

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLES

Cross-Cultural Encounters in Giving Compliments and Making Requests through Literary Texts: Pedagogical Ramifications

**Maya Khemlani David, Francisco Perlas Dumanig,
Kuang Ching Hei and Singhanat Nomnian**
mayadavid@yahoo.com, fdumanig@yahoo.com,
kuangch@um.edu.my, snomnian@hotmail.com

Introduction

People view the world according to their culture which may lead to cultural differences. However, these differences may eventually help people to learn and appreciate others. In fact, lack of awareness and understanding of other cultures may create miscommunication. To overcome this problem, it is therefore essential that people develop a better understanding of how other cultures function.

Hall (1976) argued that communication is culturally indexed. In high-context cultures most information exists in the context where it is internalised by people when communicating or it can be found in the physical context (Hall, 1976). The context is essential because sometimes the text does not say what it is trying to convey but the situation and the discourse pattern may help one to determine the essence of the message. This is common in societies where people are indirect in their discourse, often done to minimise face-threatening acts which are considered to be polite. However, some people in other cultures may not view it in the same way and they may consider indirectness as impolite and directness as polite. In this regard, it is evident that different cultures may have different concepts of politeness (Watts, 2003).

Indirectness seems to be a common feature of societies in Southeast Asian countries like the Philippines, Malaysia and Thailand. In such high-context

cultures, politeness is of utmost importance in communication particularly, in the making of requests (Dumanig, 2007). In low-context cultures, communication tends to be more direct where most information is given in explicit codes (Hall 1976, 1983). This discrepancy suggests that directness or indirectness in communication could be the outcome of social and cultural factors as supported by Samovar and Porter (2004, p.24) who say, "each human being is unique and shaped by countless factors, culture being but one of those factors". This reference to the connection occurring between culture and language/communication was also maintained by Clark and Ivanic (1992) who said, "...individual acts of communication in context cannot be considered independently of the social forces which have set up the conventions of appropriacy for that context" (Clark and Ivanic, 1991, p.170).

In this regard, readers must realise that it is important to see culture as being integrated at all levels of language (Wardhaugh, 2002). With the emergence of more non-native speakers of English, the continuous growth of more multilingual societies, and internationalisation and globalisation (Dumanig and David, 2014), it is vital to integrate knowledge and awareness of cultural norms through reading a range of reading genres which include novels, plays and even comics.

In this paper, we argue that cultural awareness of a range of discourse norms can be brought to the consciousness of readers through culturally appropriate materials culled from a number of literary texts which focus on two speech acts: compliment and request. These two important variables in language use are affected by culture and they reflect the differences in accepted norms of behaviour. Speech acts are the functions performed by our utterances, for instance, greetings (David, 2004a), compliments (David, 1999), disagreements (see Jariah and David, 1996), requests (David, Kuang and Don, 2002; Kuang, David and Don, 2006), directives (David and Kuang, 1999) as well as indirectness in women talk (David, 2004d) and obituaries (David and Yong, 2002). The way a speech act is performed in any given language can be very culture-specific (Schmidt and Richards, 1980; Wierzbicka, 1985). Culture-specific speech acts necessitate a familiarity with the value systems of the interlocutors in the interaction.

Texts from different cultures were extracted for use to make readers aware of the differences in certain speech acts albeit in English. Twelve (12) literary pieces, with eight from Malaysia and four from the Philippines, were randomly collected and analysed. They were selected based on the fact that they were commonly used as reading materials in secondary school libraries in both countries. Below is the list of literary pieces selected and used for extracting data for this study:

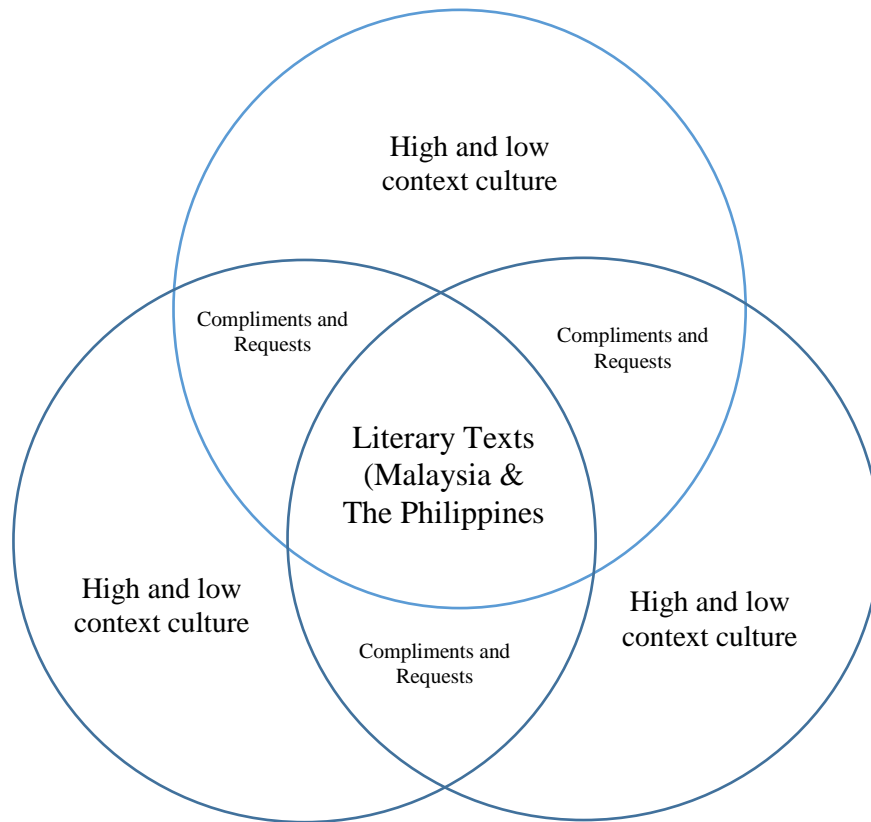


Figure 1. High and Low Context of Communication in Giving Compliments and Making Requests

Since speech acts differ cross-culturally in their distribution, function and frequency of occurrence, it is imperative that language learners of English, particularly second language learners, be made aware of the differences when performing them (see also David, 2003, 2004a). Aiming to address that gap, this paper examines the cross-cultural encounters of giving compliments and making requests through 12 literary texts. More specifically, this paper analyses the texts by highlighting what is acceptable or unacceptable among interlocutors in these two speech acts of compliments and requests.

<i>Literary Pieces</i>	<i>Country</i>
Cross-cultural Differences in Helping Strangers	Malaysia
As I was Passing	Malaysia
The Song of Silver Frond	Malaysia
Following the Wrong God Home	Malaysia
Between Lives	Malaysia

Family Matters	Malaysia
The Opposite of Fate: A Book of Musing	Malaysia
From The Winds of April	Malaysia
Dead Stars	Philippines
My Brother, My Executioner	Philippines
The Summer Solstice	Philippines
Under the Mango Tree	Philippines

Discourse and texts

Compliments

In her paper, David (1999) showed how differences in the pragmatic and sociolinguistic behaviour of native (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS) vis-a-vis compliment giving and receiving can serve as a basis for raising awareness of cultural differences. Compliments, like apologies, are primarily aimed at maintaining, enhancing, anointing or supporting the addressee's "face," which refers to the public self-image that is portrayed during interactions (Goffman, 1967), and 'face saving' is generally regarded as a positive politeness strategy. Extracts culled from a novel *Bicycle Days* (Schwartz, 1999), where a young American stays with a Japanese host family in Tokyo, show a number of compliment giving instances. The protagonist, a young American boy, made a number of compliments to various speakers, both Japanese and Americans. The Japanese hostess, on being told by the young American guest that her food was good, responded by saying, "Eat" and she diverted the compliment by saying that her husband helped her with the cooking. In contrast, a young American friend who had been complimented by the young American protagonist, responded by merely saying "Thank you" (see David, 1999). Clearly, responses to the compliments vary and the extracts clearly indicate that in some cultures an acceptance of the compliment is the norm while in other cultures an acceptance would signify an infringement of cultural norms.

A reader who may also be a language learner can be informed of the differences in the pragmatic and sociolinguistic behaviours of NS (native speaker) and NNS (non native speaker) through reading appropriate and relevant reading texts. Knowledge about how and what one should say when giving and receiving compliments can, thus, be further enhanced. Empirical data of native speaker responses from a comparative study on native and non-native responses indicate that native speakers responded to compliments by an expression of thanks, followed by either a redundant question, "Do you like it?" or by expressing pleasure "I'm glad you like it" (Eisentein - Bodman, 1986, p.171). In contrast, observations of a western-educated Malaysian colleague, for whom English has become her first language, showed that she

tended to clarify and elaborate after the initial thanks. She would say, "Thanks. I felt like a change," when complimented on having on a nice sari.

The responses of NS and NNS to compliments are, therefore, different and the "correctness" or appropriacy or politeness of the response depends on the socio-pragmatic rules of language use. "To be polite is saying the socially acceptable thing", says Lakoff (1975, p.53) and in some cultures it would not be appropriate to respond with a "Thank You" for this would mean that one is openly acknowledging the fact. The speech act of compliments is not just about the responses: it also concerns the different ways of responding, the number of times people compliment, the kinds of things people compliment on and the words they use to compliment. All of these features differ from culture to culture. For instance, in the western context, people compliment newborn babies without hesitations but this is something most Malaysians (Malay, Chinese and Indians) refrain from doing because it is a taboo to do so, as it is believed to bring bad luck.

Raising students' awareness of these cultural differences will help to improve their communicative competence and level of understanding. For this purpose, some examples of spoken discourse culled from a range of literary texts used in Malaysia and the Philippines are provided as examples to illustrate our point.

Example 1

A : Your English is improving. I'm pleased with your work.

B : Oh no. My English is not very good.

(Cross-cultural differences in helping strangers, 23)

Example 2

A : You should be very proud of your progress.

B : No, it's not true. You are a good teacher but I am not a good student.

(Cross-cultural differences in helping strangers, 22)

Example 3

A : ...now you are clever.

B : You made me clever, sir.

(As I was Passing, 149)

Example 4

(Mother on being complimented on having a beautiful daughter)

Mother: Ah but what's the use of having a pretty daughter, if she is stubborn and wilful and talks back to her mother?

(The Song of Silver Frond, 9)

Example 5

A : The house of the prettiest girl in town.

B : There is where you will lose your way.

(Dead Stars, 4)

Example 6

A : You are fortunate.

B : Is – is this man sure of what he should do?

(Dead Stars, 4)

In examples 1 and 2 “B” a Korean, does not accept the compliment. Humility and modesty are reflected in such a denial. Negating the compliment is a deferential act aligned with cultural norms and value systems (see Examples 1-4). Example 5 shows how the Philippine culture is reflected in the interaction of the characters in a novel. Accepting compliments by saying “thank you” is not the norm in the Philippine culture because it is felt that the person responding in such a way is not humble. Here, saying “no” to a compliment is less face-threatening and it projects an image of humility.

Responses to compliments not only vary across cultures but also depend on the social relationship between interlocutors. In the following extract a young wife’s response to her husband’s compliment in the early days of their marriage is playful. To his compliment of “You look as beautiful and as young as that night we met”, his wife, Nina, responds teasingly by using a question form, “But, Gonzalo, do you expect me to turn into an old hag so soon?” (http://upreplib.tripod.com/three_rats.htm).

From the same text, when Gonzalo is buying his wife an expensive present, she pays her compliment by saying, “I’m a lucky woman to have such a wonderful husband”. Upon hearing the compliment, the husband does not respond verbally but instead smiles briefly and changes the subject. In the text, the writer states, “there is irony in his smile”. This is because Gonzalo suspects that his wife is having an affair. These examples can enable readers to become more conscious and better communicators.

Compliments often focus on the physical appearance but what is considered good or pretty in one culture may not be the same in another including similes and comparisons. The following illustrates some examples.

Example 7

She is like the moon and has beautiful eyes.

(Cross-cultural differences in helping strangers, 21)

Example 8

Your earrings are pure gold, aren’t they?

(Cross-cultural differences in helping strangers, 21)

Example 9

Sometimes I really sound like a soap boxer or a school teacher and I forget that you are not only an editor but one of the most distinguished young writers in the country today.

(My Brother My Executioner, 358)

Example 10

She is beautiful – as that old tree you are leaning on.

(*The Summer Solstice*, 5)

In Example 7, “She is like the moon” praises the looks of a maiden but should the same expression be made to young Malaysians, it becomes offensive because the concept of ‘full moon’ is taken to depict roundedness, as in gaining weight. In a culture where one does not ask about the ‘verification’ of ‘gold’, Example 8 comes across as very rude even though the original intention praises the quality of the earring. A true example is drawn from the experience of one professor in a Hong Kong university. A British professor, after a summer break, had told his Hong Kong students that they were tanned. Upon hearing, the students were upset because tanned to them equates to being dark and they were proud of their fair complexions. In this example, the professor was using the normal compliment given to the British who go to hot climates for a holiday and for whom ‘tanned’ would be seen as a compliment as the aim of the holiday is to obtain a tan (Littlewood, personal communication).

Example 9 shows a police officer giving a compliment which can be perceived negatively. Here, the compliment was perceived by the recipient as a sarcastic remark made by someone who worked in the constabulary. Similarly, example 10 shows a sarcastic remark uttered by a man who described his cook as old. In the context of the Philippines, compliments can sometimes be used to sarcastically insult another person. This is the reason why some Filipinos do not take compliments seriously because compliments are sometimes perceived to be indications of sarcasm. As a defence mechanism to such compliments, “thank you” is seldom used to mitigate the gravity of the insult. It appears that declining the compliment can minimise the intensity of the sarcasm. In some instances, when a person compliments another by saying “you have a very nice dress”, the compliment can likewise be perceived negatively by some Filipinos, particularly if the person concerned does not feel that the dress is really nice.

To further enhance readers’ competence and understanding, teachers can cull compliments and their responses from literary texts, like Catherine Lim’s *Following the Wrong God Home*, K. S. Maniam’s *Between Lives*, Rohington Mistry’s *Family Matters* and many other such novels. Some examples from Catherine Lim’s novel, *Following the Wrong God Home* are illustrated.

Example 11

“You are very good to an old servant,” her neighbours said to Alice Fong. The grateful employed servants look after their old servants; the ungrateful put them in squalid old people’s homes.

“She served us well so we will do our duty towards her,” said Alice Fong, with cold precision.

(*Following the Wrong God Home*, 29)

In Example 11, upon receiving compliments from her neighbours, Alice Fong was seen as negating the very same compliments by saying that it was merely her duty to reciprocate the good deeds her servant had done for her family.

The element of rejecting and negating compliments appears to have similar patterns in Asian literature. Examples 12-14 are extracted from K.S. Maniam's book, *Between Lives*. These examples show how compliments are rejected and "returned" to the compliment giver. In the Malaysian context, where the novel is sited, it appears polite to deny such compliments and it is the compliment-giver who is perceived as being responsible for whatever good that has occurred. Hence, the act of rejecting and also attributing praise to the originator or compliment-giver is an act of elevating the positive-face of the compliment-giver.

Example 12

"You've more than got the touch, Arokian," Pak Mat said watching him.

"You've taught me well," her father said, and they looked at each other with the glow of some secret knowledge.

(Between Lives, 109)

Example 13

"Grown so much since I last saw them! Beautiful ponnus! You're lucky Amma."

"You showed us the way," her mother said smiling.

"But you did all the work," he said and stopped acting in his funny way.

(Between Lives, 116)

Example 14

"Christina great, lah!" Aishah says, looking at the Datuk's table. "Can organise anything!"

"You outdid her today," I say smiling.

(Between Lives, 164)

On the other hand, Examples 15-18 show how compliments are negated by the interlocutors through openly disagreeing and contradicting the compliment-giver.

Example 15

"Everything you touch flourishes," one of them said.

"You've a lucky hand," another said.

"No, not luck," her father said in a gentle but reproving voice, and turned and looked at the hills and jungle in the distance.

(Between Lives, 112)

Example 16

"Ah yes," the DH says, and turns to Aishah. "You're a VIP today, Aishah. And important people sit at the special table."

"I don't think so, Datuk," Aishah says giving that sarcastic smile again. "Others deserve that place more. Why not Leong, Datuk? He's among the oldest here."

(*Between Lives*, 164)

Example 17

"Wah, so brave, lah, you!" Christina says.

"Nothing to do with being brave."

(*Between Lives*, 209)

Example 18

A : Oh, my God, Anita. Don't you realise how beautiful you are?

B : Americanos are beautiful. *Mestizos* are beautiful.

A : No, you are.

(*Under the Mango Tree*, 7)

In other cultures, the act of contradiction may be seen as impolite for it suggests to the compliment-giver that he/she is wrong. However, in the Malaysian context, it is polite to negate and reject compliments and to praise by contradicting, and in this way the compliment-receiver emphasises humility. Note that in Example 15, a Malaysian Indian rejected the compliment whilst in Examples 16 and 17 a Malaysian Malay rejected the speaker's compliments.

In example 18, a Filipino woman rejected the compliment given to her by an American. With the intention of appearing humble, she rejected the compliment by saying "Americanos are beautiful. *Mestizos* are beautiful." The concept of "face", both in the Malaysia and Philippines context, is observed when compliments are paid.

Examples 19 and 20 also show how a Malaysian Indian lady negates her interlocutor's compliments by saying that this was her duty. In both the examples, the interlocutors use the words, "work" and "occupation(al)" to denote duty, rather than personal traits.

Example 19

"You're so, what shall I say, sincere?"

"I try to be."

"Try to be, that's good!" he says, laughing. "And does it take great effort?"

"My work always needs effort."

(*Between Lives*, 118)

Example 20

"Wish I can be brave like you," my mother says appreciatively.

"Nothing to it, Amma," I say. "Occupational hazard!"

(*Between Lives*, 59)

Sometimes compliments are acted out in the form of physical gifts. For instance, Example 21 shows how Aishah's colleagues congratulate her for being promoted by giving her presents. Yet the response is the same. Aishah negates the compliment (gift) by saying, "This (is) too expensive". This is to suggest that she is not worthy of the gift. Again, her complaint is meant to save her face, as it implies humility.

Example 21

A male colleague hands Aishah the wrapped-up gift; she opens the package, and, taking out the Casio electronic organiser, looks as if she'd dreaded this would happen. "This...this too expensive!" she says finally looking up.

(Between Lives, 162)

More examples of such denials are found in Rohinton Mistry's "Family Matters."

Example 22

Mr. Kapur...saying it was a blessing to have a Parsi employee: "I don't need to worry about cash sticking in the lining of our trousers. If only there were more communities like yours."

Yezad had been embarrassed. "I'm sure we have our share of crooks and good-for-nothing loafers."

(Family Matters, 156)

We now move on to discuss another speech act – that of formulating requests, which also vary across cultures. This is an important speech act as we are constantly, in the course of a day, making a range of requests.

Requests

As a request can be an imposition, there is the potential for a conflict. Bach and Harnish (1982) state that "requests are directives, i.e. their illocutionary point consists in the fact that they are attempts by the speaker/writer to get the hearer/reader to do something". As those making requests expect a preferred response, they must ensure that the request is polite. Politeness, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), is the phrasing of one's remark in such a way as to manage the face, or public identity (Goffman, 1967) of each interactant. There are assumed to be two universal face wants: negative face, the desire to have one's actions unimpeded by others; and positive face, the desire for connection or closeness with others (Goffman, 1967). Many acts threaten the positive or negative face (or both) of the speaker (addresser) and/or hearer (addressee). Requests, for example, threaten the negative face of the hearer (by imposing on him or her). Acts threatening the face of an interactant can be made more polite (less face-threatening) by performing

them with one of Brown and Levinson's politeness super-strategies (Brown and Levinson, 1987). The use of words like "please, kindly" when making requests may help in projecting a less face-threatening act. Below is a sample taken from a Philippine text.

Example 23

Dantes acted swiftly. "Please," he addressed the two officers, "let us go into this dispassionately."

(My Brother My Executioner, 359)

Example 23 shows a request which can be considered typical in the Philippine culture. The use of "please" helps to minimise the social distance between the requester and the requestee. Such words indicate a politeness strategy used by Filipinos to make the utterance less face-threatening. A request with no such words can be perceived negatively as an impolite behaviour.

We now provide an example of indirect requests from Amy Tan's book (2003). This extract (Extract 24) is useful for raising the consciousness of readers in relation to the realisation/s of this speech act. Moreover, the text can be used as a stimulus to ask questions regarding the preferences of readers – readers can ask themselves if they enact directness or indirectness in their discourse.

Example 24

My aunt and uncle were about to return to Beijing after a three-month visit to the United States. On their last night, I announced I wanted to take them out to dinner.

Amy: Are you hungry?

Uncle: Not hungry.

Aunt: Not too hungry. Perhaps you're hungry?

Amy: A little.

Uncle/aunt: We can eat, we can eat, then.

Amy: What kind of food?

Uncle: Oh, doesn't matter. Anything will do. Nothing fancy, just some simple food is fine.

Amy: Do you like Japanese food? We haven't had that yet.

Uncle: We can eat it.

Aunt: We haven't eaten it before. Raw fish.

Amy: Oh you don't like it? Don't be polite. We can go somewhere else.

Aunt: We are not being polite. We can eat it.

(Amy drove them to Japan town and they walked past several restaurants.)

Amy: Not this one, not this one either (as if searching for a certain Japanese restaurant). Here it is (in front of a Chinese restaurant).

Aunt: (Relieved) Oh, Chinese food!

Uncle: You think like a Chinese.

Amy: It's your last night in America. So don't be polite. Act like an American.

(Adapted from The Opposite Of Fate: A Book Of Musing by Amy Tan)

Similarly, examples of indirect requests which are in the form of rejection are found in Catherine Lim's book, as shown in Examples 25, 26 and 27.

Example 25

He (Vincent) ordered liberally and soon the table was crowded with plates, bowls, tureens of hot, steaming, delicious smelling food. "Too much, too much," complained his mother, but he continued to summon the stall attendants with more orders.

(Following the Wrong God Home, 54-55)

Example 26

Vincent said, still flushed with pleasure, "Ling, shall I order some to take back to your mother?" Yin Ling's mother steadfastly but politely turned down all invitations to join in the happy food outings, disliking the very sight of Mrs. Chee, the very sound of her voice. Vincent ordered chilli crab for his future mother-in-law.

(Following the Wrong God Home, 19)

Example 27

Later resting upon a sand bank, Mr. Adap did ask, "Are you hungry now?" Indeed, we had not thought about taking supper before leaving. I lied, saying "Oh no, I'm not hungry yet."
"Next time, let's not forget to get a bite of cold rice before we go," he said.

(From the Winds of April, 10)

In Example 25, Vincent's mother complained when her son ordered a lot of dishes but, instead of stopping, he kept ordering more. In Example 26, Vincent asked his fiancée if her mother would like to order a "take-away" meal and, although she rejected his offer, Vincent still ordered the food. In the Chinese community, it is polite to reject offers because it suggests humility as well as letting the listener know that the speaker does not wish to impose or be troublesome in any way. Yet, at the same time, according to the Chinese culture, one must treat guests like royalty, as not doing so implies arrogance. Here, Vincent, a Singaporean Chinese, reacted to the rejection by ordering more food. These extracts bring to the fore the indirectness in discourse that is prevalent in many Asian cultures and it shows how face is maintained for both speech partners, and so politeness was maintained.

Example 27 is extracted from the story "The Winds of April" by N.V.M. Gonzalez. It shows indirectness in the request form in the Philippines. Mr. Adap's question of "Are you hungry now?" appears, on the face of it, to be asking whether the person he is speaking to requires food. The indirect way of making a request makes Mr. Adap more likeable because in the Philippines context being indirect is perceived as being polite while being direct is interpreted to be impolite (Dumanig, 2007).

Example 28

The publisher was opening his morning mail with a gold letter opener and on his large circular desk were copies of morning papers, including Luis' magazine. "Sit down, Luis" he said without turning to his editor. "If you want a drink, the bar is over there." Dantes thrust his chin across the expanse of blue carpet, the conference table, to the cabinet at the far end of the big room.

"It's too early, sir," Luis said.

(My Brother My Executioner, 355)

In Example 28, which is taken from the novel "My Brother, My Executioner" written by Francisco Sionil Jose, the example shows a conversation between Luis and the editor. Indirectness of request, "If you want a drink, the bar is over there", is evident but Luis also indirectly refuses the publisher's offer for a drink. He responds indirectly by saying, "It's too early, sir" which indirectly says that he does not want a drink at the point in time. Instead of saying "no" he said "It's too early." This example shows that in the Philippines culture, being direct and saying "no" is avoided so as to refrain from being impolite.

With such a text the need to read beyond the words and look for non-verbal and paralinguistic features like intonation ("Raw fish!" with a facial expression that indicates it is not quite what one likes) can be pointed out by a parent reading to a child, or by the reader him/herself. Some of the questions a parent can ask include:

- "Can you provide an example of how you would ask a good friend for her crayons?"
- "When you want something, are you direct or indirect in your request?"
- "If indirect, why?"
- "With whom are you direct/indirect?"

Readers can move from texts to real-time interactions to see if the people around them use direct or indirect discourse norms for various speech acts. In this way the knowledge obtained from such texts can be made use of in real time interactions with people from different cultures.

The interactions of the characters in the novels cited provide similarities and differences in their cultural practices, specifically when giving compliments and making requests. It is evident that both the Malaysia and Philippines culture at times do not recognise compliments positively. Also, most responses to compliments may not include a word of thanks but, instead, what follows is oftentimes, a negation of the compliments. This strategy has been identified as a way to save "face" and to project a polite response. In making requests, indirectness is more favoured because it is perceived to be polite. Being direct can be interpreted as a sign of disrespect to the hearer.

The commonalities of cultural practices in compliments and requests in both countries can be interpreted as being typical of Asian culture. Exposing readers through novels and other literary texts containing culturally appropriate discourse norms in Malaysia and the Philippines is a way of educating readers to the uniqueness of the Malaysian and Filipino cultures.

Pedagogical implications

The study provides some pedagogical implications particularly in teaching English as a second language. However, it must be noted that the examples used in the study were taken from literary texts and, therefore, do not necessarily reflect the authentic speech patterns that occur in real life-situations. It is evident that the use of literary pieces as teaching tools in the classroom can offer learners an insight into understanding language and cultural differences. Thus, when teaching compliments and requests in English, these literary pieces can be used as materials where students could see and reflect on how such speech acts are used in those particular contexts and situations.

It is essential to raise cultural awareness in English language classrooms because this can make language learners more aware of culture differences and appropriateness in using language. It is significant for learners to recognise their own culture first so that they can start making cultural connections. According to Frank (2013, p.6), there are 'yes or no' questions that concern a high- or low-context culture that can allow learners to reflect on their own cultural background. The questions are as follow:

1. In your culture, is it okay to call your teacher or boss by his or her first name?
2. Do you feel frustrated when people do not answer your questions directly?
3. Is it important to you that many people know about your personal accomplishments?
4. Do you feel comfortable with short-term casual friendships?
5. Do you rely more on words than non-verbal means to express yourself?
6. Do you seek rational solutions to problems or personal ones?
7. Do you prefer an individual approach over group decision-making processes for learning and problem solving?
8. Are results just as important as personal relationships in terms of achieving goals?
9. Is your identity strongly defined *outside* of group associations (family, work, culture)?
10. Do you feel conflict is a necessary part of human relations and should not be avoided?

If learners answer 'yes' to six or more questions, it can be interpreted that they are from a low-context culture. Then they can apply their knowledge of high- and low-context cultures to reflect on how these questions differentiate between their culture and that of others. Teachers must then encourage learners to think of their own cultures by asking them to consider some guiding questions such as: 1) Which behaviours reflect our culture; 2) How are the behaviours learned and shared?; 3) What are important sociocultural factors that play important roles in our culture?; 4) What kinds of values are prevalent and shared in our culture?; and 5) How does culture in our country serve as a way for our people to live with one another?

Classroom discussions based on these questions can provide a space where learners and teachers can share similarities and differences between cultures represented in English literary texts. The "sphere of interculturality" in English language classrooms can foster learning and provide learners with the scaffolding to construct their own cultural concepts.

Raising cultural awareness in the English language classroom can be a daunting task for language teachers as it depends on how and the extent to which learners engage in the discussion. Yet, it is worth pursuing because learners cannot fully master the target language unless they recognise its cultural norms. Although the idea of teaching culture in the English classroom is not new, teachers need to go beyond introducing traditional concept of the target cultures, like holidays, food, and folk songs. They have to expose learners to the intangible aspects of the culture by creating the intercultural sphere to examine and reflect on the target culture and that of their own. Consequently, they will be better equipped as culturally-informed citizens of the regional and global communities.

Conclusion

The world is a globalised village. Multi-cultures flourish. Kachru and Smith (2008) emphasised that we must recognise "multi-norms of styles and strategies" and "socio-linguistic pluricentricity". The target language must reflect local cultures if English is to be used not only within the nation but also as a means of communicating with people from other cultures. Culture and language are so closely related that teaching language without referring to its culture is not fair to students. The beliefs, values, behaviour model and mental representations that reflect culture are manifested in language. Therefore, language and culture are inextricably connected. Readers must, therefore, become aware of the cultural and sociolinguistic differences underlying the communicative behaviour of non-native users of English.

By reading texts which show native and non-native responses to a range of speech acts, a reader can build and sustain sensitivity and change his/her

conversational styles depending on whether English is used intra-nationally or internationally, with native speakers of English or with Asian/European speakers using English. The study of a broader repertoire of speech acts is strongly urged as it will make readers aware of their own cultural wealth. A comparative approach indicating native and non-native responses to native speakers and non-native speakers who used a range of the more frequently used speech acts like greetings (see David, 2004a); requests (Lin – David – Kuang, 2004); and directives (David – Kuang 1999) will sensitise readers to the culture-specific differences in language behaviour. Inevitably, readers will then acquire a repertoire of speech styles which they can switch to and fro, depending on their interlocutor. Such knowledge and awareness of cultural variation in speech will make readers communicatively competent, having “the knowledge of linguistic and related communicative conventions that speakers must have to create and sustain conversational cooperation” (Gumperz, 1982: 209). In short, the capsules drawn from vignettes culled from reading materials will make readers aware of cultural variations in discourse and, thereby, making them communicatively competent.

Note:

This is an updated revised paper of an earlier paper on “Learning about cross-cultural encounters: Authentic texts in extensive reading (ER) programmes at university level.” In Andrzej Cirocki (ed.). *Extensive Reading*. (pp. 483-501). Muenchen: LINCOM Studies in Second Language Teaching.

References

Bach, K. & Michael H. (1984). *Linguistic communication and speech acts*. Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Bedankova, K. (Ed.). (2004). *Language, ethnicity and the mind*. Maikop: Rio Agu Publishers.

Berger, P. & Thomas L. (1966). *The social construction of reality*. London: Penguin.

Brown, P. & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Clark, R. & Ivanic, R. (1991). Consciousness-raising about the writing process. In C.N. Candlin (Gen. Ed.); Carl James & Peter Garrett (Eds.) *Language awareness in the classroom* (pp. 168-185). New York: Longman, Inc.

Cole, P. & Morgan, J. (eds.). 1975. *Syntax and semantics 3: Speech acts*. New York: Academic Press.

David, M. K. (1999). Attaining communicative competence in the reading classroom. *Literacy across Cultures* 3(1), 16-20.

David, M. K. (2004a). Greetings in Multilingual Malaysia. In Bedanokova (ed.) *Language, Ethnicity and the Mind* Vol. 2, (pp. 10-16). Adyghe State University, Maikop, Russian Federation-Maikop: RIO AGU Publishers.

David, M. K. (2004b). Representation of sociolinguistic realities in language teaching. *Journal of Communication Practices* 1, 19-33.

- David, M. K. (2004c). Relational and power concerns for language teachers. *Philippine Journal for Language Teaching* 43, 37-50.
- David, M. K. (2004d). The discourse of women - peaceful? (Plenary paper presented at International Social Science Conference, Fatima Jinnah University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan Dec 9-10, 2004.
- David, M.K. & Kuang, C.H. (1999). Speech act of directives in legal offices in Malaysia. *Hong Kong Linguist* 19/20: 36-44.
- David, M. K. & J. Yong. (2002). Even obituaries reflect cultural norms and values. In Andy Kirkpatrick (ed.) *Englishes in Asia: Communication, Identity, Power and Education* (pp. 169-178). Melbourne: Language Australia Ltd.
- David, M.K., Kuang C.H. & Zuraidah Mohd Don. (2002). Routines of requests in an academic setting, *Culture, Communication and Language Pedagogy* (pp. 169-178). Hong Kong: Hong Kong Baptist.
- Dumanig, F., & David, M. K. (2014). Miscommunication in Malaysian-Filipino Interactions: Intercultural Discourse in English. In Hajar Abdul Rahim & Shakila Abdul Manan (Eds.), *English in Malaysia: Post Colonial and Beyond* (pp. 251-276). Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Dumanig, F. (2007). A conversation analysis of direct and indirect request in Filipino discourse. Paper presented at the 5th Malaysia International Conference on Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, University Putra, Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, May 22-24, 2007.
- Egan-Robertson, A. & David, B. (Eds.). (1998). *Students as researchers of culture and language in their own communities*. Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton.
- Frank, J. (2013). Raising cultural awareness in the English language classroom. *English Teaching Forum*, 4, 2-11.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior*. New York, NY: Doubleday Anchor.
- Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond culture*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Hall, E. T. (1983). *The dance of life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Jariah, Mohd Jan & David, M.K. (1996). Oral skills: A need for acceptance of L1 cultural norms. *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities* 4, 11-19.
- Kachru, Y., & Smith, L. E. (2008). *Cultures, contexts and world Englishes*. New York: Routledge.
- Kirkpatrick, A (Ed.). (2002). *Englishes in Asia: community, identity, power and education*. Melbourne: Language Australia.
- Kuang, C. H., David, M. K. & Zuraidah Mohd Don. (2006). Voices of Malaysian children. Berlin: *Multilingua* 25, 27-42.
- Lin, A., David, M.K. & Kuang, C.H. (2004). Appropriating English for intercultural communication in Asia. Paper presented in *Language, Linguistics and the Real World*. Hilton, Petaling Jaya, Malaysia, 7-9 December.
- Littlewood, W. & Lee, C. (Eds.). (2002). *Culture communication and language pedagogy*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Littlewood, W. (January, 26, 2002). *Personal Communication*. Hong Kong.
- Samovar, L. & Potter, R. (2004). *Communication between cultures*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Schmidt, R. (1991). The role of consciousness in second language learning. *Applied Linguistics* 11(2), 129-58.

- Searle, J. (1975). Indirect speech acts. In Peter Cole and James Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Acts*. (pp. 59-82). New York: Academic Press.
- Tan, H. H. (1997). *Foreign bodies*. London: Penguin.
- Wardhaugh, R. (2002). *An introduction to sociolinguistics* (Fourth Ed.). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Watts, R. J. (2003). *Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wolfram, W. (1998). Dialect awareness and the study of language. In Ann Egan-Robertson and David Bloome (Eds.). *Linguistics at School*, (pp. 167-190). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Resources

- Aaron, H. (2003). Under the mango tree. In *The best Philippine short stories*. Retrieved 13 Decemner 2008 from www.sushidog.com/bpss/stories/mango_tree.htm
- Benitez, P. M. (1925). Dead stars. In *The best Philippine short stories*. Retrieved 13 Decemner 2008 from www.sushidog.com/bpss/stories/mango_tree.htm
- Gonzales, N. V. M. (2005). From the winds of April. In: Panitikan.com.ph. Retrieved from 12 Dec. 2008 www.panitikan.com.ph/fiction/thewindsofapril.htm
- Jose, F. S. (2007). My brother, my executioner. In B. Lumbera and C. N. Lumbera (Eds.). *Philippine literature*, (pp. 355-363). Pasig City: ANVIL.
- Levine, R. et al. (2001). Cross-cultural differences in helping strangers. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 32, 543-560.
- Lim, C. (2003). *The song of silver frond*. London: Orion.
- Lim, C. (2001). *Following the wrong God home*. London: Orion.
- Lumbera, B. & C. N. Lumbera (Eds.). (2007). *Philippine literature*. Pasig City: ANVIL
- Guerrero, M.W. (1948). *Three Rats*. Retrieved 20 Decemner 2008 from http://upreplib.tripod.com/three_rats.htm
- Maniam, K. S. (2003). *Between lives*. Petaling Jaya: Maya Press.
- Mistry, R. (2002). *Family matters*. London: Faber and Faber Limited.
- Sri Delima. (1976). *As I was passing*. Kuala Lumpur. NST Press.
- Schwartz, J. B. (1999). *Bicycle days*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Tan, A. (2003). *The opposite of fate: A book of musing*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.