

POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN MALAY AND ENGLISH: COMPARATIVE VIEW OF GREETINGS AND INVITING EXPRESSIONS

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Abstract

This paper investigates the difference and similarities of the underlying socio-cultural rule governing the use of language-functions of specific informal and formal greeting and inviting expressions in English and Malay. It is also specifically focused on the politeness strategies governing the use of such expressions in both languages as they are commonly used in any conversation regardless of culture differences. Significantly, the aim of the study is not only to look at the differences or similarities that exist in both languages, but to discuss how such insight found in this study can be used to improve the practice of intercultural communication. As there is a tendency for practitioners of language teaching to give emphasis on the formal aspects of communicative speech acts without regard for the socio-cultural conventions governing them, it is then essential for learners of the target language made known of the different socio-cultural convention to avoid any miscommunication or misinterpretation that may exist. (Abdul Aziz Idris, 1991). Based on the similarities and the differences illustrated in the greeting and inviting expressions of both English and Malay, it can be concluded that in order to successfully be polite in the target language, linguistic knowledge may not be enough for the learners to acquire. In relation to this, a learner needs

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to become communicatively competent in another both in the form and the socio-cultural conventions governing them. In other words, a speaker needs to understand the social values of a society in order to speak politely. In addition, with the realization of the importance of cultural rules involved in a language, it is important that the teaching of associated cultural values becomes an integral part of the language teaching process. Hence, this study also propose several activities that can be taught in any language classrooms in facilitating learner’s critical awareness of the language learnt. Among them include the introduction of interactional sociolinguistic study, the use of ‘model dialogues’ of specific greeting and inviting discourse, and the evaluation of relevant situations. Other activities include tape recording of their interaction, role playing activities asl well as having feedback and discussion activities.

INTRODUCTION

Learning a language is more than just learning the linguistic aspect of that particular language like learning its lists of vocabulary items, syntactic paradigm and native-like pronunciation (Schiffrin, 1997). Schrifin (1997) further contends that language learning also includes other aspects like knowledge of interpersonal meanings (symbolic values of what is said and done) and social structure (abstract forms of social life). He states that *“language is a system of use whose rules and norms are an integral part of the culture”* (Schiffrin, 1997, p. 312). As such, the meaning and structure and use of language can be seen as “socially and culturally relative” (Gumperz, 1982). This notion is based on the discovery of different grammatical items, including different phonemic (sound) and semantic (meaning) systems that exist among us. Our verbal behaviour, as well as the structure of linguistic code, is open to external (social and cultural) influences. For example, language can be the most powerful emblem of social behaviour that not only functions as a transfer of information but also sends vital social messages about the speakers and participants involved. Thus, the language used symbolically represents dimensions of social behaviour and human interaction. It can also be extremely complex, as the relationship between the language

and society can affect a wide range or level of interpersonal relationships (Wardhaugh, 1999).

Thus, bearing the above notion in mind, it is important to note that learning a second language, especially in the context where it performs a secondary role, is not an easy task. As pointed out by Gumperz (1982), people's perception of similarities and differences in the world according to their predispositions about language and the way it is used are culturally bound. The differences lie not only in the core grammar (syntax, phonology and semantics), but also in the marginal features of language signalling mechanisms such as intonation, speech rhythm and choice of lexical phonetic and syntactic options known also as contextualisation cues. In relation to this, a learner needs to become communicatively competent in another language both in the form and the socio-cultural conventions governing them. In addition, with the realisation of the importance of cultural rules involved in a language, it is important that the teaching of associated cultural values becomes an integral part of the language teaching process. As there is a tendency for practitioners of language teaching to give emphasis on the formal aspects of communicative speech acts without regard for the socio-cultural conventions governing them, it is then essential for learners of the target language made known of the different socio-cultural conventions to avoid any miscommunication or misinterpretation that may exist. (Abdul Aziz Idris, 1991)

Many studies have been done in relation to the politeness strategies in intercultural communication, including those by researchers such as Lakoff (1973), Brown and Levinson (1975), Scarcella (1979), Borklin and Renhart (1978) or even Nash (1983). However, it is important to point out that the purpose of this paper is not only to highlight the differences identified in the politeness strategies employed in a given intercultural communication context, but also to discuss how such insights found in these studies can be used to improve the practices of intercultural communication. Significantly, by investigating the differences exist, it will create an awareness and understanding of the different rules hence, help in minimising misunderstanding or breakdown in communication.

This paper investigates the underlying socio-cultural rule governing the use of language-functions of specific informal and formal greeting and inviting expressions in English and Malay. It is also specifically focused on the politeness strategies governing the use of such expressions in both languages as they are commonly used in any conversation regardless of culture differences. Moreover, although these expressions consist of formulas that universally serve as an affective function to establish non-threatening contact and rapport, their precise content is clearly cultural specific. By highlighting both the different speech acts (*locutionary* [literal meaning] and *illocutionary* [social function]) and the socio-cultural conventions governing them, it is hoped that awareness and understanding of both languages in relation to the greeting and inviting acts will be created while at the same time avoid any miscommunications that could occur as a result of the different socio-cultural conventions manifested in both languages.

POLITENESS AND THE THEORETICAL CONCEPT OF “FACE”

The concept of interpersonal politeness is very much associated with the face concept that has been identified by Scollon and Scollon (1995). According to them, it is an aspect of identity which is an essential element in all communication. They define the concept of face as the individuals’ interpersonal identity in communication.

Goffman (1971) states that the idea of face equates a rational person’s self image. Everyone has “face needs” for “face maintenance” that is incorporated into the fabric of social interaction. He continues that the notion of face is “*the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular context*” (Goffman, 1971, p. 309). In other words, it is the public self-image, the emotional and social sense of self that every person has and expects everyone else to recognise (Yule, 1996). Politeness, in fact, is the means employed to show awareness of another person’s face (Scollon and Scollon, 1995). This concept of face is nothing new among Asians especially in terms of establishing and maintaining interpersonal communication. Face maintenance consists of two types of interpersonal rituals: presentation rituals (an act through which an individual

makes specific attestations to recipients concerning how he regards them) and avoidance rituals (those forms of deference which lead the actor to keep at distance from the recipient). Based on these interpersonal rituals, Brown and Levinson (1987) have revised and expanded the concept of politeness and how a different face wants or desires are reflected and negotiated in linguistic form and communicative strategy (Schiffrin, 1997). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), there are two universal wants that are fulfilled:

- **Positive Face (Positive Politeness)** - the desire that others want the same thing that self wants. It is solidarity oriented and it emphasises shared attitudes and values, minimising status differences
- **Negative Face (Negative Politeness)** - the desire that one's own wants and needs be impeded and unintruded upon. It involves paying people respect and avoids intruding on them. It also includes expressing oneself appropriately in terms of social distance and respecting status differences

These two types of politeness refer to the means employed to show awareness of another person's face. Thus being more polite means accounting for both the negative and positive face needs. In this respect, behaviour that accounts for negative face needs is called negative politeness while behaviour that accounts for positive needs is called positive politeness.

GREETING AND INVITING EXPRESSIONS IN MALAY AND ENGLISH

The linguistic manifestations investigated are taken from a study of the frequent expressions used specifically in greetings and invitation expression with reference to politeness strategies, (Abdul Aziz Idris, 1991) and presented in the following table:

GREETING EXPRESSIONS

ENGLISH		MALAY	
FORMAL	INFORMAL	FORMAL	INFORMAL
(a) Good morning/ Good afternoon (50%)	(a) Hello/Hi (31%) (b) How are you doing? (37.5%)	(a) Apa Khabar? (50%) (b) Hendak ke mana? (28%)	(a) Apa khabar? (17%) (b) Hei, nak ke mana? (33%)
(b) Good morning + ... + how are you? (31%)	(c) Where to? (33%) (d) Long time no see ... (12.5%)		
(c) Hello (13%)			

INVITING EXPRESSIONS

ENGLISH		MALAY	
FORMAL	INFORMAL	FORMAL	INFORMAL
(a) I would like to invite you. (25%)	(a) What about.. (31%) (b) Do you want to have...? (19%)	(a) Boleh kita ...? (55%) (b) Bagaimana kalau kita..... ? (17%)	(a) Jom/ Mari makan sama (66%) (b) Mari makan (17%)
(b) Would you like to... (19%)	(c) Won't you.. (12.5%) (d) Why don't you join us? (12.5%)	(c) Mari kita.... (17%)	(c) Makan (17%)
(c) I was wonder- ing if you could... (19%)			
(d) It would be great pleasure if you could.... (12%)			

Generally, in the context of greeting and inviting expressions, the participants will make certain unmarked assumptions about their relationships, and about the face they want to claim themselves and that they are willing to give to other participants (Scollon and Scollon, 1995). In this case, for both speakers of the English language and Malay, such strategy is utilised in making contact with other participants. Initially, in a communicative act, a participant will likely to begin with an assumed relationship with another

and will then try to negotiate making closer contact with the addressee involved.

For instance in the act of greeting in a formal context of the *English language*, (e.g.: *Good morning/ Good afternoon*) as well as *Malay*, (e.g.: *Apa Khabar?*) and the inviting expressions found in the *English language* (e.g.: *"I would like to invite you.."*) or *Malay* (e.g.: *"Boleh kita .."*), the addresser projects an assumption that accounts for having phatic communions; which are performed to establish contact or acknowledge the presence of a person (Abdul Aziz, 1991). This strategy, considered as the '*negative politeness*' strategy, are performed by being indirect and neutral to the addressee. Hence, using such neutral form in the particular context of greeting, the strategy of 'distancing' oneself from the addressee and creating a minimal threat to the latter is then created without damaging the relationship that exists between the participants. However, it is important to note that in carrying out this function, the addresser initiating the contact or the acknowledgement has to abide to certain socio-cultural norms required of such situation in his society. Hence, as concurred by Abdul Aziz (1991), even though there is a need to be polite in making greetings as well as invitations in both English and Malay, the linguistic manifestations of both functions for both languages may differ to varying degrees, depending on the situation.

Formal Situation – Greeting Expressions

In the case of formal greeting expressions for English as well as Malay, appropriate address terms that account for status or showing respect may be included. As being polite involves taking into account the feelings of others, being linguistically polite involves speaking to people appropriately in the light of their relationship to the speaker. Thus, such address terms involve the use of negative politeness strategy in which the addresser recognises and respects the addressee's face and wants, and expresses the addressee appropriately in terms of social distance and respecting status differences through the use of '*Honorific*' terms before or after the greeting expressions (Holmes, 1997). For instance, when one greets in English "*Good morning + Mr/Sir (Honorific) + How are you?*" or even in Malay "*Tuan/Puan/Encik/Dr (Honorific) + Apa Khabar*" [*How are you?*] it is not only to indicate the dimension of formality,

but also for social solidarity purposes in which it is to pay people respect and avoid intruding upon them.

It is also important to note that a certain degree of differences in formal greeting expressions do exist in both languages. In this case, the difference lies in terms of the *content and structure* that are manifested in the expressions used (Abdul Aziz, 1991). In the *English language* for instance, the ‘*negative politeness strategy*’ used in greeting an addressee (e.g.: *Good morning/ Good afternoon*) is not only performed by distancing oneself from the addressee, but also to convey an expression of good wishes. In addition, the strategy used is in the form of formulaic commentary statements or a ‘*situation focused*’ strategy, focusing on the manifestation of making reference to the immediate situation/ environment. One such instance is the ‘specific time-of-the-day context’ during the time of the encounter such as “*morning/ afternoon*’. As the main focus for using this strategy is to assume that the addresser is imposing on the addressee, and intruding on his space that may trigger some social distance or awkwardness in the situation, the neutrality between the participants will be achieved through such strategy (Brown and Levinson, 1987).

In contrast, the greeting expressions used in the formal contexts found in *Malay* occur through the manifestation of a variety of enquiry type expressions addressed to the addresser greeted. For instance, the expression “*Hendak ke mana?*” [*Where to?*] or “*Sihat?*” [*Fine?*], is not inquiring the addressee’s destination, or let alone his health condition but rather it serves as an expression that centres on the addressee that emphasises the ‘predilection of the individual’ (Scollon and Scollon, 1995). Also, using the ‘*negative politeness strategy*’ in this context will significantly offer the least threat to the addressee. This also maintains his ‘self esteem’ as the addresser recognises the addressee’s desire to be respected and will not (or will minimally) interfere with the addressee’s freedom of action and territory.

Formal Situation – Invitation Expressions

Similar features are found in the case of inviting responses for both speakers of *English* and *Malay*, in which both languages manifest the concept of indirectness in the politeness strategy in formal situations. As such, the

addressers of both languages employ invitations in the form of request, or questions of the 'yes/no' type. For instance, in English "Would you like...?" would require the addressee to provide response of "Yes/, I would love to..."/ "No, I'm sorry I can't" while in Malay, "Bolehkah kita...?[Can we?] /Adakah ... [Is it...?]" would require responses like "Ya/Tidak[Yes/No]".

Other similar features shared by both languages in relation to inviting responses include using linguistic markers with modal auxiliary such as 'would' that is integral to formal invitations in English (e.g. "I would like to invite you..." or "Would you like...") and the word "Boleh" (may/can) (Abdul Aziz, 1991). In certain contexts, this modal auxiliary is also accompanied by the 'If conditional clause, for instance "I was wondering if you could..." (English) and "Kalau kita ..." [If we could...] (Malay). In this case, the 'If-conditional' is embedded in the 'yes/no' question form; hence it provides such indirectness that is non-imposing or a suggestive feature to the invitation that gives the freedom for the addressee to accept or decline the invitation (Abdul Aziz, 1991). Therefore, this strategy used by the addresser is also known as "positive politeness strategy" which in this respect provides a behaviour that accounts for the positive needs of the addressee's 'face'.

Informal Situation – Greeting Expressions

Interestingly, the manifestation of individual focused expressions is also found in informal situations in *English* as well as the informal greetings in *Malay*. For example, in *Malay*, the enquiry type of expressions addressed to the person greeted may include "Apa khabar?" [How are you?] or even "Hei nak ke mana?" [Hey, where to?]. Although both expressions occur in formal and informal situations in Malay respectively, it is important to highlight that the former occurs more frequently in the formal situation, while the latter occurs more in the informal situation (Abdul Aziz, 1991). As such expressions are centred on the addressee or to serve as a focus to the 'predilection of the individual', they then significantly offer the least threat to the addressee and maintain his 'self esteem' as the addresser recognises the addressee's desire to be respected, and will not (or will minimally) interfere with the addressee's freedom of action and territory. (Scollon and Scollon, 1995).

However, the difference in the use of the two expressions for Malay in formal and informal situations lies on the different intonation patterns that must necessarily be used for the same greeting expressions (Abdul Aziz, 1991). In this context, apart from a more casual and relaxed tone being used in the informal situation; the insertion of ‘*Hez*’ in the expressions also indicates a positive politeness strategy to be employed. In addition, it minimises the social distance that may exist between the participants, while creating a ‘friendly atmosphere’ that helps to achieve a connection or solidarity between the participants (Kang, 2000).

Similarly, in the context of informal situation in the English language, the formulaic greeting expressions, like “*How are you doing?*” or “*Where to?*” are in the main enquiry type of expressions directed to the addressee without any verbalisation of good wishes. By imposing such questions to the addressee, the positive politeness strategy employed tries to minimise the distance between the participants by expressing solid interest in the addressee’s need. This is further reiterated by Brown and Levinson (1987) whereby they feel that positive politeness is oriented to the positive face (positive self image) that the addressee claims for himself. Kang (2000) further reinforces the fact that this strategy is approach-based as the addresser gives face to the addressee by indicating the addresser’s interest on the addressee’s interest. This positive politeness strategy is used to encourage groups rights and reciprocity where there is a need to be accepted and maintain a positive face as well as to know that one’s wants are shared with others (Scollon and Scollon, 1995).

Informal Situation – Invitation Expressions

The politeness strategies employed in informal inviting expressions are also less direct in both languages. For instance, the structures often employed in invitations in English are expressed commonly in the form of questions of the yes-no type and request to indicate the ‘indirectness strategy’ employed in the English language like suggesting “*what about...*” or “*do you want to have...*”. Such indirectness provides a non-imposing or a suggestive feature to the invitation, leaving the decision to accept or not to the addresser. In contrast, the inviting expressions found in Malay do not seem to be administered by

the use of 'indirectness strategy'. Instead, invitations are 'linguistically realised' in the 'we' imperative like *Jom/Mari makan*' (Abdul Aziz, 1991).

Brown and Levinson (1987) stress that even though different languages employ a different structure in the inviting expression; they share a few common goals. These are minimising the social distance between the speakers (positive politeness strategy) and to be connected by seeking agreement from the addressee in drawing attention to a common goal (positive face) thought to be desirable for both. To the participants involved, these two goals result in increased familiarity as well as showing interests in the addressee.

POLITENESS STRATEGY AND MISCOMMUNICATION

According to Chick (1997), the sources of intercultural communication are resulted from the distinctive nature of the value systems, pervasive configurations of social relations and dominant ideologies of cultural groups. Hence, such dimensions of the social context shape communicative conventions, which in turn give them their cultural specific character. Despite this, learners are not made aware that unsuccessful acquisition of the appropriate socio-cultural conventions of the learnt language can create not only major miscommunication but also have devastating social consequences for them as they can be denied access to valued resources, based partly on the inability of those in control of crucial 'gate-keeping' transactions to accurately use others contextualisation cues as a basis from which to infer intended meaning (Schiffrin, 1997). Hence, in the context of intercultural 'gate-keeping' encounters (interviews for jobs or promotions), misvaluations of the abilities of the this group could occur; thereby resulting for them not being able to secure their fair share of resources and opportunities due to the inability to realise their potential or attain positions of authority in societal institutions. (Chick, 1997)

As ideas about the appropriate language to mark politeness differ substantially from one culture to the other, understanding how people communicate is actually a process of interpreting not just what the addressees say but what they intend to mean (Yule, 1996). In other words, knowing the

sociolinguistic rules of speech behaviour in a community that is referred to as ‘sociolinguistic competence’ is vital in being able to employ an appropriate language use (Holmes, 1997). This is because when people from different social groups or cultures meet, their sociolinguistic norms may conflict. This will result in embarrassment or miscommunication among the participants (Yule, 1996). To illustrate this point, below are two examples of how miscommunication can occur when such differences are not made aware by the speakers/participants involved.

The first example is the reciprocal first name employed by the British and Americans in initial encounters or greetings in interactions between relative equals, or those in a hierarchal position to indicate that the encounter with a stranger is proceeding well and that an equality of interaction has been established. Also known as the *‘involvement strategy’*, such discourse strategies indicate that the addresser is closely connected to the addressee and demonstrates solidarity politeness (Scollon and Scollon, 1995). Hence, one shows involvement by addressing the person with his/her first name like *“Harry/Shirley”*, instead of *“Mr. Harry Brown/Miss Shirley Taylor”*. However, for many foreign speakers of English in which the hierarchical and deferent alternatives are preferred in such encounters (i.e. the use of formal titles Doctor, Mr. or Mrs/Madam – for example *“Mr. Harry/ Dr. Shirley/Encik Adam/Puan Hana”*), this strategy of first name use like *“Harry/Shirley/Adam/Hana”* produces a certain embarrassment caused by seeming over-familiarity (Scollon and Scollon, 1995). For instance, non-native speakers like Malays may find it uncomfortable or rude to address a stranger by his first name. Rather, they will address the stranger by the formal titles like *“Doctor/Encik (Mr) Puan (Mrs/Madam)”* as a sign of being linguistically polite or expressing oneself appropriately in terms of social distance and respecting status differences. As a result, if the addressee is of British or American origin, the situation may be seen as a sign of ‘distancing’ oneself from the communicative event. The addressee may assume that the encounter between both speakers is not proceeding well enough.

Another example that may cause a miscommunication between the two cultures of Malay and English is when the types of expressions employed by the speakers are mistakenly used in the wrong context (i.e. formal and informal contexts). As highlighted earlier, there exists a notable

difference in terms of the content and structure of the greeting expressions used in formal contexts of both English and Malay. Firstly, the use of negative politeness strategy in English is situation-focused, in which it is performed through the manifestation of making reference to the immediate situation upon the time the greeting is made – like *'morning/afternoon'* in *"Good morning/ It's a nice weather today"* (Holmes, 1997). In contrast, the greeting expressions in formal and informal situations found in Malay occur through the use of a variety of enquiry type of expressions addressed (i.e. *"Hendak ke mana?/ Sibat?"*). These expressions centre on the individual/addressee or also known as 'predilection of the individual' (Scollon and Scollon, 1995).

The difference in the use of the two expressions for Malay in both formal and informal situations lies only in the different intonation patterns that must necessarily be used for the same greeting expressions. A more casual and relaxed tone as well as the insertion of 'Hei' in the expressions to be used to create friendly atmosphere between the participants (Abdul Aziz, 1991). Hence, if a Malay speaker is not aware of such difference that exists in the greeting expressions of the formal situation of both languages and attempt to employ the Malay way of achieving 'negative politeness strategy' by saying *"([Hey], where are you going? [i.e. [Hei], Hendak ke mana?"]*, the addressee (English speaker) then may assume that the addresser is imposing the addressee's freedom of action or territory. Hence, this may result in a conflict or miscommunication between the two speakers. Instead of the expression being seen as minimising the distance or providing a connection or solidarity as well as creating a friendly atmosphere between the participants to achieve a common goal (the need to be accepted), the addresser is seen as posing a threat to the 'face maintenance' of the addressee. This is due to the failure of achieving such solidarity.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

It is pertinent to point out that in the planning and implementation of lessons on intercultural communication specifically that of politeness strategies, there is a consensus among sociolinguistics (Fairclough, 1992, Olshtain and Cohen 1990, Wolfson, 1989, Gumperz and Roberts, 1980, Erickson, 1979) that critical awareness training should be advocated to facilitate language learning

as well as avoid learners from being unintentionally misunderstood (Chick, 1997). As such, learners should be encouraged to not only focus on the message form of the language but also on the processes of interpretation of the discourse that they are engaged in. Learners need to be aware that such conventions reflect assumptions about social relations and values and that one of the ways in which groups establish and maintain their dominance is through getting their sociolinguistic conventions accepted as ‘appropriate’ in particular domains.

One such method to facilitate learners critical awareness of the language learnt is through the introduction of interactional sociolinguistic study within the classroom. Interactional sociolinguistic study offers ways of describing and analysing social events and situations. The contexts can help learners to identify particular utterances as socially and culturally appropriate. For instance, in the context of greeting and invitation expressions, a teacher needs to make learners be aware of the politeness strategies (positive politeness and negative politeness strategies) employed in any interpersonal rituals to indicate the “face wants” or “desires” reflected and negotiated in the linguistic form and communicative strategy used. As such, when teaching learners how to greet and invite others, a teacher could incorporate into the lessons that identify not only the use of different forms (e.g. modals, questions, commands), but also information about whom, when, why and where such forms are considered appropriate.

One useful activity is the use of ‘model dialogues’ of specific greeting and inviting discourse for learners in the language classrooms. These model dialogues can be used to focus learners’ attention to the key distinctions of the expression involved both in the informal and formal context of both languages. In addition, in the initial stage of the lesson, learners can be asked to listen and identify the speech acts (*locutionary* [literal meaning] and *illocutionary* [social function]) involved in the discourse. The activity can then be extended to a language ‘guessing-game’ in which learners are given dialogues without the information concerning the setting as well as the particular participants involved in the conversation. As Cohen (1997) asserts, this activity can facilitate learners to sensitise the sociocultural factors affecting the speech acts of the particular discourse.

In relation to this, the evaluation of a situation is a useful technique to further reinforce the learners' awareness of the factors affecting the semantic formulas. Alternatively, the learners can be asked to tape-record some of their own interaction – greetings and inviting expressions, while employing the politeness strategies in different contexts. In addition, the teacher can also create 'role-play' activities of various informal and formal contexts for the learners to practice their greeting and inviting expressions in the language classrooms. Such lesson can also incorporate specific discussions of how different ways of expressing greetings and invitations work by the contextualization cues used by the participants. Different words, intonations and syntactic forms help to structure the participants' definitions of what is going on in the interaction. When learners 'role-play', they also learn to analyse such situations by identifying the social status and roles of the participants, the degree of their request imposed to the participants, as well as the different forms used for certain purposes. The learners could also be given opportunity to comment on the meanings and interpretations of what went on and try to identify what was responsible for their own inferences and responses. Such role-play activities would then help the learners to become aware of the verbal and non verbal behaviour associated in the interaction while practising the target language (Schiffrin, 1997).

Feedback and discussion activity in relation to speech acts in greeting and inviting can also be included in making learners become more aware of the different aspects of both languages involved as well as in avoiding any communication failure to occur (Cohen, 1997). The teacher can include some of the possible meanings of using an inappropriate form as to make learners aware of the social-cultural conventions that are attached to these expressions, specifically that which deals with the greeting and inviting expressions. For example, apart from the grammatical aspect of the greeting and inviting expressions taught, such lessons can also include specific ways of making greetings and invitation work through the use of contextual cues for participants – e.g. how different words, intonations, syntactic forms and others can help learners identify the appropriate social meaning into the interaction involved (Schiffrin, 1997). One example is the use of enquiry-type phrase as in "*Hi, Where are you going? [Hi, Nak ke mana?]*" or even "*Come let us.. [Mari kita..]*" uttered by a student to a teacher in a formal encounter. Using such enquiry-type phrase or direct strategy of an informal greeting context

would imply an equal social position held by both participants and may be interpreted as the student being arrogant or presumptuous. Hence when learners become aware that greeting or inviting someone of a higher position requires a different sentence structure, intonation patterns or vocabulary altogether, ramification of the language by the teacher can effectively be done.

Finally, these ‘role-play activity’ as well as ‘feedback and discussion activity’ can also be extended to a discussion of learners native experiences in both the greeting and inviting contexts. As the learners are in the position of becoming the participant and observer of a conversation during such ‘role-play’ activity, these native experiences provide a valuable cross-cultural perspective. Moreover, by discussing the inappropriate forms in the latter activity, learners can also learn to identify forms that would be appropriate in comparable to the greeting and inviting situations found in their own cultures, thereby facilitating them to become aware of the pervasiveness and cultural relativity of contextualisation cues existed in both languages (Schiffirin, 1997).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is important to note that the sociolinguistic rules of the appropriate way of speaking in different communities are quite distinctive from one another. The politeness strategy that governs both English and Malay greeting and inviting expressions reflect the ‘*negative politeness*’ (Brown and Levinson, 1987) strategy that is marked by *indirectness* “*Boleh kita ...?*” [Can/May we...?] (Malay) and *neutrality* “*I would like to...*” (English) and *distance* that is either *situation-focused expressions* “*Good morning*” (English) or *formally learned expression* “*Apa khabar?*” [How are you?] (Malay).

Although the act of greeting shared by English and Malay is for the same purpose, which is to establish contact or acknowledge the presence of a person, the linguistic manifestation of greetings for both languages differs. In formal situations in English, the strategy used is by distancing oneself from the person greeted through the use of immediate situation (morning/afternoon). Comparatively, in formal situations in Malay, the greeting expressions are individual-focused in which emphasis is given to the

predilection of the individual. However, as the expressions for greetings in Malay in terms of content and structure are very much the same for both formal and informal context, (for example "*Hendak ke mana?*") the use of different intonation pattern and in some cases the use of appropriate honorific for the addressee help to identify the different context involved. In addition, Abdul Aziz (1991) contends that the expressions of greetings manifested in informal Malay and English are very much the same and are apparent in terms of content and structure as both languages employ a variety of enquiry-type expressions used towards the person greeted [*"How are you doing?"*- English and "*Hei, nak ke mana?*" – Malay].

In formal invitation situations of both in English and Malay, the deference politeness (negative politeness) is marked by non-imposing strategies that provide an option for the addressee to act or otherwise. In this context, it is often embedded in the yes-no question form, with the use of modal auxiliaries (would/can)- "*Would you like to...?*" (English), or '*kalan*' (if-conditional)- "*Bagaimana kalau kita ?/What if...?*" (Malay). In comparison, although the 'be-indirect' strategy is found in the linguistic manifestation of invitations in informal situations in English ("*What about...?*"), such indirectness is not apparent to be the factor governing invitations in informal situations in Malay, "*Jom/Mari makan sama*" (*Come let's eat together*). Rather, invitations are 'linguistically realised' in the 'we' imperative like '*Jom/Mari makan*' (Abdul Aziz, 1991).

Based on the similarities and differences illustrated in the greeting and inviting expressions of both English and Malay, it can be concluded that in order to successfully be polite in the target language, linguistic knowledge may not be enough for the learners to acquire. Instead, as the meaning, structure and use of the language are socially and culturally relative, learners need to master the underlying socio-cultural rules governing the use of such language-function-specific expressions of the target language. In other words, a speaker needs to understand the social values of a society in order to speak politely.

Therefore, bearing into mind of such context, it is important to point out that in situation where English is spoken as the second language, learners must be exposed to awareness training by which they are aware of culturally

specific conventions found in the language expressions. It is necessary for the non-native speakers of English language not only to be taught the formal and grammatical aspects of the linguistic manifestations of the target language but also its underlying socio-cultural rules governing these specific functions. In accordance to this, the planning and implementation of lessons to facilitate the acquisition of the language both the form and its sociocultural aspect, activities such as interactional sociolinguistic study, use of ‘model dialogues’, evaluation of a situation (tape-record/role play activities), feedback and discussion activity as well as discussion of learners native experiences should be advocated.

In relation to the greeting and inviting expressions, being polite involves understanding the social values governing the way the social dimensions such as solidarity and formality are expressed. Hence, by acquiring both the linguistic as well as the socio-cultural aspect of the target language will the non- speakers of English not only attain a true native communicative competence or the native rules of speaking, but also able to avoid any miscommunications that may occur in functioning effectively in their daily communication.

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