style cups which are not refilled through the course of the meeting). The visitors drink the tea they have been offered and say nothing. The next day, the secretary comes in again and once again brings one mug for each visitor (at the request of the host she brings larger mugs this time rather than the smallish cups of the previous day). Each person is presented with a mug, containing loose tea leaves, which has been filled with hot water. With the words ‘*I don’t need one, I’ve got my own*’ the senior visitor reaches for his bag, takes out a plastic travel mug, containing his own tea leaves at the bottom, and says: ‘Can you fill mine with hot water?’

(Stadler 2011:112)

Undoubtedly, the Chinese behaviours in the case study as above are interpreted by the British informants as confusing; it, of course, draws an interpretation of impoliteness, as Stadler reports in her study. The Chinese offer to bring another pack of tea in the first situation is perceived as an “act of criticism” and in the second situation where, possibly, there is neither intention of politeness nor impoliteness, the Chinese speaker’s insistence to drink his own tea is potentially judged as impolite since it implies a refusal of British hospitality.

Stadler's study addresses an important issue: do we have adequate knowledge of East Asian politeness?; her findings go against the typical conceptualisation of Eastern Asian politeness in current knowledge:

- 1 East Asian people value and exhibit polite, considerate and well-mannered behaviour.
- 2 East Asians are indirect, implicit and suggestive.
- 3 East Asians do not embarrass, shame or criticise in public.
- 4 East Asians are face-conscious and causing others to lose 'face' is unforgivable.
- 5 East Asians are modest and humble.

(Stadler 2011:112)

However, the account for rapport management, as suggested by Spencer-Oatey (2000) and also applied in Stadler's case study, should be used with caution in the identification of politeness in Eastern Asia since the investigation covers all activities involved in the meeting, some of which carry no politeness intentions. However, these actions are brought out and compared with stereotypes of East Asian politeness in the analysis, for example, the desire to drink tea brought from home because of health concerns.

It should not be believed that all activities in social encounters significantly involve facework. Of course, offering food, drinks, or gifts is universally related to positive politeness (Brown & Levinson 1987:129), and certainly, people always control their behaviours for social approval in public spaces; however, some actions which are made during an interaction are done without particular politeness towards the other, for example, taking notes during an interaction does not significantly carry any intention of politeness. Another factor to be considered is that Asian politeness cannot be fully expressed in English or other languages because of the different language resources—lexicons and style, as well as the problem of the speaker's low English fluency; non-native speakers of English tend to utter clearly rather than using indirect strategies in order to avoid misunderstandings. Importantly, Stadler's study can voice the doubts of people from outside the culture about the Asians' actions during the encounter.

Stadler's study reveals a weakness in researching intercultural pragmatics in the respect that using only a situational focus and dialogue analysis cannot create a satisfactory

account if the researcher does not have considerable knowledge, culturally, socially and institutionally, for an in-depth analysis of “acts of meaning” (Bruner 1990, cited in Verschueren & Östman 2009:22) and contextual layers. The study of institutional talk in this field requires an interdisciplinary approach and the researchers’ real experience of integration into the target society of discussion. An alternative interpretation for the second situation is that there is no significant intention of politeness or impoliteness by the Chinese visitor through his refusal of the tea offered by the British. Tea plays a profound role in the Chinese lifestyle and cultural identity. As can be seen in this situation, Chinese people are normally able to differentiate tea leaves, tea type, and tea age. I realised this profound connection when noticing that my Chinese friends brought their own tea from China, although they live in a country with a strong tea-culture like England. The Chinese bring traditional medicines, including herbal tea, wherever they travel in the same way that Muslim people bring the culture of Halal food with them to other countries. Noticeably, some Chinese students carry travel mugs of tea to the library and classrooms; they reveal that it helps concentration in reading, listening, and writing. Also, many Chinese are able to explain tea species and tea quality. The Chinese’s reaction in the second situation of the case study may carry no intention of politeness or offense. He perhaps focuses on work effectiveness on the assumption that tea can increase one’s concentration and energy to work. This goal includes work achievement in the negotiation from the viewpoint about competitiveness in business. Ultimately, a polite response to the Chinese action which seems illogical at the surface: ‘never drink tea from other countries’ is to acknowledge their identity and cultural wisdom.

In both situations, we can see that both sides make a great effort to comprehend the discourse and the behavioural display, but the discrepancy still remains. In the first situation, the British cannot grasp the pragmatic meaning of the Chinese regarding his generous offer to bring another pack of tea with a better quality, particularly for the British hearer. The discourse, ‘This is very good quality Chinese tea, [name of British host]. Shame it is stale though. You should get some fresh tea the next time. I will bring you some when I come *back*,’ is understood by the British informants as a criticism of the served tea. The British informants’ inferential comprehension makes sense, as it is justifiable that the Chinese refusal of the tea prepared for the reception by the British as a symbol of care and attention via convergence to the other’s culture—serving Chinese tea in England—can be decoded as a refusal of relationship establishment. Tea is one of the key details of all receptive activities—the British show an attempt at other-orientation through serving the tea from the conversation



partner's country. However, none of the British informants in Stadler's study has adequate knowledge about the relation of tea to Chinese lifestyle. On the other side, the Chinese overlooks the British's good will on offering tea and habitually insists on drinking his own tea he brought from China without the realisation that he is now in a public space outside his country, and the habit he maintains could be questioned by foreign participants in the event.

From a broader viewpoint, it is possible that this cultural pride in an intercultural encounter involves the national identity socialised by the society. Some nationalisation inputs generated by government, education, and media give citizens a worldview about the self as having a close relation to the national community, and viewing others as people outside the nation. The sense of group belonging and national supremacy is developed profoundly to make people overlook domestic conflicts and create a sense of unity in separation from other national communities. Many governments try to block and deny Western civilisation; their citizens are trained to value domestic traditions. Future research can be carried out to clarify the macro context of socialisation at a national level which influences individuals' verbal behaviours in international settings. This will give a clear picture about a person's frame of thoughts and how s/he subjectively connects with the other during an interaction. China is one of the Asian countries that has intensive socialisation programs, mainly by the communist government, as well as the national habit of regular Chinese meetings which links their eating culture to their social connections. This results in how the Chinese introduce themselves to the outside world in a unified way.

Asian politeness is mainly conceptualised and generalised by major findings about Chinese culture, which are high in quantity. As a result, people from other regions lack the knowledge for the differentiation of the sub-cultures in the Eastern region. The cluster of Asian cultures has been sharply unpacked by Kishan Rana (2009), a former Indian ambassador. His book compares the diplomatic negotiations of five Asian countries: China, India, Japan, Singapore and Thailand. Also, interesting supporting information from his diplomatic experiences and constructive academic surveys in the field of diplomacy are provided.

He gives a depiction of the Chinese negotiation style concerning the concept of "Guanxi" which emphasises "connection" and "access". The manipulative pattern is described, the Chinese:

“...attempt to identify foreign officials who are sympathetic to their cause, to cultivate a sense of friendship and obligation in their official counterparts, and then pursue their objectives through a variety of stratagems designed to manipulate feelings of friendship, obligation, guilt of dependence.”

(Solomon 1985:2, cited in Rana 2009:40)

Rana (2009:40) further discusses that the Chinese key technique is “appealing to the ego of the individual, hailing them as ‘old friend’, projecting the inference that friends should be accommodating; these avowals of friendship are graded in subtle fashion, as needed.” Also, various “status-appealing signals” are used; the usual claim is that the effect of the issue will threaten the country’s dignity if the problem is not solved. The Chinese negotiators strategically view negotiation tasks as “a contest, almost like war” (Cohen 1997:200, cited in Rana 2009:41).

The Chinese capability to make a profound impression works with the softest part of sensitivity. The humanised style moves the hearer from rational to sentimental, and creates an empathic bond which makes the other side more willing to accept than refuse.

In the implementation of foreign policy, the ancient concept of Sino-centric universalism—the self-perception that China is the top of a hierarchical world order, influences how China perceives itself and the world (Zhao 2014:67; Ford 2010). The reality of the country’s size, its military victories in history, and its location close to Russia and India supports China’s independence from the Western countries. China has considerable freedom of decision-making as long as it perceives its own tremendous power in comparison of other countries and has other choices of allies with economic, military, and technological competences.

Rana presents the view that Singapore has gained influence from both Chinese and British cultures. Like China, Singapore underscores interpersonal connections. The Chinese-Singaporean population is the dominant group in Singapore. On the other hand, systematic planning and innovation for the highest performance which leads to capability and creditability are also Singaporean highlights. The latter style was planted by the past colonising governance of Britain. I consider that Singapore is a small state; this characteristic

allows its administration to get things in control, especially human resource development in the country as a whole which is successful with decent supplies of economic demand, and educational and technological demands. The policy has been conducted efficiently; it seems to be one of the most dynamic, modern nations in the region that has actively adjusted itself to the changing world. However, Singapore is a trading state, not a producing state, so its prospects widely depend on international relations. We can expect fluency of English as well as a mixture of Western and Eastern manners in the Singaporean negotiation.

As for Japan, one of the feedbacks about Japanese-style negotiation is “painstaking, tedious, (marked by) extreme patience, distrust of the written words, importance of saving face” (Rana 2009:102). Rana depicts Japanese negotiation characteristics (2009:102):

- 1) The views are not articulated explicitly;
- 2) The negotiators are not very accommodating, especially under the pressure of the counterpart’s unchangeable plans and heavy-handed tactics;
- 3) The pre-negotiation process is given importance—“Nemawashi” (testing the water or information contact); the positions of both sides are taken into account;
- 4) Implicitly calling for support on the principle of an unequal relationship—“an inferior partner’s expectation of benevolence from the superior, imposing an onerous, lifelong responsibility for the latter.”;
- 5) The negotiation and decision processes are slow.

Another prominent diplomatic country in Asia is India. Indian culture is part of the Thai cultural root—Thailand is located on the Indochinese Peninsula; the cultural influence of this region is the combination and simplification of both Chinese and Indian cultures. To clarify differences among Asian negotiators, Rana quotes a foreign ambassador who states that Indian negotiators navigate to get “visible gains from negotiations, to show own success...they love paper, and have an MOU culture” (Rana 2009:73). Diplomatically, MOU refers to the Memorandum of Understanding, a kind of international treaty. The feedback indicates that Indian diplomacy is based on paper documents as evidently written and agreed in bilateral and multilateral relations.

Stephen Cohen, in his chapter “India Which Says No,” notes: Indians are intent on establishing the moral and political equality of their side and are especially touchy over

“status”; they negotiate for information, they have a good institutional memory, better than the Americans; they reflect “a defensive arrogance and acute sensitivity to real and perceived slights” (2002:86, cited in Rana 2009:73-74). Raymond Cohen states that the Indian negotiation style is “...a perceived imputation on their intellectual ability, any sign of arrogance or superiority would produce an explosion” (1997:47, cited in Rana 2009:74). India’s foreign partners point out, “a more self-confident Indian does not say ‘no’ in knee-jerk fashion” (Rana 2009:74).

Finally, Rana elucidates the Thai negotiation style:

“The impressive, soft-spoken and non-confrontational style that characterizes the Thai approach to negotiation can be misunderstood as weakness. In reality, this style is combined with a hardheaded view of Thai interests. The result of an outwardly soft manner is also that Thais are given less credit than they deserve in multilateral diplomacy.”

(Rana 2009: 157)

A Thai official reveals the principles behind those actions that the Thai technique is “gradual, consensus-based, looking to ‘comfort level’ of the interlocutor” (Rana 2009:157). In the light of weaknesses, the Thai style is described by foreign diplomats as “too flexible and accommodating...While soft spoken, Thai negotiators are often rigid and hard to persuade” (Rana 2009:157).

Rana’s study and record of his experience reveals Asian variations in diplomacy; it convincingly shows that cross-Asian differences exist. His study reminds diplomatic people of how important it is to seriously learn about their conversational partners. However, in his discussion, the reasons behind the communication style of each culture as aforementioned are not fully answered. More or less, the joint-studies of diplomatic talk and Thai culture in this research can clarify his findings about Thai diplomatic communication.

## IV.Thai Politeness Studies

In the sub-area of Thai politeness, none of previous studies has dealt with diplomatic conversation data. The research subjects whom have already been examined are university

students (Rojjanaprapayon 1997; Intachakra 2001; Thijittang & Lê 2002; Wannaruk 2008; Barr 2004; Knutson & Posirisuk 2006, Srisuruk 2011), businesspersons (Punturaumporn & Hale 2003), and professionals from hotels and travel agencies (Srisuruk 2011). The data of those previous studies are acquired from mainly questionnaires, interviews, and corpora. These kinds of data lack the quality of spontaneity and actuality. Data from questionnaires, role play, fictions, and corpora are unable to present the dimension of uncertainty of real-life situations in which the subjects have to cope with the stress of self-presence in social surroundings the inability to totally predict what is going to happen and the inability to communicate as accurately as they intend to do. For these reasons, this research aims to explore the naturally-produced utterances during real-time conversation events which are more face-sensitive and challenging for the speakers; they must deal with the uncertainty of situation while the time provided for each turn-taking is very short. In questionnaire-based discourse completion tests, the data is what is in the speaker's mind—what they think that they would say, but in this research, what the speakers actually say is examined.

Another weakness of Thai politeness studies is the rigidity of theoretical application. Although the previous studies about Thai politeness successfully pinpoint Thai politeness characteristics and identify frequently-used politeness strategies, there is inadequate progress at theoretical level. Furthermore, the complex context of institutional talk is not revealed, and communicative goals within a specific context as well as the working conditions of a specific career gain very little attention. More importantly, despite the fact that culture-specific studies about Thai communication are growing, there is a shortage of research which synthesises Thai culture and utterances in analysis. Most Thai studies offer insufficient explanations for interactions across cultures, for instance, identifying cultural meanings in spoken Thai English, showing how people from different cultures treat Thais by using their cultural knowledge about Thai society, or when a mismatch between message conveying and interpretation takes place. Since there is inadequate knowledge about these relevant issues, the study about diplomatic talk which can reveal the cultural aspect deserves more attention.

This research is a pioneering study of genuine institutional talk which will identify politeness strategies used in a particular event and timeframe with challenging external environment for diplomatic work. My study will put Brown and Levinson's theory

(see Chapter 2, Literature Review, Brown and Levinson) into a certain institutional setting and intercultural context. In a diplomatic work setting, the situation carries a high risk—the cost of diplomatic failure is high due to the fact that potential impacts can take place at many levels: the speaker’s career path, his/her organisational mission, the personal relation with the counterpart, and the bilateral relation of the two countries—as well as pressure from time limits and the constraints of the semi-public meeting event. This research also helps fulfil the suggestion by Eelen (2001) that more real-situation data are necessary to address the problems of the current theories. In retrospect, Brown and Levinson’s theory can help clarify conversational techniques in diplomatic dialogues and vice versa, diplomatic data have the potential to suggest more politeness strategies under Brown and Levinson’s theoretical umbrella.

# **Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Analytical Approach**

This research presents politeness strategies found in naturally-occurring utterances. Using this naturally-occurring data is a reasonable alternative to the other available options such as questionnaires. Some previous studies raise issues about data in conversation studies, for example, a questionnaire study cannot fully claim to satisfactorily and accurately describe language production in speaking. For example, Barr's research on speech acts in Thai English (1998) shows that some Thai respondents cannot completely understand the questions and scenarios described in English. Neither do they give adequate time and attention to answering in writing. Possibly, the answers in the questionnaires may not be exactly the same as what the respondents would actually say in the reality of face-to-face communication. By contrast, natural conversation can better present the real utterances that the speaker produces when s/he faces physical friction in a face-to-face social encounter. That is, the conversation takes place within a physical environment, including power constraints in a work setting and time pressures. These factors affect utterance production. With an awareness of the difference between what one plans to say (or the message in the world of thoughts as usually presented in a questionnaire) and what is spoken out in the real situation, this research has chosen to use data from natural occurring conversation. The data presented will comprise selected parts of the data within the scope of this study, focussing on speech acts and linguistic modification.

This chapter mainly reveals the process of data collection and research methodology, consisting of the issues surrounding data collection, approach of analysis, limitation of data presentation, and finally, contextual data, which are connected with the following chapters concerning analytical results and discussion.

## **I. Data Collection**

The data for analysis in this research are natural conversations in diplomatic reception meetings (courtesy calls and general visits). The ethnographic method of non-participant

observation allowed the researcher to experience the real physical atmosphere—persons, voices, actions and settings. Apart from the presentation of the recorded utterances, the researcher can also describe the reactions of participants. The findings of this research are mainly generated from the evidence of naturally-produced utterances or what is said in real situations where speakers do not have the time for a thinking process as long as if they were filling out a questionnaire in writing. Moreover, speakers in real settings have to cope with some nerves when meeting with a foreign guest on duty, while an informant for a questionnaire does not face this unstable and unpredictable situation.

## **A. Data Access**

The data access was done by requesting academic observation and data collection from the Thai state and government agencies, which routinely arrange diplomatic events. The requests were made by formal letter. In the letter content, the ethical code of research conduct and research utility for staff training in the area of foreign affairs were confirmed (see Appendix I). Once permission was granted, the seat for the researcher (as an academic observer of the event) was provided. The foreign guests of the Thai state and government were informed of the academic attendee and the research project prior to the meetings by the host organisations. The researcher also gave a brief about the research implementation to the foreign guests before the meetings started. An agreement that this research would not be involved in confidential sessions was made between the researcher and participatory organisations. Permission for academic attendance could be granted only when the participatory organisations considered the meeting matters to be safe issues. Therefore, this case study broadly reveals the mission of bilateral relation strengthening and cooperative endeavours in general routine diplomatic reception events in Thai organisations.

## **B. Utterance Data**

During the years of data collection, 2009-2011, the researcher stayed in Thailand for about 3-4 months per year. The researcher's attendance of the meetings was allowed



whenever the participatory organisation gave a notification of attendance. During the meeting, the conversation was recorded by a finger-sized MP3 player. Afterwards, those audio files were transcribed for detailed analysis.

There are four organisations which participated in this research:

1. The Bureau of International Relations, Secretariat of the House of Representatives of Thailand (The operational agency which serves the Thai National Assembly)
2. The Department of Protocol, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand
3. The Office of Thailand Trade Representative, the Prime Minister's Office.
4. The National Science Technology and Innovation Policy Office, Ministry of Science and Technology of Thailand

In total, seventeen meeting events were selected for study. The judgment criterion for the selection was the quality of detectable voices from the recorder. Fourteen events were from the Thai National Assembly, the rest from the other three organisations, one event each. Each audio recording lasts for about 20 minutes. The nationalities of the foreign guests were **Polish, Singaporean, Malaysian, Romanian, Russian, New Zealand, Swiss, Turkish, Indian, American (2 events), Australian (2 events), Belgian, Bhutanese, German, Uruguayan**. In these bilateral diplomatic meetings, the participants in each event are from two parties: Thai representatives and a delegation from a foreign country.

## **C.Types of Events and Meeting Participants**

The type of meetings at the Thai National Assembly and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were courtesy calls: formal meetings in which the diplomatic representatives, for example, ambassadors or a political delegation, pay a visit of courtesy to the heads of the government/state offices (Berridge & James 2001:55, Berridge et al 2012:85). The meeting matters were a self-introduction to the leaders of the resident country upon arrival and a farewell to them at the end of the visit. Because of the on-going political conflicts in Thailand during the time in which the conversational events took place, one of the discussion topics

during the 20-minute talk was the situation in that period and the future solution of the residence country.

At the Office of Thailand Trade Representative, the guests were the representatives of foreign companies in Thailand. The guests discussed problems of foreign businesses in the period of national crisis with the Thai government representatives. The meeting at the National Science Technology and Innovation Policy Office was a discussion about cooperative proposals in technology and education. Two foreign educational diplomats from a country of high technological advancement were specifically invited to join the meeting.

The term “observer's paradox”, proposed by William Labov (1972, Labov & Waletzky 1967, see also “observer coding” Kàdàr & Haugh 2013), refers to an observation or experiment which affects the naturalness of the observed/recorded conversational situation due to the presence of the researcher. One of the means which is usually used in research to reduce the impact of the observer's paradox is developing an in-group relationship with informants. However, in my case study, the presence of the researcher did not create a significant impact on the conversation performance of the interactants. Unlike everyday conversation in which the interactants have more freedom of action because there is no monitoring viewer, the events in my case study were semi-public. The speakers were viewed by other participants in the meeting, so their work performance needed high behavioural control, whether the researcher observed the meeting or not.

Normally, seats for academic observers who attend the event for academic purposes are provided because the speakers perform conversational work on the behalf of the state/government. Research is considered necessary for working development, though researchers are not allowed to disseminate sensitive issues that may affect diplomatic relationships. The seats for academics are arranged in the back row. Accordingly, the speakers realise that an academic observer may attend the event. However, most important for the speaker is their goal of achieving their diplomatic mission by talking with their foreign counterpart. Therefore, the speakers seemed to pay more attention to their conversational partners, high-status participants, and the issues of discussion more than the presence of academic observers.

## II. Analytical Methods

### A. Finding a Unified Picture

Working on a macro scale, this research attempts to find commonalities of diplomatic talk from the selected meeting events during Thailand's national crisis. The research interest is not seeking an understanding about one single conversation event. Rather, this study was designed to present an overall conclusion about polite diplomatic English used in Thailand. Instead of pinpointing politeness that the participants of the event agree, the study identifies broad modification principles which can be practically applied or adapted in other similar situations to the diplomatic talk.

Due to the research ethics, and restrictions regarding the anonymisation of subjects, a shift is made from typical politeness research design which focuses on particular persons, to identifying actors by profession. In this research, all Thai speakers are considered as the same agent: the leader of the state/government organisation which hosted the meeting. All foreign speakers are treated as the same agent, the foreign guest of the Thai government/state organisation.

However, the specific context is brought into the discussion when it becomes an important factor for linguistic interpretation. Attention should be drawn to the fact that the absence of contextual description in Brown and Levinson's politeness theory does not mean that context does not exist, but that those contexts are all politeness-related situations which the readers can understand from their experience. In the same way, my research does not offer the detailed context of a single utterance or turn of talk, because this is not required by the selected methodological approach. This method also supports the research aim which strives for the generalisation of politeness principles for diplomacy in interaction across cultures.

### B. The Qualitative Approach

In this qualitative research, the researcher's sensitivity and perception aids in sample selection and data interpretation; this facilitates the identification of minor details which laypeople who do not study linguistics may not capture. This qualitative research presents a

logical analysis which can answer the question of “why” rather than “what”. As I stated in the introduction chapter, my research takes an inside-out approach; a researcher from another culture could not subtly detect and interpret those acts of meanings which involve either Thai culture or diplomatic relations or both. Historical and sociological factors are brought into the discussion of linguistic phenomena. The conversation data are purposively selected to support the research objectives, which is a method of data analysis. It is arguable that this inductive approach would be valuable and valid with especially the particular sorts of data because they are self-evidently of interest.

Linguistic politeness in this research is theoretically judged. This approach is different from seeking opinions and judgment by the participants (Watts 2003), because this study aims at formulating politeness strategies as a means of linguistic modification in cross-cultural communication that can be adopted or adapted in other situations, depending on the speaker. One of the politeness sub-areas is the study of feasibility and predictability (Eelen 2001) together with describing the potentiality of politeness effects. The point of difference for this politeness research is giving weight to supporting evidence from previous studies. Politeness study is unfulfilled if it is monopolised by accuracy-based approaches which mainly rest on statistical assessment. Figures cannot tell the truth by themselves, they must be interpreted first; inevitably this means that there is some invisible law/principle behind the scenes (see Polkinghorne 1983; Kvale 1996; Humphrey & Lee 2004; Anderson 2006; Zawawi 2007). The logical description of language phenomena presented in this thesis should be weighted for more balance in the knowledge based on objective and subjective world.

Accordingly, this rare work of research, more and less, shows the need for humanising the Humanities. The judgment of Humanities research by completely empirical accuracy, departmentalisation, and objectivity undermines the key spirit of this science which, indeed, requires sensitivity and insight from the researcher. The presentation of academic views together with evidential support in qualitative research which is manipulative does not always harm academic credibility. Although the academic authors of the Liberal Arts avoid ambiguity, their successful theories usually generate multiple interpretations (knowledge is the text which is independent from the author) and enrich further academic discussion. This is especially the case for work by non-native speakers of English whose perspectives and language presentation may be partially foreign. This field of study is

expected to offer motivational concepts rather than presenting findings explicitly in a fixed way, especially for descriptive research which does not totally rely on empirical statistics.

“If academic writing in general is not to become a sterile, formula-oriented activity, we have to encourage individual creativity in writing. It is the tension between received conventions and the innovative spirit of the individual that produces good writing in academic disciplines as well as in creative literature.”

(Kachru 1996:311, cited in Woods 1999:7)

According to the explanation above, Kachru preserves the right to be ambiguous. Creative and original thoughts can be found in the academic work of non-native speakers, which can encourage more thoughts and interpretations on the part of the reader. Implicit messages are not always academic flaws, but require subtle consideration and a broader worldview for comprehension, especially for the work of a researcher from a culture which does not pro radical, obvious novelty, but the minor development of challenging concepts in details.

All in all, this qualitative research treats Humanities as a “soft science”; a certain degree of flexibility is allowed because human beings have individuality—people may respond differently in the same context. The judgment of Humanities research by completely empirical accuracy, departmentalisation, and pure objectivity would undermine the key spirit of this science which should value the academic’s sharp observation and insightful interpretation rather than producing statistic and factual results.

## **C. Applied Research**

This research was designed to support training programs for diplomatic people in Thailand; in other words, the study serves diplomatic organisations. This piece of " **research** was developed through a vision of its research genre: creating knowledge which is able to fix practical problems. Therefore, the content is simplified to ensure its ability to be applied by people outside the academic community. Nevertheless, this ease of reading does not equate with simplicity of content, but rather the rejection of being academic for its sake. In this direction, the main theories are regarded as instruments that the researchers adopt to solve real-world problems, not just objects of study. The applied researcher has more concern about

whether their academic innovations can function in reality and meet the demands of the knowledge users. For this reason, academic sophistication is not the key in presentation because it can limit public accessibility to the knowledge.

“...when the distinction between basic[theoretical] and applied research makes good sense philosophically when not interpreted in terms of rigid and exclusive metaphysical categories, and that historical events in science as well as present science policy questions are more adequately understood with than without this distinction.”

(Roll-Hansen 2009 :27)

Since applied research is concerned with complex real-world context, orientation to knowledge users, and creating a workable task for solving a problem or improvement of a situation in the reality, this academic specialization deserves its own standing. Still, this academic aspect gains very little attention from politeness scholars of the present generation. There is a lack of research in this field which can bridge theoretical development to communicative improvement in the real world.

## **D. Conceptual Research**

This research is developed from a broad research perspective which accepts the value of conceptual and empirical studies. Due to a lack conceptual research, which deals with the construction of new principles or explanations of the mechanisms working behind the scenes, the main goal of this research is to conceptualise the politeness of intercultural talk rather than assessing it empirically. To show how politeness works, the intuition and insight of the researcher influences the interpretation of the phenomena and the data selection. This thesis is not an attempt to prove that there is no other way to explain the data. Unlike empirical research which relies on data-based evidence—measurement, testing, experimentation, this research involves explaining the principles based on identifiable data under the theme of analysis. That is to say, the ultimate distinction of this research is not its ability to show the obvious easily-observable qualities of the data, but to describe the data on a more conceptual level which can potentially be applied to similar phenomena. This conceptual research was not developed qualitatively to form an absolute conclusion through analysing a large quantity of example data; rather the data were approached qualitatively according to the researcher’s individual insight and acquired supporting knowledge. The capability to ‘tell the truth’ at different levels within research, confirms that research is “the art of scientific investigation”

(Kothari 2013, Beveridge 1957). This research, which does not purely concern objectivity, exploits diplomatic data in order to construct communicative principles which diplomatic professionals can learn and apply in other situations.

This study does not totally rely on external evidence or factual details. My analysis is oriented to ‘logical prediction and feasible estimation’. This distinct part of Brown and Levinson’s approach has been overlooked. As a result, the new trend of studies in the Humanities, turns the critical researcher into a quantitative measurer or evidence seeker; the findings are generated as they are seen. Instead, in this study the researcher develops explanations/principles of how the politeness strategies/devices work, which can be practically applied in similar situations and contexts for knowledge users, rather seeking the truth about the target events and participants only. Therefore, the principles theoretically developed in this study can be later tested in reality. However, the tester should be aware of flexibility of those rules in use.

## **E. Theoretical Position**

The theoretical suitability of a piece of research depends on its capability to reveal research answers. Andreas Jucker (2009:1633) states:

“The ideal research method for the investigation of speech acts... does not exist. There is not even a method that is in a general way better than all the others... One particular method may provide interesting results for one specific research question or set of question while it is of little value for another set of questions.”

Among several politeness theories as I discussed, Brown and Levinson’s theory is mainly applied in this research because of the following aspects:

### **1. Politeness in Diplomacy**

Politeness in diplomatic conversation is still a mystery in the academic world because of a lack of politeness research in this field. As a result, Brown and Levinson’s theory has

been underestimated and overlooked by new-trend linguistic scholars, especially after Watts's critique (2003), without awareness that many of the aspects of the theory proposed must be re-examined deliberately. The main asset of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is bridging the speech-act linguistic concept (Austin 1962) and "instrumental rationality" according to Max Weber's theory of social action (Kasper 2006: 283-284). In fact, Brown and Levinson's rational approach is highly applicable to diplomats, whose mission is the pursuit of benefits for their side. This manner of speaking represents the speaker's professional goals. Besides the pursuit of interests, the stakes of conversation for the speaker's party is higher than in everyday conversation, for example, the risk of embarrassment while speaking with a diplomatic leader can result in the loss of national interest. Because of this, the verbal act and the speculation of the end as suggested by the theory can be recognised in diplomatic discourse.

Diplomatic talk can re-enforce the concept of rational actors and their goal-oriented communication in accordance with the theory. No matter how the conversation is geared to either the win-lose or the win-win situations, the typical goal of diplomatic work is speaking for the benefit your country. It is true that some diplomatic speakers may perform the conversations for their own personal interests, or even value their personal interests over their duty to their nation, but those exceptional cases are beyond the scope of this talk-on-duty research.

## **2. Politeness of the Speaker Side**

Politeness can be explained from the production side (the speaker), the reception (the hearer), and society (normative approach/community practice). I propose that studies on speakers' politeness strategies in interaction across cultures deserve more attention because there is a lack of research focussed on strategies of intercultural politeness. This knowledge is essential for providing alternative choices for linguistic modification in interpersonal communication by the consideration of how language is mastered by the diplomatic speaker in the discourse analysis. This research will be useful for both native speakers and non-native speakers of English since the ability to select the right politeness strategies is also an important factor for successful communication—getting what the speaker wants, distinct from English fluency.



Ultimately, the strength of Brown and Levinson's theory always remains in essence that we cannot deny behavioural incentive; politeness is communicated for a purpose, like a baby cries out for a reason. Despite the fact that Brown and Levinson's approach focuses on the speaker's side, (and is criticized because of its theoretical bias to the speaker's side without considering the hearer and contextual variation), we should not leave the theory too soon because it is able to assist in figuring out mechanisms in the discourse produced by the speaker and the incentives of those verbal actions.

In contrast to the idea that the role of the speaker is controlled by the social circumstance as Goffman and his followers suggest; a capable speaker who can use language effectively is able to control a communicative outcome. The speaker has to engage with an external situation through verbal actions which enable him/her to achieve a preferable position and a desirable outcome. The speaker's capability of social determination remains to an extent—the other plays a partial role in discourse production. I regard interaction as a ping-pong game between two players, but both of them have a different level of ability, one can control the other. The aim of controlling the situation can be studied from whatever side. This is why my research focus is language production by the speaker—for example, tactful communication can be discussed by looking at why some words are added and others are omitted, and what possible benefit the speaker gains from his/her manner of communication.

### **3. Politeness in Formal Events**

My study examines institutional talks in bureaucratic organisations which require formality. In these official international meetings, many elements of linguistic politeness are widely used for very fixed meanings. A speaker at a formal event follows linguistic conventions to a certain degree because their role and power are institutionally fixed. So, formulaic expressions play an important role in formal events. Playfulness with words is not appropriate in these situations. Brown and Levinson's theory, though widely commented on for its focus on politeness in the form of words rather than context-dependent meanings, has the capacity for assessing formal events in which the negotiation of meaning is not flexible.

## **4. Politeness in Crucial Acts**

Viewed as a part of the entire conversation, politeness does not occur in every turn of talk, but it is strategically used in some turns in which the speaker needs an important outcome. It is clearer to apply Brown and Levinson's approach which describes strategies which appeal to the other's face want. The return to Goffman's face concept, as in the work of Watts and Arundale, may be problematic because the focus is not on what the speaker wants to achieve through their use of language, as demonstrated in this research, but the methods by which dynamic moves of conversation are stressed.

Considering definitions, many theorists view that individuals abide by social rules, for example, Watts (1992:50) defined politeness as "socio-culturally determined behaviour directed towards the goal of establishing and/or maintaining in a state of equilibrium the personal relationships between the individuals of a social group," Nwoye (1992: 310) states, "being polite is ... conforming to socially agreed codes of good conduct", it is also said that "to be polite is saying the socially correct thing" (Lakoff 1975: 53, see also the sections by Terkourafi and Mills and Kàdâr). These approaches have a common concern about social control over individuals, but overlook individuals' striving for situational control—the individuals are not always passively controlled within the constraints of situation and social rules. Speakers with good language abilities may exploit those norms to pursue a communicative goal. So, they conform to the norms for the purpose of self-survival in the society. In my view, there is a possibility that social members in a particular society receive the same cultural inputs, but people do not all cases use their politeness knowledge in the same way. This is why in this thesis attention is paid to linguistic strategies which everyone does not use in the same way.

## **5. Linguistic Modification**

Politeness strategies are linguistic techniques for explicitness avoidance (Verschueren 1999; Chen 2010). Politeness opens an area of study about how communication is social rather than informative. The key theme of this study is to validate the view that some lexicons and formulaic expressions have inherent politeness, as suggested by Watts (2003), also under study are the devices and methods of modification (see Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984; House

& Kasper 1981; Færch & Kasper 1989). Politeness modifiers can fulfil the function of politeness only when they are connected with the right linguistic forms and fit appropriately in a social context.

## **6. Prediction and Estimation**

Most politeness research, including the studies which test Brown and Levinson's theory, tend to develop findings empirically—for example, truth depends on numbers of subjects or direct assessment from the participants. Indeed, there are several branches of politeness study as introduced by Eelen (2001): evaluativity, argumentativity, politeness, normativity, modality, and reflexivity. According to this, research answers about politeness can feasibly be argumentative—explaining that there is a potential for interlocutors to gain or lose something, analysing the speaker's available options and possible interpersonal estimation. The interpretation of transcribed conversations and perceived behaviours is based on socio-historical knowledge.

## **7. Developing Brown and Levinson's Theory**

One of the weak points of Brown and Levinson's Theory is the strategy list which is too complicated to be used practically by the speaker. To develop the classic theory, the concept of Brown and Levinson's face is maintained, but newly-found strategies in interaction across cultures and institutional talk are explained. To apply Brown and Levinson's concept in these complex situations, the theoretical developer has to use a constructive knowledge background to justify positive and negative face in these particular situations, as well as connecting politeness theory with more recently-developed theories. Some new concepts are selected to fix the weaknesses of the target theory and increase its theoretical capability to explain the data in this thesis. This study does not fully follow the steps of Brown and Levinson, but it brings this theory to bear on a more complex analysis.

My study shapes a better understanding of Brown and Levinson's theory in an intercultural setting. The proposed strategies can be applied in similar situations, but they should not be used very rigidly since most conversational situations are complicated and different and require a certain level of flexibility in performance.

This research's contribution to the current knowledge is not a paradigm shift, but rather the findings about culture-bound politeness in Thai English, and politeness strategies in diplomatic interactions across cultures, which have never been academically revealed before. My study not only re-considers the classic theory in relation to the data, but also extends its theoretical capacity for practical application in cross-cultural communication.

Due to the limitations of Brown and Levinson's theory in accounting for interactive data—both dialogue and sequences of interaction, other newly-developed politeness theories as presented in the literature review were applied to clarify some minor details; however, the core theory still maintains its function.

Other politeness theories which I bring into my discussion are Arndt and Janney's emotive cues, Watts's "surplus" "appropriate" "politic" politeness, context-dependent meanings and sub-culture politeness in the discursive approach, Goffman's self-face, O'Driscoll's face mismatch and Giles's Communication Accommodation Theory (see Literature Review), which is adapted taking into account the use of the hearer's first language (code switching) for the purpose of appealing to the positive face of the other. These concepts can explain some goal-driven communicative situations and help explore minor details in the main theme of Brown and Levinson's face and strategic formulation. In my applied research which serves the training of diplomatic staff, the main theory's sub-strategies are not rigidly used because its complication may lead to impracticality—the long list of strategies and complex details could confuse knowledge users from other disciplines. So the findings of this study are presented more simply than the original theory. Also, the new principles of cross-cultural conversation are added. In this way, Brown and Levinson's theory is advanced for the user-friendly, practical application.

## **8. Politeness Judgment**

My research focuses on theoretical politeness or second-order politeness (Watts 2003), not socially-acknowledged politeness or politeness that people generally comprehend. The selected approach does not require the assessment of what the participants of the situation actually judge to be polite or not, which focuses on the analysis of language mechanisms and cultural meanings. Moreover, seeking participant feedback is still

questionable because the interview itself is also a social encounter. Concealment of certain facts will remain, especially in a situation where two interactants are in high-ranking positions; their commendations about each other are likely to be done in a very respectful manner. Another problem is how far the speakers can evaluate themselves. Many speakers cannot recall what they did during talk, because they were concentrating on the aims of the diplomatic mission and pursuing the goals according to the meeting agenda, more than linguistic phenomena. Additionally, my participants did not have the available time to be interviewed immediately after the meeting. Therefore, it is better to monitor interactions by applying politeness knowledge to justify those actions in the conversational event. For this reason, I propose the concept of researcher-centred judgment, especially for the studies of second-order politeness. The researcher can judge the situation better than the participants, as one with constructive knowledge of politeness is more sensitive to politeness components than laypeople. Additionally, the repetitive utterance examination is done through the data-transcribing process; therefore, many event participants may not pay attention to politeness as highly and specifically as the researcher does.

In addition, for my specific research, there are limitations on seeking after-event feedback because the interactants are high-status persons—top leaders of the state and government organisations. Data collection during talk was permitted, but conducting an interview after the meeting event was difficult since the leading interactants and other participants have very tight work schedules. For this reason, this research offers a theoretical viewpoint on the assumption that the properties of politeness can be constructively explained by linguistic presentation evidence and contextual analysis.

This research supports the concept that language contains properties of politeness, although we do not know whether the speaker intends to be polite or not or whether the hearer perceives the utterance as polite. For example, in the notice “Please Keep Your Work Area Clean”, politeness is linguistically evident. This type of message is something that everyone has experienced. Elaborate details of context are not necessary, but it is essential to roughly mention the location of the notice, for example, on a research room’s wall. This would constitute a typical placement, however, in an abnormal placement, for example, if the sign was put up after a room user never tidied his/her working space, readers who are also users of the room can infer that the intention of the communicator was attack the untidy room member by exploiting the public mode of communication. Nevertheless, in the normal case

of reminding people in general, “please” on the notice is a sign of politeness and can soften the imperative. In this way, we are able to justify the categorisation of certain features as ‘politeness’ through linguistic and contextual evidence or observable interaction scenes, with no reliance on feedback from a particular group of people or individual interactants or participants.

## **F. Cultural Aspects**

Contrary to typical sociolinguistic studies which examine utterance data to find out communicative norms, this study researched the previous literature for the interpretation of culture-bound linguistic expressions. Rather than developing a new cultural theory, socio-cultural knowledge in this study is treated as a supportive discipline which helps explain culture-related linguistic strategies.

Although the new paradigm of cultural studies pays more attention to sub-culture and globalisation impacts, this research still pertains to national-culture aspects because it seeks an understanding of the conversational work of diplomatic representatives. Moreover, the influence of globalisation does not lead to the collapse of national culture, which is historically accumulated. The process of specialisation has continued and could be stronger for political purposes—culture can separate one group from another as well as promoting a feeling of harmony which serves administration and governance. Apart from national unity, national culture serves an individual’s communication in terms of his/her self-presence in an international setting—for example, I introduce myself as a Thai, which facilitates the other’s understanding about me.

There are culture definitions which relate to national identity as compiled by Spencer-Oatey (2012), as in the following examples:

“Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artefacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other, as conditional elements of future action.”

(Kroeber & Kluckhohn 1952: 181; cited by Adler 1997: 14)

“Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member’s behaviour and his/her interpretations of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behaviour.”

(Spencer-Oatey 2008: 3)

“[Culture] is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.”

(Hofstede 1994: 5)

In brief, culture is described as the system of knowledge shared by a relatively large group of people (Gudykunst & Kim 1992:13). Basically, it indicates “cultivated behaviours” gained through the process of social learning, not by inheritance. People who live in a particular society have accumulated experience of a particular pattern of culture. In communication, culture affects behaviour and interpretations of behaviour (Spencer-Oatey 2012:4), it is the presentation of signs and the interpretation of what those signs mean, so when people from different cultures interact, they have to cope with unintelligible messages or discrepancies between what is intended and what is perceived.

Hofstede’s notable research which differentiates nation-level cultures is also applied to my linguistic analysis. Recent studies about Thai culture still support Hofstede’s major findings (Pimpa, 2012; Morakul & Wu, 2001; Swierczek & Onishi, 2003). Hofstede’s aspect of culture agrees with Bourdieu’s “Habitus” (1977, 1990) in the sense that people’s knowledge of social conduct is not free from cultural influence as they live in a particular society; culture can exist as the schemata acquired from socialisation and interaction within the community. In use of English as a foreign language, when the non-native speaker cannot grasp the second language’s culture, it is likely for them to that they will apply their repertoire of knowledge from their first-language culture to solve communicative problems

since the knowledge of the target-language culture is not available (Nishida 1999). Moreover, Face Negotiation Theory describes a way of capturing conflicts between individualistic and collectivistic cultures in negotiation, as explained by Ting-Toomey and co-researchers (1985; 1988; 2005; 2009; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998; Ting-Toomey & Oetzel, 2003) which also influences my study.

According to Zhou (2008) and Liu (1995), scholars divide cultural transfer into two forms—surface-structure transfer and deep-structure transfer. I adapt this finding to explain culture-bound politeness strategies at the two levels. The surface level involves cultural evidence which can be identified through utterances, such as the topic of talk which the hearer from another culture prefers, or convergence into the hearer's language (code-switching). Culture can also be tangibly presented in the form of language, religion, cuisine, social practice, and arts. All of these inventions reflect particular thoughts and beliefs, so using the hearer's language in diplomatic conversation is a display of acknowledgement of the hearer's identity. The deep-structure concerns the conversation performance which is oriented to the speaker's or hearer's cultural norms and social values.

The question of how to distinguish cultural behaviours from personal behaviours in the identification of data, for example, does only one Thai speaker speak in this way, while the others may not?, is a typical concern which could harmonize studies in this field into only one single standard.

An alternative perspective based on joint studies between different academic disciplines is framed as “culture and personality [are] not independent” (Hofstede et al. 2010:40). This concept is relevant to my study and many others using different approaches. It can be seen that even sexual behaviours, though these happen in a private space, can be explained in either way, as culture-influenced behaviours or personal traits, depending on which aspect the research investigates. Describing whether or not the English usage of a speaker reflects his/her first language culture can be justified. Investigating this area depends on the researcher's knowledge and information background as well as considerable authentic communication experience in the first language culture that the knowledgeable researcher can use to validate the discussion. Another relating factor to consider is whether the selected discourse is open for the cultural interpretation or not. Of course, if the argumentation is very weak, a better one can be formed and later accepted if it is supported by adequate evidence.



In humanities and the social sciences, we should not celebrate only one absolute answer. Striving for complete and accurate truth via measurements and comparisons in cultural and language studies is a valid strategy, but there should be room for qualitative inquiry, descriptive competence in revealing the relations between factors, and acknowledging the strength of different approaches in explaining human behaviours; "...it is important to avoid a position that privileges one particular theoretical approach or mode of understanding as the sole direction to be taken in future research" (Miller 1997:118).

To a certain extent, this thesis can reveal cultural implications in the utterances produced by the Thai speakers. It offers an alternative interpretation through the use of available knowledge from previous Thai studies and the researcher's real experience of growing up in the culture. Unlike typically empirical research, this study provides a logical descriptive analysis of potentiality and feasibility, rather than a full reliance on external evidence objectively. The attempt of contemporary researchers to measure cultures as accurately as possible may lead to making a mistake about cultural studies because culture should not be seen as static, but dynamic (Ting-Toomey 2014). Therefore, an amount of flexibility should be provided. Contemporary cultural researchers should have more awareness that many times and cases of measurement can be different in number, so an empirical approach may produce illusive, problematic findings. A good model of cultural studies that we should strive for is to seek an understanding of each culture with cultural sensibility as well as giving adequate information to support the reason why those characteristics were maintained historically and socially. This understanding is more permanent for the learners who can flexibly adopt the cultural knowledge in different communicative situations.

## IV. Data Presentation

This research has limitations in data presentation because of the impact on international relations and persons involved. Therefore, the study refrains from showing the full details of the data. However, the available data which can be presented is sufficient to answer the research questions within the scope of this study.

## **A. Data for the Research Scope**

This case study observes Thai-foreign diplomatic encounters. The foreign guests are not described nation by nation, but they are holistically regarded as Thailand's foreign counterpart. The research scope was to show Thai-foreign diplomatic talk during Thailand's national crisis. However, the nationality of the state/government guest is mentioned in cases where it is crucially relevant to the interpretation of a particular utterance's meaning.

Ultimately, all diplomatic representatives in my case study should be well-protected. I avoid presenting them in a way which may affect the speakers in their real lives. This is why I address my subjects as "a foreign ambassador" rather than "the German ambassador" because the real person in the period of study could be identified and German culture is outside the scope of my study. By designing research based on research ethics and research questions, I can reveal politeness strategies in diplomacy and the national culture of Thailand which influences the conversational performance of the diplomatic representatives in positive and negative ways.

## **B. Data Required by Approach of Study**

In a Brown and Levinsonian speaker-centred approach, the emphasis is placed on the speech acts and the possible benefits for the speaker's side arising from those modified verbal actions. This study will not discuss pronunciation and intonation as elements of politeness, so example transcribed voices presented in the form of play-script is enough to explain pragmatic force or the implication of meanings at a certain level, according to the research aims. The distinct aspects of the Brown and Levinsonian approach which are applied to my analysis are compared with other research approaches in the table as shown on the next page.

<p><b>New-trend politeness studies influenced by the major critics, Eelen (2001) and Watts (2003)</b></p>	<p><b>Brown and Levinsonian Approach</b></p>
<p>Researchers seek truth from the external world including language users and empirical data about the situation; the use of personal perspectives to judge the situation is avoided.</p>	<p><b><u>Researcher-centred</u></b> approach: The politeness phenomenon is too complex to be explained by laypeople. A researcher with specialised knowledge can identify/conceptualize politeness strategies.</p>
<p>Clarifying discourse (the use of language in a social context), sociolinguistic variation.</p>	<p>Hiding pragmatic force for the achievement of interpersonal communication. <b><u>Both form-based meanings</u></b> (inherent meaning of linguistic forms) and <b><u>function-based meanings</u></b> (meanings from outside the linguistic system) are examined to show the speaker's language mastery.</p>
<p>Showing transcribed utterances in minute detail, for example, using CA transcription convention which is an accurate way to show natural speaking manner, such as incomplete/incorrect pronunciations.</p>	<p>Dialogue presented in the form of <b><u>play-script</u></b>—as generally used in pragmatics—and/or other transcription conventions, depending on the aspect of analysis.</p>
<p>Hearer-based (revealing the hearer's reaction and interpretations) and interaction-based (mutual intelligibility)</p>	<p><b><u>Speaker-based</u></b> mode of analysis: explaining the speaker's behaviour, utterance production, and language mastery—enquiring about the speaker's intentions and/or identifying evidence from the speaker's utterances.</p>
<p>Interactive sequences are preferred (two-way communication)</p>	<p>Originally, the data was presented as a <b><u>uni-directional model</u></b>; however, a dyadic model/conversational sequence can be considered relevant to facework.</p>

In a Brown and Levinsonian approach, the researcher aims to capture the key interpersonal indicators relating to the speaker’s speculation and linguistic modification rather than dealing with context-generated meanings as the centre of study. The latter may require contextual analysis turn-by-turn. Of course, all of the major politeness theories (see literature review) are in the same area, so called “language in context”, but there are slight differences in contextual viewpoints. My research treats the speakers as diplomatic representatives of the Thai side and of the foreign side. In this layer of analysis, a description of the shared context between all the events is given: the host-guest relationship between the countries’ representatives, incidents of political protest in Thailand, the participation of organisational staff from both sides in the meeting, and the working environment of bureaucratic office. The details of each single situation are provided in case an utterance’s meaning significantly depends on this specific contextual condition. In this research, contextual presentation corresponds to the matter of interest in the Brown and Levinsonian approach, as shown in the table below:

<b>Discursive Approach &amp; Watts's Relational Work</b>	<b>Brown and Levinsonian Approach</b>
<p>Consider the situational interaction very closely, objectively, and precisely. The researchers are expected to describe the rich details of what is momentarily happening in the physical world, including sounds, actions, etc., consistently with the dynamically changing interaction.</p>	<p>Consider the social context in a more abstract way</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>-Power</b></li> <li><b>-Interpersonal Distance</b></li> <li><b>-Rank of Imposition</b> (depending on culture)</li> </ul> <p>These factors in the original formula are relative indicators of the FTA’s weightiness, and can be taken into account for explaining politeness strategies and the degree of face risk in Brown and Levinson’s paradigm.</p>

To identify strategic utterances, Brown and Levinsonian scholars cannot ignore the social context, but the amount and aspects of the descriptive context should serve the point of analysis. My emphasis is the speaker's institutional role and the country's power in relation to the hearer in the diplomatic context.

### **C. Limitation of Diplomatic Data**

Before permission for the data collection was granted, it was agreed between the researcher and the participatory organisation that all information would be presented with caution and responsibility. I refrain from showing many parts of the conversation which are not relevant to my politeness study, as diplomatic data is sensitive; the presentation of the whole conversation may impact the persons and countries concerned. For example, the interactants sometimes speak without thinking because of reacting quickly in natural fast-paced talk. These can be forgotten in the real event, but when these faux pas are presented in academic writing, there could be a possible impact on the research subjects, who are public figures and leaders of particular organisations, for example, they could be criticised for their low level of English proficiency. Moreover, many issues of talk, if disseminated, may affect politics between Thailand and other countries. As an ethical researcher, I have to protect information from these organisations and countries. So, the research can present diplomatic politeness from the 80% of data which are usable. However, it can contest with other research which may have some limitations in presenting academic truth, for example, problems with random or inadequate samples.

## **Chapter 4: The Thai Background of Politeness and Diplomacy**

This chapter provides background knowledge about Thai party in the situations of study, consisting of Thai communicative culture, Thai English, and diplomatic approach. In my case study, Thai speakers who have diplomatic roles as representatives of the host country and Thai host organisations are not professional diplomats. They are the leading politicians and high-ranking government officers who live in Thai society and do not have any particular training in communication in overseas settings as diplomatic professionals. It is likely that their politeness performance is significantly influenced by Thai social values and their first language. The background knowledge is necessary for explaining cultural and linguistic transfer as well as the communicative limitations of the diplomatic speakers.

This chapter reviews academic literature concerning Thai studies in order to pinpoint the characteristics of Thai society, Thai social values, Thai communicative characteristics, and the Thai way of diplomacy. This macro picture, drafted from existing knowledge from previous findings, gives a direction for the analysis of Thai diplomatic utterances in the following chapters. My presentation of the Thai background starts with an overview of Thai society and perspectives about politeness. Next, it introduces politeness features in the Thai language and Thai English respectively. The last section encapsulates the Thai diplomatic approach; it delineates the Thai state's communicative style formed within the specific cultural circumstances. These ingredients of both the cultural and social conditions, as well as institutional conditions, are essential for the comprehension of the pragmatic meanings conveyed by the Thai diplomatic speakers.

The literature review in this chapter is not highly critical because this research does not claim to be a cultural study by itself, but borrows knowledge from other disciplines for deepening data interpretation in the aspects of Thai culture and diplomacy. However, the selection criteria and some comments about previous studies are provided in order to confirm the validity of those previous findings which are used as the knowledge background for this research.

# I. Thai Society and Politeness Perspectives

Reviewing available Thai studies about Thai English can reveal a unified picture of Thai communicative culture and the characteristics of Thai English. The key findings of previous studies were collected and presented as pieces of the picture as a whole. The contradictory results of these studies can be seen as evidence that the degree of westernisation in Thai society is increasing. However, none of research as presented in this chapter rejects the cultural roots which play their role in Thai society. Therefore, my literature review in part is an attempt to identify Thai communicative values and the reason why those values are accepted in society. This forms the knowledge background for data interpretation and discussing the implications of the Thai speakers' communication.

The academic literature selection is based on the credibility of the sources, the fame of researchers and institutions, and the credibility of the academic journal in which the work is published. Also, the degree of acceptance of those pieces of research is judged by their number of academic citations in Thai culture studies. As opposed to some research, which aims generate new findings about Thai culture or challenge the previous findings, this research's objective is more concerned with examining existing cultural knowledge and identifying Thai communicative culture in order to explain its influence on Thai-English discourse. In this interdisciplinary study, different fields of knowledge are integrated, and the key findings about Thai culture are identified for the purpose of deepening the linguistic interpretation of the data, rather than re-studying Thai culture by itself.

According to the prominent comprehensive study of national cultures by Geert Hofstede and colleagues (Hofstede 2001; Hofstede & Hofstede 2005; Hofstede et al. 2010), culture is defined in the overview as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (Hofstede et al. 2010:6) In this perspective, culture (collective programming) is able to influence an individual's way of thinking and judging; people in the same society tend to have the same worldview acquired from socialisation and use particular codes for common understanding, including how to present the signs and how to interpret them. In Hofstede's study, Thailand's scores, derived from questionnaire data, fall into the zone of high-power distance, collectivism, femininity, high uncertainty avoidance, and long term oriented culture. From

this point of departure, I present politeness and social relations in Thai society, based on my fundamental argument that politeness in a particular society is designed and preserved because the social members see that those behavioural characteristics advantage them within their particular living conditions.

Power distance is defined by Hofstede and Hofstede as “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally” (2005:46). According to Hofstede’s study, Thailand is one of the societies that accepted high-power distance conduct and inequalities. This aspect also reflects the dependence of lower-status persons on higher-status ones: subordinate-boss, child-parent, student-teacher. Obviously, lower-status persons in a high-power society are afraid of disagreeing with people in higher positions. Because this power imbalance is accepted, Thai politeness is performed through various asymmetrical relationships, acknowledging different statuses: the monarch-subjects, parents-children, teachers-students, employers-employees, Buddhist monks and laypeople, etc. Kummer’s study states that statuses in the Thai social order are judged by a person’s educational level, financial status, and authoritative role (1992:330). Rojjanaprapayon notes, “Thais are class/status conscious” (1997:59). Likewise, Intachakra describes Thailand as a “hierarchy-sensitive society” (2004:57). These observations are sensible when we consider the special bond of the Thai monarch and Thai people. King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand launched many development projects during the long decades that the civil democracy functioned poorly; his power is highly recognised and supported by Thai subjects (Bangkok Post 2006, The Chaipattana Foundation 2013). The stability of the Thai monarchy in modern days supports the long-standing good image of Thai bureaucracy traditionally developed for serving the king. Bureaucracy is valued in the frame of Thais’ concept of gratitude as an essential part of social modernisation; those institutions made a major contribution to the society. Up to the present, the system has been secured and honoured in Thai society. The bureaucratic culture which promotes hierarchy and formality is broadly preserved, and is passed on to present-day Thai organisational culture.

Concerning collectivism, Thais tend to make decisions based on the interest of ‘we’ rather than ‘you’ or ‘me’—“the interest of the group prevails over the interest of the individual” (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005:74). Politeness in this collective society serves the



purpose of keeping group harmony and maintaining person-to-person relationships. The perception of the “interdependent self” and the “introvert personality” are characteristics of people in a collectivist society (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005:97). Disagreement is seldom expressed, or is communicated with caution. In a critical situation, people refrain from communication or they do not speak, as a result, they are perceived as introverted. The speaker usually sacrifices his/her own desires for the other’s desire; in other words, the speaker tends to accommodate him/herself to the other(s), because the relationship is valued. Hofstede and Hofstede add, “In cultures in which people are dependent on in-groups, these people are usually also dependent on power figures” (2005:83). Decision making in this society is not on an individual basis, rather, the instructions and suggestions of the other are taken into account because of trust in their good will and adequate experience/ability/power to guide. Most Thais value the others’ contribution to their progress in life. For example, my Thai friends often say that they have a good life because they have a good mother, good teacher, good doctor, good boss, or even a good prime minister, but they do not tell others that their success and well-being is due to their own ability and effort. People from collective societies avoid the dominance of the self among the other(s), so in their politeness behaviour, they display self-effacement and give credit to the other(s).

High uncertainty avoidance and long term orientation, another two dimensions from Hofstede’s findings about Thailand, described a society that prefers to “control the future and the virtue of living for tomorrow”. People think that traditions should be preserved and they do not readily accept social changes because of the belief that traditions can produce more predictable results, as has happened in the past. Formed on these perspectives, politeness in Thai society is a stabilising interaction; obvious conflicts or disagreements are not presented, as the long-term relationship is valued over short-term success in a single task. This Thai convention clearly allocates power between two interactants on an unequal basis to prevent conflicts. The conversation is geared on the prediction of future acts—a signal of warning is presented before a serious confrontation actually takes place. In relation to high-power distance and collectivism as above-mentioned, the individuals in this society are not accustomed to uncertainty within a communicative situation because they believe in guidance from other(s). Top-down instructions are accepted in schools, workplaces, and even between friends—the more able person can instruct the less able one.

Femininity is the key aspect that differentiates Thai culture from other Asian cultures. Considering the top eleven highest feminine societies in Hofstede's index: Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Denmark, Slovenia, Costa Rica, Finland, Chile, Estonia, Portugal, and Thailand, it can be seen that Thailand is the most feminine Asian country with a score of 34; while other Asian countries are classified as masculine societies: Japan has the top score, 95; followed by China, 66; The Philippines, 64; Hong Kong, 57; India, 56; and Arab countries, 53 (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005:120-121). Hofstede and Hofstede further point out that the specialisations of a feminine society are agriculture and service industries (2005:147). People from a feminine society are not highly stressed about competition. The society members do not strive for excellence. "Failing school is a disaster in a masculine culture", for example, in Japan and Germany, but people in a feminine culture view failure at school as "a relatively minor accident" (Hofstede et al. 2010:161,165). In a feminine society, quality of life and social relationships are valued over success in competitions, so, in this type of society, one can expect relaxation and cooperation because the individuals' sense of competition with the others is low. Also, Hofstede and his research team show that the roles of genders in a feminine society are overlapped. Hofstede's findings agree with the distinction of Thai society in terms of economic specialisation (The Economist 2010) and gender roles. Thai women hold important positions in the society: prime minister, judges, diplomats, though the proportion is smaller than men. Many of them are in managerial and administrative offices and have decision-making power. Importantly, Thai female leaders do not try to blur the gender difference by doing as men do, but maintain their soft approach in relationship building. As Hofstede and Hofstede suggest, managerial style in a feminine society tends to be on the basis of "intuition and consensus" rather than "decisiveness" (2005:147). This feature of mixed-gender roles characterises modern Thai society.

There is coherence between Hofstede's findings about Thailand's femininity and the studies about the Thai national character. Living in a society with low restrictions—social laws are not highly strict, Thais are easy-going and fun-loving; they also work with pleasure and enjoy a considerable degree of freedom (Fieg & Mortlock 1989; O'Sullivan & Tajaroensuk 1997; Komin 1991). In a masculine society, strict rules and high perseverance are required for winning competitions, but people in a feminine society are not severely stressed about competitive ambitions.

Referring to the concept of a "loose culture", the non-restrictive use of social norms and conventions in some societies, which was introduced by Triandis (1995), is explained by

Ting-Toomey: “There is a high probability of looseness for cultures that are located at the intersection of other major cultures (e.g. Thailand at the intersection of India and China)” (1999:75). Geographically, Thailand is at the centre of transportation in Southeast Asia, for both marine and air travel. The country functions as a passage to different regions. The nation was constructed by a mixture of people from different ethnic backgrounds. Thailand, which is an open society, developed a culture which can be fit for all, so the conventions are based on simplifications and adaptations from other cultures.

I also put forward the point that communication of the vertical relationship in Thai society is not highly strict. That is to say, the respect shown from a lower-status person to a higher-status one is quite flexible. In the same way, the senior, higher-status person can display friendliness to reduce communicative gaps relating to different ages and social statuses. The study of Thai young adults’ communicative tactics in family conflict by Iamsudha and Hale (2003) presents the “socially relaxed interaction” of Thais at a family level. Young Thais are friendly, enthusiastic, informal, and relaxed when interacting with their parents (2003:18). Many of them used various techniques to cope with conflict within the family, such as using a third party as an intermediary, accommodation tactics with a “fun-and-pleasure” orientation, or the “wait and see” tactic—withdrawal from an emotional argument with the view that conflict will naturally fade away. Many Thai families use a participatory approach—parents reveal, for example, their financial problems and allow their children to share ideas. A recent study about Thai organisational culture by Pimpa (2012) also shows that Thais appreciate Western culture. As evidence, Thais’ vertical-relation politeness is not strictly and consistently performed. Thais display friendliness and flexibility is to reduce interactional tension in their high-power distance society.

## **Critique of Hofstede’s National Culture Study**

Contrary to many arguments against Hofstede (McSweeney 2002; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin 2009; Bowe & Martin 2007, Jandt 2010), for example, the data is outdated, collected in 1967 – 1973; the sample group is too small to pinpoint country-level culture; the vagueness of how to use the countries’ scores in individual-level studies, and the false focus

on national culture<sup>2</sup>, I consider that Hofstede's cultural science merits attention, as long as there is no other comparable work with equivalent achievements in the differentiation of the macro-level culture. As Williamson (2002:1391) states:

“To reject totally Hofstede's or similar functionalist models of national culture, before more satisfactory models have been developed, would be to throw away valuable insight.”

The aforementioned criticisms against Hofstede's study miss considering the nation as a political unit with a form of government which has the capacity of legal and institutional power over citizens, both directly and indirectly, such as media and educational control. The state authority which functionally shapes the society as a whole is hardly challenged by the ruled individuals of lower power. National unity creates a desirable atmosphere for ruling society at large. For this reason, nationalization has to be continued to preserve and foster the existing national institution system, one of the methods for doing this is cultural educating (see also Hofstede 1983).

Correspondingly, the majority of people desire national uniqueness constructed by the state or government. This knowledge of national identity facilitates contacts within the society and becomes an important part of face management in international settings. The interlocutors tend to introduce themselves by nation and use their knowledge of national culture for their self-presentation. One can observe that international coordinators introduce themselves “I am from Thailand”, not “I am from Southern Thailand”, the latter is more optional and may later be revealed, but the first is more frequently used in a work introduction.

With regard to the comment about the outdated data, cultural change is a gradual process. Assimilation into other cultures may harmonise people from different national origins, but cultural preservation is possibly a parallel process over time. The more a country has international involvement, the more intensive inputting of national culture is required to support and stimulate the people's sense of competitiveness. Furthermore, the claim of

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<sup>2</sup> National culture is considered outdated because nation-level cultural borders no longer existed by the time of Hofstede's study, due to the growth of cross-national immigration and the strength of intraculturalism—cultural diversity within a country.

invalidity in Hofstede's study due to too few sampled populations (only IBM's representative officers in different countries) is not weighty, thanks to the fact that other academics who used boarder samples still confirm Hofstede's results, "these people added more validations, and contributed to the overall picture" (Hofstede 2002:1358, see also Williamson 2002). Most importantly, evaluations which place a premium on statistics can blind us to the academic quality in Hofstede's description of phenomena. Many critics fail to capture "a wealth of expertise and erudition from outside the questionnaire" (Chapman 1997, cited in Hofstede 2002:1360). The long list of Hofstede's references which support his data interpretation consist of academic publications from various subject areas, especially the key books in world economy studies and non-academic books which embody cultural facts about a country. Hofstede et al's discussion of the data is rich and constructively interdisciplinary. It is the comprehensive reference sources and insightful social analyses which stabilize Hofstede's long-standing fame—it was found in 2001 that there were more than 1,500 Hofstede-related studies (Hofstede 2002:1360). Unfortunately, the critics against Hofstede tend to lose sight of the vividness and richness in this high-grade qualitative study. Hofstede's academic performance holds the property of remarkable qualitative research, which is considered to be "a strong piece of art" (Kvale 1996:252) which "generates a sense of reality and draws the reader in" (Polkinghorne 1983).

Considering weaknesses, it is acceptable that some of Hofstede's measurements of the cultural dimensions cannot completely present the current cultural reality since some nations have not had stable political and social systems over the past years, for example, a major change of political regime or the establishment of a close allied relationship with other countries, for example, the Taiwan–United States relations since 1979. Of course, some countries may have significant dimensional changes when being re-measured. However, in the case of Thailand, there is no clear evidence showing a major cultural shift. This can be justified by the fact that the fundamental institutions of the country have been maintained and cultural preservation correlates with in-society power management and economic development through international relations, such as the tourism industry.

As for the question, “How can Hofstede’s cultural dimensions be applied in the analysis of an individual’s behaviour?”, it is important to underline that Hofstede assumes that each individuals’ manner of thought and action in a particular society is programmed by a certain type of socialization. Undoubtedly, not all actions are culture-bound—there are exceptional individuals who do not act in the same way as the majority does, and the theory in this field cannot offer an explanation of all humanistic and social details in all cases. Cultural science should not be looked at with a very rigid view. To an extent, Hofstede’s work can elucidate collective mind-sets and behaviours in different countries.

Still, the new findings in recent research confirm that Hofstede’s findings are able to reflect the Thai present-day culture. Pimpa’s internationally acknowledged research (2012) regarding Thai government officers tests Hofstede’s theory with the new Thai generation. The new findings are not significantly different from Hofstede’s measurements of cultural dimensions for Thailand. So Hofstede’s theory is still workable as an explanation of organisational culture in the Thai public sector. Although the new findings show changes among the Thai new generation in terms of being more individualistic, more familiar with the concept of organisational change, and more appreciative of Western management concepts (2012:35), including promoting working-role gender equity (2012:40), the researcher concludes that the main aspects of Thai culture: collectivism, high-power and uncertainty avoidance still support the old generation of Thais in the period of Hofstede’s research.

“The results from this study confirm some similarities and differences with previous studies in 1980s. This is not uncommon to claim that all aspects of cultural dimension will change with time and situations in the society. In the case of Thailand, key aspects on gender and group orientation have been changing constantly and it is clearly reflected from the attitude of the participants in this study. Some dimensions, however, remain unchanged.”

(Pimpa 2012:41)

Pimpa’s research does not re-assess Thais’ competitiveness and assertiveness because it deals with Hofstede’s “feminine society” only on the subject of gender roles. However, these

feminine cultural characteristics can be explained by other researchers who found that Thailand is a society where relaxation and being genteel is more valued than being assertive. For example, the characteristics of a fun-loving attitude, communication with care, and work with pleasure as I mentioned before, are part of Thai femininity. Other tests of Hofstede's theory have been done by Morakul and Wu (2001), and Swierczek and Onishi (2003), but their subjects are the staff of private Thai organizations, which do not directly fit my research context.

## II. Thai Politeness Features

Thai interactional manners are the codes of conduct that the Thai speech community values, which Thai societal members acquire knowledge and experience of and know how to interpret, however, people outside Thai society may not be able to recognise those meanings. So the knowledge background of the speaker's culture is important for comprehension of the verbal acts and intentions when s/he uses another language. In this section, I classify the characteristics that are highlighted by the researchers of Thai culture. Some parts of analysis include my experiences relating to those politeness features as a person who grew up in the Thai society. Furthermore, the controversies that arise when those politeness norms are adopted, directly and indirectly, in conversation with people from different cultures are also discussed.

### A. Care and Considerateness

A notable piece of research about Thai culture, *Psychology of the Thai People: Values and Behavioral Patterns* by Komin (1991), lists Thai interpersonal interaction traits according to the ranked order of importance as follows:

- (1) Caring and considerate
- (2) Kind and helpful
- (3) Responsive to situations and opportunities

(Komin 1991:143)

On the one hand, Thai interaction gives an impression of cordiality and generosity which supports connections with the hearer by affection and demonstrative physical actions, rather than by informative messages; on the other hand, as No. 3 on the list shows, Thais have the characteristic of being able to speculate about possible personal benefits. In a society that values the morality of generosity and which supports an interdependent social life, interaction with care serves the need for person-to-person support, mentally, physically, materially, and intellectually, so that people are positively disposed towards making friends and having frequent contact. Care and considerateness is a cultural mechanism to keep these relationships healthy. Judged by action, Thai politeness can be described as other-accommodation, and non-decisiveness. However, these concepts may blind people of different cultures about Thais' intentions to please the other—showing deliberate attention to the other and seeking the other's comfort zone.

Intachakra (2012), who identifies Thai face during interaction, proposes that the 'heart/mind' is an alternative metaphor for Thai face. Christopher Moore, the author of *Heart Talk*, a book about Thai culture, found more than 1,000 Thai phrases alluding to Jai or the heart (2006, Cited in Knutson 2004: 151, see also The Royal Institute Dictionary 2011; Lexitron 1994; dict.longdo.com 2003), for example, 'Tok Jai' (falling heart) means to be shocked/startled; 'Jai Dam' (dark heart) means to be wicked/heartless; 'Jai Hin' (rock heart) means to be cruel/merciless/pitiless; 'Tang Jai' (placed heart) means to concentrate one's attention/to aim/to intend; 'Sia Jai' (losing heart) means to be sorry/to regret/to grieve. The high amount of Thai lexicalisations with "Jai" (heart/mind) indicates that the Thai language guides the speakers to pay attention to the other's mental state and be sensitive to the changing moods and feelings over an interaction. This account is similar to Brown and Levinson's politeness approach (1987) regarding dealing with the other's wants. Intachakra's approach paves the way for further explorations about wants that Thais identify in interpersonal communication. These wants are probably diverse, encompassing more than the two aspects of wants suggested by Brown and Levinson.

Intachakra (2012) claims that the communicative approach using the "heart" metaphor is different from Brown and Levinson's approach in which rationality is the mitigation of imposition for the speaker's benefit. On the contrary, in the Thai approach, he proposes that



to be polite is to show a concern for the other(s), and this sometimes leads to self-sacrifice or self-devotion. The speaker can lose their benefits, but the relationship is secured. In addition to this contrast to Brown and Levinson's face concept, neither is the Thai heart-as-face concept the same as face proposed by Goffman (1967). Intachakra describes that in some cases the speaker has no concern about their self-esteem, also described as 'self-worth over interaction', but rather, they value emotional disposition: "I contend therefore that considering politeness by virtue of 'how we feel towards one another' can complement and sometimes even replace appeals to 'how our personhood is maintained, flawed and/or damaged'" (2012:3). He draws the conclusion that Thai interactional politeness is rapport-oriented rationality. Overall, Intachakra's study can clarify the Thai mind-set behind Thai expressions, and his theory suits various casual situations. However, the concept of "heart" instead of "face" will be convincing if further research investigates whether it can be applied in formal interaction, for instance, in court proceedings, state official events, and religious ceremonial procedures, since such situations do not much allow the speaker to use affective politeness.

According to the review of the academic literature, one of the controversial characteristics in Thai talk is *Kreng Jai* (considerateness) a display of polite intentions. Wyatt and Promkandorn point out that *Kreng Jai* "is often referred to as the most difficult concept in Thai culture for Westerners to understand" (2012:362). They examine 27 Thai cultural studies with topics about *Kreng Jai*. The literal meaning of *Kreng Jai* is "fear of the heart/mind"—"*Kreng*" means to be afraid/to fear and "*Jai*" is heart/mind. Komin explains that *Kreng Jai* is "to be considerate, to feel reluctant to impose upon another person, to take another person's feelings (and "ego") into account, or to take every measure not to cause discomfort or inconvenience for another person" (1990:136). *Kreng Jai* means to show the wish to avoid embarrassing others or intruding or imposing on them in a self-effacing, respectful, humble, and extremely considerate manner (Foreign Areas Studies Division 1963). According to Intachakra's study, Thais express *Kreng Jai* in various ways: non-communication, epistemic displacement, explicit self-effacement, and hedged intentionality (2012:6-13). Although an overall impression of *Kreng Jai* is an abundance of negative facework, the display is more complicated than negative facework in an English-speaking community, because the speakers of *Kreng Jai* underline caring and considerateness; concern for the other is emphasised—Thais think about consequences that may affect the other stemming from their verbal acts.

When taught about Kreng Jai, Thais are equipped with skills for estimating the other's "face want", as in Brown and Levinson's concept (1987). Kreng Jai shares the characteristic of dealing with the other's feelings/desires (face want) and concerns speculation before choosing the means of communication. As described by Redmond, Kreng Jai is "the complex calculations of emotions, ulterior motives, and relative status [which] go far beyond a Westerner's rough summing of another's feelings" (1998:125, cited in Intachakra 2011:5). Kreng Jai is a show of concern about the other's burden caused by making a request, it is similar to Brown and Levinson's Apologise Strategy in negative politeness—Admit the impingement, Indicate Reluctance, Give Overwhelming Reasons, and Beg Forgiveness (1987:187-190). However, the point of emphasis is awareness and estimation, sometimes including a deliberate expression of caring about the other's difficulties caused by the speaker and the showing of the speaker's intention not to bother the hearer at all. Thais potentially use "Don't do the FTA" (non-communication) if they find that the burden on the other will be too big or it is impossible to receive acceptance of the request. Particularly, this concern includes whether the hearer is happy to do so or not.

Kreng Jai can produce negative effects when being used with people without a Thai cultural background. A foreigner in Thailand reveals, "Sometimes a concern of this type could either be felt by the other party as unnecessary or even go against the wishes of his/her interlocutor" (Intachakra 2011:5). Nevertheless, Kreng Jai, if applied within proper limits—too much Kreng Jai or exaggeration of the other's difficulties sounds unnecessarily polite for foreigners—can support interaction across cultures by its property of empathic accountability, the speaker can save self-face; s/he does not demonstrate self-concern. Thai society is slightly different from other Asian societies in the way that personal autonomy is valued—being independent and free (O'Sullivan & Tajaroensuk, 1997:6), to a certain degree, Thai people enjoy diverse choices in lifestyle, beliefs, gender identities, and careers. Fieg (1976; Fieg & Mortlock, 1989, cited in Gannon 2002) presents in his comparative study that Thais and Americans share similarities in freedom-loving, a dislike of pomposity, and having a pragmatic outlook. It is also shown in the Thai cultural profile presented by O'Sullivan and Tajaroensuk that Thais are reasonably flexible (1997:7). These unique features characterise the Thai way of acknowledging the other's autonomy and freedom; contemplating possible results before making a verbal act. It can be linked to the Thai interaction manner of seeking the other's comfort zone and eliciting voluntary actions. This tactic probably satisfies face

wants in interaction across cultures, in cases where Thais have enough knowledge about the hearer. A good command of the foreign language can support descriptive reasoning in demonstrations of *Kreng Jai*; otherwise, it may be interpreted negatively.

## **B. Volition of Address Terms**

In a cultural-specific study, Ide (1989) distinguishes Japanese politeness from Brown and Levinson's politeness (1987). Brown and Levinson's politeness is characterised by the concept of volition: the speaker has several linguistic choices of politeness and they choose the one that best serves their communicative purposes, whereas politeness in Japanese is characterised by the concept of discernment: the speaker is governed by strict rules of sociolinguistic convention that provide specific appropriate forms of social relation, time, and place, for example, the Japanese system of honorifics must be used on the basis of correctness in accordance with the rules. The discernment type is independent of the speaker's rational intention (Ide 1989: 242). That is to say, the speaker has no freedom to make a decision about the linguistic choices that serve his/her intention and advantage.

Considering the Thai case, I found that Thai language conventions are more flexible than the Japanese discernment type. The uses of linguistic choices in Thai are not completely limited. Like many other cultures, in a formal situation, politeness is performed according to fixed conventions: however, most situations at the workplace are not completely formal; there is flexibility for the speaker to direct the conversation based on the hearer's face wants, apart from using conventionalised deference. In many situations, the Thai speaker still has a certain freedom to choose from the available choices that benefit him/her within the frame of rules, or even to choose a convention among all those available within the situation that most satisfies his/her communicative goal. In the Thai speech community, conventions are quite loose and do not completely limit politeness choices; the speaker can either choose the norm that most benefits him/her or create a new term that serves the individual's communicative purpose in a particular situation. For the Thai speaker who has higher status than the Thai hearer, while occupation-rank norms are used in formal situations, being necessary for authorising power exercises and keeping interpersonal distance (see Brown & Gilman 1960), the kinship norm serves the purpose of making the hearer feel closer, so that the imposition is legitimised; the hearer can fulfil the speaker's request because of a close relationship rather than because of the regulations.

Thais are socialised to communicate with hierarchical concern—the speakers are aware of social status and social duty in relation to the other while interacting. If the difference in rank cannot clearly be identified, the speaker tends to choose a display of inferiority to show honour to the hearer in the first stage of relationship establishment. This feature can satisfy the hearer's positive face wants because acknowledgement of the hearer's higher status implies admiration of the hearer's positive attributes—charisma and outstanding abilities in their accomplishment of status change. Accordingly, the display of inferiority does not always have to involve negative facework as Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest (see O'Driscoll 1996).

More profoundly, in parallel with the verticality of occupational ranks associated with interpersonal distancing, family-like relationships are formed in Thai politeness; the King and Queen of Thailand are simply called the “Father and Mother of the Land”. Using such terms strategically strengthens ties between the rulers and the subjects, because family relationships cannot be broken off. It makes people in the society feel close and realise their long-term responsibilities to each other. These kinship terms are usually used in Thai addressees everywhere in informal situations, on the assumption that Thais are from the same family.

In the working boundary within the hierarchical system, Thai family-like relationships are formed inside, so that Thai politeness becomes a soft-style conducting of a vertical relationship. Kummer states, “In Thai, the communicative partners are constrained by the variables of sex, age, kinship, education and profession. It is on the basis of such norms that Thai people will distribute sets of expressives with care” (1992:328). He also demonstrates that Thai kinship terms, such as, ‘Lung’ (uncle), and ‘Pa’ (aunt), are particularly used when addressing lower-status people (service labours), such as, taxi drivers and house-keepers (1992:334-336). The use of kinship terms is an attempt to eliminate relational distance; in the meantime, the speaker shows attention toward the other without egotism—overlooking his/her own higher status according to job ranking. Without this attribute, the high-status Thais would hardly win social approval in Thai society where compromise and interdependency is promoted.

Thai politeness in the workplace is mainly displayed in accordance with these two norms: occupational rank and kinship. Both share a commonality in the Thai vertical perception of social relations; the different statuses/unequal ranks between two people are marked. The hierarchical norm stresses interpersonal distance vertically, which decreases the

chance of the other to challenge the speaker from a lower position. In another way, the kinship norm satisfies the demand of safe, stable, and close relationships. In practice, there is a switch between these two norms in different situations—formal and casual. With the same hearer, Thai organisational staff use hierarchical norms in association with the job title/position, together with “khun” (a Thai honorific pronoun and formal title used before the first name) in a formal situation, and switch into kinship terms in informal situations, such as: in job practice, brainstorming, and after-work hours. Still, the use of kinship terms reflects the Thais’ perspective of vertical relationships. When these address terms are applied in the workplace where power in a hierarchical system exists, the right and obligation of interactants according to authoritative power is replaced by the right and obligation within a family. Although Hofstede’s study (2001; Hofstede & Hofstede 2005; Hofstede et al 2010) described the Thai perspective of high power distance as I mentioned in the previous section, the alternative address terms in Thai society indicate how people behave to cope with the power distance.

Kinship terms are able to soften the speaker’s verbal act because they convince the hearer of a safe and close relationship. The hearer’s willingness is boosted by the addresser meaning they will do things for him/her as a family member. The sense of honesty to each other is also assumed in the defined same-group relationship—Thais have the same origin and work towards a common benefit. Kinship terms used by a higher-status person relax and ease the situation of giving orders/commands in working life and, to an extent, make the employees feel they belong to the house. Common possession is assumed, “we are at our home with a close relationship”, so the formed informal relationship indirectly raises awareness about in-house property care.

The use of kinship norms in the workplace shows that the hearer is worthy as a person in his family. Professional address terms such as, Doctor, General and Manager, which are used in formal settings, give the hearer confidence in his/her capability to work in relation to the speaker. However, the higher-status Thai avoids consistent adherence to formal language as it may not be polite enough for Thais. The kinship norm is friendly, and is used to convey a message that the addressee is valuable to the speaker as a family member, so the exercise of power is not perceived as strongly as in the fixed authoritative role.

Thai politeness is not very strict. The kinship norm can be violated in the age aspect, for example, Thai sellers call their customers “Pee” (older brother or older sister), even if the

customers, as judged by appearance, are not clearly older than them. The sellers are likely to position themselves as the inferior in an encounter with unknown customers. This address term carries presuppositions about the familial relationship, indicating that there is no way that the speaker can force the hearer. The customers feel that they gain the full power of decision-making; meanwhile, the seller can get close to their customers and can expect financial support from those customers by payment. The communicative goal is valued more highly than the conventional rule; for example, our neighbours address my father as “Kroo” (teacher) when the addressee is outside the workplace: a school. Concerning the particular time, place, and interpersonal relationship—my neighbour is not my father’s student—the situation in my home village after working hours does not require the use of his job title. Indirectly, the address term “Kroo” serves the function of acknowledgment of the addressee’s knowledge level. Needless to say, for Thai executives, doctors, police, local administrators, and military officers, their job titles and positions are addressed more often than their names in everyday life. This address form is more likely to be used than the nickname or the first name because it satisfies a face want with implications of admiration and acknowledgment of the hearer’s ability and social power.

Another example of volition in Thai politeness is the language of the university. For example, Thai university lecturers call female students “Noo”, a Thai address term for girls, when providing consultation in person, and address the students “Khun”, a Thai formal honorific usually used in the office, when assigning work in the classroom or giving comments on tasks in person. “Noo” connotes the meaning that the speaker considers the hearer as the younger needing care. “Khun” gives an implication to the hearer that this is an interaction between two honourable mature adults; the students are supposed to have high responsibility for their assignments as mature people. “Khun” indexes a considerable distance as it is the formal pronoun; while “Noo” signals a closer distance—“you are young and I am kind to you”. This case shows that there is flexibility in the use of Thai address terms; individuals can select the choice that meets their purpose of communication.

As discussed above, Thai politeness is a loose convention which allows a certain degree of creativity and the selection of rules for the benefit of the speaker as the rational agent in a particular situation. This supports the concept volition politeness through flexible uses of norms; the speaker has a choice of which norms to select for the best achievement of his/her

communicative goal. The right choice is the one that benefits them most, or enables the speaker to get something done or get the hearer under control. Interestingly, we can see the control given by interpersonal distance by the switching of address terms in the Thai language.

### **C.Non-Confrontation**

Non-confrontation can be found in hierarchical societies in asymmetric types of dialogue in which interactants have unequal rights and abilities (Linell & Luckmann 1991). The speaker who possesses lower power and ability than the hearer will be unlikely to win through direct confrontation. Non-confrontation is a technique of evasion and avoidance which is more helpful for the speaker in the pursuit of their communicative goals. I view that this characteristic is important in the diplomatic conversation event in which the speaker from a lower-power state encounters the representative of the more powerful state; the vertical relationship worldview can be adopted for identifying the speaker's position in relation to the hearer.

The avoidance of uncertainty, according to Hofstede's findings (2001, Hofstede et al. 2010), can explain Thais' displays of non-confrontation. Brown and Levinson's concept that almost all interpersonal communications are face threatening (1987), illustrates social encounters. It is usual that the speaker may feel uncertain and insecure when encountering a person s/he does not know very well and/or a person who can exercise power over him/her. So, high power and high distance are the factors that make the speaker carefully regulate their behaviour.

Direct confrontations are avoided because of the importance of face concern in communication in vertical relationships. Wannaruk (2008:328) points out that in Thai customs it is accepted that the higher-status person has more communicative power than the lower status one. They are likely to be more direct and assertive when talking with a lower-status person. Specifically, in the Thai seniority system, when an older person loses face, the perception of this loss is greater than normal because they have a prominent, respected status. Thai children are trained by family and in school about obedience. Guidance from a senior person is highly valued; younger people are supposed to trust in the senior person's goodwill and extra experience. Some young Thais cope with conflicts, especially with parents and teachers, by presenting themselves as a good listener, which is the sign of respect or self-

effacement, rather than making an effort to explain their own views. Challenge and confrontation is not a wise choice of communication in Thai society where inequality is nurtured within the relational model of protection and patronage.

Directness can be interpreted as a challenge, “Thai people place high value on deference to rank and respect for authority...A challenge to authority and power can lead to personal disputes” (Sirussadaporn-Charoenngam & Jablin 1999:5). High-context communication and indirectness is the effect of politeness in a hierarchical society. Small hints in utterances can save the speaker from being perceived as the opponent of the higher-status hearer. Phukanchana (2004) develops eight propositions of Thai politeness choices in disagreement. Many of them involve awareness of age, social position, and relationship concerns, for example, a Thai superiors’ use of the bald on-record strategy is socially acceptable, whereas subordinate Thais tend to use an off-record strategy. Other strategies include joking in a mixture of positive politeness and off-record reactions—comments made by a parliamentary member to the Chair in the Thai Parliament (Deephuengton 1992: 73-74 cited in Phukanchana 2004:12), or silence accompanied by a neutral facial expression, which is socially-acknowledged as sign of politeness in Thai society (Phukanchana 2004:17).

The research by Phukanchana (2004) gives the impression that the individuals struggling in a hierarchical system are not doing so to gain equal power, rather they are struggling within the scope of their power and at the position they possess. Possessing power is not always desired because a low-power person gains low responsibility and thus more protection. In this unequal power situation, the weak are not forgotten or blamed, but they are cared for and forgiven for their mistakes. So, in this kind of society, people do not have to express as much as possible to gear power bargaining with the hearer—“I have the right to be right as you do”. Instead, the quantity of the message is reduced because of careful power management in the high-power society. It has been found that Thai expression is very succinct, with much omitted. The Thai language has less variation in formulaic expressions than English and the situations where intentions can be verbalised are fewer than in the English norm (Intachakra 2001).

This non-competition in communication is supported by Hofstede and his colleagues’ studies (2001, 2010) which classify Thailand as a feminine society in which social members have a preference for cooperation, modesty, and caring for the weak. Because victory is not



the highest goal in life, communication in a feminine society tends to be less assertive than in a masculine society which concentrates on competition and rewards victory.

Overall, to a certain degree, the use of politeness in Thai society serves the individuals' way of life within their particular societal constraints: hierarchy and interdependence. Politeness which stresses unequal relationships and making compromises can be described as “bend, but do not break”—losing some is better than losing all. The main features of Thai politeness are empathetic accountability and displays of considerateness and flexibility, as shown above where I have demonstrated volition in Thai politeness and deliberate means of Thai non-confrontation.

### III. Politeness in Thai English

Analysing some example data which are not Standard English requires an understanding about the characteristics of the English language as produced by Thai users. The previous findings are the background knowledge which guide data interpretation. These results increase an awareness of what was studied, how to use the results in data analysis, and how this research can build on the existing knowledge. According to the previous findings, Thai politeness culture influences Thai English as follows:

#### **A. Display of Self-Deficiency and Low-Confidence**

Speech act studies in Thai English indicate that Thais display inferiority as a gesture of politeness. Unlike people in individualistic cultures who tend to value confidence which enables them to cope with the equal manner of interaction effectively, people in collective cultures potentially feel that it is right to present a subordinate position or a lower ability than the other to reinforce the relationship (Cohen 1991, 1997, also see Ting-Toomey 1988, 2005; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey 2003). It has been found that Thai strategies of apology are expressions of self-deficiency and accepting blame (Thijittang & Lê 2002). In Wannaruk's case study (2008) of refusal to a request for public speaking prior to a university event, the native speakers of English reason that they have a prior commitment or they are not available: “I already have a previous engagement so I won't be able to attend”; whereas the

Thai strategy is to show modesty in responding to the same situation, for example, “I’m not good at public speaking” or “I’m bad at speaking in front of people”, “I won’t make a good teacher”, “I don’t think I am capable enough”, “I have no confidence in public speaking”, “I’m afraid I couldn’t teach”, or “Teaching is too difficult for me” (2008:331-332).

Being familiarised with the Thai speech community, which values self-effacement as a politeness display, Thais are not very decisive and active when speaking English. They are likely to show reluctance, delay, or fade into obscurity. Chaidaroon (2003) argues that the Thai distinction of shyness, as usually judged by foreigners, should not be considered as a sign of incompetence. The shyness is associated with four acts: not asking for help and not refusing to help; extreme humility; not speaking up; and not responding quickly. Shyness is a strategy used by Thais to manage the interaction, especially while facing an unusual situation in an international setting. For example, if Thais cannot speak English very well, or they are not sure about the answer, the Thai style is to “play it safe” by securing their own face in the manner of Abraham Lincoln’s famous saying: “It is better to be silent and be thought a fool, than to speak and remove all doubt”.

## **B. Active Use of Explicit Markers of Politeness**

Chakorn (2006) compares Thai English and the English of native speakers in letters of request. It is found that Thais use more indirect, deferential, and self-effacing strategies than the native speakers. The letters written by Thais embody more hedging, delays in making the actual request, passive voice, and expressions of gratitude. Politeness markers such as “please” and “kindly” are heavily used. It is possible that the Thai communicators use the subordination strategy. In this approach, the speaker on the inferior side accepts that the role of voicing politeness should be more actively performed by his/her side than the other who is positioned on the more experienced and more powerful side. The Thai perspective of vertical relationships and uncertainty avoidance is transferred into Thai communication with a person with whom they have a distant relationship. Their strict use of formal English is possibly aimed at creating certainty in their interpersonal relationships and the given situation. The heavy display of politeness components in Thai-English reveals their efforts to show polite intentions in a vertical worldview.

## **C. Relationship-Orientation**

Punturaumporn and Hale (2003) conducted a research interview; their informants were Thai negotiators and foreign negotiators who had first-hand experience in negotiation with Thai representatives in Bangkok. Since obvious competition and conflict is not desired, Thais employ avoidance strategies which best preserve Thai face by refusing to discuss conflict-potential issues at the table. Foreigners are able to discern Thai sensitivity; a foreign businessman in Thailand revealed: “I think that Thais have a good sense in learning about other people. They are good at evaluating their counterparts in order to predict what the counterparts like or want and to know which approach to use” (Punturaumporn & Hale 2003:18). Punturaumporn and Hale (2003) also pinpoint that the weakness of Thai negotiation is the overuse of feelings rather than facts. Foreign business informants have an impression that Thais are more focused on rapport management than the accurate presentation of subjects. Similarly, Rojjanaprapayon shows that foreigners who talk with Thais in the US perceive Thai femininity: attentiveness, care, sensitiveness, and friendliness (1997:200-201). This can be considered as an important part of Thai politeness in interaction across cultures.

## **D. Indirectness**

According to the foreigners’ feedback, Thai English is indirect. Thai speakers do not specify names: people, places, things, and negative feelings. They use words of probability: “somewhat”, “maybe”, and express denial of feelings or difficulties: “not really”, “I am not sure...” (Rojjanaprapayon 1997:218); for this reason, the hearer cannot identify the precise meaning. Also, Thai English utterances are carefully managed to avoid disappointing the other. A foreign businessman reveals his experience of negotiation with Thais:

“When I asked [the Thai] “how much does it cost,” I heard a long story first about how difficult it was. So, everybody avoided the “bang”! It takes longer than in Germany when I asked how much it is. There, people tell you it costs so much, then afterward you make the deal. But in Thailand, people try to prepare the mind of the other person first—how difficult everything is—so when you are told the price, which you know is too high, then he has already prepared your mind”

(Punturaumporn & Hale 2003:19-20)

## **E. Inaccessibility**

In the study of spoken Thai English in the US, Rojjanaprapayon (1997) discusses in his conclusion chapter that Thais are unable to display their politeness intentions properly because of the language barrier. Many Thais reveal that they want to perform politeness according to Thai cultural values: indirectness and hierarchical concerns, while non-Thais reveal that they cannot understand those intentions. It is also reported that many minor details of politeness signals are not significantly found in Thai English, such as disclaimers, intensifiers, and modifiers (Rojjanaprapayon 1997:200).

The application of Thai cultural values in Thai English serves the purpose of face saving. However, in doing so, Thai English becomes unusual and confusing for foreign recipients. In addition, many Thai speakers themselves do not have sufficient English proficiency to display their deliberate intentions as well as they can in their native Thai, nor do they have considerable knowledge of polite English in the native speakers' sense.

## **IV. Thai Diplomatic Approach**

Besides background knowledge about politeness in Thai society and politeness in Thai English, the interpretation of the research data involves the working condition of the speakers. More or less, Thai working visions in diplomacy influence how the conversation is performed. This section provides an understanding about the means and perspectives behind Thai diplomatic talk. The content is developed from previous studies which explore the uniqueness of Thai diplomacy.

Thailand, officially known as Siam before 1939, is a country that was not severely affected by international conflicts, although the country could not avoid being part of those international conflicts due to the extension of wars triggered by the major states. Thailand was also free from being colonised during the colonial era when Britain and France competed to control Southeast Asia. Subsequently, the country was also saved from a devastating attack in the Second World War and the Cold War, by means of non-adversarial diplomacy—one neither overtly defines the enemy, nor treats any other in an unfriendly manner. This gesture of cordiality ensures the country's safety and being free from complete control by other

powerful nations. The start of anti-foreign countries or avoiding international contacts, if Thailand had done this, may have provoked a negative reaction from the other countries. Those countries may have changed from using a soft tool: diplomatic communication, to a hard tool like economic and military tools.

In the Second World War, the Thai Government formally supported the Axis, while the Seri Thai (The Free Thai Movement), the underground military intelligence led by a group of politicians, intellectuals, and elites, supported the Allies. At the end of the war, the evidence of Thai assistance to the Allies was presented and later acknowledged by the Allies who were the winning party (Wyatt 1982; Reynolds 2004). During the Cold War, the Thai government promoted a liberal economy and ran anti-socialism policies, being a close ally of the United States. Meanwhile, Thailand also valued its historical and social relationship with China. The Thai Prime Minister, Field Marshal Pibulsongkram, and his collaborators continued informal communication with the Chinese government. Many of Thailand's diplomatic means for repairing their relationship with China were done to show the Thai government's peaceful intentions (Chinwanno 2008). One of their strategies was sending the Thai Prime Minister's principle advisor's son and daughter to be the adopted children of Premier Zhou Enlai in China, as a sign of guaranteed long-term relationship. The two children did networking within the Chinese ruling society. The daughter, Sirin Phathanothai, later became the Thai senator in her middle age. Her autobiography *The Dragon's Pearl* (Phathanothai, 1994) reveals some of historical facts about Chinese-Thai relations in the Cold War.

Up until the present, Thailand's foreign policy has been conducted carefully and rationally. Considering an example of the Thai-Burmese relationship, despite Thailand's support of Burmese democratisation with a pro-Western view—calling for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi (Ganjanakhundee 2009), Thailand's social and economic relationship with the Burmese government has continued. Thailand is one of the major trade partners of Myanmar (Economy Watch 2010). It is possible that Thailand realises the multi-channel relations between the two countries. Disputes in one area do not end the relationship in other areas; Thailand's refusal to take an antagonistic stance to the Burmese military regime has been an economic necessity. But this approach has been made easier—or comes more naturally than it would to other countries—because of the Thai cultural values of living together with peace and interdependency.

In the macro picture, Chen (2007) describes Thai diplomatic manoeuvres as “Bamboo Diplomacy”, like how a bamboo tree bends with the wind. He argues that Thailand realises the direction of global conflicts and is able to adapt itself to fit into the changing situations. Pavin Chachavalongpong, a former Thai diplomat, explicates Thailand's Bamboo Diplomacy, saying that it is “always solidly rooted but flexible enough to bend whichever way the wind blows in order to survive” (Chachavalongpong 2010:1).

In my view, if we count the advantages which Thailand gained in international relations, for example, infrastructure, income, knowledge, and the legal privilege of trade tariff and immigration procedures through multi-lateral and bilateral relations (LePoer 1987; Chinwanno 2005; Rana 2009; Department of Trade Negotiation Thailand 2010), it can be seen that Thai non-adversarial diplomacy is not only aimed at surviving in a conflict situation, but also gaining more power through cooperation with other countries. This method of effective diplomacy can be explained by a saying: “one builds a windmill instead of a wall when the wind of change comes”, that is, the country gains strength and power by association with others in international relations, namely, nation states, non-governmental organisations, and international organisations.

The Thai diplomatic approach is characterised by three factors. Firstly, Thais have a positive attitude towards foreigners, and, of course, have some willingness to enhance themselves by accepting others from different ethnic communities (Winichakul 1994). They are socialised by the Thai state-controlled formal education system and media which presents the history of Thailand's international relations in a positive way. Most Thai people have learnt that King Chulalongkorn of Thailand visited European countries in 1897 and established state-to-state relationships, introducing Siam to the world as a modern state. He also supported Thai youths' education abroad, as well as employing foreign advisors. One of his key advisors was Gustave Rolin-Jaequemyns, a Belgian who worked closely with the Thai king during a time when Siam was pressured by colonial powers (Winichakul 1994; Tingsabhadh 2000; Tips 1992, 1996a, 1996b; Stengs 2009). Using such strategies, the Thai state had a number of people who worked, both formally and informally, in coordination between Thailand and foreign countries both in war and peace time. Thai society has developed the key moral concept of ‘Nam Jai’ (the water of the heart), the Thai idiom referring to the Thai attribute of generosity to all, including unknown persons or strangers. In

the old days, Thais customarily placed a small water jar in front of their houses; this drinking water was offered to the passer-by or the unknown traveller for free; in Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, this can be considered as a gift-giving strategy to initiate relationships in an age when people could not speak foreign languages. It proves that Thai society encourages its social members' self-enhancement by accepting out-group persons: people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Up to and including the present, the country has pro-investment policies, strong export industries (CIA 2013) and supports people's rights and liberties through constitutional law (1997, 2007). In this way, Thai society has been opened to flows of immigrants, goods, and international information. To some extent, Thais have learnt more about different cultures in comparison with the countries that have banned international media, overseas social networking, and who reject foreigners' roles in their economies and their different ways of social practice. The cultural knowledge acquired from the media and the experience of interaction enables Thais to speculate upon communicative effects when communicating with foreigners.

The second supporting factor is Thai Buddhist ideology. Keyes (1987), who defines the country as a "Buddhist Kingdom", argues that Buddhism plays an important role in the Thai regime in the formation and unification of the nation. Although there are many religions in Thailand, 94.6% of Thais are Buddhists of the Theravada school (Thailand National Statistics Office 2011). Thai people of other religions also live in the Thai Buddhist context. Most Thais are socialised by Thai schools and media about the ideology of Buddhism, which is the national religion.

Thai Buddhism cultivates the appreciation of mental peace based on the values of forgiveness, detachment, gratitude, equanimity, consciousness, and moderation (Komin 1991). Thais believe in consciousness and moderation; activities should be done to a sufficient degree—not too much and not too little, extremism and strictness are socially censored. Many worldly behaviours are allowed to a proper degree. This characteristic of Thai society agrees with Hofstede and Hofstede's finding, "secularization in feminine countries does not imply a loss of civil morality" (2005:154). Thais prefer loose control, and the society accepts the reality that people pursue both mental happiness and material gains. Moderation relates to Thai interaction logics in risk estimation and decision making,

including how they define communicative goals with realistic ambitions—people are not ideally virtuous and may not be in a condition to assist, as found in the Thai *Kreng Jai* manner. So ‘the flexible and ordinary person’ is a better description of Thais with moderation in mind than ‘the supremely virtuous and disciplined person’. To some extent, this Thai trait gives some strengths to Thai diplomatic talk regarding the consciousness of national pursuits of interest, displaying goodwill, and self-adjusting to fit into a different culture.

Thais are religiously trained in emotional engagement, which supports the purpose of politeness: “outward expressions of anger are also regarded as dangerous to social harmony and are obvious signs of ignorance, crudity, and immaturity” (Sriussadaporn-Charoenngam & Jablin 1999: 385). The sustained good-temper posture can be explained by the Buddhist view that there is no serious problem, all happenings are temporary, everything comes and goes, even our existence in this world is impermanent (Buddhadasa 1988; Fronsdal 2001; Britannica 2013). Based on this paradigm, the way to solve interpersonal conflict is not external adjustment, trying to change the other’s opinions and beliefs, but internal adjustment, the person copes with their feelings which have been affected by the outside world. The Buddhist concept supports politeness performances of the vertical relationship in the Thai hierarchical system, where patience, contemplation, and tolerance are required when dealing with a higher-power person. Considering the pragmatic meaning of the unsaid, a part of Asian implicitness, it is understandable from the Thai cultural viewpoint that the quantity of unsaid messages is likely to be high due to the hierarchical society combined with Buddhism which encourages people to live in their own mental world and react to the outside world with caution. In a study about Thai avoidance of direct confrontation, Komin states that Thai informants have the perspective that there may be future chances where they can voice different opinions in another time and space, and still save one another’s “ego” by avoiding face-to-face confrontations (1991:143). Buddhist values are embedded in Thai interactive behaviour in self-context monitoring, which is a realisation of the changing context of conversation and one’s own feelings, as described in the religious practice “constantly guarding the heart” (Buddhadasa 1976: dhamma lecture). Contemplation and consciousness possibly delay Thais’ reactions: thinking carefully about the future impacts on the self and the other.



Finally, Thailand does not address its diplomatic position clearly by virtue of the Thai communicative culture. In a high power society, people learn to play it safe by maintaining a high degree of implicitness. When disagreeing, some cultures advocate people clarifying their ideas, positioning their own standing point among the others, but, in a Thai view (acquired in a hierarchical society where interactants' social power is strikingly different and is priced more highly than clarity of expression), speech is silver, but silence is gold. Silence is a sign of respect in the culture. In this way, the communicators can play it safe by selecting the safest interpretative choice when repairing a relationship. An example case is the smile, which is widely perceived as a unique personality trait of Thais. The country's slogan as given by foreigners is "the land of smiles", because the people often smile. However, Thais use smiling to convey various meanings instead of uttering; as discussed on the tourist websites, there are over 40 interpretations of Thai smiles (Citrinot 2011:1; James 2010:1), for example, polite refusal, confusion, requesting time to find a good answer, cordial intention, and disappointment. Chaidaroon suggests that Thais smile to ease the tension and reduce anxiety (2003: 306).

Culturally, these three factors contribute to the success and strength of Thai diplomacy. The Thai diplomatic approach is formed in a society where there is a cultivation of people's positive attitudes about contact with people from different cultures. Thai Buddhist society also gives Thais a sense of empathy and which shapes Thai thoughtfulness in interaction—Thais try to shape their interaction based on their prediction of future results. Moreover, in utterance production, there is a tendency that Thai diplomatic speakers will leave things unsaid in many critical situations or leave a great deal of cues or hints for alternative interpretations because of the transfer of their communicative culture in the Thai language into foreign languages. The not-telling-all style can save the country during international conflicts.

Within this framework of Thai diplomacy and politeness, it is interesting to consider how the Thai culture is situated in particular interactional situations of diplomatic talk, and what the strengths and weaknesses of Thai-English in diplomatic conversations are. These findings can support the formulation of knowledge about diplomatic talk in interaction across cultures.

# **Chapter 5: Politeness Strategies in Diplomatic Conversation**

This chapter presents my data analysis. The first part introduces interaction scenarios in the case study which comprise the co-occurring external situation and the internal context of the situation of talk, or the conversational atmosphere at a particular space and time. This contextual factor affects the conversation in terms of topic selection and implication of meanings while the interactants temporarily exist in the same circumstance and have a shared knowledge about the context. The second part discusses diplomatic politeness strategies in correlation with many aspects of competencies: conventional politeness, lexical politeness, descriptive politeness, interactive politeness and intercultural politeness. All of these are geared to an understanding of diplomatic politeness strategies and how the Thai hearers are treated by the foreign diplomatic representatives.

## **I. Scenario**

This study's analysis consists of two parts: contextual factors and linguistic forms acquired from the transcriptions of conversations in the events of study. The contextual factors relate to the interpretation of meanings concerning the circumstances in which the interactants temporarily co-exist. These factors are not only relevant to meaning generation, but also describe the conversational genre and roles of actors in the situation. This research's theme focuses on the political turmoil which was coincident with the diplomatic conversation events; therefore, the key contextual factors which are brought into discussion are the external context of political situations in Bangkok where the diplomatic meeting events were held, and the internal context which are the elements about the situation of talk at the Thai bureaucratic offices.

## **A. External Context**

In the period of Thailand's political crisis during the years of 2008-2011, there were street demonstrations across the country, in which the colours of T-shirts worn by the protesters signified divergent political allegiances (so-called "colorized politics"). Serious incidents included the seizure of the national airport, the invasion of the ASEAN summit venue, and the arson attacks at Bangkok's department stores. This political chaos, as well as the uses of military and police forces to control the protests, which were broadcast by the global media affected Thailand's international relations in the way that the country's international credibility was damaged; therefore, diplomatic conversation became an important means for Thai state agencies to rebuild their national image and ensure international support.

Because the whole country was in turmoil due to daily street protests and the various activities of mob campaigns in which a large number of people actively participated, many countries declared Thailand an unsafe destination for tourists. However, the T-shirt mobs could not totally paralyse state and government affairs; Thai state and government organisations still performed their missions, and bureaucratic offices could continue in working hours, although there was a common worry about the security of people during the political protests across country. In that period, the number of foreign travellers in Thailand significantly decreased because violent incidents caused by protests frequently occurred. Also, the daily protests and campaigns disturbed air and road transportation in the country. Nevertheless, all foreign embassies, business agencies, and Thai bureaucratic offices in Thailand officially opened as usual (see Chapter 1, Contextual Background).

## **B. Internal Context**

The meetings between Thai and foreign representatives, which provide the data for this thesis, took place at the reception hall/meeting room of the Thai bureaucratic office in Bangkok. The room was closed and private, without video cameras. There are two small

micro-phones and coffee/tea on the table between the two leading speakers. Only persons on duty were allowed in the room. The conversation was carried out in a quiet atmosphere. No extraneous activities were allowed, except note-taking, voice-recording, and photo-taking (both action photos and posed photos).

The number of attendees in each meeting event varied from 6 to 20. Apart from the leading interactants, the participants included organisational staff from both sides. These people were lower-rank leaders such as vice presidents, the director of the international relation department, and the organisational officers who are in charge of the meeting, for example, secretaries, junior diplomats and international relations officers who organised the meetings and undertook cooperative projects, and the official photographer. In some meetings, people from external organisations also participated, for example, academic experts appointed to support cooperative projects, and other researchers who gained permission to observe the meeting for academic purposes. People in the room were, however, able to concentrate on the talk situation consecutively without distraction.

Regarding the Thai party, the leading speakers were the heads of the office or the persons in charge of this position. The leading speakers of the foreign party could be divided into four categories: firstly, the foreign ambassadors who came to pay courtesy calls, which are the customary self-introductions and farewells to the state leaders of the host country. Secondly, political leaders who paid official visits to Thailand in that period; these were not all heads of state. Thirdly, at the Office of Thailand Trade Representative, the leading speaker was the representative of a foreign business association in Thailand. Fourthly, the foreign guests were two senior education diplomats invited to the Ministry of Science and Technology to discuss potential cooperative programs.

Besides the leading interactants, the other participants in the event were operational staff from both parties. For the Thai party, in some events, the event organiser seated the deputy of the head office, the representative of the organisational committee involving the issue of discussion, the academic expert, and the person concerning the cooperative project. Occasionally, both leading speakers had interpreters sat behind them. In some events, the speakers could speak with their counterparts in English directly. The total attendees were fifteen persons on average, including the researcher who sat as the observer and was not allowed to speak. Other participants were allowed to speak if the leading speaker assigned or

gave the floor. However, the participants could use body language to show their reactions to the occurring conversation, such as eye contact, smiling, and laughter.

Since my discussion and the presentation of transcripts may affect the persons involved in the real-time situation, the organisations and persons involved in the linguistic data are anonymised in the extracts and contextual descriptions. The data collection was conducted in Thailand at four bodies: the Bureau of International Relations, the Thai National Assembly; the Department of Protocol, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand; the Office of Thailand Trade Representative, the Prime Minister's Office; the National Science Technology and Innovation Policy Office, Ministry of Science and Technology of Thailand. The differentiation of diplomatic communicative strategies used by the four Thai organisations is outside this research scope; my study does not deepen the interpretation and findings at the organisational level or the individual personal level. Therefore, the researcher refrains from presenting details which are irrelevant to the analytical process which aims to reveal the politeness strategies of diplomatic talk in a broad view—the unified picture of Thai-foreign conversation. More importantly, the presentation in details about the speakers and organizations could be an ethical risk, impacting on Thailand's diplomatic work and the persons concerned. Accordingly, the contextual background which is given broadly is adequate for serving the research aims and analytical approach.

## II. Generalising Diplomatic Politeness

For practical use, I group diplomatic politeness strategies into five categories: conventional politeness, lexical politeness, descriptive politeness, interactive politeness, and intercultural politeness. All of these strategies as termed by the researcher are developed on a theoretical basis—mainly using Brown and Levinson's theory. However, this study is not a direct, simple application of a theory for putting the data into a form or model, rather it offers a knowledge-based discussion which brings about the academic principle of language mastery for diplomatic conversation in practice.

## **A. Conventional Politeness**

Conventional politeness is a way to modify utterances by using form-based politeness signs, e.g. using politeness markers and formulaic syntax in a conventional way or presenting normal meanings. The user of conventional politeness exhibits clear signs in their utterance forms to signify that politeness is conveyed, and the hearer's immediate realisation of politeness can be expected. The clear signs serve to facilitate the hearer's reception process. Conventional politeness is generally recognised by international English users, for example, 'sir', 'please', 'May I....', 'Would you please....', etc. This kind of politeness is heavily applied in the bureaucratic speech domain, which serves the consistent signification of different ranks, positions, and institutional powers between two interactants because it clearly indicates that politeness is conveyed.

In general cases, conventional politeness is deferential language which clearly shows that the speaker values the hearer and positions the hearer in a secured place while developing interpersonal relations—for example, the acknowledgement of the hearer's power implies accommodating behaviour or demonstrates that "I do not harm you". This self-abasement can be seen in bureaucratic and service careers. By using deference, different levels of power between the interactants are underlined. Conventional politeness is used in diplomatic talk because the speaker estimates that the hearer from a different country has knowledge of English at a certain level. That is to say, conventional politeness in diplomatic English is universal because it is achieved by speculating that the hearer shares general knowledge about the language. Educated, experienced participants from different nations are likely to recognise this politeness type very quickly. In all events in this study, conventional politeness is applied at a very early stage because it can ensure a smooth encounter. However, it is possible that in some cases, complicated usages of conventional politeness can be too difficult for the hearer to understand, for example, the speaker provides various politeness markers or uses a complex sentence structure in order to show a high level of respect or an appreciation of the hearer's high status. In this case, if the speaker uses the correct language components for the situation, the recipient can recognise that polite efforts were made, though they may not thoroughly comprehend the linguistic complexity.

Despite being one of Brown and Levinson's negative politeness strategies, the language of deference in my case study can be classified as positive politeness in the sense that the speaker shows an attempt to approach the hearer with an acknowledgment of his/her high power and status rather than distancing themselves from each other by the use of formalised language. According to Brown and Levinson, the strategy of this hybrid act is judged by assessing which face the speaker attends to, not by the technique of modification:

The mixture of elements deriving from positive- and negative-politeness strategies in a given utterance may simply produce a kind of hybrid strategy somewhere in between the two...when hedges (e.g. like, sort of) are used to render more vague the expression of an extreme positive-politeness opinion, the results are basically still positive-politeness strategies, even though they make use of essentially negative-politeness techniques to soften the presumption."

(Brown & Levinson 1987:230)

This socially-accepted politeness is first-order politeness (Watts 2003). Since these expressions are 'recognised', and in fact expected in diplomatic circles, it can be termed as politic behaviour by Watts' definition, because it is displayed according to the rules in this speech domain, without special effort. But there are many points during diplomatic encounters when, if this politeness was not used, it would be regarded as impolite. But in most cases when it is used, participants do not consciously judge the user to be 'polite' – it's merely what they expect, or the convention that they normally use in the diplomatic domain.

Watts' concept of politic behaviour is not significantly applied in my study because the main purpose is identifying face-driven utterances. In most kinds of interaction, there is a cline going from 'behaviour judged as noticeably polite because it is more than what is normally expected' at one end, to 'noticeably impolite' at the other end, with 'behaviour which is not noticed at all because it just conforms to expectations' in the middle. This last is what Watts calls "politic". However, there are situations in which first order politeness is so salient that there is no politic middle ground (O'Driscoll 2010:270-272). The behaviours which I examine are examples of such situations.

Considering Brown and Levinson's theory later known as volition politeness—a view that the speaker has choices in communication, rather than being controlled by social and linguistic norms (See Chapter 4), I consider that the speaker displays conventional politeness

purposefully, rather than habitually conforming to a convention. Conventional politeness gives diplomatic speakers many advantages. Firstly, it guarantees the recognition of international hearers. The speaker takes less of a risk in being misunderstood regarding their politeness display. Secondly, it eases information processing and saves communicative time; the speaker can grasp ready-constructed politeness expressions. If the speaker uses an unconventional style; s/he may spend a longer time on the production of a unique utterance and gearing the hearer's perception. However, the frequent use of conventional politeness may result in a boring conversation because it offers a verbal experience that the hearer has heard before. Thirdly, the conventional style ensures suitability for diplomatic events which take place in an official setting. Also, the persons involved in the situation are the ruling class—the top leaders and high-ranking officials of the host country. These persons universally deserve a high level of respect due to their social position.

Conventional politeness can facilitate communication. When the speaker uses conventional politeness signs, the hearer can immediately understand politeness meanings. Certainly, in the formal situation, using conventional politeness to signal an unusual meaning is avoided, especially at the beginning of the conversation where politeness should be clearly communicated for showing respect to the host country and ensuring intelligibility for the non-native speakers (Thais). Through the use of conventional politeness, i.e. using the full form of official address, the speaker clearly shows that s/he degrades his/herself and elevates the other through the perspective of hierarchical ranking.

FG: Thank you for this honoured privilege to meet Your Excellency.

Or

FG: Please accept my admiration about your knowledge and about the relationship under your leadership.

As shown above, the hearers are exclusively treated. Many conventional expressions are important in diplomatic conversation, no speaker switches to the informal style completely, as this type of event does not allow it. The use of conventional politeness can support the presentation of a soft personality, with no sign of dissent; to an extent, it shows that the speaker is a conformist who compromises with the social rules—using socially-accepted utterances. Conventional politeness, if not used for ironic purpose, can facilitate communication as commonly-used politeness devices ease the interpretative process for the



hearer. On speculation, this approach assures the speaker that the hearer can understand his/her politeness intentions; the speaker assumes that there is a high possibility that the hearer has learnt from past experience. Since the observed situations are formal and restrictive; in harmonisation with this type of the event, and the hearers are not non-native speakers of English, the speakers do not play with words to a great extent. Conventional politeness is the basic instrument that brings about clarity of politeness intentions and stabilises the encounter at the initial stage.

Presumably, diplomatic professionals have experience of working in foreign countries; in all probability, most of them gain constructive experience of, or have received formal training in, the universal manner and norms in Standard English. From the data, most diplomatic speakers skilfully use the terms of address and terms of addressee reference which match the atmosphere of the formal event. In the data, the honorifics, "*Your Excellency*" or "*Excellency*" are generally used, together with the combination of the generic title Mr./Madam, and the job title "*Mr./Madam Ambassador*", "Mr. President," "*Mr. Speaker* (parliamentary position)", which shows recognition of the hearer's power and duty in the state organisation and the country. The leading speakers do not address each other by the first name and surname. When mentioning a third person who is not present in the meeting, the speakers, both the Thais and the foreigners, add "Khun" (a Thai honorific) before the first name (in Thai culture, the person is not addressed by their surname). Some foreign guests use only the first name when addressing a person in their team. Also, ending the reply with "*sir*" or "*madam*" is used, but not very frequently. The proper level of frequency in the use of deference creates a natural conversation and shows professionalism.

Essentially, deference is typically used as a first-base warranty for safe relationship establishment during interpersonal communication. Using deference carries the intention of soften the personality when encountering with the other. Also, in some cases if there is adequate linguistic and contextual evidence, it can be interpreted that the speaker accepts that s/he is inferior to the hearer. Brown and Levinson state that deference serves to defuse potential face threatening acts by indicating that the addressee's right to relatively immunity from imposition is recognised (1987:178). Once deference is used, the interactants' relative power and positions are defined. Unlike business talks in which formal deference and bureaucratic conventions are not especially required, diplomatic conversations have substantial features of Brown and Levinson's negative politeness strategies: conventional

indirect, admission of the imposition, point-of-view distance, etc., as these features are bound with the traditions of bureaucratic hierarchy which underline power differences and distance between the two interactants who represent different countries and organisations. Mindful of institutional power existing in the conversational context, the speaker frequently marks the power and authority of the hearer, as in the following examples:

- If possible, I would like to ask Your Excellency your opinion about...
- May I ask you about...
- I would like to know about...
- I would like to ask ...
- What might be...?
- I would like to know the procedure, whether it is similar to...
- If I may express my personal opinion, I think ...

Although the user of conventional politeness loses the ability to display his/her individual qualities of creativity in language use, s/he can make impressions in terms of language knowledge, social conformity, and effort to honour the hearer.

## **B. Unconventional Politeness**

The difference between conventional and unconventional politeness is highly dependent on an individual's creativity. Unconventional politeness is more sophisticated and depends on individual style; the speaker gives the hearer a surprise by using an unpredictable utterance in relation to face concern, going beyond expectations based on the convention and type of event. While the user of conventional politeness enjoys clarity and easy communication with the hearer; the user of unconventional politeness takes a greater risk of being judged negatively by the hearer, being misunderstood or the hearer being unable to understand completely; even native speakers of English may feel reluctant to judge whether the utterance is polite in English or not.

I propose that unconventional politeness is mainly based on theoretical judgements rather than being judged by social members, and covers both the discourses and interactional behaviours concerned. Mainly, in my research, I use Brown and Levinson's face concept (1987) in judgement about the potential effects of positive and negative face on the speaker and the hearer. Ultimately, this kind of politeness can effectively satisfy face wants in some circumstances, with its properties of unanticipated impression-making. If the speaker consistently uses conventional politeness, generally known deferential expressions, interpersonal distance still remains. However, the speaker takes a communicative risk when using unconventional politeness since no one can be sure of social acceptance, the outcome they gain from unconventional politeness can be far more satisfactory than conventional politeness because the speaker displays his/her own uniqueness in the particular event—their remark differs from other people in the same kind of situation.

I classify unconventional politeness into four types: lexical, descriptive, interactive, and intercultural, depending on the point of emphasis in the display of politeness intention. I do not develop the typology at the level of the sentence unit in utterances since this aspect is indistinct in oral communication. Additionally, it should be noted that unconventional politeness cannot be worked out independently from conventional politeness. Still, the speaker performs the conversation within the specific context which relies on particular conventions, especially diplomatic language, which in some way, limits the range of linguistic choices for the speakers. However, in the cases below, those conventional components which the speaker has to use are not dominant in the function of face effects, but restrict the scope for creativity of politeness in the formal diplomatic event.

## **1. Lexical Politeness**

Lexical politeness is the tactical use of words without inherent politeness meanings. Although they are not generally acknowledged as politeness signs, these lexical items can be considered as the instrument of linguistic modification for satisfying face needs as long as they fit both the linguistic context and social context, for example, giving a sense of interpersonal proximity or distance or intensifying or lowering illocutionary force. These lexical items are different from politeness markers and formulaic expressions which conventionally facilitate politeness recognition.

A refined selection of lexical choices can be explained by Brown and Levinson's ideas on redressiveness and off record strategies, for example, instead of using a precise word, the speaker chooses a hint, clue, or understatement in order to blur/fade the FTA. In the data, many meaning-loaded words are used very tactfully within the specific context by implication and/or multiple layers of connotation. This idea agrees with Watts's studies (1992, 2003) which show that there is no fixed meaning in conversational language, but a word can be used for a variety of meanings, depending on the context.

The single word is an important basic unit to be recognised as a politeness display because a strong word, if used inappropriately in a certain context, can be the key item in face threatening. Wording is useful to direct interpersonal distance and concealment. This approach was first suggested by Arndt and Janney (1985) under the term "emotive cues" originally developed from the theory of language intensity by Bradac, Bowers, and Courtright (1979, 1980) which presents the relationship between lexical variation and interpersonal distance on three levels: intensity, immediacy, and diversity. In my research, I view that the selection of words is a re-creation of the reality between two people—re-defining who they are and the relation they have in the specific moment. Some words are used to show distance or display "uninvolvement" in the critical issue (Arndt & Janney 1985). Further, lexical techniques, either for ambiguity or redressive purposes, indicate a sophisticated use of Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies in speculating on how communication will affect the hearer.

### **a. Words of Intimacy**

Words of intimacy are used to infer a close relationship by suggesting a synergy of the two parties or the concept of "two become one" / "we are one" (see also Wierzbicka 2003:105-108). Strategically, the speaker selects the appropriate words by analysing the context with an attempt to accomplish distance conduct. Usually, intimate words are used in coordination with other politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson 1987), but the word is weighty in function. Although in some cases the speaker has to use specific words because they are required by the rules of collocation and the complement of formulaic expressions, the whole phrase is selected because it embodies an important word which appeals to the sense of close interpersonal distance. The speaker expresses this word with a stressed voice to

make sure of the successful reference of his/her communicative meaning. The following example show how it works in the diplomatic domain:

TH: Thank you for coming to visit us/me.

In the reality of working time where both parties talk on duty, the Thai host optimistically disregards the real situation that the guest comes to see him because of their work obligations. It is customary for the foreign ambassador to pay a courtesy call, and this was exactly the agenda of the meeting. In this move, the Thai host re-creates the reality; he changes the official meeting into a relaxed, friendly one with a certain degree of personal relation, implying the willingness of the guest to see him. The word “visit” can create a positive inference of the willingness of doing, more than “see” or “meet”. Consider the difference between these three choices:

- a.) To see the doctor.
- b.) To visit the doctor.
- c.) To meet the doctor.

Although the three underlined words are interchangeable in use, “visit” is the best choice to confirm an effective display of the relationship value. To “visit” can generate the meaning of meeting for social purposes or for personal reasons, that is, to present good will, not only for working purpose—actions by obligations of work. In this context, the word “visit” implies that the speaker is optimistic about the other’s willingness to meet him. The show of being optimistic can be packed with Brown and Levinson’s positive politeness (1987:126). The word creates a closer distance between two persons; it changes a work-for-achievement atmosphere into a relationship-based conversation. The key word suddenly re-defines the relationship; the interactants are quickly closer to each other than the reality that they just met for the first time, or that it is the very beginning of a conversation on duty. The interpersonal relation is well established by this optimistic view of the other’s action. Additionally, people from collective cultures which value long-term relations are potentially impressed by some words which create a perception of a closer interpersonal connection. A number of studies, for example, Schumann et al. (2010), Lam et al. (2009) and Barkai (2008), confirm that people from different cultures sense and value each selected word at different

levels. Their cultural values influence their linguistic reception and judgement. This technique is also found in the turn of the foreign ambassador:

FG: I am very much at **home** here.

The country where the ambassador comes and stays for her mission of pursuing the interests of her country is considered as home. “Home” infers a family relationship. By using this intimate word, the speaker creates the atmosphere of closeness and warmth. It is a short-cut to interpersonal solidarity at the very early stage of conversation.

Probably, lexical politeness may not be sensed by native speakers of English who are familiar with the expression as a whole phrase; however, for the non-native speakers, some words associated with their culture can create important effects.

“Home” can signify many meanings, for example, “source/origin”, such as, ‘Germany – the home of fascism’. Lexical politeness is, however, context-dependent. As for the situational context, the speaker is not in her home or her home country during the act of uttering; she is in Thailand. So by this utterance, she intends to show a positive attitude towards the hearer’s country, as a place where she feels secure, comfortable, and warm. As we can see, diplomatic politeness is not only about formal expressions. Through using one simple word, the speaker blurs her personal boundary and working boundary.

It is, to some extent, similar to Brown and Levinson’s strategies of ‘Convey That Speaker and Hearer are Co-operators’ (1987:125-129), and ‘Use In-Group Identity Markers’ (1987:107-112). However, this approach is a deliberate selection of lexical units in the utterance which quickly achieves interpersonal proximity. It eases the process of ice-breaking and requesting cooperation in later moves. To pursue the goal of diplomacy, the speakers sometimes signal that there is no more a distance between the two parties, as can be seen in the following:

The **marriage** of our industries

The **promised** area of cooperation

Our trade is **synthetic** with your market.

Thailand is one of the most interesting **partners**.

I know we are **part of one another**.

The **integration** of two countries

We consider you as **one of the Thai people**.

She is **one of us**. (The foreign guest reacted when the Thai host introduced his team member who had worked as a Thai coordinator in contact with the embassy.)

All of these utterances are used for the creation of interpersonal closeness. These key words are particularly put in the official context to drive an awareness of closeness and inseparability between two countries. This politeness is used against the expectation of the hearer who is in the context of official working, because words with connotations of personal relationships, family and romantic love, are strategically used to make an instant impression of interpersonal solidarity and relax the working atmosphere.

## **b. Redefinition**

The flexibility of conversational language allows the speaker to redefine the vocabulary's meaning in a particular context and usually for manipulating the hearer's perception of a close relationship. For example, the speaker redefines the meaning of "ambassador", which is the job position of the hearer:

"The ambassador is the main person that can link two countries."

The ambassador, generally known as the highest-ranking diplomat who represents his/her government in a foreign country, is re-defined: "ambassador" is not a person who works for his/her country, but for both countries. This utterance is polite because of its property of other-face-enhancing in that it predicates an even more important role for the ambassador.

Another example was specifically used with a Thai hearer. Like England, Thailand is a modern democratic country with a monarchical system. The royal family has a historical and symbolic role in the country, while the citizen government comes to power by election. King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand is recognised worldwide as one of the most important kings in modern times. He plays a key role in the country's development and has a profound

relationship with the Thai people. A phrase that can make an impression on Thai hearers is not “the country” which they generally hear everywhere, but rather when a diplomatic speaker specifically uses “the kingdom” when talking to the Thai hearer, emphasising the uniqueness of Thailand where the monarch, especially the present king who is a beloved king, is socially acknowledged as “the heart of the nation”.

FG: “Because we are two **kingdoms**, this is why we give Thailand top priority.”

Analysed on the principle of ‘Claim Common Ground’ (Brown and Levinson 1987:103-112), the use of the specific word “*kingdom*”, referring to a country which has a king and queen, is selectively used to replace a more general word for the convenience of talk: “country”. Although the speaker does not give a new definition for the key word; “kingdom” – the normal denotational meaning is maintained – this word, by implication, re-defines the relationship between two countries, which seems to be more special than other bilateral relations in diplomacy. It implies that the speaker knows the hearer’s background because the speaker himself realises the national characteristics of his society. The two nations share a common ground of regimes, customs, and the national experience of a close relation between the king/queen and his/her people. This word is used by the individual guest to signal the similarity of his country and Thailand; while other foreign guests from countries with a monarchical system do not strategically use this word in diplomatic conversation. In the example utterance above, only one word can carry a strong meaning for the specific hearer with a particular national background. In this situation, the Thai hearer is treated differently from other countries; the Thai national identity is acknowledged.

### **c. Vagueness**

Diplomatically, the concealment of national power and resources can be considered as a tactic for the protection of national security and maximisation of advantages in negotiation. In terms of face, financial and military issues are sensitive to the country’s self-image. An overt revelation about the country’s real status not only threatens the country’s self-face, but it also affects national security, because the hearer is one with either diplomatic or political power from another country who can use this important information for their national benefit, especially when the bilateral relation is sour. In fact, the conversational partner generally



gains their knowledge about the national power of the counterpart from documents, not in face-to-face communication.

In diplomatic talk, it is better to give an impression about the potential and resources of the country in relation to the other, for example, describing the specialisation of a particular industry in the speaker's home country which meets the demand of the hearer's country. However, when the mention of a material issue which signifies the country's power is inevitable, because it is a topic on the agenda, the speaker has to be conscious of lexical selection.

Vagueness not only serves the diplomatic mission of factual concealment about national capabilities, it also serves a politeness purpose, for example, the concealment of financial issues. It appears that in many cultures people do not reveal their financial situation to the others outside their own inner life circle. Applying Brown and Levinson's facework (1987) in considering this issue, I found that revealing financial issues cannot ensure the effect of facework. If a person says that s/he is poor, s/he may not be desirable for partnership or be judged as incompetent. If a person says that s/he is rich, s/he can be judged as lacking knowledge of social manners. Importantly, an FTA can seriously occur when showing that the self is more important than the other. So, financial issues are generally presented through indirectness.

In the data, when the speaker stays vague about these issues, his/her country becomes a tempting choice with the mystery of real power or unknown information.

TH: ...Thailand is now preparing to do what we call technology need assessment. This is the role that is given to our organisation, particularly, our team to set up a national-level working group to work on Thailand's technology need assessment. We have some **secured** budget, so we don't need to worry about the budget, but we are preparing to find experts in TNA, technology need assessment to help advise us properly. So this can fit in any expert in your list, we would like to explore possibility of working together or invite the budget in these sharing projects.

The omission of revealing the exact amount of money his organisation is preparing for the cooperative project can secure the country's image; the country could be less or more affluent than the other expects, but the speaker uses vagueness in accordance with the norms of talking about money, and creates a desirable by-product by keeping this financial power a secret. In a way, this case also demonstrates socially-accepted politeness or first order politeness (Watts 2003). However, there is no specific rule for the speaker about which word s/he should use, apart from a general acceptance that people should not clearly express material properties they possess since it can be self-face threatening. The concealment of a country's power and resources can be done in a sophisticated manner using many of Brown and Levinson's off-record strategies: Be Ambiguous, Be Vague, and Use Metaphor (1987:222, 225-226). In this case, the data suggest that a good concealment of one's meaning can maximise benefit. The speaker can maintain his country's image—he demonstrates that Thailand is not exactly a poor country; but does not exaggerate the country's wealth. Consequently, his party still deserves assistance, but he implies that cooperation would not mean that Thailand has no resources to support the program, or that it would play the role of a passive, receiving country. The country's status is presented as a good partner, rather than a receiver. Consider another example:

FG: How is the reconciliation going in the parliament?, because there is a lot of concern from [name of the capital of X country] about the political reconciliation process.

The speaker utters the name of the capital of X country by a substituting "the X government" which is the administrative centre of his home country. If he utters the usual formal bureaucratic term—the government of X country, the correlated meaning of exercising power in the administration system will be easily and quickly sensed by the hearer—the hearer may infer the head of FG's state sent him to do a mission in the host country. "The X government," which the speaker did not apply, is a high-risk choice in this context because it may be interpreted as a sovereignty violation. Each state has authority within its border and has its own administrative system. The interference of the other country's domestic affairs could be considered as a serious negative face threat of diplomatic face. So, this kind of diplomatic act is usually done with modification of the utterances concerned.

#### **d. Value-Laden Word**

The value-laden word was first introduced by Arndt and Janney as “positive-negative effect cues”, the sub-strategies of emotive cues (1985: 289-291). It denotes a selected word that imparts the personal attitude of the speaker. It may not be true in the genuine sense of reality, but is based on a judgement by personal opinion. To present an opinion, there are a range of key words from the negative scale to the positive scale, and only one is selected. For example, “chubby” is more positive than “fat” in commenting on a woman’s body.

People normally frame their thoughts with expectations about words or responses that they are familiar with. They have a pre-existing reality before the moment of interaction. Once a familiar word is removed and replaced by a new one, it can make a surprising impression. The conversation becomes more interesting and exciting; the speakers look naturally human showing both a uniqueness of idea and special care for the other. A good speaker tends to present his/her perspective concerning the hearer in a positive way, since those can be the part of the hearer’s face. They usually present an evaluation of the target that is more positive than it is in reality. Using a value-laden word enhances the speaker’s face as a non-aggressive person, and satisfies the hearer’s face, if the issue concerned is properly addressed.

My data suggests that value-laden words are crucially utilised to create an atmosphere of association, and to pose as a harmless, knowledgeable personality:

FG: I observed the parliamentary meeting; sometimes the debate is too **challenging** to manage. Your Excellency has a lot of skill and experience to conduct.

Generally, “fierce/heated/turbulent” is a familiar word used in the description of a political debate situation which is not easy to control. But the speaker’s word choice shows a positive attitude about the turbulent situation—the debate is intellectually worthy in essence for the person who conducts it. In some way, the speaker also honours the Thai politicians who were mentioned indirectly, because they were all involved in the situation of the debate that he talked about. “Challenging” is selectively used to avoid creating a potential negative attitude toward the hearer’s organisation.

Consider the next example:

FG: Now in respect of this bilateral relationship, it's quite **young**.

A lack of previous cooperative activities is envisioned as “young” instead of “unproductive” or “beginning”. “Young” is not only able to hide the negative truth that both parties were inactive in the diplomatic relationship in the past, but it also connotes hope for a better future for cooperation.

FG: First of all, I am very thankful for this **opportunity** to meet  
Your Excellency.

“Opportunity” can add value to the meeting situation; it is not just a normal working day, but a special occasion for the speaker. It convinces the hearer that he is a very important person; so the meeting becomes an opportunity to be remembered. The use of “opportunity” is intended to make an impressive salutation instead of speaking neutrally by using a standard greeting expression.

To present a favourable atmosphere for diplomatic relationships, the use of vocabularies that connote positive, beautiful meanings are more effective than vocabularies based on accurate representations of reality.

Example I

FG: How do you see the **prospect** of our cooperation?”

Example II

FG: I sincerely wish the relation between our two countries to  
**flourish**, to develop, and to expand.

Beyond typical collocations, the meaning value is uplifted to the highest when the speaker uses words relating to the domains of spirituality or art. The lexical items in these domains are generally accepted as being extremely valuable.

In the following example, the foreign guest specifically uses vocabulary from the religious domain which gives a sense of the highest value:

TH: In Thailand you have a clear-cut rice season. The season is more predictable.

FG: That's the **blessing** here.

Thailand as an agricultural country was elevated to the state of being God-given. It is an indirect compliment that signifies how much value the speaker gives to the hearer's country.

FG: Not only is rice good, fruits in Thailand are **magnificent**.

I went to other countries in this region, we saw the same fruits, but it doesn't compare.

Here, "magnificent" is unconventionally used to praise the taste of fruit. Thailand, where there are some areas with fruit orchards, is pictured using an adjective usually used for describing the architectural realm with associations with the beauty of paradise. This admiration to the hearer's country attends to the hearer's positive face want.

### **e. Confidence and Non-Confidence Cues**

According to Arndt and Janney (1985: 287), confidence cues are used by the speaker in positive messages to strengthen interpersonal supportiveness, for example, the intensification of meaning by adding adverbs like "perfectly", "truly", "certainly". Non-confidence cues, by contrast, underline an attitude of reluctance when conveying a negative message, such as the use of "a little", "just", "quite", "seem", "might", "maybe", and "somewhat" (See Chapter 2, Form-Based Politeness Section). Likewise, Brown and Levinson (1987) define these words as hedging which can soften the force of FTAs.

In the diplomatic data, confidence cues are used in positive messages to intensify the degree of impression, for instance, "I think you have done **perfectly** well", "Thailand is the **most** important country in Southeast Asia". Non-confidence cues are generally stressed in difficult situations, such as, advising, commenting, and requesting. They are also found in conventional politeness, for example, "If I **may** express my personal opinion about [the

conflict of Thailand and the Y country], I think....”, in this context, the hearer generally recognises its supporting of the polite meaning.

Besides the use of adverbs and modal verbs as originally proposed by Arndt and Janney, the data suggests a new technique in displaying a confidence cue. It is the repetition of key words which increases the auditory positivity through emphasis. As the following examples show, this unconventional style of word play is a creative way of showing admiration.

#### Example I

FG: Thanks for your hospitality. I am delighted to lead the representatives to meet you. I've brought a very **distinguished delegation to the person of distinguished host.**”

#### Example II

FG: The summit in Hua Hin (a town in Thailand) was a very big success. I personally observed the government and people of Thailand was pushing **a lot of work, a lot of effort and a lot of thinking and feeling** into making a summit a success.

The use of repetitions as above serves interpersonal facework. It makes the conversations more exciting and supports interpersonal harmony with words and sounds used differently from the hearer's usual experience. The expressions are considered creative because they do not conform to the conventional style that other speakers typically use.

## 2. Descriptive Politeness

A good story teller usually becomes the centre of attention among hearers, as in the saying, “The man looks interesting when he starts to tell a story”. Narration in conversation conveys details of ideas or facts in an interesting manner which stimulates the hearer's thinking process. The meaning of the unsaid is more powerful than what is said explicitly. Description gives the hearer joy in finding meaning. If used in a proper proportion of the

conversation, it is more impressive and the hearer will sense the speaker's attempt at building interpersonal connections through a long friendly talk.

A number of Brown and Levinson's strategies of positive politeness, such as giving reasons, safe topics, joking, intensifying the hearer's interest, gossip and small talk require the capability to describe at length. The description supports diplomatic talk in two ways. In the first place, it creates an interesting conversation since the hearer does not easily catch the meaning. The narrator can draw attention towards his/her on-going turn of talk, and provide a moment of discovery about what they are trying to say. In other words, the meaning of the act is hidden in the theme of the story—to refuse, or to praise the hearer, for example. In the second place, a lengthy description disperses the force of face threatening; its length and various details can distract the hearer. While some short, succinct message or conciseness of wording carries easy-to-access intentions, long descriptions have the quality of distributing the illocutionary force and blurring the communicative intent, alongside entertaining and persuasive purposes. Also, it can be noted that speaking at length is in itself a kind of positive facework because it indicates a wish to continue contact with the hearer—telling a long story or carrying on a long conversation with pleasure of talking to or trusting the other.

In the case study, many diplomatic speakers recount past incidents which imply that the good relationship has developed, so the present meeting does not start from zero, but it buds from what has been done before. This small talk, usually telling of successful co-working in the past, provides a background of cooperation and generates a friendly atmosphere.

FG: In mid-June, there was a delegation from Thailand, the senators visiting our parliament. They were shown everything in our parliament. They listened to an informative lecture by a specialist about parliamentary law. They were very satisfied.

Also, the story functions as a referential demonstration of interest in the hearer. That is, the speaker does not tell the story about the hearer directly, but explicates a story that the hearer can associate his/her identity with in a positive way. Logically, like “love me, love my dog”, the story carries the connotation that the speaker has an interest in the hearer while telling the story about the person, experience, or other issue in association with the hearer.

During the period of political turmoil in Thailand, many embassies warned their people not to come to Thailand because of security risks. But the Thai party realised that this warning can have an impact on Thailand's tourism industry, one of the country's main sources of income. The story below implies cordial cooperation in diplomacy between two countries, and the speaker's good will towards Thailand.

FG: We have close contacts with Khun TP [Thai honorific title and first name of a Thai ambassador], the Thai ambassador to X country. Our advice [to X tourists] is "please come, there is no problem here [Thailand]." We are in close contact with Khun TP, if we advise negatively, he said on the phone, "please reconsider". This is as we do.

Although there is no mention of the hearer, the story of how the speaker treats the country of the hearer is developed by a display of sincerity and the specific use of the Thai first name with a Thai honorific which makes the hearer feel close to the incident. Story telling reflects the speaker's effort to attend to the hearer's identity in terms of their national duty.

Still, descriptive politeness can be achieved through many language techniques. Besides telling a vivid story of experience about the hearer's country, diplomatic speakers use the technique of objectivity. They avoid presenting the matter through a personal perspective or the language of emotions which weakens their professional credibility. An objective presentation, describing the facts neutrally as they are in the external world, and avoiding personal judgement, increases the speaker's capability to display politeness within the constraints of the setting. Firstly, the conversations take place in bureaucratic organisations; the event of meeting is official. Neutralisation, required by the place, the event, and the nature of bureaucratic work, maintains a certain distance between two interactants attending a formal event. Failing to neutralise the language in some circumstances can be judged as unprofessional. Secondly, through describing the facts from a neutral position, and avoiding exhibiting personal attitudes or heavily using emotional language, the speaker gains a desirable face of credibility and maturity which is crucial to diplomatic approval, and future co-working with trust and professionalism. Finally, in the negative messages, the selective use of emotionless vocabularies can distance the speaker from the issue. This strategy can be



added as an uninvolved politeness strategy, that is, distancing one's self from an issue that potentially harms the relationship, initially suggested by Arndt and Janney (1985).

According to Brown and Levinson, the vivid presentation of matters about the hearer is a positive politeness strategy of exaggerating one's interest/approval/sympathy with the hearer (1978:106-7). When the speaker gives a long, positive description about the hearer, directly or by reference, it generally shows a special interest toward the hearer. In diplomatic talk, this show of interest to the other is delivered quite distinctively as the boundary of the encounter covers both the individual and the national level. Frequently, the speaker handles these two boundaries relatively, on the grounds that the hearer identifies him/herself closely to the nation s/he represents. Also, to an extent, the interactants abide by the bureaucratic conventions of language. The speaker can exploit this formalised situation to present images of credibility through accuracy-based communication which gives an impression of accurate background knowledge about the hearer's country and organisation. Consider this example:

TH: We have the similar systems, both have **2 houses**. Your members of the house of representative: **200**, while we have **480 members**. You have **31 senators** while we have **150 senators**. Your country has only **700 million people**, but you have a lot of things. ... There are **20-30 thousand** Thais living in your country. That is a channel to exchange way of thoughts... We are pleased to learn that this year there are **150 projects** of investment; you invested **30-40 thousand million** in Thailand, considerably high.

The extra interest toward the hearer is shown by the presentation of facts and figures. The mature, male speakers use this style of objectivity in institutional talk because it exactly fits the official setting in the bureaucratic office where obvious pleasantries should be presented within a limit in respect of persons, place, and the formal type of event. In substitution for extreme, colourful adjectives as generally used in everyday compliments, a lot of figures and factual information are presented in order to show how much knowledge the speaker has about the hearer's country. This lengthy remark with a wealth of facts and figures is

tangential to positive politeness, that is, how much the speaker has an interest in the hearer's country.

Self-other praises serve the want of inclusiveness. With no reluctance, people tend to pay compliments to the hearer as clearly as possible to facilitate their social encounters at an early stage; however, self-praise in face-to-face communication is a difficult act—if it is done very obviously, the hearer may feel that their self-worth is disregarded. The speaker's self-praise is a crucial part of diplomatic talk. This act, if done tactfully, can lead to trust and further cooperation. Compliments in diplomatic events involve the presentation of both country image and organisational competence which is intrinsic to the task of conversation. Like salespersons, diplomatic professionals have a mission to promote their country. However, unlike general sale professions, the diplomatic speaker works in formal settings; their conversation is performed within the constraints of formal conventions. Self-promotion in diplomacy, therefore, is more subtle than the normal sale of goods which can be immediately voiced clearly and loudly.

From the data, the intention of complimenting the other is delivered clearly, “You are a very patient and wise Speaker [parliamentary position]”, “I believe in the near future, you will be the leader of [name of organisation]”. Despite being made by inference, a short message in a turn using simple vocabulary can convey a meaning of admiration that is identifiable by the non-native speakers.

Unlike praising the other which is conveyed to have a quick effect and be easily accessible, diplomatic self-praise tends to be long and unclear. The capability of telling a long story or giving a lengthy description which can blur the key message is necessary in self-facework because the speaker avoids being perceived as elevating his/herself or his/her party obviously. It is found in the data that this kind of message embodies many specific details. The speaker tells a story based on facts and figures, without adding a degree of emotion or personal judgment. In doing so, the speaker provides space for the hearer's consideration and judgement according to the content, without an explicit guide or other clear message told by the speaker.

### Example I

TH: We are working in the field of rubber sector, to push for the industry, to do more in the industrial base. Soon we will deal with (name of the world-famous tyre-producing company). There are value-added projects.

### Example II

FG: Three weeks ago, we signed the contract with the biggest power plant in the Southeast Asia...I see we have a critical mark to start with logistics in a general terms. This can rank from very precise project, exchange of technology, up to the big plan. Two weeks ago, our rail system company is now making the whole system for the Emirates. They do just the planning, the design, how to optimise the rail way system. I could easily identify that's real to us, we could work together probably 2 projects.

### Example III

TH: This project is quite important. We got the endorsement to do this one from the cabinet. ...the way we work, even though we are under the Ministry of Science, the board members are quite interested in the fact that there are 7 ministers; science and technology is multi-disciplinary and integrative by having the Prime Minister chaired the meeting. Then we can do some cross-disciplinary projects.

The speakers report facts coherently. All of these underlined specific names connote meanings in themselves without an explicit attempt to show self-praise. Imagine if I tell you that "I once worked with Gaddafi". The hearer and the speaker have a shared knowledge about this name generated by the global media. In the same way, the names of the world-class company, the rich country, and the top positions as above are addressed to guarantee that the hearer understands the power behind the speaker (financial, political status, reputation) that backs up the capabilities of the speaker's side. Mentioning these facts about specific names can give the speaker credit for their professionalism. Although the adjective of absolute

degree is used, “the biggest”; still, this is just for realistic information—it is true that it is the biggest power plant according to statistical records.

Another way to present the attractive image of activeness is that the speaker emphasises what his/her party is doing. The continuous tense serves as an illustration of the continuous development being undertaken at the moment.

#### Example I

TH: We **are working** on agriculture, to see how research can support those major products....in the last 6 months there are a lot of activities **going on**, workshops, the round table; serious thinking **is going on**. I hope that we can do something with foreign partners, especially where you come from.

#### Example II

FG: [our] agriculture **is booming**. The export to this region is commodities, every little other things. They **are making headway** very interestingly last year, **selling** the powder milk to Australia and New Zealand.

Although there are some ingredients of personal perception, for example, ‘booming’, whole chunks of these utterances describe the situation objectively. The illustration based on facts presents the on-going actions and movements. This method gives the hearer a moment for finding the pragmatic meaning in his own way. The speakers do not directly convey the intention of the acts clearly.

Another technique of self-praise is borrowing the other tongue by quoting the third party as a witness or evaluator. In this way, the speaker can maintain his objective basis, and show that other people have judged him positively, as in the following:

FG: **Every government knows my position**, I am strongly for peace. I openly published the condemn of violence. Only peace, the solution must be through the dialogue, even involving Buddhist abbots, leader, also Muslims, I have called the ministers in the government too, to be more active.

In the example, the foreign speaker is not an ambassador. He is a political delegate who visited Thailand for a diplomatic purpose. Mentioning the international acknowledgment of his political role as a representative of the state, the speaker borrows the other's mount to speak for him, as shown at the beginning "Every government knows my position," and he successfully omits obvious self-complimentary utterances.

Alternatively, a compliment to the other can be paid using factual narration to avoid sentimental expressions. The low level of emotion also suits the formal event as well as the speaker's personality, gender, position, and age. Consider the compliment paid to Thailand by the following 50-year-old male speaker who holds a high position.

FG: Recently, there was the earthquake in X country; many houses were damaged. Thailand was one of very few countries came there to help the people.

The speaker leaves room for the hearer to discover this compliment. To tell the truth honestly about his memory bears the features of a self-confession. The indirectness in showing his approval toward the other fits the formal setting where the hearer and participants are educated; they are ready for an investment of thoughts in seeking the intended meaning. Importantly, this objective style represents the speaker's maturity and self-control. The interpersonal distance is maintained.

Technically, telling a story by placing the other in the position of the subject of the sentence is another way to attend to the hearer's face.

FG: In mid-June, there was the delegation from Thailand. The senators visited our parliament. They were shown everything in our parliament. They listened to the informative lecture by the specialist about parliamentary law. They were very satisfied.

In the utterance above, the visitors from Thailand are the centre of attention. The Thai delegation is seen as important, as stressed by their position in the first sentence of the utterance; while the staff members from the speaker's organisation disappear in the discourse.

The speaker intends to omit the details of the people on his side; the discourse is managed to emphasise the importance of the hearer's party.

All in all, there are two modes of descriptive politeness for showing interest in the hearer. Telling the story subjectively or showing vividness in the telling can excite the conversation, whereas objective story-telling can give the impression of professionalism in discussions about politics and social issues which require knowledgeably factual accounts. The neutralisation in the presentation of the story meets the conventions of the formal events and bureaucratic setting, including the age and gender of the speaker. The latter type of description is not used much in everyday conversation, but it is essential to develop the attraction which serves positive politeness in diplomatic talk.

### **3. Interactive Politeness**

Interactive politeness involves the quality of the speaker in performing the conversation in concurrence with the other in the conversation event. How and when the speaker reacts/replies to the other and co-structures the sequences can be an indicator of face management.

In contrast to public speaking, conversation cannot fully be prepared on script in advance. It is two-way communication, which one interlocutor cannot fulfil alone. The content is developed by two people or more in an exchange of turns over the progressive interaction. In public speaking, the speaker deals with a group or audience; whereas in interpersonal communication, the speaker attends to the target person who talks with him/her. The challenge for public speakers is how to deliver a good speech, but in interaction, the speaker may need to think more about how well they can adapt to different conversational motions, since conversation depends on how the other reacts.

In conversational management, on the one hand, the speaker can do facework on his/her speculation alone, that is, focussing on utterance production for his/her own turn of talk as in the above-mentioned lexical politeness. On the other hand, the speakers adapt to each other in the process of interaction. In the latter way, utterances and moods within the conversation are co-constructed by the two interactants. This kind of politeness is considered

in terms of two-way communication using a combination of utterances in relation to interactive behaviours (See Have 2004, 2007; Liddicoat 2011).

Unlike static, motionless written communication, conversation is simultaneously flexible, adjustable, repairable, and varied to the dynamic changes of the situation. The important distinctions of linguistic conduct in conversation are as follows:

**Variability:** the property of communication that defines the range of communicative possibilities, among which is formulating communicative choices;

**Negotiability:** the possibility of making choices based on flexible strategies;

**Adaptability:** the ability to modulate and regulate communicative choices in relation to the communicative context;

**Salience:** the degree of awareness reached by communicative choices;

**Indeterminacy:** the possibility to re-negotiate pragmatic choices as the interaction unfolds in order to fulfil communicative intentions;

**Dynamicity:** development of the communicative interaction in time.

(Balconi & Amenta 2010, cited in Nordquist 2013,  
see Verschueren & Östman 2009, 19-22)

Although the nature of conversation is dyadic as explained above, the speaker's techniques and abilities within this constraint should not be disregarded; the ballet dancer who dances on the boundary of a stage is controlled by the melody of the music and how the other(s) dances, there is no absolute freedom for him/her to dance in violation of the theme of the event, the space of the stage, and the co-dancer(s), the dance has to be connected together, either contrastively or harmoniously, but the audience is still able to pick out the ballet star in that show. In reality, both interactants do not always have the same degree of capability to conduct the interaction in balance. Rather, one can control the other in expression, completely or partially, because of linguistic competence, job rank, physical appearance, education level, social role in a particular situation, and so on.

### **a.Sensitively Value the Previous Turn Made by the Other**

Feedback cues such as, “really”, “very good”, and “I think so” are a sign of constant attention to the issue, serving the need for self-other inclusiveness. However, in my point of view, politeness is not just “what to say”, but it also is “when to say”. When the speaker momentarily interrupts with thanks for trivial/light/uncommitted offers, s/he is attentive to the positive face want, and in some situations, the reward is more.

FG: I am thinking of supplying Thailand for mobility program;  
that would be the scientists from both sides to visit each other...

TH: Cheers.

Though saying “cheers” in response to the trivial, light, uncommitted offer is a conventional completion of the adjacency pair, in this circumstance, giving thanks to the unsure offer—the other said, “I am thinking about...”—sounds like thanking prematurely since the other has not confirmed the possibility of foreign aid yet. The Thai speaker’s thanks prior to the action of help is thanking for the willingness to assist, even though there is no clarity in the utterance of the previous turn regarding taking action. The function of thanks is not only to value the other’s generosity in offering, but it also encourages the other to stop and mark what was offered. After the Thai speaker said “cheers”, the reaction in the following turn clearly changes from the first draft of an idea to a commitment to process the issue which backs the Thai side.

FG: I think this exists in some programs. I will try to convince certain  
ministries to allocate certain amount for Thailand.

Without the interruption of “cheers”, showing an eager acknowledgment of the other’s moral face, the topic could have been changed, and the Thai side might not have received a confirmation. The quick reaction stimulates the other to expand the conversation.

A diplomatic speaker usually values what their counterpart has said, demonstrating that the counterpart is always right. The message in the previous turn by the other is picked out to be



mentioned or repeated again in connection with the current turn, for example, “As you said...”. This can be considered as positive politeness because the interactants try to narrow down the gap between them, as well as to convince the other to consider the issue in harmony between both sides. A good diplomatic speaker does not easily drop the topic, nor does he/she overlook trivial details that the other mentioned. In other words, the speaker does not over-emphasise or elaborate only his/her own view. Instead, s/he actively raises the topic in connection with the previous turn and prolongs the content that the other has mentioned in a manner which shows commonalities in the self-other perspective.

Another example of politeness regarding “when to say” something is not only to raise up the message/topic in the previous consecutive turn, but to build on a previously mentioned topic. This can be the case when a speaker remembers a topic that the other has raised in a pleasant conversational manner, and brings that topic to the table again after a long period of unrelated talk. At the beginning of a reception event, the Thai host narrated an impressive experience about his visit to the guest’s country. In a good mood, he related that X country gave him some wool as a souvenir. In closing the conversation, the guest raises this topic again.

FG: If I understand correctly, you were given some wool in X country. Wool is not so much useful in Thailand, the weather is very warm. In your next visit to X country, you can take your wool with you, to keep you warm.

The important feature of this example is the conversational structure. If the speaker’s reaction to this topic was completed after the story was told at the beginning, the positive face satisfaction that the hearer would have potentially gained is proportionately less than raising this topic again at the end of the conversation, because the speaker shows that he has captured many details and has a long memory about what the other said. When what a person says is valued, s/he perceives that s/he is approved of.

## b. Actively Complete What the Other Has Said

There are convincing arguments by a number of studies stating that overlapping turns in talk, occurring before the other completes the conversational turn are viewed as “impoliteness” (Hutchby 2008; Bousfield 2008; also see Have 1990, 2004, 2007; Carey 2011). The overlapping turn is seen as an interruption where the messages of the interactants contrast, and seen as a lack of patience on the part of the hearer. One reason for such judgements of uncooperative turn-taking are that the speaker shifts his/her attention from the other to self, which is theoretically considered as neglecting the other’s face want.

On the other hand, cooperative overlapping while attention is given to the other can be associated with politeness—both sides demonstrate eagerness to co-develop the conversation in the same direction. In this case study, it is found that when speaking with a non-native speaker of English, a speaker may complete the explanation of the other before his/her turn finishes, in summary of what the other explained or by offering a more strong/concise word, when the hearer delays in finding the exact word(s) to utter. This can be considered as self-face assertion, the want to be included in interpersonal relation at the moment of talk. Consider the following examples:

### Example I

FG: Again, we think it (democracy) is the cultural fashion. We are very moderate and conservative, even the left...

TH: **is not too left.**

FG: Yes, we have a government socialist party....

(My emphasis)

### Example II

FG: We have been quite successful of agricultural country. Right now, our rice, we export about million and a half tons of rice, nothing compares to you. Certainly, we dedicate to rice is not that huge, but we have the best yield in the world...

TH: **The average per hectare.**

FG: Yeah, it’s about 8 ton per hector.

TH: A lot.

FG: Enormous, but we have only 1 harvest per year.

(My emphasis)

It is noticeable that the Thai speaker pays close attention to the pouring words, grips the issue, and intensifies his interest in the hearer's concern. He guesses what the other has in mind and knows what the other is going to say. The completion of the unfinished sentence or the missing clause is accepted by the hearer. Normally, overlapped turn-taking is judged as disregarding face, since the speaker seizes the other's turn and ignores the other's face; on the contrary, in this case it can be theoretically interpreted as one's need for association—shaping the utterances together closely. Using integrated sentences and ideas, the speaker completely takes the side of the hearer or creates an interpersonal association.

In the next example, politeness is handled by overlapped turns. The speaker shows that s/he knows the question that the other is trying to project or what cannot be said in face-to-face communication in which there is physical surrounding friction—the presence of both the speaker and the hearer, as well as other participants in the room. Not only the Thai speaker, but also the foreign speaker demonstrate a high level of intuition:

TH: The problem that we need X assistance is the trade balance. We import steel materials from your country while we send you very few agricultural products, it's not .....

FG: I agree that we should expand our trade. We are ready to buy more from Thailand. We need more information, for mutual trade, where to invest....

The example above shows a tactic where the foreign guest tries to avoid a face threatening act. If the Thai turn was prolonged and completed, it would reveal the serious opinion that the Thai party is concerned about the economic benefit they expect to gain from the other, and the hearer, including his country, was going to be blamed by the Thai side for a lack of willingness to support Thailand in the past years. The interruption that stops the Thai utterance can be interpreted as face preservation.

### **c. Smoothly Withdraw from Potential Conflict**

A politeness strategy can be identified in a turn or conversational move where the speaker stops developing the issue under discussion in order to save face. That is to say, they abandon achievement in the minor issue and prioritise the maintenance of the relationship as the main objective. If one side continuously persists in a conversational move, despite using very polite language, while the other wants to close the issue, it is a sign that the speaker is ignoring the other's face wants.

Due to the fact that the events take place in Thailand, the Thai side has the power of the host who owns the space and resources used, which relates to their ability to control the guests within their border. In this situation, a foreign guest makes a pre-condition for a request. Considering the Thai government representative's response in the next turn, it is predictable that the request for special recognition/privileges for her group in bidding for a working contract with the Thai government is unlikely to be accepted; she can sense that taking the risk further may affect the relationship. Clear trespassing can cause face damage which affects future contact. In realisation of their lesser power, and to avoid making a bad impression by a serious face threat, the speaker moves back to her territory or displays association to save face. This can maintain the benefits during future contact. Consider how she does it smoothly in her second turn:

FG: In the last meeting, there was the frustration of the bidding committee (of Thai government). I said I would definitely highlight this issue. The X company has too many jobs in the enforcement. Their office needs to be done and needs to be sustainable. And I see the huge effort. And I said yesterday why can't we get recognition about [...]. They are very keen on what they work with. We had dialogues and many constructive achievements, and I think they have worked very hard. I honourably, clearly recognise the important side; they do an outstanding jobs, but they did feel frustration.

TH: Calm down, they need to submit documents, evidence of qualification to us as much as possible. We deal with it fairly.

FG: We had a great dialogue with them to do that; we will continue to do that.  
I just let you know what happens after the meeting.

TH: Give them some medicine. I think they need some medicine for that  
frustration (laugh).

FG: (She shares laugh). We had a great dialogue with them to do that, we will  
continue to do that. **I just let you know what happens after the meeting.**

The first move contains a story telling which contains the details about the third party's difficulty. In the last move, she withdraws from her position of making a request. She moves to the role of informing the Thai side, and then supports the Thai side in explaining to the third person(s) from her country. The dialogue which starts with developing a request, finally ends with playing it safe, albeit due to the Thai reaction which affirms the Thai's uncompromised standing. The politeness is displayed when she stops her move and slightly shifts the content in acknowledgement of the other's territory in decision making. In other words, she switches the direction of talk to omit saying more about the goal. She rates the relationship and the prevention of face loss more highly than having success regarding this issue. Some diplomatic goals do not suit the face-to-face communication channel; instead, there are many other communicative modes, for example, lobbying and written correspondence.

### **3. Intercultural Politeness**

Intercultural politeness can be found in convergence into the counterpart's language and culture. More particularly, this accommodation technique tends to have a good effect if the speaker uses the knowledge about the hearer's cultural and linguistic background properly. Topic management and cultural traits have crucial functions in diplomatic conversation because interactants are national representatives who tend to associate themselves with their national culture. Lexical politeness and descriptive politeness involve how to say; interactive politeness involves when to say; and intercultural politeness involves what to say. All of them overlap and support each other; however, there is only one aspect that is notably distinctive in each strategy. In face-to-face communication, acting and

pronunciation/voice are the components of conversational expression. I will briefly touch on this issue in support of my analysis of the convergence of language and speech styles. Also, to present intercultural politeness, Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies are applied in the context of interaction across cultures.

### **a.Safe Topic**

Introduced by Brown and Levinson (1987:112), the small-talk of safe topics is a positive politeness strategy—if both sides are fond of the topic and enjoy talking, interpersonal solidarity is gradually formed over the interaction. In diplomatic talk, a safe topic is used in the first stage for ice breaking. The real effect is not the content or solution, but allowing both sides to learn about each other: personality traits and basic information that can be developed to address the target issue. The safe topic, theoretically low-risk facework, tends to have a predictable outcome. It can appeal to a positive reaction. Its function is not to gain an exact informative answer, but it encourages the self-opening and harmonisation of the two interactants. In Thai–foreign diplomatic talk, popular issues that create pleasant small-talk are:

- The relationships between royal families
- The previous visits of the state leaders to the counterpart's country
- The speaker's own experience in the counterpart's country
- History
- Agriculture
- Tourism
- Religion
- Sports

Some of the issues above may be forbidden in other countries, but they are all allowed to be expressed in Thailand if the speaker can present them properly.

People tend to speak more on topics in which they specialise or own a stock of information. The strategic speaker realises what kind of topic meets the hearer's likes, particularly when speaking with non-native speakers whose expression in English is not confident, the right topic can help.

Regarding diplomacy, every nation has its own symbols associated with its national identity. This identity is a subset of individual identity. One symbol can draw sentiment from people from a community, while others regard it as meaningless. For instance, several years ago, an international football audience wore Buddhist monks' robes for fun, sitting at the stadium, and cheering the football. This was news that many Thai TV audiences could not bear, because the status of monks in Thailand is exceptional. The disdain of monks is very sensitive in the Thai community.

Talking with Thais, the foreign guests raise the topic about the unique monarchical system in Thailand. The monarchy is the national symbol that all Thais are most proud of and deeply associate themselves with. In a link, the foreign diplomats bring up the common ground in the royal relationship between two countries.

#### Example I

FG: His Majesty the King still has his memory of visit to Thailand. The people in my country is also fortunate like people in Thailand, we have good kings, the knowledgeable kings, so the kings really serve the people.

#### Example II

FG: This year is very busy year of X country and Thailand's relation. Besides, ASEAN meeting, we have privileged official visit of the Royal Highness Princess Maha Jakree Sirinbhorn. Royal Highness Princess was the guest of our president. One of the areas that Her Royal Highness Princess paid attention was the use of technology to help the handicapped people in rehabilitation and daily life. This is a subject of very close relation between government agencies, civil societies.

This matter is purposefully and specifically raised up to please the Thai hearers. In a similar fashion, when a Thai speaker talks with the representatives of a country with a global reputation for sports, he raises the sports topic, which gradually changes the atmosphere from a quiet reception hall into the room full of laughter and joy. It is observable that the conversation partner feels easy and has more motivation to join the conversation.

Most speakers can select the right topic, but the degree of impression varies depending on their capability in storytelling. The following is an example topic about history:

TH: We are always grateful for the help of [address form and name of a historic king of the guest's country].

FG: That's very wise policy of [address form and name of a historic king of Thailand who reigned in the same period as the above mentioned king]. In my office, I have the self portrait of the two kings. [address form and name of the historic king of his country] wrote on the cigarette he presented to [address form and name of the historic king of Thailand], very important word, "from your friend," This cigarette case is in the palace here.

The foreign guest seeks common ground by the technique of illustrating the historical relationship between both countries' monarchs. This impressive past story serves the hearer's positive face want because it shows that the hearer's country is valued in the memorable story shown.

Capability at storytelling is a part of the diplomatic art. The new aspect of a story not only attracts long mutual attention, but can also shed light on a hard topic.

Due to the flexible motions of talk, some aspects of small-talk can ease the transition into the key issue on the agenda. For example, after the Thai side described the history of the diplomatic relationship between the two countries in the session of small-talk, the foreign guest extended the details that his country assisted Thailand by sending an advisor to the King of Thailand in the colonial era. In conclusion, he draws attention to the present-day relations:

FG: This is known until today, how we can work together. We have no political interest in this region. We have only economic interest. Our companies are working in Thailand, Thai companies in X country, but it's not negative way. It's only positive way. They all started with [address form and name of a historic king of Thailand.] Between our two countries, there is no hidden political agenda. It's so nice.



Through historical narration, the speaker clears up potential suspicion in the early stages of the encounter, gradually approaching the other and paving the way for a more serious economic issue. Tactically, the topic of small-talk is very selective because within the first stage of an official meeting, the first 10 minutes, the speaker wants to develop interpersonal solidarity as quickly as possible. The right topic for people in the particular culture can help reach the target of interpersonal association.

### **b. Convergence to the Hearer: Norm, Language, Speech Style**

In a situation of national crisis, countries can use negative-face orientated strategies, such as responding to the representatives of other countries who asked questions about the political protests in Thailand by mentioning an official statement, “this is our own domestic affair” which others are not supposed to ask about or give advice upon. However, in the data, the Thai speakers use the technique of self-depreciation, admitting the country’s weakness, faults, and defective conditions; they also express apologies to the foreign guests for inconveniences caused by the political turmoil which they cannot effectively control. Often, when the Thai hosts use self-depreciation, the foreign guests also recognise this and convert their speech to this norm in a similar way, with a significantly empathetic sense. This norm is given more importance than the institutional norms that aim to present the strengths and attractions of their own countries. However, when visitors convert to the hearer’s cultural norm, the gesture of a good relationship which contributes to the mission of the institutional talk is affirmed. One may argue that self-degrading is not a specific Thai value; it is a universal one; however, I view that in presenting the crucial situation of the national crisis to the foreign guests, which may sensitively affect the international credibility of the speaker’s nation, each diplomatic speaker has choices. Some bring self-depreciation into diplomacy; others may not. Additionally, some countries may do the same as the Thai speakers do; nevertheless, we cannot deny that this self-depreciation is a Thai social value (O’Sullivan & Tajaroensuk 1997) though this manner is not unique to Thai culture, in addition to Thai society, it can be found in other speech communities.

## **Claim of common ground**

In a time of crisis, the host speaker expressed deficiencies in the national system which implied the inability of the government to solve the domestic political conflict or end the political uprisings. As soon as Thai face is threatened, the foreign guest restores Thai face by claiming common ground—every country has political problems in some way, the deficiency is just normal; to put it another way, some speakers decide to threaten their own face, thereby fostering a close relationship through shared suffering, and future hopes of resolving the same issue.

### **Example I**

FG: Of course, you have difficulties, our country also has many difficulties, but I hope we can develop our democratic stability. I wish good luck to you, to your staff, your colleagues.

### **Example II**

FG: I would like to express to Excellency, we share some similarities. 30 years ago, I myself, and my colleagues faced the similar situation in the past. I have reported to Minister about the situation in Thailand. I talked to him that I was not telling the situation in our country 30 years ago, but the current situation in Thailand, very, very similar (laugh). So we understand completely.

### **Example III**

FG: We understand that very well. We also have similar problem. We've also had the change of PM. In coalition, he has to arrange 6-7 parties, sharing, competing power. It's hard to compromise within the coalition.

## **Pointing out a positive outlook in the hearer's flaw**

When the conversational partner reveals a weakness or deficiency which threatens his/her own positive face, the speaker immediately provides an optimistic perspective on the

hearer's condition in order to show approval. This is usually done in small talk (see also "Be Optimistic", Brown and Levinson 1987:126). However, this convergence into Thai values is not rigidly done in the same manner as a Thai speaker. The foreign counterpart realises the Thai speakers' wants, that is, although the Thai speakers describe the low capabilities of the country they are talking about, they do not expect the response that their country is truly weak and lacking in efficiency. Instead, an acknowledgement of the various aspects of the country's potential is expected, and the foreign guests satisfy that want. This method, encouraging the hearer to have more confidence in their self-worth, can be depicted as a visual motion of raising up the person who lowers himself/herself.

#### Example I

FG: The situation of Thailand is familiar to me because we have similar experience. But now what is important, it guarantees, it's the presence of His Majesty the King. I think it's the most important guarantee of Thailand's today democratic country. Political argument is the part of democracy, they can take this between parties, but in a peaceful way, that's for safety of the Thai people.

#### Example II

FG: About [Thailand's] political situation, we, from X country, do not worry at all. We also have our politics which can, sometimes, be quite exciting and turbulent. I think democracy functions in this manner, just according to the local condition.

#### Example III

TH: It (the process for solution) will be a lot further. We will gather all information, and consider whether we will have referendum. Thai people do slowly.

FG: Sometimes slow [solving political problem] is better if you have a good result.

#### Example IV

TH: I would like to tell you that Thailand is one of the poor countries; Thais earn their living by agriculture. Industries are from foreign investment. Actually Thai people are poor, but in their hearts, they are very kind. When we see all of you coming to Thailand, we consider all of you as our relatives.

FG: But you are very rich in your heart and human attitude, hospitality as I mentioned. It is the greatest thing; material things are temporary, other thing that you have is permanent.

The convergence into the Thai norm of self-degradation which is accepted in the hierarchical society with high power distance (See Chapter 4), either by showing commonality or finding a positive aspect about the hearer which meets the Thai speakers' expectation, ensures satisfactory results from the conversation with the Thais who are from a society which prefers this norm—displaying humility is valued more than confidence. This approach is also weighty in the interactive aspect, since, all are responses to speakers from the host country who use this norm in diplomacy first. One may ask, in response to this, what else could a polite foreign guest do? Although there are not many choices for reacting to the Thais' acts of self-deprecation, what can be considered is the cultural content that the speakers are able to specify about Thailand. This aspect shows a different level in mastering intercultural politeness. Some speakers can react very impressively; while others may just acknowledge what the Thai speakers have informed them of. The data also shows that many foreign guests disregard the Thais' concerns, and fail to make appropriate responses; they do not put effort into giving the Thai hearers more confidence about their self-worth in the difficult time of the political crisis.

Besides adapting to Thai social norms, foreign speakers use the strategy of convergence into the counterpart's language (code-switching) for some key words or expressions. Assessing how the speaker adapts to the conversation partner's speech culture by using Accommodation Theory (Giles & Smith 1979; Giles et al. 1991; Giles & Ogay 2007), I found that code-switching from English into Thai when speaking with a Thai hearer is an acknowledgement of the Thai hearer's cultural identity in an indirect way. This usage

was only found on the side of foreign guests who came to Thailand. The Thai hosts consistently used English.

Normally, when visiting another country, foreign tourists switch basic words: yes, no, hello, OK, thanks into the language of the community they visit for the purpose of making an impression and seeking information from local people. This shows that the speaker values the culture of the hearer, and friendliness which reduces interpersonal distance is displayed. But diplomats can speak more. From the data, their talk in Thai is not long, but does deal with some strategic words that have connotations of Thai identity. In giving advice to the Thai host about the on-going political conflict, the foreign ambassador switched to the Thai language: “Jai Yen Yen” literally means “Cool your mind”, idiomatically meaning “Calm down”, or “Do it slowly”. When all the Thai hearers in the room heard this word, they all welcomed it with smiles as the word carries a distinctive meaning for Thais, especially when this simple Thai word is uttered by a foreign guest.

Some foreign guests can introduce themselves in Thai at the early stage of the meeting, and then switch into English conversation. A foreign diplomat surprisingly replies in Thai in place of a usual English expression:

FG: ...We have many Thai students in X country around 4 thousand, and many Thai workers, Thai business people. If any of them are exploited, we will look into it and if I come across these people, I will send them back here. We will always follow this. The Thai Embassy in X country is welcome to raise this matter with us. So, thank you for relating me to the problem. We will maintain the joint about this.

TH: Thank you very much. The Thai people who want their kids to learn English sent their kids to X country, better than sending to Y country, and we have learnt that there are about three hundred Thai university students in X country. I would like to thank in advance.

FG: **Yin Dee** [Thai word means “pleasure,” (author’s translation.)]

The guest completes the adjacency pair exactly, but switching into the Thai language. “Yin Dee” is a Thai word which literally means “pleasure”. In a casual situation, the use of this short-form colloquial expression means “My pleasure”. The use of the hearer’s language

gives a hint that the speaker has a special interest in the hearer's culture. The hearer is likely to realise that s/he is valued in the conversation.

In another case, the sub-culture is emphasised to show attention to the hearer in particular. In a situation when the foreign ambassador knew that his Thai conversation partner was a politician from the Northeastern Thailand, he switched from English into a Thai colloquialism, "E-san", which is the so-called nickname of North-eastern Thailand. Foreigners who live in Thai society long enough may catch this term in the Thai media, and it is specifically used in the oral language. Switching to this term positively surprises the leading hearer and other Thai participants. It particularly gives a sense of closeness, since it shows that the speaker knows Thailand very well, as when one calls someone by a nickname, and reflects that the speaker has substantial information about the hearer's background. The speaker also explained an experience in the market at the hearer's hometown and specifically pronounced the Thai name of the province correctly. This code-switching, despite being demonstrated in one word or a short phrase/sentence, is a new technique for indirectly showing an interest in the hearer (Brown & Levinson 1987: 103-107).

In an aspect of social norms, the conventional politeness that the foreign guests consistently apply meets the expectations of the host society, Thailand, where emphasis of different statuses makes an impression. The foreign guests mention the third party with respect, especially in conversations which take place in Thailand where the court costumes and social order have been well-rooted. The third party who was not present in the room was honoured by using a full-form typical honorific, such as, "His Majesty the King", "Her Royal Highness Princess (Name)", "Prime Minister + name", "job title + name", the pronunciations of Thai names, no matter how long they were, were perfectly correct.

Furthermore, Gile's Accommodation Theory (See Chapter 2) can be adapted to the investigation of interaction with a non-native speaker (Thai). Intercultural politeness includes changing one's speech style to meet the level of language competency of the hearer. The foreign guest adapts to the Thai hearer's speech style in the process of interaction. The convergences into the hearer's speech style are using the Thai language, simplifying their English, slowing down their speech, and making longer pauses than usual to avoid being too dominant by language fluency. Through adjustment and adaptation to a balance between two sides in utterance production, speed of speech, and level of linguistic complication, the

foreign speakers can provide the Thai hearers with a comfort zone during interaction in English, which is not the Thais' first language, and attend to the Thai hearers' identity of the non-native speaker of English.

Politeness by linguistic clarification using a simple, non-aggressive tone in conversation with the non-native speakers of English, is potentially judged as more effective than sophisticated modification for showing politeness intentions, since the hearer perceives that their lower-level of language competence is addressed and the difficulty of their communication is resolved. They can enjoy a better balanced interaction in terms of speed and style of expression. In addition, they are able to prevent themselves from face loss or embarrassment at making linguistic mistakes in public.

To sum up, strategies in diplomatic talk can be classified into two modes: conventional and unconventional politeness. Conventional politeness is required by official protocol and suits the hearer who holds an important position at the national level. In this sense, the linguistic codes and patterns are ones that global English users generally recognise as signs of politeness. The speakers choose this kind of politeness because it guarantees that their communication will affect the hearer since those signifiers have been broadly used before by other people. Unconventional approaches, namely, lexical, descriptive, interactive, and intercultural politeness, are not so easily and immediately realised by the hearer. The recognition of this style of utterance requires a recovery process since it is not primarily signified by politeness markers. The speaker using unconventional politeness has both creativity and sensitivity in his/her evaluation of the situation in which to use it. Also, s/he is able to demonstrate knowledge about the hearer's background. In institutional talk, the diplomatic speakers uphold the principle of non-infringement on the host country's autonomy in domestic affairs. When touching upon Thailand's political issues, they convey an assurance that Thailand's power as a sovereign state is essentially recognised. Furthermore, the hearer's face in diplomatic talk involves the country that the hearer represents; criticism or admiration of the country can have a significant effect on the hearer's face.

## **Chapter 6: Thai Politeness Strategies and Cultural Implications**

In this chapter, my study accounts for the culture-specific values which influence the Thai party's politeness performance in the pursuit of their national interests during their period of national crisis. Along with probing the scopes of culture and politeness, this study also examines the elements of conversation in relation to the probability of working achievement—presenting some verbal acts which serve the key diplomatic functions during the time of national crisis. The analytical framework aims to define the possible diplomatic goals of the verbal acts which benefit the Thai side during the national crisis, whether the strategies used as the means to achieve those goals support the key missions in this challenging period of Thai diplomacy or not. The research identifies the key diplomatic goals shaped by the emergent external political and social contexts. Regardless of whether speakers were genuinely aware of the mentioned national interests or not, their verbal acts in the conversations – as presented in this study – were considered essential for the survival of the country in the period of crisis. Next, cultural and linguistic influences on those strategies which significantly indicate the Thai party's diplomatic efforts are discussed.

The analysis of conversation data is presented in 3 sections: 1) identifying the speakers' communicative goals within the institutional and situational context; 2) classifying Thai politeness strategies and discussing cultural implications; 3) discussing potential pragmatic failures in Thai-style politeness when it is performed in interactions across cultures. The main aim of my approach is not to present purely emic strategies, or a uniquely cultural approach that only Thais use. Some of the strategies that the Thai speakers use can be found in other similar cultures. My study attempts to reveal the influence of culture and one's first language on the crucial acts of entailment, presupposition, and inference. Certainly, some of the politeness strategies also concern technical language use and conversational management, which tactically support meaning concealment and mitigation. This cultural and linguistic transfer potentially brings both positive and negative effects. Hearers from different countries may be unable to detect entailments implied by utterances, or the speaker's complex presuppositions as influenced by their particular culture—the background



knowledge that the speaker does not reveal because s/he assumes that the hearer knows. There is a probability that hearers from outside the speaker's speech community cannot decode those culturally-bound utterances, even though both interactants speak the same language, English.

## I. Thai Diplomatic Goals

It is a central concept in diplomacy that the state acts to pursue its national interests (McLean & McMillan 2012:80). I have adapted this concept to examine politeness motivation in diplomatic conversations—to pinpoint the goals of communication which benefit the speaker and analyse the strategies or the communicative means from a culture-specific perspective. The analysis of national interests can be independent from the goal which a particular person has in mind, but the circumstance or condition which challenges the person to take an action to secure his/her preferable position is the pressure of the diplomatic environment. Originally, the concept of national interest as the diplomatic goal was used for the macro analysis of foreign policy implementation, and outcomes were defined for the highest benefit of the nation as a singular entity. In the observed events, the Thai speakers performed a diplomatic task in their given role as the leaders of the host country. Abiding by their occupational role and social position, the speakers associated their goals of talk with the country's benefit, in other words, they worked for their own country. However, a diplomatic team's operation of work differs from sport competition in the sense that the diplomatic actors can choose either a win-win or a win-lose approach.

National interest, which is the key word in diplomacy, was identified by seeking the most commonly occurring topics during the major political crisis in Thailand. There are similarities between conversations from different events which show that the Thai speakers have common concerns about the external situation of political conflict. It is understandable that the incidents shape the subject of talk if we accept the fact that all diplomatic speakers have the mission to serve the national interest during that time. Therefore, some questions from foreign guests can be predicted. On the theoretical assumption that people speak to better a situation for themselves, the diplomatic speaker converses to achieve a diplomatic goal, or to ease their diplomatic job in the future. That is why the clarification of the domestic

conflict is consciously done through speaking. Of course, a speaker may have his/her own purpose in speaking, but this research considers the utterances s/he made from the perspective of work goals, as long as there is no evidence that indicates personal interest.

This research presents the potentiality or feasibility of target national interest which is explained through evidence in utterances and the external environment, which set the constraints for the agent to make verbal acts to create a preferable position of him/herself and the country s/he represents. That is to say, a good image of the country relates to diplomatic working achievement, and eases encounters during diplomatic work. The diplomatic representatives from a country which has international conflicts may potentially find him/herself in an uneasy situation of talk until s/he is able to communicate with the other to clear up any concerns. Whether the speaker speaks for the goal of national interest or not may be questionable. However, this fact can be viewed in similarity to a person being interviewed for the role of a teacher; there is no need to state that the role of the teacher is to teach students, this is common-sense knowledge accepted by everyone. Another aspect is the research limitation. The speakers are not required to reveal their own intentions involving their diplomatic missions and the target national interest because these goals are internal information of the organisations. Also, the subjects, who are the top leaders of the organisations, do not have time to provide self-reflexive data. Therefore, this research does not explore what exactly is in the mind of the participants, and this aspect of truth may not be necessary because each person may have his/her own view and attitude which is not helpful for knowledge users. Rather, a better method is to analyse the environmental factors which can help identify diplomatic goals at the particular period, so that this does not vary by person.

The transcribed conversation data of this research suggest that there is a commonality of topics about the co-occurring political protests in the country, which significantly affected Thailand's international relations before the conversation situations took place. The specific external context was mentioned in almost all meeting events in the fixed period of study, though in some of them the political situation was not directly involved in the meeting subjects and meeting agendas. Because the news about Thailand's political instability had been broadcast worldwide, the country's credibility had suffered in the period of political crisis. By their position as leaders of the state and government agencies, the Thai speakers have to act for their national interest; the achievement of this diplomatic mission proves the

speakers' success in their occupational task. Although some speakers may communicate for their own personal interest in some part, the conversational content involving Thailand's national interests during its national crisis can be divided into three themes:

**A. To restore the image of the nation.** The on-going political crisis broadcast by international media frightened foreigners residing in Thailand and potential foreign visitors. The long-running political demonstrations damaged the country's image. There was a common concern among Thai state and government agencies that if foreign countries had withdrawn their relations with Thailand because the country lost credibility, this would have brought about a great loss of national interest. A tangible interest would be the growth of the economy, which was connected with various economic activities of foreigners, and an intangible interest would be the country's reputation which could facilitate the work of international relations on various levels, state-to-state, business-to-business, organisation-to-organisation, and people-to-people. Realising this, the Thai representatives, as the hosts of the meetings, made an attempt to restore the national image of stability and credibility.

**B. To seek international cooperation.** The Thai government did not stop the daily T-shirt political gatherings; they explained that those protesters had a democratic right of political expression; however, since Thai law prohibits violent means of activism, the police and army guards were employed for the prevention of massive violence triggered by the emotional protesters. During the years of crisis, government and state bodies were able to continue their duties. Thailand's international affairs were expected to be carried out and to maintain a certain degree of productivity. Seeking international cooperation was a challenging mission for the organisations concerned in this period of political uncertainty.

**C. To deal with requests and complaints properly.** During the political riots, foreigners in Thailand faced many difficulties, ranging from heavy traffic jams, and insecurity of life and property, to the long-term loss of business opportunities and incomes. Some foreign diplomats brought these issues to discussion. Furthermore, due to the instability of the Thai government in that period, foreign business representatives had doubts about various on-going government projects/programmes in which their companies were involved. Dealing with those complaints and questions was an important task for Thailand. Good answers given to the foreign guests could confirm the relationship, and facilitate co-working on a great deal of unfinished cooperative programs. However, in this situation, Thailand

could not give the clear answers, or commit itself completely, since state and government organisations were not in their usual state of being fully competent and having complete managerial resources, for example, a lack of budget and specialists in some areas. The Thai speakers therefore had to deal with those questions very carefully. Otherwise, unsatisfactory replies would affect their long-term bilateral relations.

## II. Thai Politeness Strategies

### A. To Restore the Country's Image

Besides concerns about social approval in the world community, a damaged national image can result in the downfall of tangible interests, especially economic and technological cooperation with foreign countries. Therefore, to protect their national interests, the Thai party had to control foreign countries' perceptions of the political crisis. The strategies that the Thai speakers employed to cope with the challenging situations of talk were as follows:

#### 1. Joke

Although using jokes is a universal strategy (Brown & Levinson 1987), the national style of humour can be judged from differences in styles of discourse formation and the situation in which the speaker considers joking to be appropriate (Vuorela 2005; Rogerson-Revell 2007; Davies 2003). In this case study, the Thai speaker chooses the joke strategy for the crucial act of dealing with the critical moment of the diplomatic conversation, which is typically supposed to be formal. The joke he uses is unique in style of Thai English and it was observable that the joke could bring a friendly, relaxed atmosphere which supports interpersonal connection. This study explains a culture-bound joke which is considered as an important verbal act which serves the diplomatic work in the period of national crisis.

Joking is a positive politeness strategy, creating a relaxed atmosphere for interpersonal solidarity (Brown & Levinson 1987:124). Joking enables the speaker to mention the critical issue in a very implicit way, creating an interpretative frame that both interactants know without uttering all or saying everything obviously. However, it is one of

the strategies which must be handled very carefully and tactfully, because the hearer's misinterpretation may occur and then weaken interpersonal relations. The studies by Komin (1991) and O'Sullivan and Tajaroensuk (1997) present Thai values about fun and pleasure orientation; therefore, we can expect the occurrence of a good mood in Thai facework.

“Thai people are fun loving in nature. They love having fun and poking fun at one another. They also love good jokes as long as they don't offend or embarrass. Their humour is often related to events, situations, ineptitude of some people or groups of people..., or the way things are said or expressed”.

Centre for Intercultural Learning,  
Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada, 2009

Telling jokes is one technique for avoiding straightforward communication when a Thai encounters a person of higher status (Phukanchana 2004). Fieg and Mortlock (1989) present that unlike the American who tends to work hard, separating time for work and time for fun, the Thai have an attitude of working with happiness, or working and having fun at the same time. Therefore, a Thai conversational task is coupled with Thai joyful behaviour and having a positive view toward trouble, as in the Thai saying, “one can smile when the danger comes”; in the meantime, humour can put the other at ease. Niels Mulder, an anthropologist in Southeast Asia, asserts, “The Thai are masters of relaxation” (1978:103, cited in Komin 1991: section “Fun and Pleasure Orientation”).

Thai entertaining talk is probably developed in the Thai collective, feminine society (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005, see Chapter 3) where long-term close relationships are nurtured. Talking for pleasure can support regular social gatherings and excite interaction. Thais seldom show their opinions on an academic basis, nor do they heavily exhibit accuracy of factual data. Knowledge-based discussion is not a typical Thais' preference, although many of them graduated from university. Once, a Thai graduate student made an anti-intellectual comment to an American professor, “Oh, you are different from us. You should enjoy the moment and savour the good. Maybe, you think too much” (Knutson 2004:147). Still, the professor, who is also the research author, gives her credit as “one of my intelligent and charming graduate students” (Knutson 2004:147). The Thais' process of argument is the presentation of wit and the individual's intuitive vision. The way Thais present points of

view, especially in talk with acquaintances, does not always correlate with presenting systematic knowledge and factual evidence involving the physical world. For example, the British start a historical discussion in casual conversation with the name of the year presented in figures, and analyse causes and effects of incidents; while most Thais start a narration about their national history with “in the reign of..”, which shows that the historical person is the centre of attention.

In the conversation data, the Thai speakers talk about the concurrent political protests during the meeting events in a relaxed style. Instead of discussing the incident from a factual basis, the Thai speakers use ‘light’ talk to play down the political situation. In the following example, the Thai speaker first shows concern towards the hearer during his living in Thailand, and takes the opportunity to describe the heat of the political protest from a humorous viewpoint.

TH: Your Excellency may feel uncomfortable during this time, but your Excellency may understand it correctly. **The Thai people are hot-blooded. We live near the equator** (laughs), so the sun shines upon us.

(My emphasis)

To an extent, the joke about his own country could damage the Thai speaker’s face; however, this loss does not mean that there is no gain. Telling self-deprecating jokes to appear as a common person, promotes the idea that mistakes should be forgiven. Also, it plays down the political situation from a big, serious issue into a small, common matter. The massive destruction is re-considered as a natural occurrence by the jokey remark, “living near the equator”. The speaker clears up the other’s doubt about why it happened and when it would end. His utterance works as a hint: “Things comes and go just like nature, life is easy”. Joking helps to put the hearer in an amicable mood; the speaker can show his desirable qualities, such as wit and optimism, although he does not project the self-image of a perfect/ideal personality. Meanwhile, he appeals to the hearer’s face showing the hearer as someone he pays attention to via a pleasing joke.

As soon as the foreign ambassador heard the answer from the Thai party, he demonstrated solidarity. Importantly, the tension of the conversation was reduced, he did not move back to serious factual content.

FG: (Laugh in response) You are right about the climate; sometimes it heats up the atmosphere. The right word here is Jai Yen Yen.

At the end, the foreign speaker switches from English into a Thai idiom, “Jai Yen Yen”, which means “Relax.”, “Calm down.”, or “to do the task more slowly with patience”. In the Thai speech community, this idiom is normally used to stop the other’s emotion-driven action. This language convergence also supports the relaxed atmosphere created by the Thai speaker in the previous turn, because “Jai Yen Yen” is colloquial. Used by the foreign speaker in an official setting, this Thai idiom elicits satisfied smiles from all Thai participants in the office room.

The joke, in this case, comes with frankness and an unusual perception of the issue. The hearer feels closer to the speaker who shows this honest self-evaluation. Mood management can put the situation of talk at ease. The perception of the external context, with a sense of humour, was shared between two parties. If the Thai speakers had given an answer based on facts, the distance would have been maintained, because one side is the questioner and the other side has to give answers or justify the situation from a factual basis, as in court proceedings in which two sides are separated.

## **2. Pre-Emptive Move**

Politeness strategies to avoid the risky situation of making serious face threats concern conversational moves and turn-taking management. Culturally, Thais deal with vertical relationships; they tend to prevent obvious interpersonal conflicts because of the imbalance of power between interactants. So the person with less power has to avoid the moment of direct attack or the situation of talk which can put him/her into trouble. Thai facework has an anticipatory style, that is, while operating talk, the speaker predicts future acts and foreseen effects. This style, defined as an Oriental approach, is the opposite of the

Euro-Christians' participatory style which emphasises contributing to conversation; talk is moved on for an open-ended outcome.

“In speaking, Orientals tend to opt for an ‘anticipatory’ style, trying to anticipate what the others think and how they may react, as opposed to the ‘participatory’ style preferred by Euro-Christians, where importance is given primarily to the self’s contribution, on more or less equal footing with others.”

(Intachakra, 2012:4; also see Ide, 1989; Wierzbicka, 2010)

In the participatory style, expressions tend to be extended—the willingness to make active talk has a face purpose in an individualistic society; what the hearer immediately says is at the forefront of the speaker’s attention, and the speaker addresses his/her standing point. On the contrary, reactions in the anticipatory style tend to be dropped and skipped, with the belief of honouring the other by non-challenge. Ultimately, not only does the speaker of the anticipatory style deal with the currently-occurring conversation, but his/her effort is also channelled into speculations of a future sequence in order to prevent obvious conflict lying ahead. In a similar fashion, Ting-Toomey (2005) suggests that collective cultures tend to employ preventative strategies of facework to keep interpersonal harmony during conversation. Based on the concept of face prevention and anticipating future acts, the Thai technique of avoidance of the undesired, awkward question which jeopardises face loss, can be divided into two methods: 1) answering before being asked; 2) asking before being asked.

Since democratic states are expected to support people’s rights to express political opinions, the use of the army by the government to end a protest is generally not accepted in the world community. During the national crisis, the Thai government employed military forces to curb the violent political riots because they considered that the incidents could turn massively destructive. The news about injuries to the protesters in clashes with military/police officers was monitored and disseminated by international media. In dealing with this potentially serious question about the Thai state agency, the Thai speaker answered before being asked by exploiting the conversational flexibility.



FG: You've recently had some problems in Thailand with demonstrations. On top of that the problems of the world global financial crisis. How do you see the future now for the next six to twelve months in government? We've heard that 64 people are injured.

TH: First of all. I would like to say, because I used to be an army officer before, so I understand the feeling of the army officer. What is they're thinking about the political situation in Thailand. But I have to say, I have to talk to you frankly that the problem is that.....sorry. It is a conflict between two groups of people...

In this exchange of turns, the Thai speaker goes a further step from the mentioned statement about the future of the Thai government and the number of injured protesters. In this way, the guest does not have to pose the risky question, "Why did you let the army take action to break up the political gathering?" with the entailment that this action would receive international condemnation. The speaker saves the guest's face; he is spared the act of intrusion of asking a question about the Thai party's decision making, which caused injury to the protesters. This news was broadcast worldwide in that period. Also, if the question had been put to the Thai country leader, this verbal act could have been interpreted as an intention to interfere in the Thai state's sovereignty. The question about the future of the Thai government does not seriously attack the Thai hearer, because he is the leader of the Thai National Assembly, not the government leader.

The Thai speaker's answer actually responds to the unsaid message of what the other has in mind. The conscious guess or mindreading of the Thai speaker is driven by sensitivity to the coming face-challenging act. By moving a further step, nobody has to run a risk in facework. The utterance of the hypothetical question, if the Thai side had allowed it to occur, would have threatened Thai face through an implication of condemnation, and the other's face, as it is an intrusive move—questioning the other's domestic affairs. The mission of the foreign guest, seeking information about Thai decision-making via asking about the key issue, is finished without direct argument between the two sides. The crucial moment is covered up by pro-active justification of the key essence of the issue, which is not overtly

stated; whether the military actions were taken within the rule of the law and human rights. The conversation is carried on with considerable caution about Thailand's image.

The Thai reply can be interpreted as an admission that the rule of the law had been broken and human rights had been infringed. The people who did this infringing—the army officers—were aware of this fact and very sad about it (cf. their 'feeling'). Thus the answer allows the inference that the Thai state normally abides by the rule of law and people's rights, but the decision to use weapons in a protest crackdown had been made with reluctance and caution. The use of military means was justified as the best way to maintain law and order because the violent protest affected ordinary people's security and destroyed public properties.

The next example is a conversation between a Thai government representative and a leader of a foreign business organisation in Thailand.

FG: How is the present situation of the country?

TH: The parliament will not be dissolved easily. It is protected by law. They will pass the budget first if they need to dissolve, that's the best for the continuity of the budget from September to continue economic progress...

The guest poses an imprecise question; there is an ambiguity between presenting personal concerns with goodwill about Thailand's national crisis and seeking information. The questioner gives freedom to the hearer by questioning an issue without specification; however, the hearer has to give an answer or a set of information about the topic. The answer from the Thai side is an evasive response about the factual situation of the political crisis; the speaker answers a question the hearer has not uttered yet. The Thai speaker interprets the foreign guest's utterance in association with his occupational role as the representative of a major foreign business organisation in Thailand, whose group won bids for Thai government projects. The purpose of visiting is not exactly about politics, but also about business concerns; so the Thai government representative invests more time in answers about financial

security, though the foreign guest has not raised this topic of concern yet. The act of precise questioning about financial concerns, which potentially leads to face damage, is undone. The evasive reply by the Thai side takes both the speaker and the hearer to a safer position, in the way that no-one shows material concern, and the Thai party secures his creditability by giving confidence that the political movement will not affect the budget approval. Although the evasion is not completely made, the Thai speaker still contributes to the conversation logically; the evasion in this circumstance is done by changing point of view, slightly shifting from the political issue suggested by the uttered question, into the financial issue, responding to the unsaid question. As such, the speaker can completely block any utterances about financial concerns which may be produced by the other in the following turns and can threaten the face of both sides. The question conveys the meaning by inference that the questioner knows that the Thai party lacks financial stability. Additionally, it is an intrusion into Thailand's domestic affairs. Universally, material concerns or money consciousness are concealed in social actions; people hide the desire for self-benefit, which is a negative attribute.

In another way, a Thai speaker seeks a pre-condition for bringing the target issue to the table. The matter of the political crisis is raised without question; it is mentioned early in the welcome part of the conversation.

TH: Your Excellency may feel uncomfortable during this time about the trouble in Thailand, but you may understand it correctly.[...] We have the character of understanding, patience, after the aggression, they will get better, they get to understand each other, like in the family, when people have argument, if they fall apart for a while, they will stay together again.

The message is not only informative, but it is a justification of the chaotic political atmosphere. An optimistic strategy is applied, "...you may understand it correctly", "like in the family", the simile of the political conflict describes the situation as being as little as an argument among family members. The picture of in-home fighting evokes the idea of domestic conflict. The simile implies that Thailand's social divide is not permanent; re-union is expected because they all live in the same homeland. Again, giving this explanation

beforehand took the hearer away from the possibility of posing a high-face-risk question in the meeting; this difficult issue was later discussed in a gentle, understanding manner.

Since the political chaos happened in the host country, for the Thai party, answering questions about the situation is more difficult than questioning it. The questioner has more power to control the replying party. In two to three meeting events, the Thai speakers pose a snatch question, asking before being asked about the on-going political crisis:

TH: Before we leave, how do you feel about the Thai political situation?

FG: Actually, you should answer me (laugh). Well...amazing Thailand I would say, but you will find the way out I am sure. We compare the actions, environment, social and economic conditions with other countries. We didn't recommend our people to stay from Thailand. We do recommend our people who do their jobs, business, and come as the tourists to stay away from demonstration, not to wear the shirts, that is red, yellow or whatever, you know. I am sure you will find a good way out.

The Thai speaker snatches the moment to explore the opinions of the other side first, then he shares his idea about the situation. This way is easier than passively maintaining the normal replying role, waiting for a difficult question that may bring about an awkward situation for the host country. If the conversation had carried on without mentioning this target topic (because of the politeness of the guest) Thailand would have lost the opportunity to correct this information and explain the limitations of solving the political crisis. By pre-emptive questioning, asking before being asked, the speaker is safe from the position of being the replier. He switches to the position of questioning about the situation, and then shares his opinions afterwards. Polite articulation about the situation is shifted from being the duty of Thailand, as the host who knows best, onto the other country as a feedback provider, especially at the opening of the issue which facilitates latter discussion. The foreign guest is not completely pushed into the hot seat, though the power of criticism is given to him. However, by being asked the question, the hearer is given the difficult task of finding a satisfactory answer for the host country, or in theory, any answer that can save the host

country's face. However, because this kind of answer offers a positively biased criticism; it is easy for Thailand to develop the conversation from those satisfying opening opinions. The question from the Thai side to the guest about the situation, in a view of self-humility, is granting the chance to the other to speak first, strengthening the image of Thailand's open-mindedness in acceptance of any criticism and advice from the foreign guests, even expressing frustration about the on-going Thai political riots that affected them.

### **3. Stereotype Claim**

Stereotype claiming is the technique of "tautology", one of Brown and Levinson's off-record politeness strategies (1987:220-221). By justifying the situation using a certain formulaic pattern like "Boys will be boys", "War is war", or "Business is business" the speaker can stop the utterance before an explicit attack. What is important about strategic tautology, which is semantically uninformative, is its pragmatic implication of stereotypical properties that the speaker and the hearer share a pre-existing knowledge about:

Mother: Did the children ever clean up their rooms?

Father: Well, boys will be boys.

(Gibbs & McCarrell, 1990:1)

The stereotypical claim can be used positively to underline the desirable properties and to defend flaws/deficiencies in a person; it can be used as justification that imperfection is common; that person is not different from the others in the same category.

At a department store: Someone walks by carrying lots of shopping bags.

A: Cor, look at that! She spent a lot.

B: Women are women.

In an international context, national stereotypes convey descriptions of certain nations. I found an example from my experience on a stay in Switzerland. At the reception desk, I heard a guest commenting on the room rate with the hotelier.

Guest: Why's it so expensive?

Hotelier: This is Switzerland (friendly smile).

From the answer, the speaker is pointing out stereotypical knowledge of Switzerland in the tourism context—the surprise at a high hotel service charge in a country with a strong economy. The explanation of the high prices of products and services in Switzerland gains acceptance from a logical perspective—different countries, different rates. This concise method of conveying meaning saves the speaker’s and hearer’s face since the confrontation about the issue is curbed at a certain level. The speaker does not show her annoyance about the question, but uses the technique to explain “I’m sorry but there’s nothing I can do about it”. If she had used an unfriendly intonation, this utterance could have implied “That was a stupid question”. The stereotype claim gives the hearer a moment of meaning discovery, while the on-record utterance may lack a quality of mitigation because refusal or condemnation may lead to the unending debate.

Considering the diplomatic data, when being asked about the political chaos, stereotypes are claimed in order to remove the hearers’ worry about uncontrollable violence in Thailand, and to reassure the hearers that the crisis would end in a satisfactory way.

Example I

TH: **Thai people are Buddhists**, the problems can be compromised.

Example II

TH: You know **the character of Asian people**. They have **ethics**.

(My emphasis)

When using this subtle phrasing, the speaker must be sure that the hearer has the pre-existing knowledge background of the stereotypical meaning. In the examples, the speakers exploit the stereotypes or the knowledge in the mind of the hearer by implying that Thai/Asian-styled moral favour can bring the conflict to an end peacefully. The examples show that cultural stereotypes can become a tool for justifying the domestic problems in the country. The stressed words carry the stereotypical concepts of meanings, rather than simple semantic meanings. The speakers assume that the hearers share their knowledge of entailments of these implications; the explanation of complete details is left undone. Indeed, a stereotype is a partial reality or a selected part of reality. The real details of the

Buddhist/ethical character are richer than the image people learn from the media. The Thai speakers exploit this not-saying-all style or the non-extension of utterances to limit the scale of a face attack. Thus, the speakers can guide the hearer to understand the political situation by using succinct, implicit messages; the meanings which exist in the hearer's perception are larger in quantity than in utterances.

## **B. To Seek International Cooperation**

This section presents the Thai politeness strategies for seeking international cooperation in the period of national crisis, which makes Thai diplomatic work more difficult. Thai facework in seeking international cooperation involves the Thai hierarchical worldview, gratitude concept, and de-formalisation. This strategic category comprises not only the act of requesting, which is sometimes omitted between meetings of organisational leaders, since it threatens the requester's face, but it also encompasses appealing for assistance, maintaining good relationships for future contacts by operational staff, and motivating the hearer about capabilities and mutual benefits of working in a partnership.

### **1. Display of Weakness**

It can be counter-intuitive for people from other cultures when the counterpart's self-promotion is a display of weakness instead of confidence. As it is not always true that Thai speakers have no cultural knowledge about their counterparts, why do they maintain this cultural trait instead of converting to the hearer's culture, which in some cases favours displays of dominance? In the first place, the presence of a subordinate manner in the Thai style, which gives an impression of a supporting, harmless personality, facilitates the establishment of a relationship. In the second place, the subordination strategy can legitimise later acts of making requests when the speaker attaches his/herself to the other as a same-group follower, and positions him/herself as the weaker through the process in which an unequal relationship is invoked. Moreover, when this strategy is combined with developing interpersonal proximity, it seems natural for a request to be made smoothly.

Certainly, when a vertical relationship is formed, it is natural for the high-power person to request things from the low-power person, that is, to politely couch what may effectively be a command because the low-power person is not in a position to refuse to the

request. However, in the Thai method, one concedes to the other's control and does not see a top-down request as a serious face threat because the protection and privilege provided by the higher-power person outweighs the act of support they have to give in return. Metaphorically, it is culturally obligatory that the smaller has the duty to serve the bigger. The higher-power or the older are allowed to make requests without linguistic modification. These persons are not expected to show heavy politeness signs when speaking to a lower-status or younger hearer. This politeness rule is designed in a society that accepts a power figure who rules many lower-status people, so that the superior does not have difficulty in communication with many others.

Moreover, acts of top-down command are not freely done in a public space; indeed, the higher-power person is also under social control in a sense. Bottom-up requests may be easier than those in the top-down direction. Imagine the big person requests the small one to carry a big box. Because of concerns about the public eye and feelings about one's own capability, the bigger person tends to refrain from requesting help in that situation. And vice versa, when the small person tells the bigger person to carry the big box, the act is usually done without reluctance—the sizes of the bodies and the box are commonly perceived. The bigger hearers' feeling of relative power gives him/her an opportunity to feel beneficent. As illustrated, the high-power person does not fully enjoy the full freedom to make any request, due to those contextual constraints—physical and cultural realities that affect self-perception in relation to the other. In the international relation respect, the powerful country, whose image is projected by the country itself, feels reluctant to express the need for financial support from another country with an image of being poorer. In return, the country that presents itself as the economically weaker can easily make the request and easily refuse to lend to the other.

The data from many events suggest that Thai speakers have no reluctance about displaying the country's weakness, especially being relatively weaker than the counterpart, for example:

TH: If you talk about political democracy in X country, it is quite stable better than Thailand, because in democracy we look at election process. You have three million people and you have 400 (parliamentary) members. This proportion is better than in



Thailand. In X country, the senators are elected. We compare the laws, we think democracy in Thailand is not as good as democracy in X country.

This inequality of emphasis has a hidden moral expectation—the weaker holds the privilege; the smaller deserves protection. The use of a culture-specific norm in interaction across cultures is likely to bring both positive and negative effects. Positively, it can offer a new experience of Thai culture, which tends to show clear deference, evaluating the other and lowering itself, to the foreign guests. It also has some strengths for building associations between interlocutors from similar cultures, because the interaction is managed according to the same norms. Negatively, there is a possibility that this culture-bound politeness is felt negatively due to the dissonance of message sending and interpretation.

TH: ... Given the fact that X country has high reputation in producing staff and workers, it would be very interesting if you can look and see how X country can assist this endeavour. This is a difficult one for us, very difficult.

From the Thai viewpoint of a vertical relationship, Thailand does not feel seriously ashamed of requesting assistance by using conventional politeness, as it is regarded as a privilege of a less developed country to request help from the more developed one. It is important that the projected image is not relevant to the physical size of the country, but is more associated with the level of capability. The relationship of “you are stronger than me” is defined, then the duties to each other are implied—“the have should help the have-not”. In contrast with the concept of “big fish eats small fish”, Thais value the concept of “the richer should help the poorer”, “the stronger should help the weaker”. Through this moral paradigm, the weaker’s request for help is not regarded as a great loss of honour. The speaker is not reticent about their need; the highlighted weakness allows the speaker to gain attention and utter the request, no matter whether the act of requesting is done in the formal meeting or at a future occasion.

Specifically for certain cultures, Brown and Levinson’s formula,  $W_x = D(S, H) + P(H, S) + R_x$  (1987: 76–77), is not always workable. A high power difference between the

speaker and the hearer does not make it harder to make a request when social obligations in a vertical relationship are manipulated. The more inequality and responsibility to each other are underlined, the more the higher-power person abides by the moral rule of giving, more than taking, from the lower-power side. This is why the weaker's request is accepted in this cultural context. If the higher-power person refuses to provide assistance and support, s/he will lose his/her high status with social approval—respectful, benevolent behaviour is expected when a higher status is given.

In the data, the Thai speakers openly articulate their poor properties and thus empower the other, so the unequal relationship is defined.

#### Example I

TH: democratic promotion is what we are doing at the moment, but we don't have a lot of budget, if X country has the spared budget, you can give us assistance on building democracy in Thailand. And we will invite you to be the lecturer.

#### Example II

TH: If I have a chance, I may visit your country, but our economy is not good. We cannot reach the target of collecting taxes. So, it's quite difficult in this period for travel.

#### Example III

TH: We don't have the staff work closely with your country before. We would like to have that link.

Some of the example acts of request are overtly conventional, direct and assertive; however, the element that supports the central aim is the negation that creates the perception of "lack", "absence", "dearth", and "scarcity". It is clear that the communicative goal of these acts is not to construct the image of a competent state, but to appeal for international assistance. The Thai culture of humility and modesty in self-presentation probably influences the projected image of the country. The speakers thus describe the realistic conditions, or even exaggerate the degree of shortage. This selected factual presentation serves a strategic purpose for promising support, because lowering the status gives the speaker more freedom

to speak out about the need, and legitimises the position of a receiver. This is not possible to do, or more difficult to do, if the talk is operated in an equal manner.

Like other feminine societies (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005), Thai society places a premium on family values. The family is a big part of Thai life, and can influence Thais' decision-making in other aspects. The family-like relationship is cultivated at the national level; the King is respected and beloved as “father of the nation”. The Thai proverb, “Blood is thicker than water”, describes inseparable bloodline relationships. When a Thai diplomatic speaker deals with a representative from a higher-power state, the address term “big brother” is used to form the model of an unequal relationship, which can satisfy the country's safety and supporting needs more than the equal relationship model.

TH: Thailand is a small country, [he compares the population and geographic size of the two countries], we consider your country as our big brother. In economic situation, the big brother should help the younger brother to grow up.

The modification of a pre-commitment preceding the request (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain 1984:204-205) is developed by setting out the condition; the foreign guest is obliged to do something for the speaker. The family relationship metaphor brings an awareness of job allocation at a basic level. Stereotypically, the younger brother has less power as well as less responsibility than the older brother; moreover, if the young brother has a conflict with the older one, he will have more opportunities to be forgiven for any faults. He less deserves punishment in accordance with the moral code—the weaker is protected, the bigger is benevolent as s/he has higher power with a capability to give because of the possession of more resources. In a vertical relationship, positioning oneself as smaller or weaker than the other warrants considerable support from the other.

The display of weakness is a culture-specific strategy. A hearer from a different background may not share the Thai moral perspective of social inequality. Possibly, hearers from individualistic societies feel negative about these obvious requests and indirect compliments because of the different perspective of the social relationship. From the Thai viewpoint, mentioning duty/obligation to each other is a confirmation of the hearer's higher

status, because higher power entails more responsibility in Thai society. Without sharing this hierarchical worldview, the hearer may see the speaker as imposing on her/him since the requests are very direct. Efforts are made to establish this unequal relationship by using compliments, as well as self-deprecation. Rather than specifically modifying the act of request, the Thai party's practice is an attempt at positive politeness. Elevating the other can be a kind of indirect compliment—"You are the successful/high-status/powerful person" (also see O'Driscoll 1996). This exaggeration of power difference as well as the stress of proximity differ from Brown and Levinson's original concept which regards being deferential—abasing oneself and raising the other, as negatively polite because this act shows that the speaker recognises the hearer's immunity right (1987:178).

However, there is a possibility that this act, delivered in a culturally specific maxim, could be perceived beyond cultural barriers. The interpretation by the hearer could be free from the emic worldview about the aspect of social status/rank (both low and high), which entails obligatory duties between the two parties. Those acts as examples can be conceived as the presentation of the difference between the strong and the weak. Expressions that appeal to an unequal relationship are not against the law of nature. People are different in physical size, intelligence, and ability. Likewise, countries are different in size, quantity of resources, and material possessions. The physical reality and international image facilitates Thailand's positioning itself as the weaker; in this way, the diplomatic speaker can maximise the national benefit—strengthening the status of receiver and being protected, while representatives from major countries cannot do the same. The example utterances universally persuade the other by provoking sympathy on human nature and moral grounds, which generally exist in every culture.

## **2. Display of Tolerance**

The display of tolerance is an important part of maintaining a healthy relationship which supports international cooperation. It is the way to allow the other to do the face threatening act, while the speaker gives no direct response or a response which carries the same level of serious pragmatic force in return. Socialised in a hierarchical society, the Thai have face tolerance—face threats made by an older/higher-status person are not sensed as serious acts. This tolerance is reasoned by the social input that one should learn from the

senior and the person with higher success. In Thai society, obedience is a desirable characteristic in families, schools and workplaces. The characteristics of the follower and the life-long learner are firmly developed through social interaction and interpersonal connections. That is to say, the process of learning is not the individual's independent study, but one leads the other. Those who are obedient gain social acceptance and adoration from persons of higher status; while people who violate this norm risk social punishment/rejection and alienation from the society. The more people fear the loss of social approval, the more strictly they conform to the social norms. Additionally, Thai Buddhists value inner peace, guided by the idea that conflict is resolved by forbearance and detachment; the turbulent state of competitive debate and non-compromise is not preferred. Thais tend to react calmly and show that the other's opinion is valued; speaking for self-benefit and defending one's own stand point are not socially encouraged.

Thai culture accepts commendations, instructions, and advice from high-status, experienced persons. The desirable reaction to these acts in Thai society is the display that you are a good listener and show willingness to make flexible adjustments for self-development. Thais can accept the unfair face game, one gains less and loses more in face because those serious face threatening acts are viewed in a positive way. The evidence of this Thai uniqueness is mentioned by a foreign guest in an observed event below.

FG: We are happy that problems (about Thai politics) are solved one by one. The situation this year is better than in the last year....As Excellency said, they can consider and calm. It's the ideal of Buddhism—tolerance. Now my country is promoting the alliance of civilisation, alliance of all cultures and religions. I think Thailand is the best country to join alliance of civilisation because they have understanding the tolerance for other cultures.

The tolerant speaker has a high degree of patience when his/her face is attacked; they do not hit the other's face in exchange. A calm reaction which tones down the situation is a way to sustain the conversation.

FG: Absolutely, actually you only achieve the result only on the ground, when we make people work together while they never

work together before, it's difficult. It doesn't go by job, telling once and they do it. ...To make a connection between private business and state research, I think there is a good basis. Normally there are competitions within companies, I mean, why should we go to Thailand. Human resources are the best. I think a big subject for Thailand is to attract more research.

TH: (In a firm friendly tone) We realise that and we think the way to implement is to identify only certain industries where the present X companies are strong in the region, not only in Thailand and see how Thailand can help, you know, facilitating the localisation of resources. It might not be as high as it is Europe but it helps to engage the production on science at least, so that we can do well in the region.

The foreign guest gives advice in the first turn, "Actually you only achieve the result only on the ground, when we make people work together while they never work together before, it's difficult. It doesn't go by job, telling once and they do it". This obviously threatens the Thai speaker's face, showing him as being inexperienced, and having inadequate capabilities; his task is not satisfactory. This is a serious act if the interpretation includes the institutional context where the hearer is the representative of his country, holding the position of the head of a government office. The foreign guest does not realise this cultural context. He does not adopt the hierarchical system in Thai bureaucracy during the construction of his utterance; the conversation is managed in a dominance style—"our country has more knowledge and experience in this particular area than your country."

Thais have a culture-specific vision for pursuing communicative goals, that is, obvious disagreement is not displayed; one will gain a better outcome with patience and emotional control. In the above example, the diplomatic conversation is operated by the cultural outlook of disregarding face losses in cases where weight is given to effective collaboration and learning from others. In the data, it is rare that Thai speakers give advice or comments about the hearers' countries in return.

### 3. Display of Familiarity

High-formality can become an obstruction to diplomatic goals on the grounds that the speakers are within the constraints of occupational roles and interpersonal distance. Accordingly, many diplomatic speakers add friendly gestures, if the situation allows, in order to increase flexibility in conversational moves. Casualisation of language can be an instrument used by non-native speakers to signal an assumed familiarity—“Shall we talk as friends, not as officers?”—because this strategy is achieved by simple, basic language. In this category, an act of request does not need to be done; once the speaker requests while there is interpersonal distance, this act critically threatens his/her own face, especially in the first meeting, nor should it be made in speaking—it can be delivered through some other medium, e.g. by letter. In fact, many concrete cooperative activities can be worked out later by operative staff. However, in a face-to-face meeting, leaders can pave the way for future cooperation. This approach is appealing to hearers establishing mutual trust for future working in partnership. In the Thai manner, the relationship is built in a primary mode, the heart-to-heart style, without consistent focus on social ranks.

Being ‘back to basic’ creates human empathy, that is, comparing similarities of childhood or making friendly gestures; this interpersonal connection cannot be achieved by the use of linguistic sophistication.

TH: Your Excellency, if you have anything to tell us, you are always welcomed here. Come and have lunch with me.

The main strategy in this utterance is talking as a friend, although the speaker uses the formal address term as used since the first handshake at the early stage of meeting, and such term confirms his recognition of the hearer’s power. The simple language is an available choice for non-native speakers of English, and it can be used very touchingly in a display of familiarity. The Thai speakers use their limited linguistic competence in a valuable way as the non-sophistication of linguistic modification is a sign of sincerity—no effort is made to boost the image of the high class or intellectual class by exhibiting high-level language (communicating one’s own social status and social power). Also, simple language can relax the atmosphere. Contrastingly, the consistent use of formal language underlines talk on duty—working for the interest of one’s own country, without making a personal connection.

Sophisticated language is likely to give a sense of division and distance, presenting different classes, levels of education, and job ranks between interactants, but basic language possibly stimulates the recognition of self in childhood; before acquiring professional positions, everyone is the same.

FG: ...There are 300 members in our parliamentary friendship group. If all of them would like to come here, it's gonna be...(laugh).., it will be the problem of Thai side to receive 300 parliamentarians. It shows a great interest from the X parliament toward Thailand, all of the MPs would like to join this group. I would like to see as soon as possible Thai friendship group visit X country.

TH: If 300 members come, we have enough hotels available to receive. Although the economy is not very well, we have rice, so we will cook rice for reception (laugh).

Unlike some cultures which strictly maintain formality, the Thai culture values simplicity, 'back to basics'. The display of friendliness and generosity is valued over preserving restrictive formality. Using this flexible method, the speaker can easily construct interpersonal harmony because the engaged conversation is more flexible and cosy. However, this strategy should be employed with caution, as the hearers of some cultures do not like this proximity.

Consider the next example:

TH: I think we can pick up rice or other commodities. We will do joint research in terms of the cultivating method, non-used chemical, or post-harvest technology.

During a moment of motivating the other about a future cooperative project, the Thai speaker neither uses the clear, conventional expression, "I would like...", nor deferential interrogative forms, "Could you please...", "Would it be possible...". The de-formalisation, "I think we can pick up rice or other commodities", is a means of modification that can signal



the speaker's want in a soft way—"We will do it together, won't we?". The scope of the request is minimised; the area of the cooperation is specified. This persuasive mode is like brainstorming; the speaker shows no willingness to control the other's decision-making.

In all circumstances above, the Thai speakers raise topics which concern 'you and me' rather than 'your country and my country' by using simple expressions about having lunch together, feeding the state guests as at home, and assuming a mutual understanding about co-working with happiness. These expressions carry the connotations of interpersonal fondness and good company. Thai speakers strengthen relationships by stressing friendliness for developing personal, close-distance relationship, rather than maintaining the formal style of conversational performance.

#### **4. Reciprocal Offer**

Expressions of gratitude are a major part of Thais' cultural identity. In the section "Thai grateful relationship orientation" of the research "Psychology of the Thai People: Values and Behavioural Patterns", this Thai cultural trait is described by Komin (1991) as follows:

"...the Thai are bound for sincere and deep reciprocal relationships. And the deepest one is the psychologically invested Bunkhun relationship, as opposed to the "etiquettical" or "transactional" relationship. Bunkhun (indebted goodness) is a psychological bond between someone who, out of sheer kindness and sincerity, renders another person the needed helps and favours, and the latter's remembering of the goodness done and his ever-readiness to reciprocate the kindness. The Bunkhun relationship is thus based on the value of gratitude. Therefore, this value orientation is characterized by the highly valued Grateful quality in a person, and by the patterns of Bunkhun or grateful relationship. Reciprocity of kindness, particularly the value of being Grateful is a highly valued characteristic trait in Thai society".

Members of Thai society are educated to remember what they are given, no matter how long it is. A good example of the gratitude bond is the connection between children to parents throughout their lifetimes. The parents bring up the children, and they will receive equivalent care when they are old. Outside of the family life, Thais profoundly remember the other's kindness in the long term, and look for a way to pay it back one day. In interactions, Thais sensitively react to value the act of giving by the other, expressing admiration at this positive attribute. More than thanking, Thais offer assistance in return. This manner can be seen as Thai considerateness.

In international relations, reciprocity is a pattern of international relationships, regardless of the size and power of the countries. This relationship can be illustrated by the lion and the mouse in Aesop's well-known fable—the mouse can bite the net to save the lion's life. A country which has lower power can bargain well if it shows its competence in the area that the powerful country demands. Normally, the indicator of a country's power toward the other in rewarding and sanctions is military and/or economic strength; in some cases, it can be key knowledge, skills, or particular information that the other country desires. The lower-power country becomes important to the more powerful counterpart if it is able to present a crucial competence which no other country can offer, for example, tangible competence: the production of key products, such as, oil, food, weapons, and other innovations, and intangible competence: the communicative ability to motivate other countries in the region to become pro or con a particular issue that creates an impact on the bigger state, a competency in international management and cooperation, and so on. By omitting the act of making a reciprocal offer, a diplomatic speaker may fail to convince his target that a partnership would be a win-win situation.

In diplomatic talk, the Thai value of gratitude strengthens the diplomatic strategy of reciprocity. For Thais, a one-side request creates a feeling of shame and guilt. In this Thai concept, giving is expected from both sides. The Thai speakers consistently make reciprocal offers in almost every event after the other offers assistance, for example.

TH: That's very good idea. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you. If you have anything to ask for; on behalf of Thai institution, we will be pleased to do.

FG: Thank you very much to make that offer. I am sure that there are many issues that my embassy would like to follow up with your staff and your colleagues. We will be in touch if those matters arrive. When our parliamentarians visit Thailand, then I would like to bring them to meet you if you have the time for such meeting.

The interaction above shows that the Thai side offers assistance in return or commits to pay the hearer back sooner or later. In response, the foreign guest accepts the offer and makes plans for future contact. This reply indicates that the ability of the Thai party to assist is recognised. The reciprocal offer helps move away from the position of pure requester. To a certain extent, it restores Thai face after the previous acts of request.

Although the reciprocal offer is possibly displayed by diplomats from different cultures, according to the data, it is certain that the Thai speakers offer assistance in return more consistently than the foreign speakers. It could be said that this act is vital in the Thai sense because it creates equilibrium in the relationship between the self and the other—"I am not no use, but have real worth for you". Also, theoretically, it repairs damaged face after a request act is made. One reason for this emphasis by the Thai speakers is the strong feeling of indebtedness socialised in their society. Thai culture encourages Thai speakers to make a considerable effort when making a reciprocal offer. In a sense, this strategy can be considered a cultural distinction, since other small states may fail to confirm their ability to give in return, and tend to use a one-sided request strategy.

### **C. To deal with Complaints and Requests Properly**

Whilst running the country in an unstable political and economic climate, the Thai state administration probably worked toward a realistic goal due to the limitation of resources and managerial efficiency in the critical period of time. Within this limitation, it can be understandable that decisions made in state affairs must be very sensible, particularly the allocation of budgets and human resources. For the Thai speakers, one side of the coin is that the country could not give the other more than its capacity—refusals must be made; another side of the same coin, is that Thailand had to give satisfactory answers to those who came and

needed help. Otherwise, face-to-face meetings could worsen foreign relations whilst the country was in a vulnerable situation. To protect national interests, the Thai speakers can empower their position by projecting their identity as having an authoritative role—working on the behalf of the Thai state/government with authoritative power to control the situation/solve the issues; the conversation is geared to skip undesired acts by using an instructional style. It is a top-down communicational direction, but no act of confrontation takes place. It is found that there are many politeness strategies that the Thai speakers use for dealing with complaints and requests during the national crisis, but the following two strategies are complicated communication techniques which can be explained by the Thai culture.

### **1. Kill a Rooster to Scare a Monkey**

A Thai proverb, also found in Chinese, “Kill a rooster to scare a monkey”, means instilling fear with a showcase, guiding the hearer by creating/mentioning another story to imply what would happen if s/he does the same. In doing so, the speaker can block a foreseen act of territorial intrusion by applying psychological pressure—do think twice before doing this. The avoidance of serious face threatening is achieved by not conveying a serious face-threatening act—“I don’t need to say no, because you will not make the request”. It might be suggested that this strategy is the Asian style because the speaker manages face based on the anticipation of future acts rather than dealing with the current momentary face. Asian communication is an ‘anticipatory’ style—one is supposed to realise how the other will feel, or theoretically, how the hearer’s face will change; talk is managed in anticipation of the future act and foreseen effects, as opposed to the Western ‘participatory’ style—responding directly to the previous turn and generating talk freely for open-ended outcomes, rather than controlling the end result (Ide 1989; Wierzbicka 2010; Intachakra 2012).

This strategy holds the property of an instructional narrative which distances the hearer from the current face awareness. Instead of speaking to the hearer directly and immediately, the speaker mentions the story, distancing the hearer from the momentary self; meanwhile, the speaker’s self is shown as an instructor, a person who knows more by experience. The talk is managed in an unequal manner, like the way we teach a child, “You should do your homework. Look, Peter (a person in the showcase) didn’t, and he failed the

exam. I know you are a lot different from him”. In this instructional style, the speaker avoids directly attacking the hearer’s face. It is defensible because he does not threaten the hearer’s face directly, but below the surface, he tries to tell a fact about another person and points out the result of that undesirable behaviour. In another example, a parent may say, “I worked hard today; but you know, I get very little money” in order to block the action of their child’s money request. Therefore, no serious moment of face attack takes place.

In the example below, a foreign guest withdraws from the request of assistance from the Thai party because the showcase story implies the Thai answer in advance—the request will not be accepted—but the Thai speaker does not express direct refusal to the hearer. He describes previous cases which have dissatisfied him with the optimistic view that the hearer will not do the same. He assumes that the hearer understands the Thai party very well as someone in the same group. Although the speaker is quite assertive, projecting the identity of the Thai authority, not as a friend of the hearer, the positive politeness is done because the speaker is showing his positive view toward the hearer, indicating that the hearer’s group will do better than the other foreigners in the previous case; so, this group is special among the others from the perspective of the Thai side.

\* DIP : Department of Intellectual Properties

\*\*[TP]: First name of the third person who is not present at the meeting;

the labels [TP1] and [TP2] are used to distinguish two such persons.

FG: ...Yesterday we took 15 state-owned companies, the partners of X, and we have the people in the software industry, the motion picture industry, entertainment industry,...and the Thai side, there was the Department of Intellectual Properties, some of enforcement agencies, the custody, and India side. We had a very good dialogue, and a lot of positive achievement that DIP has done over the last year, I think they worked very, very hard. They joined the establishment of a national committee. The Prime Minister has placed importance on DIP because of the creative economy, a number of registrations,... the digital environment, even the new custom facility, ... a lot of good impressions and efforts, and of course DIP spent a lot of time and effort on an awareness of education campaign. Our members clearly recognise the

enforcement side; they're doing a standing charge. However, we did feel the frustration...what they said is catastrophe; they get dubbed pieces everywhere, despite all enforcement activities are going on. The dialogue [...] the market access issue with the [.....] companies, which is I think where the issue lie. And we had a number of companies there dealing with DIP. They agreed to have a further dialogue...It probably is that the dialogue need to take place at the Ministry of Public Health. I think a part of the (Ministry of ) Commerce's frustration is there are 70 issues not in their control. But they are continuing to work on setting up a committee to work on further discussion to see how we can try to resolve the market issue, which will gain Thailand's improved reputation of getting dubbed pieces everywhere.

TH: I explained a couple of days ago. TP1 came to us, I say, "The expectation of your group is so unreal". Ok, they expected to have the representation by the foreign companies in the national committee, as it, (smile) come on. You know, do we have that in the United States?, no. Any other country? No. I explained that they can have inputs two channels: complaint to the chamber, the joint-standing committee, you have that. We have worked with FTI. The Federation of [Thai] Industry, they have found suitable group. Of course, sometimes, there is shared interest, sometimes there is the conflict of interest, that's why we are here, there is the third channel too, which means, if you really cannot get together, [...], you come to me, which is open for all the joint foreign private companies. What more do you want, we want? The government names you in the national committee to satisfy? Come on (smile), you know. That's what I explained to them, they started to see the picture. And I spoke with TP2 at night I said, TP2, we'd better ensure that the expectations properly match [...]. If we are blamed because of this, can you imagine the feeling of the government that tries to do their best, to accommodate all of these, just unrealistic request, you see. So, we encourage

participation. We already have form of these channels, proper channels... I suggested the Asian now to do the [...] to make the market that has governance power...what I wish is that those of you to understand the situation here, the frustration, and the challenges, the well-intended, the regime, the people that try to do their best, who tackle all of these.

The communication technique in this example possibly focuses on creating fear in order to motivate the other to withdraw their aimed action of request; then the serious act of face threatening does not occur. The implication of refusal is done before the hearer performs the act of request. Foreseeing that there is a tendency to become the requestee, the Thai speaker takes the identity of the representative of the host nation and representative of the Thai authority, holding the right of decision making rather than conducting the conversation in a manner of other-accommodation or submissiveness. Brown and Levinson's "Be Optimistic" strategy (1987:126) is applied to keep the hearer close—"I believe you won't do that", plus the discourse devices, "you see" and "come on", which guide the hearer to take his side. Additionally, he provokes a sense of empathy by logical rhetoric questions. The aim of this narrative strategy is to block the request. It is observable that the conversation goes on smoothly; the participants enjoy the conversation without the critical moment—direct blame among them does not take place. No clear request is uttered, there is no difficult situation to refuse, and no obvious confrontation occurs.

## **2. Creating a Scapegoat**

Another strategy which is influenced by the communicative culture in a hierarchical society is creating a scapegoat. This tactical method to deal with complaints during the national crisis can be explained by the Thai social value of obedience—the one has to obey and follow the person of higher status who assigns work to do. This vertical relationship can be effectively managed in international relations when the Thai speaker claims higher power within the country's borders and has the authority to control the situation of talk by being the host and holding a high-ranking job position. There is a tendency for vertical relationship management to be significant in the Thai method of politeness, no matter whether the speaker

strategically acts as the lower-power person (the weaker) or the higher-power person (the stronger) in accomplishing the crucial acts. These power gaps enable them to achieve their communicative outcomes. In a display of weakness, the speaker convinces the hearer that the speaker's self-position is helpless, and in *Creating a Scapegoat*, the speaker treats the lower-power hearer in a friendly way.

Pragmatic transfer of Thai emic politeness is described by Cooper and Cooper that the Thai way to deal with trouble in conversation is "to flee the scene" (1982:80) because the culture does not encourage direct fighting. In the case study, the Thai speaker flees the scene (passing swiftly away from the high-risk act/to make those predictable confrontations unnoticeably vanish) by guiding the hearer to the world of the story, while distancing the hearer and the issue. At the same time the speaker implies a link between the story and the issue. Another strategy which is used is beating the supposed person (attacking the face of the third party), so that the face of the conversational partner is saved from a direct attack in the current time and space. Moreover, the speaker can move the hearer into the same-group position by provoking more conversational cooperation, while isolating the third party.

The representative is the medium of communication—the work of the conversational representatives is speaking for the others in their group; the speakers have to bring issues involving people in their group to the table. In order to maintain relationships with people in a face-to-face meeting, the speaker separates the hearer as the representative from his/her group. The refusal act can be done in two ways: the speaker refuses the person who is speaking to him (the one who voices the complaint), or refuses the absentees who are involved in the issue—treating the hearer as the person who conveys the complaint, not the complaint maker. In this utterance, the speaker intends to say "you did it (complaint), but I don't blame you. I understand that you have no choice. It is your job; the person I blame is the one who assigned you". In this way, the speaker shows that the hearer has no choice, he/she is within the constraints of the order given to him/her.

The following example is from a talk between the representative of the Thai government and the representative of the foreign business company which aims to continue their work for the Thai government's projects. The foreign guest indirectly makes a request through her report about the previous meeting. The communication goes further than giving general information. The subject is eventually raised to alert the Thai party about an unfair



competitive bidding process which may take place during the political crisis because the national administration lost its control. The foreign guest implies her calling for a confirmation of fair bidding among many foreign companies for a government project, that is, the use of legal criteria provided without bias or the influence of personal relationship.

FG: In the last meeting, there was the frustration of the bidding committee (of Thai government). I said I would definitely highlight this issue. The X company has too many jobs in the enforcement. Their office needs to be done and needs to be sustainable. And I see the huge effort. And I said yesterday why can't we get recognition about [...]. They are very keen on what they work with. We had dialogues and many constructive achievements, and I think they have worked very hard. I honourably, clearly recognise the important side; they do an outstanding jobs, but they did feel frustration.

TH: Calm down, they need to submit documents, evidence of qualification to us as much as possible. We deal with it fairly.

FG: We had a great dialogue with them to do that; we will continue to do that. I just let you know what happens after the meeting.

TH: Give them some medicine. I think they need some medicine for that frustration (laugh).

FG: (She shares laugh). We had a great dialogue with them to do that, we will continue to do that. I just let you know what happens after the meeting.

Responding with humour, "Give them some medicine", not only implies that the company is panicked about the unfair bidding procedure in Thailand, but it also steers the hearer away from the issue concerned. The Thai speaker disapproves of the third persons who have unreasonable worries. The Thai side's joke could reduce the tension, as all participants

share a laugh at the absentees; the joke could foster solidarity in the conversation group. Everyone laughs at the third party who was hit to boost laughs. The refusal is implied by hitting the shadow—those people have unreasonable concerns, so that the expected support according to the indirect request from the foreign guest is unnecessarily to be provided, the conversational partner in the meeting is saved from the speaker's attack as everyone in the event laughs at the third party. Even though, to some extent, his acts affect the hearer's face because she represents her group's interest. However, the speaker distances the representative from her group—showing an understanding, “you are not wrong to do your job, but your group's demand is unreasonable. It is not your fault that you speak for them”. The Thai speaker's utterance, “I think they need some medicine for that frustration”, carries the intention of blaming the person whom the hearer works for, not the hearer herself. Somehow, the Thai speaker threatens the organisational face; however, the hearer's individual face is saved.

A native speaker of English may question the reaction ‘calm down’ which could be interpreted as “I'm telling you to calm down”. It sounds very face-threatening, patronising and belittling (implying the foreign guest is behaving like an emotional child). However, I consider there to be an alternative interpretation, since the Thai speaker may intend to show consolation taking the hearer's side and caring about their mood. We should realise that the non-native speaker may not always use some words/phrases in an accurate sense. Nevertheless, if it is true that the speaker has made an attempt to position him/herself higher than the other; still, the interpretation from the native speaker's perspective is not seriously face threatening in the culture-specific view, because the higher-status person has the right to give an order to the lower-status one—telling her to calm down.

The main strategies in the last two cases are the conversational management by the Thai speakers to gloss over serious acts by showcasing another story and attacking the third person who is not at the meeting. The speaker blocks what the other is going to say, making the other side withdraw from taking an undesired act, by anticipating their future reaction which reduces uncertainty (Lee & Boster 1991). Thus, when the speaker knows what is going to happen, they direct the conversation away from the potential serious face threatening acts—“if you request; I will refuse”; however, none of this happens, the answer is given in advance by implication.

To conclude, the crucial acts regarding Thailand's national interests in the period of national crisis are operated with support from Thai communicative values in the aspects of vertical relationships and interpersonal harmony. Thinking hierarchically, when speaking English, the Thai speakers apply the strategies of Display of Weakness—emphasising the inequality of national power legitimises the request for foreign support and assistance; Display of Tolerance—the acceptance of a serious face threatening act made by the other and the display of a positive view toward it. Besides politeness in a vertical relationship, the Thai speakers use friendly politeness and relaxing interactions, as a practice in the collective, feminine society, namely, Joke and Display of Familiarity. Furthermore, the Thai speaker avoids lengthy justification about the political situation. Stereotype Claim is employed to guide the hearer to use their background knowledge of cultural stereotypes to comprehend the answer. This succinct expression or incomplete explanation, flouting the Gricean maxim of quantity—providing information less than required by the other—reduces the risk of severe face threat. The Reciprocal Offer reflects Thai care and considerateness; the speakers value the other's act of giving and establish a two-way supportive relationship. The method of non-confrontation is revealed as can be seen in sequential management, based on the anticipatory style or using a preventive strategy (Intachakra 2012; Ide 1989; Wierzbicka 2010; Ting-Toomey, 2005)—dealing with future acts to avoid serious face threatening acts (questions, request, comments). The strategies in this group are Pre-emptive Move and Kill a Rooster to Scare a Monkey. The speakers respond to future turns, or speak in response to what the other has in mind rather than what has already been uttered (the utterance of the previous turn); they do not precisely engage turn-by-turn. This inexact exchange of conversation is made to avoid direct confrontation in future pairs of turns, that is, high-risk acts which create trouble in face saving do not occur. Another non-confrontation technique is the strategy of Creating a Scapegoat. The Thai speaker avoids attacking the person who sits with him, the conversation partner. The blame rests with a third party who is not in the meeting but who assigned the speaking job to the diplomatic representative. All of these are complex communicative management practices within the on-surface simplicity of Thai diplomatic English. Even though the speakers use simple language, the modes of face management in the society where they live play an important role in the pursuit of national interests in diplomatic tasks.

### III. Potential Pragmatic Failure in Thai-Styled Politeness

This analytical discussion of cross-cultural pragmatic failure centres on identifiable discrepancies in the conversational data. Supporting knowledge about Thai diplomacy and culture can explain the possibility of paralinguistic and sociopragmatic failure in the diplomatic talk which is intricate and expressive in style. Paralinguistic failure is the communication of pragmatic force that cannot be achieved by virtue of difference in linguistic encoding between two languages. It occurs when the first language knowledge is transferred into another language (in this case, English). Sociopragmatic failure is caused by different cultural beliefs and perceptions between the two interactants, occurring when the speaker adopts his/her cultural norm in conversational conduct and the hearer from another speech community cannot understand the pragmatic meaning; usually, this error is not about linguistic forms and grammatical rules (Thomas 1983:99-100; Leech 1983, also see Thomas 1995; Wolfson 1989; He & Yan 1986; Lin 2008).

Regarding the case study, on the one hand, most foreign guests have international experience. Therefore, it is predictable that they can make cognitive adjustments for Englishes in different localities. On the other hand, many cases of conversational discrepancy still remain, and they are worthy of mentioning because diplomatic talk can never be completely prepared in advance. There are many unpredictable situations, varying according to the persons, contents, moods, settings and components. Ultimately, the production of utterances in interaction is simultaneous; sometimes, the speaker is unable to produce a target utterance with carefulness. Moreover, the foreign speaker cannot fully acquire cultural knowledge of the Thai counterpart because they are from another society. In my case study, the observable data suggest two arguable features involving pragmatic failure: Thai intimacy and Thai directness.

## A. Thai Intimacy

In the case study, Thai positive face strategies are likely to result in face mismatch (O'Driscoll, 2007, see Chapter 1) when the speaker attempts to convey positive politeness, but the hearer experiences it as flouting negative politeness, disregarding the other's personal territory. The speaker's intention behind the expression—to make an interpersonal connection—is sensed by the hearer as an impingement of his/her personal boundary. This critical act occurs when the speaker and the hearer use different social values in judgment. Although the analysis of data can be done in many ways—it is possible that other factors influence the conversation, this study mainly reveals the cultural implications.

Habitual talk in the Thai collective, feminine society is a display of care. This interpersonal closeness may exasperate or discomfit people from outside the culture. Thais are generally eager to build a personal association with others by showing care and involvement. Their casual conversations in the workplace can be about family issues, birthdays, and personal favourites. Expressing concerns about the hearer's family happiness, the speaker intends to tell, "I have a particular interest in you" (Brown & Levinson 1987:103-4), but in Thai society, this interest can be turned into a show of affection, "I am deeply concerned about you". For Thais, family is the centre of life and the source of happiness. Thais carry out family duties throughout their lives—taking care of children and parents. Showing gratitude for past kindnesses can keep most Thais in their hometown and their country instead of migrating to find better job opportunities overseas.

In an interesting example from the data, as physical appearances are apparent in a face-to-face meeting, the two interactants realise their age difference. Age may not affect people in other cultures, but for Thais, age is an indicator of how a relationship is to be established, because kinship address terms play an important role in Thai communication in the workplace. The Thai speaker alters the conversation with awareness of his age; he regards himself as an uncle, and possibly considers the young foreign ambassador from an individualistic society as a young nephew. It is normal for Thais to manage conversations in an instructional style; one learns more from experience and recommends the other to do the same. In the conversational data, the Thais tend to switch between work issues and personal

issues. This de-formalisation on the one hand can support interpersonal solidarity, but if used without limitation, it can be interpreted as an impingement of privacy.

\*FTA : Free Trade Agreement

TH: Though we have the FTA agreement for 4 years, the progress hasn't been very much. Your Excellency is the young people, please find the way to bring a progress to our economic cooperation. And Your Excellency should bring more X tourists to Thailand. At present, you have around twenty thousands, Your Excellency should increase it into a hundred thousand or something. **Your Excellency is young and haven't had a family yet. Your Excellency can find the family, settle your family in Thailand** (laugh).

FG: (pause) I can inform (Mr.+ position) that in fact I have nine brothers and sisters. Perhaps, we can start increasing visitors by my siblings' visiting to Thailand. More seriously, ..(move back to work topic).

(My emphasis)

As I mentioned earlier, there are triple layers of face in diplomatic talk: personal, organisational, and national face, which control the interactants' role. Simply speaking, a speaker engaged in institutional talk has less freedom than a speaker in everyday conversation. Within this role, occasion, and setting, the interactants are two diplomatic representatives of their states; some personal issues are ethically against their missions. Hearing the recommendation to make a family in Thailand, the foreign guest from a Western country made a pause; his answer deviates from the last point of the previous turn. Evasively, he smoothly switched the topic from finding a lover in Thailand to another concept of family: childhood and siblings, which is a safer issue for his diplomatic career with the mission of pursuing national interests in the foreign country.

The example implies that proximity engagement, if done without carefulness, can make the hearer feel uncomfortable and uncertain. This is because the interactants lose track of the stabilised situation sustained by formality. Foreign guests from individualistic cultures

need a broader personal territory in comparison with Thais. Without this awareness, engaging in talk as if speaking to another Thai does not always work in Thai-foreign interaction. The example above is conceivable among Thais as an attempt to display good intentions towards the other; with a sense of humour, the speaker can soften the act of recommendation. However, the topic of marital status may not be welcomed in other cultures. Raising this topic should be done by using a deliberate technique; otherwise, it could be considered as an inappropriate verbal action in the work setting in which there are many participants in charge, and professionalism is expected. Theoretically, it can be classified as trespassing on the hearer's personal territory—breaking Brown and Levinson's politeness rules. The startled reaction of the hearer which was noticeable during the observation indicates either surprise that the speaker knows about this aspect of his personal information, that he is not comfortable with the conversation topic, or that this issue is unexpected in general diplomatic talk. Personal issues are more appropriate, or become lower face-risk utterances if they are addressed in a dinner talk without participants/observers who pay attention to the on-going conversation for purely work purposes. So, the use of Thai-styled politeness in this case, with a low threshold between work and personal boundaries, can be regarded as an intrusive act from a different cultural view. As evidenced by the hearer's facial expression, the foreign guest was a little confused and considerably uncomfortable.

The next example shows a paralinguistic failure which potentially causes miscommunication about positive facework in interaction across cultures. The Thai speaker transfers a Thai word into English; and the interpretation does not completely match between two languages when it is adopted in this particular context. Trained by their first-language communicative culture, Thais tend to address the issue closely and subjectively—describing something from the speaker's perspective rather than as it is; their manner of talking is personalized. However, this expression used by the Thais can be interpreted differently from the foreigners' perspective.

FG: If I may, you are concerned about Y country and Thailand, if I may express my personal opinion...(give a critical analysis about Thai-Y conflict),

TH: Your Excellency can act as the middle man. Your Excellency are posted in both countries. Thailand doesn't have any problem with Y country.

Speaking to the diplomat who works in Thailand and Y country (not the country of the hearer), the Thai speaker presents self-face as a peace-loving country, using an expression which copies the way of speaking in the Thai language, “I have no problem with (another person)” (usually used in explanation of feelings about someone). Through this direct transfer of Thai into English, the Thai speaker intends to address Thailand’s position on the relationship with Y country. It is an attempt to say that the Thai government has no ill-intentions, neither in anger nor seeking revenge on Y country. This act can threaten Thailand’s own face if the foreign hearer considers the facts about the confrontation of the Thai-Y armies as presented by the international media. By the key statement, “Thailand doesn’t have any problem with Y country”, the Thai speaker could be perceived as a lying person since it is found that the Thai-Y conflict remains an international problem. The foreign hearer may not grasp the intention to explain the Thai’s feelings and attitude. Rather it could be interpreted in relation to the facts about international issues and Southeast Asian politics in the media and at international conferences accessible to foreign diplomats. So, the intention to present a positive attribute can be perceived negatively because the external reality does not support this statement. To avoid this misinterpretation, more description is required to clarify the different layers of apparent facts and what the speaker feels about this situation. Sitting with the diplomat who works in both Thailand and Y country, the Thai speaker wishes to show a standing point in favour of diplomatic manoeuvres, meanwhile, its army force was defending the border, but the communication may contradict this purpose; it instead creates suspicions of Thai hypocrisy.

Although the above-mentioned case is paralinguistic failure—the problem arises through an error of language encoding from one language into another—the speaker cannot find an exact expression in English to present his intention more precisely, thus this utterance production is not completely separated from the cultural factor. Because Thai culture values care and considerateness, lexicalisation in Thai language which concerns “Jai” (mind/heart) shows that Thais emphasise feelings about the person or situation (presenting the interpretive perception or one’s own perspective) rather than revealing their own view about reality objectively (presenting a realistic view or things as they are). Communicating from heart-to-heart in a face-to-face meeting to deepen the participants’ mental connection is not universal; some cultures prefer a certain interpersonal distance and value reserve; in other words, there is a degree of difference between interpersonal distancing and approaching, varying from culture to culture. Research on diplomatic speeches by Hafriza Burhanudeen (2006) shows a



high number of words for ‘connection with the audience,’ like “warmth”, “heartfelt”, “honourable”, and “gracious” in the leaders’ speeches at Muslim international conferences, classified as “warm fuzzy greetings” (See Chapter 2). The study shows that speakers from some cultures intensively use affective communication to create a mental link with the others, while in general, native speakers of English do not apply this norm.

Furthermore, there is another feature of cross-cultural mismatch in the example above. The foreign speaker has been giving an objective, impersonal analysis, but the Thai speaker starts with a personal suggestion. This may be intended as complimentary, and so interpreted by the speaker as positive other-facework, but it might be experienced by the foreign hearer as being dismissive of what he has just said, like “yes, yes, never mind all that – you deal with it”, which is an imposition or threat of the hearer’s negative face. Also, in consideration of the roles in institutional talk, the two interactants are from different administrations. If the act is sensed as an imposition, the effect could be considerably strong in this institutional context. An assignment from a diplomatic representative of one country to another can cause more serious face threatening than an assignment act within a bureaucratic system. Although the speaker is in the top position, he is not the leader of the hearer who is in a lower position than him, because the hearer works for another country’s administrative system. Complimenting, a strategy of positive politeness supporting a friend-to-friend request which the Thai speaker uses, is potentially successful in some situations, but not in the case where the hearer cannot conform to the request very flexibly because s/he abides by official regulations. To be polite, the diplomatic speaker should not refrain from showing an acknowledgment of the national administration border line in his/her act of request.

## **B. Thai Directness**

The determinants of Thai directness are cultural perception and language competence. Cultural perceptions about relational power, rights, and social obligations condition how people should behave in a particular situation, while low English proficiency limits the linguistic modification options. Simply speaking, the speaker may not want to use directness, but there are limited language choices available for him or her in conveying a target message. So directness is not a politeness choice the non-native speakers want to choose, but it is a choice that they have.

Directness in the study is considered in association with Brown and Levinson's fundamental concept about the communicative goal of the speaker in relation to conversational work of diplomacy. I define directness as a communicative characteristic referring to explicitness and frankness in revealing the speaker's benefit. Directness in speaking embodies some key words which clearly indicate the speaker's intentions. In other words, the speaker obviously acts as the party which expects to get an advantage from the other rather than giving; the speaker does not hide his/her benefit implicitly and does not use ambiguity in their speech. Directness can include hedged performative (indirect illocution) acts and/or on-record acts with redressiveness (Brown & Levinson 1987). In diplomatic conversation, the speaker using directness clearly conveys the request for assistance and support with or without the use of politeness markers/modifiers. In a way, directness affects the speaker's face as it can be regarded by as an expression of self-concern because the speaker's benefit is exhibited quite clearly in the utterances and it can be strongly sensed by the hearer. In this section, I discuss Thai directness which is influenced by culture and the first language.

With regard to cultural perceptions, Thai seniority and bureaucratic hierarchy characterise their manner of utterance expression. The facets of identities are dynamically twisted over the course of an interaction, varying according to the communicative goal. In contrast to a display of weakness that legitimises the small country to make a request from a more powerful country in a sensible way, the aforementioned request is also made in downward communication, the Thai speaker, who is older and holds a higher-ranking position, is speaking to the younger foreign guest. In this sense, the request is developed on an interpersonal relationship basis which addresses the individual and organisational face more than the national face. In the Thai speech community, Thai senior administrators are honoured in their working life. This social role of giving orders and gaining special attention is habitually brought into diplomatic talk. Doing favours for the elderly and top-down communication are generally accepted among Thais because the society provides the right and privilege to the senior and the superior to perform a powerful role: making direct requests and giving orders. These requests or orders show a one-sided absolute demand without evidence of considerable redressiveness, they entail good will and higher responsibility towards each other in vertical relationships, which is accepted in the Thai society, but they can be seen as an imposition from other cultural viewpoints.

As in the examples below, when the age gap between two speakers is wide—the Thai leading speaker is about 70 years old, while the foreign leading speakers are middle aged, the requests made by the Thai party are very obviously based on the specific cultural perspective that the younger must actively do a favour for the elderly. The expressions are quite clear and simple. The imperatives are directly used without carefulness or no serious face concern. These acts of the speaker can be explained by the Thai perspective that the younger has to do favour for the elderly. So, they do not consider that speaking with the younger needs deliberate modification. However, the verbal acts done from the Thai perspective can be perceived as impolite by people outside the Thai society.

#### Example I

TH: It's good that you have come to see me this time; I have something to request, that is, about the Thai workers in X country. They faced the problems here in Thailand, and they sought the new jobs in X country. It appears that some people have been mistreated. I would like Your Excellency to look after those people, sending them back. There were some people who were misinformed. They sold properties to get the plane tickets to work abroad. When they arrived there, they couldn't find jobs. I would like your Excellency to pay attention to this issue.

#### Example II

TH: Tell your Minister of Foreign Affairs: do not have to worry about the security in Thailand.

#### Example III

TH: Find the way to bring economic progress for two countries.

#### Example IV

TH:..in terms of investment, I have to request Your Excellency to tighten [...].I want Your Excellency to make public relations about the situation in Thailand. In tourism, there're tourists from X

country to Thailand about five thousand. It's very little; it should be increased soon to ten thousand. I want to see the direct flight from X country to Thailand. So, that would increase our relationship. It would be better if X country starts doing this. In terms of relationship, Your Excellency has the character that [...], wherever you go, everybody likes you[...] I would like Your Excellency to do more in giving an understanding about Thailand to all European countries.

#### Example V

TH: This morning, I heard from the news that four people are dead in...(war issue). I don't like to hear this again. Thai people feel depressed. Many others will die more and more. I hope you will help us about the situation. Because you like red tie, so, help us solve the problem about the war in...

In example IV, the Thai speaker mentions, "you like red tie" this connotes the on-going political demonstrations in Thailand where one's political view is signified by the colour of one's clothing. He assumes that the hearer is one of the Thai social members. These requests for assistance leave no negotiable gap, and are open to the interpretation of being impolite because negative face is ignored.

Theoretically, face size can matter in Eastern vertical relationships, It is said that in managing interaction, "high-status individuals are assumed to have "big face" and they can afford to be benevolent to the subordinates" (Ting-Toomey & Kurogi 1998: 195-196).Accordingly, the speaker's identity of having an older age and higher job position creates the view that the face of the hearer is small. This low-degree politeness has an effect like "it doesn't matter" in Thai society. In the above examples, the language is simplified for close-distance conduct in the way that an uncle would speak to his nephew; the tone of speech is neither forceful nor coercive, but warmly friendly. Normally, young Thais allow this kind of verbal power exercise and sensitively access adoration signs—"I assign you because you are able, young, and energetic", or "I dare to ask you about this job because of our close relationship, and in this relation, I am not supposed to do this job because I am older"—given by the Thai older speaker. However, the foreign visitors who are

representatives of the interests of their states may not be able to access the speakers' presupposition in this Thai politeness request.

In the examples, age is an important signal in the Thai speech community, where seniority is valued and overrides all other possible criteria, e.g., the job position of the hearer as an ambassador and the power image of the country that the hearer represents. Such evidence shows that occasionally, the first language culture is adopted without awareness; in other words, the speakers' inadequate knowledge of other cultures can result in poor speculation about communicative effects.

The data merits consideration of previous findings about implicit, indirect and non-straightforward communication in collectivistic societies (see Chapter 1). Looking at the whole picture, the 'play-safe' concept can explain why people from a collectivistic culture tend to use relationship-oriented communication. Mqjeffrey (2007), a blogger on business skill development, gives a good example when explaining this difference in American directness and Chinese indirectness. He describes the differences in the cultural aspects of Amy Tan's world famous novel, "The Joy Luck Club": "An American business executive may quickly get to the point say, "Let's make a deal", which reflects a task-based perspective, while the Chinese manager may place more emphasis on relationship as shown in the example of the first move about family issue, "Is your son interested in learning about your widget business?"

Gudykunst, Ting-Toomey, and Chua suggest in the key book "*Culture and interpersonal Communication*" that people in an individualistic culture tend to use low-context communication; clear, logical expressions are used to strengthen those speakers' standing points in the conversation in an equal manner (1988). I put forward a view that by using high-context communication, people from a collective culture on the one hand, can play safe and please the other—"I know what you are going to say"; mindreading is pervasive in Eastern interaction. On the other hand, according to Hofstede and Hofstede, people from collective cultures depend on power figures (2005:83), so most collective societies are hierarchical—respect is given to the higher-status person. The communication of people from the collective, hierarchical society can be very direct, because they are accustomed to high-power management in unequal relationships. For example,

the boss's utterance is clear and short to draw attention; trivial details are eliminated because the hearer may miss the point. One power figure deals with many subordinates or many people of lower status; so it is socially accepted that the superior does not have to take time and effort in utterance modification. Also, there is a possibility that the inferior can use directiveness, described in the display of weakness and the strategy of request, when the unequal relationship is established. Effort is not paid to the modification of the request because the right to request is legitimated by the established vertical relationship. From this analysis, we cannot expect that Thais are very polite; they can be very direct when their hierarchical perspective influences their conversation conducted in another language.

As for the factor of language competence, low-level proficiency in the English of non-native speakers can constrain linguistic politeness performance. This proposition is not concordant with scholars who introduce the pragmatic failure concept, asserting that grammar is not the central issue of pragmatics which is the study of what is meant versus what is said (Thomas 1995), or in other words, the comprehension of the implied meaning as opposed to the mere lexical meaning (Rintell-Mitchell 1989). These ideas in pragmatics suggest that intercultural pragmatics is mainly grounded in different speech norms which lead to misinterpretation and context analysis—what is not uttered or indirectly uttered. The existing knowledge in this field is formulated from consistent findings that high levels of grammatical competence do not guarantee concomitant high levels of pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig 1999:686, cited in Kasper 2001:506). In this concept, people who lack grammatical knowledge can hold pragmatic competence.

Nevertheless, in reality, diplomatic talk does not take only one minute; politeness interaction requires a variation of lexical choices, correct grammar, and formulaic patterns. Language proficiency is useful for articulating appropriately with precise vocabulary and various linguistic techniques which tone down illocutionary force. Many politeness strategies are displayed by describing long messages, as well as generating a lively, refined conversation with well-selected words. This ability should be more trained in Thais, whose sense of contextualisation is strong, but their simple, succinct English is potentially judged as being too direct and authoritative. Research by Anchalee Wannaruk (2008) supports this argument.

“EFL learners with higher English proficiency were more capable of giving clear and specific explanations than those with lower language proficiency. Their explanations include ‘Oh, that’s a pity, because I have to go to my hometown to visit my father. He’s in the hospital’ and ‘Oh, I’m sorry. I can’t. I have an appointment with the dentist’ when refusing an advisor’s invitation. On the contrary, lower intermediate learners said, ‘Sorry. This Thursday I’m not free’ in responding to a junior member’s request or ‘I think I can do it’ in refusing a friend’s suggestion. In short, language proficiency level seems to be an important factor.”

(Wannaruk 2008:328).

A simple, condensed, language display is not effectively communicative in the context of a formal or semi-formal event. Diplomatic professionals are generally equipped with a wide range of linguistic choices, so that they are able to explore efficient politeness strategies for different situational reactions, whereas the Thai speakers who have lower language proficiency are unable to deliver the complex message because of grammatical and lexical limitations.

According to the EF EPI English Proficiency Index (2011), in a survey by University of Cambridge Research Centre of English and Applied Linguistics, Thailand is ranked at No. 42 among the total of 44 countries, marked “Very Low Proficiency”. The list below shows that Thailand has a lower score than many other Asian countries.

No. 9	Malaysia 55.54 High Proficiency
No.12	Hong Kong 54.44 Moderate Proficiency
No.13	South Korea 54.19 Moderate Proficiency
No.14	Japan 54.17 Moderate Proficiency
No.26	Saudi Arabia 48.05 Low Proficiency
No.29	China 47.62 Low Proficiency
No.30	India 47.35 Low Proficiency
No.34	Indonesia 44.78 Very Low Proficiency
No.39	Vietnam 44.32 Very Low Proficiency
No.42	Thailand 39.41 Very Low Proficiency

The survey was conducted to assess the levels of English proficiency. Some countries which have a large number of English users, for example, India, are not at the top of the list because the quantity of people who can speak English does not always indicate the level of language proficiency. Considering the facts behind this statistical data, many Thais are in circumstances where learning English is optional, and not compulsory by social conditions. Education in Thailand, which has never been ruled by an English-speaking country, is conducted in Thai, also, Thai is the official language. There has been a growth of international programs in Thailand, but that is limited to a small group of upper middle class and elites. Generally, Thai EFL teachers do not pay considerable attention to using spoken English in harmony with Thai communicative habits, for example, prolonging the turn of talk and communicating the mood of the speaker.

The Thai speakers and their staff in my case study live in Thai society and they all received their education in Thailand. Some of them studied at MA and PhD levels in English-speaking countries. However, none of them grew up in English speaking countries. Generally, English teaching in Thailand concentrates on grammar and written language. According to my observations, the Thai speakers and interpreters speak clear English, but are not very fluent. There is a lack of variation in vocabularies and idioms. It is possible that the speaker cannot communicate his/her intended meanings exactly because of a lack of linguistic choices.

A study of Thai communication in English in a non-Thai context, conducted in the United States by Rojjanaprapayon (1997), illustrates the weakness in spoken Thai English. In an evaluation of the feedback from international hearers, the author concludes:

“In regard to verbal communication, the non-Thais reported that Thais had, more or less, problems with language barrier and cultural differences. In terms of language barrier, the non-Thais reported that Thais had accent and did not understand American colloquialisms and expressions and that Thais had limited word choices and terminology, grammatical difficulties, and lacked listening comprehension skill.”

(Rojjanaprapayon 1997:147)



In addition, an American teacher gives a reflection about the English of his Thai students in the research, “Thai students here [at his dept.] have a big problem in English terminology. They can use terms but not quite well. It is a big problem, but not too serious. Thais also have problems in fluency and articulation. They can’t speak English fluently and not clearly enough” (1997:144).

Likewise, simple, short English is found in Thai diplomatic talk. It is a common characteristic in all the events in my study that the foreign guests’ turns of talk are mostly longer than Thai speakers’ turns. Thais are apt at styling concise speech; the length of any given description is short. This succinct Thai English, in which it is very easy to grasp the meaning, gives rise to a lack of concealment. Such a feature, contrary to Brown and Levinson’s initial concept of linguistic politeness described by the terms “modification” and “redressiveness”, puts the Thai speakers into a disadvantageous position because of limited strategic choices and lesser ability to use the politeness strategies they choose effectively.

In avoidance of false communication during encounters with foreign guests, the Thai speakers directly reveal the intention behind the speech acts.

I would like to **praise** for...

I **praise** for ability of ...

I would like to **request** Your Excellency to consider ...

I would like to **request** you to help...

We **ask for** X country to help us sell ...

Somehow we would like to **request** that ...

Some of these are examples of conventional politeness, the others are seldom heard in spoken English, for example, paying a compliment “I praise for your beauty today” sounds abnormal to native speakers of English. Also, many foreign diplomats with experience in an English-speaking community may find it unusual. In diplomacy, these overt expressions, as examples of requesting assistance, can be considered as ineffective politeness communication because the speaker’s intention to take advantage of the other is clearly conveyed. This clarity can undermine self-image and carries a force of imposition. The linguistic forms show self-concern more than mutual benefit. Conversely, foreign guests can modify acts of request more subtly, as in the following examples:

#### Example I

FG: I think the time is coming, to do something in specific term. There is an initiative from the part of the senators to pay official visit to Thailand in June. If Your Excellency think it is fit, it's just a suggestion, you can send the official invitation. Of course, it's up to you.

#### Example II

FG: I think that Thailand and X country should have the exchange of visit. At present, there are a lot of members of the Thai parliament visit X country. In order to tighten this relationship, I would like to suggest that a friendship group should be established.

#### Example III

FG: I know we are part of one another. Sometimes I think along that we should have the limited area of cooperation. The specific sub-sectors are [.....] We push the embassies, government to government, also the private sector.

These low-tone impositions are made by mitigation of the burden and giving a considerable space for decision making to the Thai hearers' side. As in the aforementioned examples, the Thai party focuses on a conventional style, making the clear request formally. The overt expression of one's own want, through the addition of formal politeness devices, can bring about the hearer's immediate detection of the Thai aim of pursuing their national interests. Consider the conversational extract below.

TH: Thailand is an agriculture country. We do rice farming. We ask for X country to help us sell the rice.

FG: Excellency, we imported a lot of rice from Thailand, vegetable, fruits, durian is very popular in X country. A year ago there is a rice shortage; we were concerned about the supply of

rice from Thailand. We had to watch the situation closely. We also spoke to the agricultural organisation of UN here in Bangkok about the rice supply. The price of rice is going up again because of the monsoon from India. We may experience another.

TH: It is a good sign that we will sell more rice, it depends on (the decision of) X country as well.

The answer to the Thai request for rice selling cooperation is carefully conveyed by displaying a reluctance to accept, “We had to watch the situation closely”. Additionally, the foreign guest attempts to point out the increasing price of rice which currently affects his country. He tries to elicit a confirmation or some actions from the Thai side to improve the uncertain situation of the rice supply from Thailand, but the Thai partner misses these points; instead, he pays attention to the coming of the monsoon as a good sign that rice will be in high demand internationally, and that this is a good circumstance for rice-selling countries like Thailand. The Thai speaker was unable to capture the other’s request in this unclear message. This frequently happens when the speaker firmly moves the conversation in his/her favour, while the demand from the other side is overlooked; those requests as shown in the examples simultaneously come beyond the prepared topics in the meeting agenda which the speaker has in mind.

In the avoidance of uncertainty, the speaker develops the conversation to serve his own mission, and does not spare much time to deal with unpredictable utterances, then he leaves the previous turn inadequately unresponsive or unattended. Another factor is cultural training. Top-down communication in the high-power society creates a less negotiable gap between two interactants. To show respect, the hearer confirms by his/her reaction that s/he understands the message and will follow or the request is accepted without explicit verbal expression. The communication can be just nodding or eye contact. Thais have a familiarity with this clear one-side expression or the commands about what to do, as opposed to the communicative management of negotiable, co-constructed meanings. So, this trained manner results in evasive responses or deviation from the focus of turn-vs.-turn reaction.

In communication with Thais, long messages can blur key contents that the foreign speaker intends to deliver to the Thai hearer; high-style modification without emphasis may fail to elicit the Thai hearer's action taking.

TH : I would like to request Your Excellency to consider this matter in the parliament.

FG: I've followed this issue for a long time. It's not a new issue. It's issue of trust. We have to rebuild the issue of trust. I don't defend the violence, any form, I mean, very clear. We have to rebuild that trust, particularly, when (it) involves the minority that feel that they are marginalised. In my country, we have the Hindu, the Chinese Buddhist, the Christian, they have problems. I represent the outlook that embraces everybody. I talked to many leaders, I agree with you that the issue is not complex; it's based on trust in my view. Again, there are some pockets of the problems needed to be solved, education development, not necessarily military. It takes both Thailand and X country. It takes the members of the parliament, the Prime Ministers, it takes religious leaders. It takes society on that. It will benefit us immensely if we take excellent relation, between Thailand and X country, it should be special relation. I have optimistic vision like you. It just requires a strong political view. It would be shameful, you know, Thailand has a vibrant democracy, also striking government, X country also. I can ensure you that many of my colleagues, parliamentary committees, have started to talk about it. Why don't we take it up again? Ten MPs from Thailand, ten MPs from X country sit down entirely, talk to solve this problem. I will certainly support.

TH: On behalf of Thailand led by His Majesty the King, I had a chance to welcome the King of X country, as well as his royal family, as we regard as a good opportunity. During the visit, Thai Princess accompanied and provided a warm reception. This is a

sign that we can enhance our relationship. I think the problem about [...] will be solved. I think you are at the position of [...], you can help us, as I told you many times, you can help us.

The guest's request for a meeting arrangement has not been recognised by the hearer; as evidence, the Thai speaker flouts the Gricean maxim of relevance, he moves to another topic, (which is still close to the first one) and makes a request with emphasis in the same manner that he first tried in his previous turns—the other is expected to do something for Thailand. On the contrary, the foreign guest moves in the direction of mutual cooperation and signals the Thai side to think about hosting the meeting, then the proposed mission would be fulfilled, and he would accept a supportive role, "I will certainly support". No evidence confirms whether it is the Thai's technique to cease further discussion, because the request does not meet the conditions of Thailand's policy, or if there are other factors giving the Thai side a foreseen scenario of an unproductive meeting. However, considering only the linguistic data and the situation of talk, it is understandable that the Thai side is not able to sense the meaning of this low-force request, which is unusual in Thai hierarchical culture—people are familiar with expressing clear commands; the issue is thus suspended without reaching a solution. Another record shows a similar notion.

FG: Excellency, apart from exchange of delegation visits that can happen every year, we would like to explore whether we can do some more things, something like seminar. We conduct committee or whatever, some exchange of information program, I think that will be useful in the long term.

TH: Your Excellency, I feel very good since we had the friendship group. The relation between us will be easier. I will ask the chairlady of the friendship to coordinate for the friendship group.

The friendship group in this context is the organisational committee that works particularly in relations with a country. It is usual for the parliamentary friendship group to make an exchange visit with the parliamentary friendship group of another country. After the guest signals the suggestion, the conversation loses track of an assurance for the seminar, as can be seen when the Thai speaker moves to the next topic. Of course, the assignment of a

coordinator could confirm that the international seminar can still happen. Nevertheless, the assignment is vague, and is made without a sharing of ideas about planning in practice. The Thai side skips off the act of acceptance—responding to the guest's request, which the foreign guest is likely to expect because he spends time and effort on motivating the Thai party. The adjacency pair of suggestion/propose and acceptance/refusal is not fulfilled. The inability to catch pragmatic meanings in this extensively-modified act perhaps results from unfamiliarity regarding indirectness in Thai organisational culture.

In closing, diplomatic talk during the national crisis was a channel for Thailand to reduce tension and stigmatisation. Because of the political chaos, the country was observed and questioned by the world community about managerial failures. Thailand's diplomatic counterparts lost confidence in their bilateral relationship. The Thai social values that are applied in strategies of diplomatic talk during this difficult situation include a fun-pleasure orientation, an appreciation of vertical relationships, and communication with care. As for the weak points, there are both paralinguistic and sociolinguistic failures in Thai English at diplomatic events. Thai speakers have the potential to perform critical face threatening acts or create misunderstandings about politeness intentions in interaction across cultures because of their proximity engagement, insufficient English proficiency, and hierarchy-based courtesy, which influence their politeness strategies.

## Chapter 7: Concluding Remarks

In searching for the answers to the three research questions, “what politeness strategies are used in the Thai–foreign diplomatic talks conducted in English?,” “How do culture-specific values support the conversational performance of the Thais working in international relations?”, and “How do misunderstandings caused by cross-cultural mismatches occur during social interaction, and why?”, my study integrates several theories of politeness in the analysis of diplomatic conversation data and presents cultural implication based on previous studies about Thai culture. Its findings contribute to the existing knowledge in the following respects.

### I. Theoretical Politeness

This study of diplomatic conversation proves the strength of Brown and Levinson’s theory (1987), regarding its utilitarian quality, it has portrayed how politeness strategies are applied to accomplish the speaker’s diplomatic aims: seeking information in other country, strengthening relationships, enhancing cooperation, and promoting the country’s image. Despite the fact that interaction can be described as a ping-pong game which requires two-way actions, this research has presented that the refined language of politeness the speakers use in conversation reflect the attempt to control the hearers and to satisfy their ends—diplomatic goals and the speaker party’s benefit. That is to say, this research investigates how people master conversational language in the way like how to win the ping-pong game which requires two parties of players. In this way, the speaker does not wait and see how the other reacts, but s/he tends to predict the possibility of certain happenings and communicate for the desired effects.

There is no obstacle in adopting Brown and Levinson’s theory in the diplomatic context, including in assessing the interactions across cultures and the conversations in the formal events. Additionally, I used many other theories, in support, to delineate many components concerned, such as: lexical unit (Arndt & Janney 1985), the surplus of politic behaviour and context-dependent meaning (Watts 1992, 2003, Locher & Watts 2005),

convergence into the hearer's culture (Giles 1973, Giles & Smith, 1979, Giles & Ogay 2007), face differences by cultures and situational identity (Ting-Toomey 1985, 2005, 2009), face and cultural mismatch (O'Driscoll 2007), and the concepts of changes over interaction and community of practice in discursive approach (Kádár & Mills 2011; Mills 2011). These supporting theories were helpful because Brown and Levinson do not particularly emphasise the aforementioned constituents. All in all, my study shows that politeness theories can function together and support each other, because using only one theory cannot entirely clarify how politeness discourse is worked out.

This research advances politeness strategies within Brown and Levinson's face theory (1987). In application of this theory to diplomatic conversation, I divide politeness strategies into 2 categories: 1) conventional politeness, and 2) unconventional politeness, including: lexical modification, description and illustration, interactive signal-managing in turns of talk, contributing dyadic discourse, and attending to the hearer's cultural identity (see Chapter 2). Some utterances comprise more than one component; however, the most dominant feature can be identified by consideration of the speaker's effort and through rational speculation.

For further studies, I suggest that the judgement of what unconventional politeness can be done not by examining the approaches the speaker uses (lexical politeness, descriptive politeness, interactive politeness, and intercultural politeness) but the choices themselves. If the choice that the speaker uses is immediately recognised as a politeness signal, still, it is conventional politeness. For example, to refer to a country when addressing a representative's country or a third party, using the term "a developing country" instead of "an underdeveloped country" can be judged as conventional politeness because most English users immediately realise that politeness is intended when using the latter. Although the speaker has selected this term from his/her lexical repertoire with mindfulness, this polite term is generally accepted in diplomatic community, so it is not categorized as individual-initiated politeness. My classification of politeness strategies relies on the data of the case study, so the proposed strategies could be debatable in other circumstances.

This research is geared to the re-consideration of "appropriateness" proposed by Watts (2003) and the notion of "discernment politeness" introduced by Ide (1989). According to the data, there is a possibility that diplomatic speakers do not rigidly conform to the principles of appropriation and conventional rules. Politeness is not a machinelike action, and



human beings are not completely controlled by social laws. To some extent, the speakers' actions are within the constraints of social rules at a macro level: codes of conduct, social values, language conventions, socialised manners, and at a micro level: what the hearers' expect. However, in such circumstance, I view that the individuals still have choices while they are struggling to cope with social interaction. In the acts below, as I presented in the previous chapters, the effort to be polite can be seen in the data:

- 1) Request
- 2) Refusal
- 3) Seeking social approval

The effort of the speakers includes both significant emphasis of politeness markers and avoidance of explicitness in the face to face meetings. Since these acts are for the speaker's benefit, it can be concluded that the speakers' use of politeness involves their communicative goals, apart from conformity to social and linguistic rules.

According to Watts's concept (2003; Locher & Watts 2005), politeness is the surplus of politic behaviour, or what is required by the situation and convention. It is predictable from my study that the more the speaker values a goal, the more effort is put into politeness display. The indicators include the quantity of politeness devices, the attempts to use indirectness, and all acts done to block future serious face threatening acts. Politeness in interpersonal encounters is the same as in situations in which a person exhibits weapons as much as possible when s/he feels insecure and uncertain. Therefore, politeness functions are not only to facilitate interaction (Lakoff 1990), to smooth the on-going conversation (Arndt & Janney 1985), and to drive face effects (Brown & Levinson 1987), but also, to ensure a good communicative outcome. However, it should be added by a metaphorical statement that a soldier with a great deal of weapons may not always win in combat; it is not the quantity or high degree of politeness effort that determines successful communication. Indeed, the key for communicative success is the tactful use of a politeness strategy for the maximisation of positive effects—using the right strategy, at the right time and place, and with the right person.

Moreover, my research has shown that conventional politeness, which can be considered as first-order politeness introduced by Watts (2003), is included as one of the rational means. The use of conventional politeness in my study is goal-driven rather than

rule-driven. Basically, conventional politeness offers a warranty regarding its effects because it has been previously used by members of society many times, including the speaker himself/herself. The user of conventional politeness feels certain that the hearer will immediately recognise the signs of politeness. Dealing with creative politeness takes more time and carries more risks for misunderstanding.

In conclusion, this research revitalises Brown and Levinson's theory by a deliberate depiction of the speaker's strategies of engaging situations for his/her own advantages. It also ascribes that rules of language and norms are static, but language in use may not be, because those rules are judged by the user, as to how and when to use.

## II. Interaction across Cultures

The findings indicate that the speaker from a hierarchical society does not project a sole identity; there are a wide range of identities based on vertical relationship perspectives: the younger, the follower, the collaborator, the senior, the superior, and the authoritative actor. In interaction across cultures, all of these can be twistable over interactions. Hence, the identities projected by a speaker from a hierarchical society can swing more than the identities of people from individualistic societies who conduct conversations in a more stabilised and equal manner. The argument that people from hierarchical cultures usually stress displays of self-abasement and deference (Gu 1990) is invalid in interaction across cultures, because their self-positioning can switch from a lower status to a higher status (relative to the hearer), and vice versa, depending on the communicative goal. Using some identities, the speaker can claim his/her power and right which enables them to engage the situation of talk more effectively. In the case study, the Thai speakers position themselves both at a lower status: being the representatives of a lower-power, poorer country; and at a higher status: the host, the Thai authority, and the senior. The facet of identity that the speaker emphasises at a particular moment is determined by their communicative goal; the speaker can leave one aspect of his/her identity and take another if that choice of identity better ensures him/her of the desired communicative outcome.

Furthermore, socio-pragmatic transfer in interaction across cultures possibly gives rise to misinterpretations because the foreigners cannot connote those culturally-based

entailments and presuppositions. Overall, my study supports the concept of volition politeness (Brown & Levinson 1987) rather than discernment politeness (Ide 1989); however, it should be noted that the speaker has the right to choose, though in some situations, s/he has limited choices, because of a lack of knowledge of the foreign language and alternative culture. So, the speaker can choose the way to communicate only from the choices available to him/her.

### III. Diplomatic Politeness

Diplomatic politeness concerns the following areas of emphasis:

1) **Conventional Politeness**

The diplomatic speakers equip themselves with the conventional politeness required for their working context: official time and place, speaking with high-status persons. Besides these contextual constraints, conventional politeness suits interaction across cultures because it is easily recognised by the hearer, especially at the early stages of the meeting in which the interactants are not acquainted with each other, and in crucial acts in which the speaker wants to deliver his/her politeness intentions.

2) **Lexical Selection**

The mindfulness in selection of lexical choices is a strategic facework.

3) **Description**

Through the presentation of a lengthy message, the illocutionary force is de-centralised and hardly sensed by the hearer. A long indirect description within a turn of talk reflects politeness efforts in avoidance of explicitness.

4) **Neutralisation**

Contrary to Brown and Levinson's original examples of colourful, vivid expressions of interest toward the other, a diplomatic method of politeness is an emotion-free presentation of facts and figures in neutralised language. Desirable attributes of a diplomatic speaker are resourcefulness and trustfulness. Through quantity and accuracy of information, the speaker

is able to demonstrate that information about the other's country is of his/her interest. This technique can boost a self-image of credibility and professionalism.

### **Professional Knowledge**

When playing the role of a representative of a country and an administration system, the diplomatic speaker is mindful of the hearer's national autonomy (or of the sovereignty over the national border) during the performance of a conversational task. Seeking answers about the domestic affairs of the hearer's country or making a commitment about an important issue, the speakers demonstrate acknowledgments of the hearer's decision-making concerning authoritative power at various levels. For example, the domestic speaker implies that s/he will not interfere or control the decision-making of the Thai party in finding a solution to the political conflict. The foreign ambassador requests contact by official letter and does not immediately commit to the controversial mission requested in speaking. These verbal acts give the view that there is an awareness of organisational face, and negative politeness is shown in association with professional regulations.

### **Interaction Behaviour**

Interruption is not always impolite on the grounds that it sometimes signifies appealing to the hearer's positive face—implying “I am paying attention to what you are going to say”. As I have shown in the section on interactive politeness in Chapter 2, interruption during talk in a non-competitive manner can support the production of utterances for facework.

### **Knowledge of the Hearer's Background**

Diplomatic politeness is created through constructive information about the hearer. Historical, social, and political knowledge about the hearer's country, including language and social values are the ingredients of a politeness display. This can be shown via topic selection and cultural and language convergence: code-switching, speech style, norms concerning the hearer's speech community, and giving respect to public figures in the hearer's society. Sub-culture is involved in positive politeness strategy when the speaker shows their knowledge about the sub-culture the hearer belongs to, such as, the use of specific dialect and colloquialisms of the hearer's hometown.

In communicating with non-native speakers of English, diplomatic speakers carefully ease the Thai speakers' conversational contributions through simplification of language and clarification of voices, thanks to an awareness of the hearer's language background. By this way, the speakers can display positive politeness as those acts which indicate the acknowledgment of the hearer's identity by adjusting their speech style to facilitate the hearer's communication.

It is suggested by the data that diplomatic politeness strategies can be achieved by three supporting factors: Firstly, language proficiency which gives the speaker advantages in having a wide range of linguistic choices and expressions, coping with the speed of utterance production, extending messages, and generating a vibrant conversation; secondly, the sensitivity to catch the on-going mood/tone of talk is essential for judgment of when, what, and how to react in a particular moment; finally, the ability to present background information about the hearer's side properly. The tactful selection of right topics and linguistic choices tends to create quicker effects on face want of the target hearer than using linguistic politeness without the hearer evaluation. Such effective use of politeness strategies can lead to productive talk within the limit of the meeting time.

## IV. Thai Politeness in Diplomatic Talk

The distinction of 'Thai politeness' is on the basis of the low-restriction of social and linguistic rules as the country has the highest femininity ranking among other Asian nations (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005:120-121). Thai diplomatic speakers do not have the constraints of policy and image in comparison to other countries which have to focus on competition rather than cooperation with other countries. Also, without the 'historical wound' from international conflicts, the Thai have a positive attitude towards foreigners and develop international relations from an interdependent perspective. The Thai speakers position themselves at a lower status than the other on the judgement criterion of state power and competence. They pursue their national interests from the worldview of inequality.

The demonstration of Thai politeness in the case study includes relaxation; while the speakers from masculine societies may have concerns about competitiveness which can bring

about non-compromise and inflexibility. The Thai stay-cool style: 'Joke' and 'Display Familiarity', boosts interpersonal affection and unlocks the restriction to fact and reason, thus it can play down a situation of national crisis.

The Thai strategies of 'Reciprocal Offer', 'Display of Weakness' and 'Tolerance' reflect the Thai social worldview of living together interdependently and unequally. Moreover, the Thai speakers tend to block future face challenging acts, as appears in the strategies of 'Pre-Emptive Move', 'Kill a Rooster', 'Scare a Monkey.' These strategies are achieved by anticipating the future act. 'Creating a Scapegoat' is the strategy to free the hearer from the current scene by hitting the absentee whom the diplomatic representative speaks for, so that the interactants can save face at the meeting. Additionally, Thai speakers limit their explanations and stop the other's questions about Thailand's political crisis by exploiting the knowledge of the hearers about their country and culture. This strategy is the Stereotype Claim which can lower the risk of face loss caused by prolonging the talk about the issue.

To an extent, Thailand could put the situation at ease by taking the opportunity of the routine reception to explain its domestic problem of the political protests to other countries. While some countries believe that their domestic affairs should not be accessible by others, the Thai speakers welcome the topic of the national crisis with acceptance of their self-deficiency and, in some cases, this topic is first raised by the Thai speakers to create an opportunity for the justification of the state's/government's actions. Doing such is more advantageous for Thailand's international relations than claiming that the political turmoil is a domestic issue; questions about it from other countries are not expected. This enthusiasm from the Thai party to correct the information and restore the country's image during the national crisis indicates that Thailand places high importance on international acknowledgement/social approval in the world society. Otherwise, the country would have preserved the right not to share information about its domestic problem.

Thai politeness based on vertical relationships potentially produces both positive and negative effects when it is brought into interactions with people from a different cultural background. On the one hand, the Thai appear very polite through their strategy of self-deprecation; they do not promote themselves overtly. On the other hand, the Thai requests can be very direct when the speakers use high-status identity, with presuppositions about

responsibilities to each other in an unequal relationship, such as, “the big assists the small”, “the lower-status person serves/pleases the higher-status one.”

My findings support previous studies of Thai communication in English by Barr (2004), Knutson and colleagues (2003), and Knutson and Posirisuk (2006) which conclude that Thai English is direct. This feature results from the communicative convention in Thai society where clear communication in instructions and giving orders is preferable to the negotiation of meanings. Also, the lack of proficiency in English is an obstacle to politeness performance because having limited linguistic choices can worsen the utterance modification. Also, this factor links to the unsatisfactory adaptation of Thai cultural values while speaking English, since the speaker can communicate their deliberate intentions in English less effectively than they can do in Thai.

In interaction across cultures, Thais’ proximity attempt (displays of concern about the hearer’s personal issues) may lead to the interpretation that the Thai speaker is trespassing on the other’s personal boundary. Some personal issues are not appropriate for discussion in a diplomatic event which takes place in an official setting with participants performing their duties. Although, expressing a special concern for the other is a quick move for interpersonal solidarity, as is generally shown between Thais.

It is my recommendation that Thai politeness competence in diplomatic talk can be improved by the preparation of information for the leading speaker before a meeting of bilateral diplomacy. This is an important role for the operational staff. Besides background information about the country and the personal history of the foreign guest, the knowledge about the hearer’s interactional norms, social values, and first language—the selective idioms and key words for code-switching expressions, should be presented to the Thai leading speaker. This information would enable the Thai party to diversify their strategic performance of intercultural politeness—in other words, enabling convergence into the hearer’s culture more effectively. According to Gudykunst and his colleagues’ discussion of Ting-Toomey’s theory (1993), “The more diverse individuals’ communication resources are, the more effective they are in interactive identity confirmation, coordination, and attunement (2005:19, also see Ting-Toomey 1993). This idea extends Brown and Levinson’s concept of politeness choices, that is, the speakers who are equipped with the knowledge of languages and cultures have more alternative choices of politeness strategies than the speaker who

learns about only his/her own culture and lacks language competency. In addition, current issues about the hearer's country are necessary for developing divergent topics in small talk in the diplomatic event. This information can move the Thai speaker's focus from personal boundaries to institutional boundaries, which increase ability to approach the other through factual discussion in a more professional way. This well-rounded knowledge can increase the possibility for a Thai speaker to develop their conversation with a wider range of politeness strategies and speech styles. Accordingly, they can accommodate the other more effectively. Lastly, Thai English requires a particular improvement in variations of lexical choices and vivid expressions for displays of affection, compassion, empathy, and friendliness, so that the communication of Thai considerateness, care, and humour can be effectively performed in the conversations conducted in English. It is very important for Thai people with their culture of 'speaking from heart to heart' to speak English in harmony with their communicative habits and social values, so that Thai politeness competence will increasingly shine in interaction across cultures.

## V. Methodological Conclusion

My data consist of naturally-occurring utterances, academic literature, and the observation of situations from an external context: both the political protest in Thailand, and the internal context in the meeting rooms. This methodology is an alternative for researching politeness, since some of previous studies raise issues about the creditability of indirect data, for example, the questionnaire survey cannot fully claim satisfactory accuracy. Barr's research about speech acts in Thai English (1998) shows that some Thai respondents cannot completely understand the questions and scenarios described in English. Neither do they give adequate time and attention to answering in writing. Possibly, the answers in the questionnaires may not be exactly the same as what the respondents do in practice. By contrast, direct data (actual language in use) can represent the reality of utterance production where speakers face communicative friction. That is, the conversation takes place within a physical environment, including power constraints in a working setting, and time pressures; these factors operate simultaneously to utterance production during interaction.

In this study, I did not seek interactant feedback about the situation, because it is my intention to leave the issue of individual judgment—one person may find the utterance polite;



the other may not. Importantly, my research focuses on theoretical politeness or second-order politeness (Watts 2003), not socially-acknowledged politeness or politeness that people generally comprehend; it is not required by this approach to assess what the participants actually judge to be polite or not. Moreover, the validity of direct feedback is still questionable because the interview itself is also a social encounter. Concealment of certain facts will remain, especially in a situation where two interactants are in high-ranking positions; their commendation about each other is likely to be done in a very respectful manner. Another problem is how far the speakers can evaluate themselves. Many speakers cannot recall what they did during talk, because they were concentrating on the aims of the diplomatic mission pursuing the goal according to the meeting agenda, additionally, they do not have available time to give the interview immediately after the meeting. Therefore, it is better to monitor interactions with politeness knowledge to justify those actions in the conversational event. I rate participant/speaker/hearer feedback as a secondary option, rather than the utmost. Nevertheless, feedback research could be done in a further study, as far as it fits into the research questions, and the possibility its implementation within the given setting and timeframe.

## VI. Research Limitations

Reviewing the quality of the research findings and the capability of the study to answer the three research questions, I found that this research has limitations in two aspects: the answers are acquired using only one single approach to politeness study and the research is limited with regards to its possible implementation.

Addressing the first limitation, this research focus on the theme of pragmatic politeness which concerns what the speakers potentially mean and the speakers' use of techniques of linguistic modification, avoidance, and concealment. This thesis is an attempt to give an in-depth analysis of the data using one single approach, rather than dealing with broad boundaries: the multi-dimensional integration of various approaches, such as, Conversation Analysis and post-modern politeness theories (Watts 2003, Kádár & Mills 2011). These approaches are in favour of seeking meanings from the participants'

interpretation and context; in the other words, the meanings of linguistic forms are questioned.

However, the new analytical method in this study is a combination of Brown and Levinson's politeness concept with cross-cultural communication studies, in the context of diplomatic discourse. This method not only clarifies the meanings and interpretations which often arise in Thai-English discourse, but also brings to light some strengths of Brown and Levinson's theory; diplomatic conversation hinges upon the speaker trying to motivate the for the benefit of his/her nation, or satisfying the speakers' goals by means of the soft approach to communication. Although some relevant areas from conversation studies are discussed in this thesis, the weight of them is controlled, which allows the core theme of politeness strategies to be stressed.

A number of scholars take the view that neutrality is essential for achieving the status of a credible academic study, others argue that each piece of research is served by its approach (see Jucker 2009). The view that the newly developed politeness theories can replace the old ones should be re-considered. My thesis, more or less, supports the view that there is none of the best approach in politeness studies, but discussions from different perspectives resulting in alternative viewpoints enrich studies in Humanities area; striving for the most accurate results in this field can be a false direction because human communication is not static. The practical use of generalized knowledge should be adapted to different contexts, rather than being rigidly used like the robotic way.

To some extent, subjectivity is expected in Humanities research because it attempts to answer to address the "why" behind human behaviours which the subjects themselves do not understand or are unable to explain because of a lack of background knowledge. Proof in the soft sciences like Humanities can be based on either logical proof or evidential proof. Methodological justifications are debatable from different points of view. In fact, all contemporary theories have this status; they all are debatable and under development. The single approach of politeness study is no truer than any other; what theory to use depends on what aspect the study aims to explore. A piece of research can suggest academic truth at a certain level, but it cannot perfect or devoid of all theoretical weaknesses.

This thesis offers a means of data interpretation; the findings using the method employed are different from those using another academic lens. In the future, diplomatic talk can be re-studied via another approach, and findings from different angles will enrich understandings about linguistic behaviours.

Addressing this study's second weakness, diplomatic information is sensitive and well-protected, so it is not fully accessible by the researcher. The dissemination of information about real persons, counterpart organisations, and other information concerned is generally prohibited. Therefore, this study can only provide an aspect of truth due to the limited scope of information dissemination which the participatory organisations permitted. For this reason, the selection of the approach and theory to use had to meet the limitations of the data acquisition and presentation. As can be seen in the analysis, the chosen approach requires only selected parts of conversations to be presented, which enable the analyst to present strategic acts, instead of whole conversational sequences.

Furthermore, the findings on politeness strategies would be richer if the researcher had been able to conduct interviews with the leading speakers and participants about "what the speakers meant and what they said" as well as how language affected the hearers. Research on participant viewpoints could have been conducted if the researcher had been able to acquire appointments for the interviews. However, appointments were not easy to schedule during the time of political crisis in the country. The interactants are high-status persons: top leaders of state and government organizations, foreign ambassadors and foreign leaders of political delegations, who normally had very tight working schedules. Appointments with such people must be very well-planned. Nevertheless, interviews about the speaker's intention and hearers' feedback should not be considered as the principal data source. As I discussed earlier, interviewees may not completely remember what they did or heard during the meetings.

Additionally, the limitation of research implementation in diplomacy also results in weaknesses of subject variation. The researcher was unable to control the situations and schedules. The data collection was conducted during the 2009-2011 political crisis in Thailand; therefore, the majority of the data is pertinent to Thai parliamentary diplomacy because many government affairs could not be operated to their full capacity. Also, there were many uncontrollable factors in the data collection. Obtaining an invitation to attend

meetings for research purposes depends on the participatory organisations. Sometimes the staff was not available to provide research support, which resulted in a loss of contact with the researcher. The arrival of foreign visitors during Thailand's national crisis was another uncontrollable factor. Some state guests cancelled their trips to Thailand or avoid travelling to Thailand during the period of crisis, and some meetings took place in the period that the researcher did not stay in Thailand, so that the researcher was unable to attend the events. Thanks to these research obstacles which results in a problem of data dispersion as can be seen that the highest proportion of the data is from the Thai National Assembly, my findings do not constructively represent the Thai English of Thai professional diplomats from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but it generally provides an understanding of the Thai English of the state and government organisations which host the meeting event in Thailand. Due to unequal proportions of organisational data, the research cannot sufficiently reveal differences between the organisations. Instead, the study shifts its focus to the Thai diplomatic speakers' politeness strategies under the pressure of external circumstances and domestic political instability, rather than classifying strategies by organisation.

In dealing with real-time meeting events, there were many uncontrollable factors in the data collection, as example, the schedule of the meetings during the national crisis could not be fixed in advance for prior research planning. Some meetings were not open for research, and some organisations lost contact with the researcher. These obstacles reiterate that methods for acquiring talk-in-action data are of the utmost importance in research design. For future studies, it would be better to acquire the data before deciding on the research questions.

## VII. Research Suggestions

This pioneering research describes intercultural and interlanguage pragmatics in Thai-foreign interaction. Future studies on diplomatic conversations may do more, particularly: classifying types of international relations events, focusing on a specific organisation/sub-agency, for example, visa section; investigating an interactional pair, such as German-Thai, Malaysian-Thai, Indian-Thai. Another subject is the distinction between male and female diplomatic speakers, which requires knowledge of gender and politeness for analysis. Also,

how the participants and setting affect the conversation can be examined by Goffman's principle of footing (1981). Furthermore, diplomatic interaction studies can be further developed by a discursive approach (Kádár & Mills 2011; Mills 2011) with a focus on only one meeting event or a set of conversation. By this means the researcher can show dynamic changes in the conversation series, and a variety of different contextually-generated diplomatic meanings.

Furthermore, my approach can be applied to the exploration of diplomatic talks conducted in other countries, so that we can compare the diplomatic politeness strategies of different nations. The findings will challenge the traditional paradigm about the universality of diplomatic etiquettes.

In my view, it should be an academic mission to bring about an understanding of cultural diversity, and to formulate the knowledge that can cure a weakness in diplomatic communication. A lack of academic concentration on language in diplomacy can lead to the distrust of diplomatic means and the abandonment of communication attempts. Then, the use of military force and economic instruments, which undoubtedly produce a quick result, but affect ordinary citizens in the long term, will become the prime options of the country leaders in solving international conflicts.

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**Appendix A: Example Letter of Request  
for a Permission of Data Collection**



มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ วิทยาเขตตรัง  
อำเภอเมือง จังหวัดตรัง 92000

22 ธันวาคม 2552

เรื่อง ขออนุญาตสังเกตการณ์การเข้าเยี่ยมคารวะของแขกต่างประเทศ เพื่อเก็บข้อมูลวิจัย

เรียน อธิบดีกรมพิธีการทูต

ด้วย ดิฉัน นางสาวปิยนุช รัตนานุกูล อาจารย์สาขาภาษาอังกฤษ มหาวิทยาลัยสงขลานครินทร์ วิทยาเขตตรัง กำลังศึกษา ณ University of Huddersfield สหราชอาณาจักร และทำ วิจัยเรื่อง “Politeness in Diplomatic Talk : A Thai Case Study” โดยมุ่งหวังให้ผลงานวิจัยเป็นฐานความรู้ในการพัฒนาบุคลากรของหน่วยงานภาครัฐ เสริมสร้างความเข้าใจอันดีระหว่างชาวไทยกับชาวต่างประเทศและเผยแพร่คุณลักษณะเด่นของคนไทยด้านปฏิสัมพันธ์ข้ามวัฒนธรรมในระดับนานาชาติ

ในการนี้ ใคร่ขออนุญาตสังเกตการณ์การเข้าเยี่ยมคารวะ (courtesy call) ของแขกต่างประเทศ ณ หน่วยงานของท่าน ในช่วงเดือนมกราคม – มีนาคม 2553 ในการเก็บข้อมูลจะใช้เครื่องบันทึกเสียงขนาดเล็ก (MP3 Recorder) ทั้งนี้ เมื่อดิฉันจบการศึกษาแล้ว จะจัดส่งผลงานวิจัยให้หน่วยงานของท่านไว้ใช้ประโยชน์ต่อไป

หากพิจารณาแล้วเห็นชอบ โปรดมอบหมายเจ้าหน้าที่ประสานงานให้ทราบถึงวาระโอกาสที่เห็นเหมาะสมให้เข้าสังเกตการณ์ โดยสามารถติดต่อผู้วิจัยตามรายละเอียดด้านล่างนี้

จึงเรียนมาเพื่อโปรดให้ความอนุเคราะห์การเก็บข้อมูลดังกล่าวด้วย จะเป็นพระคุณอย่างยิ่ง

ขอแสดงความนับถือ

(นางสาวปิยนุช รัตนานุกูล)

อีเมลล์ : [xxxxxxxx@hud.ac.uk](mailto:xxxxxxxx@hud.ac.uk) หมายเลขโทรศัพท์ :xxx-xxx-xxxx

รายละเอียดโครงการวิจัยและประวัติผู้วิจัย : [www.xxxx.com](http://www.xxxx.com)



[TRANSLATION]

Prince of Songkla University,  
Trang Campus  
Muang, Trang 92000

22 December 2009

Subject Request for Research Data Collection at the Courtesy Call

Dear Director-General of Protocol Department

I, Miss Piyanoot Rattananukool, a lecturer at Prince of Songkla University, Trang Campus, am pursuing a research degree at the University of Huddersfield, UK. I have undertaken my research on the title of "Politeness in Diplomatic Talk: A Thai Case Study" with the hope of building a knowledge base for personnel development in Thailand's state sector, bringing a better understanding between Thais and foreigners, and disseminating the Thai distinction in interaction across cultures at an international level.

In this regard, I would like to request permission for observations at the courtesy call events which will take place in January – March 2010 at your office. The equipment for data collection is an MP3 recorder. After my graduation, a copy of the dissertation will be sent to your organization. I sincerely hope it will be of some benefit for future diplomatic missions.

If it is agreed, please assign a coordinator who can inform me which occasions are appropriate for my attendance prior to the meetings. My contact details are as below.

Your kind support and assistance would be highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

[SIGNATURE]

(Piyanoot Rattananukool)

Email: [xxxxxxx@hud.ac.uk](mailto:xxxxxxx@hud.ac.uk), Tel.: xxx-xxx-xxxx

Research Website: [www.xxxx.com](http://www.xxxx.com)

## **Appendix B: Data Transcription**

[According to the agreement between the participatory organizations and the researcher, the transcription is not publicly disseminated.]

## **Appendix C : Consent Forms**



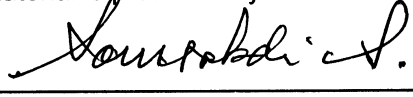
CONSENT FORM

Thai Politeness in Interaction across Cultures: A Study of Diplomatic Conversation

A Research Project

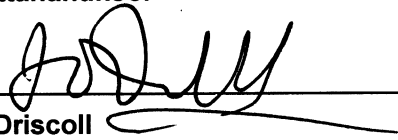
Name of Participant: Mr. Somsakdi Suriyawongse  
Position: Director- General Organization: Department of Protocol,  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Contact Number: 02-643-5000 Ext. 3607 e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

I confirm that I (and my team) have agreed to participate in the research project. I have been briefed on the purpose of the project and have had an opportunity to ask questions. I agree to the use of the findings of this project for academic purposes if the data is presented in an anonymised form. I understand that the material is protected by a code of academic ethics.

Participant's signature :  Date 27 May 2009

I confirm, for the project team, that we agree to abide by the code of academic ethics with respect to data collected for this project.

Researcher's signature :  Date 27 May 09  
Researcher's Name: Piyanoot Rattananukool

Supervisor's Signature :  27 May 2009  
Supervisor's Name : Dr. Jim O'Driscoll

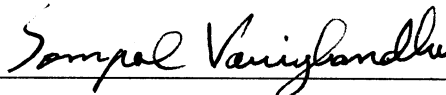
English Department, School of Music Humanities and Media  
University of Huddersfield, UK  
Email: j.o'driscoll@hud.ac.uk  
Tel: 00-44-1484-473-568

**CONSENT FORM**

**Politeness in Diplomatic Talk: A Thai Case Study**


**A Research Project**

The Bureau of International Relations under the Secretariat of the House of Representatives of Thailand granted permission for Ms. Piyanoot Rattananukool, PhD student, to observe the parliamentary courtesy calls in 2009-2010 and collect research data from the events. We agree to the use of the conversational data for academic purposes.

Authorised Representative Signature:  Date 30/03/2009  
**Sompol Vanigbandhu**  
**Deputy Secretary-General of the House of Representatives,**  
**in charge of the administration at the Bureau of International Relations**  
**The Secretariat of the House of Representatives of Thailand**  
**Contact Number: 00-66-2357-3173, 00-66-2357-3100 ext. 3139**

I confirm, for the project team, that we agree to abide by the code of academic ethics with respect to data collected for this project.

Researcher's Signature :  Date 30/03/2009  
Researcher's Name: **Piyanoot Rattananukool**

Supervisor's Signature :  Date 30/06/09  
Supervisor's Name : **Dr. Jim O'Driscoll**

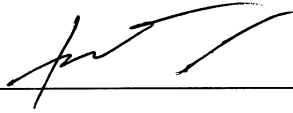
**English Department, School of Music Humanities and Media**  
**University of Huddersfield, UK**  
**Email: j.o'driscoll@hud.ac.uk**  
**Tel: 00-44-1484-473-568**

**CONSENT FORM**

**Politeness in Diplomatic Talk: A Thai Case Study**

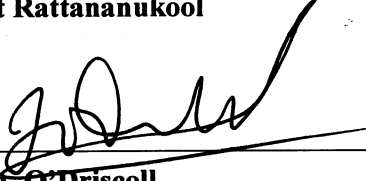
**A Research Project**

The Thailand Trade Representative Office granted permission for Ms. Piyanoot Rattananukool, PhD student, to observe our international meeting on 17 February 2011 and collect research data from it. We agree to the use of the conversational data for academic purposes.

Authorized Representative Signature:  Date 17/02/2011  
**Pennapa Deechaiya**  
**Acting Head of Thailand Trade Representative Office, Prime Minister's Office**  
**Contact Number: (66)81-440-9989**

I confirm, for the project team, that we agree to abide by the code of academic ethics with respect to data collected for this project.

Researcher's Signature :  Date 17 February 2011  
Researcher's Name: Piyanoot Rattananukool

Supervisor's Signature :  Date 17 February 2011  
Supervisor's Name : Dr. Jim O'Driscoll

**English Department, School of Music Humanities and Media**  
**University of Huddersfield, UK**  
**Email: j.o'driscoll@hud.ac.uk**  
**Tel: 00-44-1484-473-568**

**CONSENT FORM**

**Politeness in Diplomatic Talk: A Thai Case Study**

**A Research Project**

Name of Participant: **Dr. Pichet Durongkaveroj**

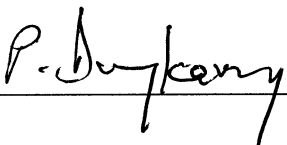
Position: **Secretary General**

Organization: **The National Science Technology and Innovation Policy Office,  
Ministry of Science and Technology, Thailand**

Contact Number: **(66)21-605-432**

E-mail:.....

I confirm that I (and my team) have agreed to participate in the research project. I have been briefed on the purpose of the project and have had an opportunity to ask questions. I agree to the use of the findings of this project for academic purposes if the data is presented in an anonymised form. I understand that the material is protected by a code of academic ethics.

Participant's signature :  Date 01/04/2010

I confirm, for the project team, that we agree to abide by the code of academic ethics with respect to data collected for this project.

Researcher's signature :  Date 01 April 2010

Researcher's Name: **Piyanoot Rattananukool**

Supervisor's Signature :  1 April 2010

Supervisor's Name : **Dr. Jim O'Driscoll**

**English Department, School of Music Humanities and Media  
University of Huddersfield, UK  
Email: j.o'driscoll@hud.ac.uk  
Tel: 00-44-1484-473-568**