

**Face-work at work:
Avoidance and Corrective Practices in Performing
Two Face-threatening Speech Acts in the Workplace**

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Abstract

Applying Goffman's (1999) framework on the two kinds of face-work, this article investigates how the *avoidance process* and the *corrective process* are used by Filipino employees when fulfilling two face-threatening speech acts, namely, breaking bad news to their manager and pointing out their manager's mistake. Seven Filipino employees of a Danish-managed IT (information technology) company engaged in web development outsourcing participated in this study. Analysis of the participants' responses showed that although their discourse was made up mainly of *corrective* measures, the participants likewise practiced the *avoidance process*; significantly, its protective measure which accounts for almost half of the face-saving utterances made by the employees in the speech acts. Through the use of the protective measure, the employees can be said to have exerted effort to protect the negative face of their superior as a form of politeness with due regard to their power relations. Overall, the study provides an understanding of workplace interaction and face management between superior and subordinates in the Asian setting, and provides interesting insights in the study of organizational behavior.

Keywords: face-work; face management; speech acts; organizational behavior; avoidance process; corrective process

Introduction

In this age when cross-cultural communication has become commonplace in many corporate and business settings, the importance of understanding the various mechanisms that govern the construction of language and interaction has motivated many empirical studies to uncover the complex underpinnings of social interaction. Not only do the knowledge that these investigations yield make people of different cultures better understand each other, but at the end of the day, such understanding facilitates work productivity—and productivity always translates to progress.

Researchers on the dynamics of organizational behavior in Asia propose *face* as a key variable that can explain much of the complexity of social interactions in Asian organizations (Kim & Nam, 1998). Indeed, Goffman's (1999) sociological notion of *face* is distinctively useful in explaining interactional behavior. *Face* is defined as the public self-image that every individual wants to claim for himself (Brown and Levinson, 1987). In simpler language, *face* means an individual's self-esteem (Huang, 2006). Linguists have proven that when individuals perform acts that threaten *face*, they will construct and adjust their utterances to encode *face* concerns—thus, the more threatening the act, the greater the extent to which *face* concerns will be encoded (Holtgraves, 1992). Thus, in social interaction it is necessary for speakers to engage in preventive or remedial linguistic work to avoid, mitigate, and deflect consequent social friction (Morand, 2000) that may result from performing face-threatening acts.

In the Philippine culture, *face* carries a heavy weight due to the prevalent values *hiya* (shame) and *amor propio* (sensitivity to personal affront), which are major norms of socialization (Hunt, Espiritu, Quisumbing, & Green, 1998). To understand how *amor propio* and *hiya* operate in Filipino psychology is to understand the value of *face* management to Filipinos. The extreme care taken to avoid offense is necessary among Filipinos because the individual's *amor propio* or self esteem is fragile and may be shattered by an open disagreement and may yield to *hiya* or shame (Hunt, Espiritu, Quisumbing, & Green, 1998). *Hiya* is deeply seated in Filipino consciousness and functions as a protective device to shield an individual from losing *face* (Jocano, 1999). Since *hiya* and *amor propio* define their public and private behavior, Filipinos' orientation

towards preserving one's *face* is strong and governs many aspects of their behavior when interacting with other people.

Filipinos place great importance not only on maintaining one's *face* but also that of others. In his discussion of Filipino psychology, Enriquez (1977) asserts that *pakikipagkapwa* (general regard for others) is an important level and mode of interpersonal relations among Filipinos. Filipinos highly value smooth interpersonal relationships, causing them to be reluctant to take action or say things which will impact unpleasantly on others (Hunt, Espiritu, Quisumbing, & Green, 1998) or will cause others to lose *face*.

Though sociologists have generally characterized *face* management among Filipinos in day-to-day interactional settings, not much research has been done on this interesting subject in the context of the workplace. According to Schegloff (1998), in studies concerning social structures, it matters that the participants in the data being examined are working at tasks which are constrained by organizational contingency. Indeed, linguists have established that the way most people communicate with their manager, colleagues, or clients greatly differ from the way they communicate with family and friends (Koester, 2004). Moreover, the workplace is a venue where power-relations strongly affect language and interaction. Power is a variable in superior-subordinate interactions in organizations, which follows that subordinates are careful not to offend or infringe on those upon whom they are dependent (Morand, 2000). Consequently, performing face-threatening speech acts in the workplace can be extremely challenging, especially for workers whose culture is highly oriented toward face-preservation. This and other workplace-related variables may affect the way *face* management is fulfilled by Filipinos at work. This area is what this research aims to explore.

The present study investigates how face-work is linguistically realized by a group of Filipinos in the context of work, using their second language, English. Specifically, this paper aims to answer the following questions:

How do employees of an IT company manifest the two kinds of face-work when fulfilling two face-threatening speech acts, namely, breaking bad news to their manager and pointing out their manager's mistake?

- a. Using their L2, English, how do they manifest avoidance process?
- b. Using their L2, English, how do they manifest corrective process?

The findings of this study are significant in the Philippine workplace. Jocano's (1999) study of multinational companies operating in the Philippines, which focused on Filipino and expatriate relations in the workplace, reveal that not all problems encountered in the workplace are technical. Instead, strained relations in the workplace are the main sources of conflict arising from "a clash of cultural values, norms and practices, which may either be verbal or nonverbal" (p. v). Jocano points out that due to these reasons, foreign managers and Filipino workers often do not understand each other even if they communicate. Thus, knowledge on *face* management among Filipino workers in their second language will help facilitate better understanding between foreign managers and Filipino employees. This may prevent strained relations in the workplace and indirectly contribute to productivity.

Framework

To answer the research questions, the study employs Goffman's (1999) framework on *face* where he describes two basic kinds of face-work: *the avoidance process* and *the corrective process*. According to Goffman, these two kinds of face-saving practices are observed in certain delicate transactions. The speech acts of *breaking bad news to one's superior* and *pointing out a superior's mistake* are undeniably delicate because such acts are highly face-threatening, both to one's positive face and negative face. The *positive face* represents an individual's desire to be accepted and liked by others, while the *negative face* pertains to one's right to freedom of action where one need not be imposed on by others (Huang, 2006).

Goffman (1999) differentiates the two kinds of face-work. In the *avoidance process*, individuals avoid contact or voluntarily withdraw even before an expected threat to face is likely to occur. This process includes two measures: (a) the *defensive measures* and (b) the *protective measures*. On the other hand, in the *corrective process*, the face-threatening event has occurred or was not overlooked, and thus calls for corrective steps. This

process entail *interchange* or a sequence of acts done after a threat to face had been acknowledged. *Interchange* is made up of the following phases: (a) *challenge* where the threat is acknowledged; (b) *offering* where the offender corrects the offense; (c) *acceptance* where the offering is accepted by the offended person; and (d) *gratitude* or *thanks* where the forgiven person conveys a sign of gratitude to those who accepted his or her offering.

Holtgraves (1992) theorizes that Goffman's face-management framework has the potential to explain comprehensively how speakers will phrase all remarks that have interpersonal implications. Moreover, what easily lends Goffman's framework as a tool in linguistic analysis is the fact that, in his framework, he enumerates specific linguistic measures by which the above categories may be realized. For instance, one is considered to employ the *protective measure* of the *avoidance process* when one says things that show respect and politeness, extending to others ceremonial treatment that might be their due; when one does not say or instead leaves unstated facts that might implicitly or explicitly contradict and embarrass the positive claims made by others; when one employs circumlocutions or roundabout expression, a form of indirectness for evasion; and the like. In other words, the two types of face-work, including their categories and phases of interchange, are measurable through language and discourse.

In the method and procedure section that follows, I presented a detailed list of these linguistic measures which I used as basis in the analysis of the participants' discourse. I deemed to place the linguistic measure in the method and procedure rather than in the framework section because these criteria are used in the analysis of data.

Method and Procedure

This research is a case study of seven employees of an IT company engaged in web development outsourcing, with clients mostly from Europe and North America. It is owned and managed by a Danish national who will be referred to as "John" (not his real name). Despite having stayed in the Philippines for thirteen years, John does not speak Filipino and understands very little of the language. At work, he communicates with his employees in English, which is why the employees are perfect participants for this study, since they use their L2 at work most of the time, especially when communicating with their superior. At the time this

research was conducted, the company had seven employees, six of whom are programmers and one an accountant. All employees speak Filipino and use English as their second language.

Data were gathered through one-on-one interviews using a questionnaire, which comprises two parts: the first are questions on approaching a foreign manager to break bad news, while the second are questions on pointing out a foreign manager's mistake. A role-play was included in each part of the questionnaire. Two scenarios were given to the participants, which required them to construct a talk directed to their foreign manager: (1) to break bad news to him; and (2) to point out his mistake.

(1) Scenario to break bad news to the foreign manager:

You discovered a programming error by looking at the development specifications of a program. You realized that you made a major mistake: you forgot to add the newsletter module; and now you don't have time to get it in because you're currently working on another project. You need to tell John about this bad news.*

** The foreign manager's fictitious name; employees address him through his first name.*

(2) Scenario to point out the foreign manager's mistake:

John assigned you to do a website and he strictly instructed you to use Design Layout # 1. After a week, you finished the website. But upon finishing it, you became certain that the correct design layout that should have been used was Design Layout # 2. How will you tell John that he made a mistake?

These scenarios were printed on flash cards and the participants were given sufficient time to plan their talk. During the role-play, this researcher acted as the manager. The employees were interviewed

individually in their office's conference room where they were not heard by the rest of their colleagues. The interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed. This study used interview to gather data instead of recording actual dialogues between manager and employees because, according to the company's manager, occurrences of employees approaching him to break bad news do not happen frequently (John, personal communication, May 27, 2007).

The data was first gathered for another empirical investigation, i.e., to determine the strategies of the employees in fulfilling the two speech acts. This time, the set of data are used to achieve a different set of research objectives under a totally different framework, which was discussed in the preceding section.

The transcribed data are segmented using *utterance* as basic unit of analysis. Utterance unit is used because the data emanated from oral discourse. To determine and categorize the face-work expressed in the participants' utterances, I used the linguistic measures specified by Goffman (1999) in the framework. The table on the following page shows these linguistic measures which were posited by Goffman (1999) himself. Thus, the participant's utterances were examined for these linguistic measures which were used as basis in the analysis of the discourse.

Notice that in the corrective process, I only included two phases of interchange: *challenge* and *offering*. The *acceptance* phase (when the person to whom the offering is made accepts it) and *gratitude* or *thanks*, which is the terminal move (when the forgiven person conveys a sign of gratitude to those who have given him forgiveness) are not included. I glossed over these last two phases of the *corrective process* because the focus of the investigation is on the employee's discourse, excluding that of the manager. Since *acceptance* is the discourse of the addressee or the manager, and the *gratitude* or *thanks* follows it, these two phases were deliberately excluded from the analysis.

| <i>Avoidance Process</i> | <i>Corrective Process</i> |
|--|---|
| <p><u>A. Defensive Measures</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Keeps off topics ▪ Keeps off activities that would lead to information that will ruin the line that one is maintaining ▪ Changes the topic of conversation ▪ Changes the direction of activity ▪ Presents initially a front of diffidence and composure, suppresses any show of feelings until he has found out what kind of line others have ▪ Makes claims regarding self with belittling modesty, with strong qualifications or with a note of unseriousness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Hedges to prepare a self that won't be discredited by exposure, personal failure, or the unanticipated acts of others ▶ If one doesn't hedge, one attempts to be realistic about one's claim knowing that otherwise, events may discredit him/her and make him lose face <p><u>B. Protective Measures</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Shows respect and politeness, extending to others any ceremonial treatment that is due them ▪ Employs discretion; leaves unstated facts that might implicitly or explicitly contradict and embarrass the positive claims made by others ▪ Employs circumlocutions or roundabout expression as a means of indirectness for evasion ▪ Employs deception, phrasing ones replies with careful ambiguity so that the other's face is preserved even if their welfare is not ▪ Employs courtesies, making slight modifications of his demands on or appraisals of others so that others will see the situation as one where their self-respect is not threatened ▪ Makes a belittling demand upon others | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Challenge – Participant calls attention to the misconduct or acknowledges the incident 2. Offering – The offender attempts to correct the offense and re-establish the expressive order <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An attempt can also be made to show that what took place is a meaningless event, unintentional act, a joke not to be taken seriously, or an unavoidable, understandable product of circumstances ▪ Meaning of the event may be granted and effort concentrated on the creator of it <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Information may be provided to show the creator was under the influence of something and not himself b. Or that he was under the command of somebody else and not acting for himself ▪ When one claims the act in jest, he may claim the self that seemed to lie behind the act was also protected as a joke ▪ When one finds that he has failed in capacities that others assumed him to have, he may quickly add, in a serious or unserious way, that these capacities are part of himself |

| | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Imputes uncomplimentary attributes to others <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ May employ a joking manner, allowing one to take the line that one is a good sport, able to relax from one's ordinary standards of pride and honor ▪ Before engaging in a potentially offensive act, provides explanations as to why others should not be affronted by it | |
|--|--|

Findings

A. Face-Work when Breaking Bad News to a Foreign Manager

Let me first establish that breaking bad news to a manager, especially when the source of the bad news is an employee's mistake, is a face-threatening act. This speech act threatens to disrupt what Goffman (1999) terms as ritual equilibrium or interaction order, and intrinsically threatens face. A bad news caused by an employee's mistake – which was the scenario the participants were given – threatens to ruin the line (Goffman, 1999) that an employee maintains, i.e., that one is competent to do the tasks that one is assigned with, and that one is attuned to the details of one's job in order to avoid mistake, thereby not causing any complications at work. Breaking bad news threatens the positive face or the speaker's face because it endangers the employee's desire to be liked or accepted by his or her superior, or the employee's desire to be professionally viewed as a skilled and efficient worker.

In fulfilling this face-threatening speech act, one would commonly be expected to use the face-saving *corrective process*, since the event that threatens one's face (i.e., committing the mistake that led to the bad news) was not prevented and has occurred, and hence, needs to be corrected. However, this was not the case with the participants. Although their discourse was made up mainly of *corrective* measures, which accounts for 63% of the utterances, the participants likewise practiced the *avoidance process*, making up 37% of the total utterances for this specific speech act. Table 1 shows the details.

Table 1

Kinds of Face-Work Expressed in the Employees' Utterances when Breaking Bad News to the Foreign Manager

| Employee | Corrective Practices | Avoidance Practices |
|-----------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Mary* | 3 | 1 |
| 2. Bob* | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Scott* | 3 | 0 |
| 4. Rick* | 3 | 1 |
| 5. Ted* | 2 | 1 |
| 6. Ann* | 2 | 2 |
| 7. Kay* | 2 | 0 |
| Total (Percent) | 19 (66%) | 10 (34%) |

*These are not the participants' real names. Their names were changed in order to protect their identities.

Except for Scott and Kay, all the other employees combined the two kinds of face-work in their discourse and had at least two moves. Let us take one example:

- Rick* : Uh John, we have a problem (laughing tone). Uh regarding the previous project, I forgot to add the newsletter module (.) uh well I have no other excuses since I forgot it, so (laughs a bit), yeah that's it. I have to face the music right (laughs a bit) so.
- John* : What should we do about it Rick?
- Rick* : Well the, the best thing to do about it is to delegate this task to another person who is free, who has the time or the spare time to finish this one.
- John* : That's it?
- Rick* : Yes, that's the only solution that I can think of because I'm busy with the other project.

Rick begins by taking on the responsibility of calling attention to the misconduct. His opening utterance *Uh John, we have a problem* is an introductory to the interchange phase *challenge*. In the succeeding utterance, John acknowledges the incident—*Uh regarding the previous project, I forgot to add the newsletter module*. This corrective step is then followed by

an avoidance move, specifically a *defensive measure*, when he says *I have no other excuses since I forgot it, so ...I have to face the music*. This utterance shows Rick making a realistic claim about what had happened, i.e., he forgot to include the module and he had no excuse for it. This may be understood as Rick's defensive way of preventing his manager from further probing for the possible causes of the bad news, which can aggravate the threat to one's face. The manager's question on what should be done about the matter is a cue for Rick to proceed to the next phase of the interchange, *the offering*, where he is given the chance to correct the situation and, in Goffman's term (1999), re-establish the ritual equilibrium. Rick takes the opportunity to do a *corrective* step by offering a possible solution to the bad news by saying *...the best thing to do about it is to delegate this task to another person who is free, who has the time or the spare time to finish this one*.

The face-saving pattern reflected in Rick's discourse appears in most of the employees' talk, where they intersperse *corrective* steps with *avoidance* steps, shifting from one repertoire of face-saving practice to another.

Only two out of the seven employees, Scott and Kay, manifest one kind of face-work in their discourse, i.e., *corrective process*. Scott's message was direct, concise, and does not contain any defensive or avoidance measure:

- Scott : *John, I ah, have not added the newsletter module for this program ah, and it is a requirement. Um (.) I need time to (.) include the module into the program.*
- John : *So, what do you plan to do Scott?*
- Scott : *Um (.) I have to stop what I'm doing right now and add (.) the module.*

Scott begins breaking bad news to the manager by directly acknowledging his mistake, thus fulfilling the *challenge* phase in the interchange—*John I ah, have not added the newsletter module for this program ah, and it is a requirement*. He then proceeds to the *offering* phase by informing the manager what he should do to correct the mistake—*I need time to (.) include the module into the program*. The same may be said of Kay's talk. She starts with a challenge or the acknowledgment of the misconduct,

providing a detailed explanation, and towards the end of the talk makes an *offering* to re-establish equilibrium:

Kay : *John I have um I made a mistake when I prepared the income tax return and there were some revenues that (.) I (.) declared in this quarter's income tax return that were supposed to be declared in the, in the succeeding quarter. Um (.) so as a result, the current, current quarter's income tax return is overstated. But the, the revenue that was declared in the, at the, sorry, the revenue that will be declared in the next quarter's income tax (.) will be reduced because they were already declared in the (.) current quarter's income tax.*

It is interesting to note that all employees begin their discourse with the interchange phase *challenge* in accordance with the *corrective process* that Goffman (1999) outlines in his framework. All of them admit their mistake and, therefore, acknowledge the misconduct that led to the face-threatening event. This is understandable because, as mentioned, the situation is a face-threatening event that took place which naturally calls for rectification. Here are examples of employees' introduction expressing a *challenge*:

Mary : *John I would like to tell you something, which I did wrong.*

Bob : *Um (..) uh (..) John, as I (.) went through the specification sheet of the (.) uh project that I had last week, I (.) forgot (.) to include the newsletter module that was clearly stated in the specification sheet.*

Ted : *Uh we have a problem, I know, we have a problem. I didn't, I didn't, we're missing a newsletter module for the project I was working on before and (.) uh we need it, we need it.*

Ann : *Uh, hi John. Um (.) I'm sorry but I forgot to add something on our previous project*

Kay : *John I have um I made a mistake when I prepared the income tax return and there were some revenues that (.) I*

(.) declared in this quarter's income tax return that were supposed to be declared in the, in the succeeding quarter.

The findings show that the employees' discourse in fulfilling the speech act of breaking bad news to their foreign manager manifest the two kinds of face-work. Table 2 shows the frequency of the phases of the *corrective process* and of the measures comprising the *avoidance process* as expressed in their talk.

Table 2
Specific Corrective and Avoidance Practices Expressed in the Employees' Utterances when Breaking Bad News to the Foreign Manager

| Kind of Face-Work | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Corrective Process | 19 | 63 |
| Challenge | (10) | (33) |
| Offering | (9) | (30) |
| Avoidance Process | 11 | 37 |
| Protective measures | (6) | (20) |
| Defensive measures | (5) | (17) |
| | 30 | 100 |

I have discussed above how the employees manifest the *corrective process* in their discourse. Let me now discuss how their talk reveals the two measures of the *avoidance process*. The participants employ both *defensive* and *protective* orientations, as can be gleaned in Table 2. These are the ways by which they expressed *protective* measures:

Mary : *Um if it is okay with you, I'm going to stop the project I'm doing right now...*

Bob : *Um since you are the manager here, you can decide on things that I should do.*
 : *Um right now I cannot decide.*
 : *So if you want me to (.) go out of the project that I have right now and fix the missing portion*

- Ann:** Um (.) I'm sorry but I forgot to add something on our previous project.
: And then so um if ever you will give me time to do it, I can um do it later

The underlined utterances show *protective* orientation. Mary, Bob, and Ann adjust their language to show respect and politeness. Respect is manifested in the way they emphasize on the manager's power, i.e., his decision-making function which determines what they can or cannot do—if *you want me to..., if it's okay with you*. In Goffman's (1999) language, the employees extend their superior a ceremonial treatment that is due him. Such orientation to the manager's power show respect and politeness among the employees. In fact, Ann, directly apologizes to display politeness. In Goffman's (1999) concept of face-work, these are manifestations of *protective measure*.

On the other hand, these are the ways by which the participants manifested *defensive measures* in their talk:

- Bob** : So (.) I know you don't accept sorry, uh (.) so, eh, it was my mistake.
: So (.) I uh accept that it was my mistake so (.) I'm (.) ready to (.)take any (.) ah punishment or (.) that that you will give.
: Um right now I cannot decide.
- Rick** : Uh well I have no other excuses since I forgot it, so ...I have to face the music.
- Ted** : It was my mistake, so I can (.) I can you know spend a few hours on working on the newsletter.

According to Goffman (1999), one of the ways by which a *defensive measure* is manifested is when an individual attempts to be realistic about his claims for himself, "knowing that otherwise events may discredit him and make him lose face" (p. 310). The examples above show this. The underlined utterances are an admission of one's mistake, thus a realistic claim made for oneself. By admitting their mistake, the employees have prepared "a self for himself that will not be discredited by exposure, personal failure, or the unanticipated act" of their superior (p. 310). By

professing their own mistake, the employees defensively anticipated what their superior may have said, e.g., blame them, and prevented their manager from further probing, which can be another face-threatening encounter. The underlined utterances are also a form of hedging where the employees express compensatory measures so as to counterbalance a possible negative reaction of the manager. Hedging is also a *defensive measure* to save one's face (Goffman, 1999).

B. Pointing Out the Manager's Mistake

Just like breaking bad news to a manager, pointing out a superior's mistake is a face-threatening act. It generally threatens to disrupt the ritual equilibrium and specifically threatens the negative face of the addressee, i.e., the manager. Telling a manager that he or she committed a mistake threatens that superior's negative face because it endangers to ruin the line that he or she maintains. It poses a doubt on his or her competence as a leader, as someone who can make decisions that will yield productivity – it questions his or her skill or knowledge about tasks that he or she orders subordinates to accomplish. On the part of the employee, fulfilling the speech act can make him or her appear confrontational, challenging his or her superior's capability or leadership, or can make him or her appear as though he or she is deliberately causing the superior to lose face. This can be an extremely awkward and uncomfortable situation for the employee, since in the normal course of work, one would want to maintain a positive and harmonious relationship with the manager. A good relationship with a manager puts an employee in better professional standing as regards evaluation, promotion, trust, or career path in general. Fulfilling this speech act may threaten this professional relationship.

The mistake has been committed by the manager and cannot be overlooked by the employees. It has occurred and, thus, needs to be corrected. Consistent with the previous analysis, the employees manifest both *corrective* and *avoidance* steps when they pointed out their superior's mistake. Their discourse was made up mainly of *corrective* measures, which comprise 55% of the utterances, and the *avoidance* steps, which account for 45% of the total utterances for this specific speech act. Table 3 shows the details.

Table 3
Kinds of Face-Work Expressed in the Employees' Utterances when Pointing Out the Foreign Manager's Mistake

| Employee | Corrective Practices | Avoidance Practices |
|-----------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Mary | 3 | 1 |
| 2. Bob | 2 | 5 |
| 3. Scott | 2 | 0 |
| 4. Rick | 2 | 1 |
| 5. Ted | 2 | 2 |
| 6. Ann | 2 | 1 |
| 7. Kay | 3 | 3 |
| Total (Percent) | 16 (55%) | 13 (45%) |

Except for Scott, the rest of the employees practiced and combined the two kinds of face-work when pointing out their manager's mistake. Let us analyze one talk:

Ann : *Hi John um (.) I just saw a mistake on my work but it was because you instruct, instructed me to do that, the layout number (.) one. It should be the layout number two. So, (.) um how am I gonna (.) deal with that, begin again, start doing that again all over again, or shall I continue with my other task, or what do you (.) what do you suggest?*

Ann begins with a corrective step of calling attention to the misconduct—*I just saw a mistake on my work but it was because you instruct, instructed me to do that, the layout number (.) one*. Notice, however, that Ann said *mistake on my work* first, which psychologically cushioned the addressee for the next face-threatening clause—*but it was because you instruct, instructed me to do that*. Despite the fact that Ann acknowledges the incident, i.e., her manager making a mistake, she deflects the weight of the burden from him, and instead designs her talk in such a way as to make herself share in the accountability. This is clearly a face-saving practice, orienting to negative politeness (Huang, 2006) for the purpose of saving the negative face of her superior.

After making the short *challenge*, Ann immediately proceeds to the *offering* phase of the *interchange*, volunteering a way to correct the incident by giving information to correct the mistake, which the manager must simply approve. This quick shift from one *interchange* to another, with

specific focus on *offering* seems to be a pattern among the talk of the participants. To put in perspective, this is also a face-saving practice. The employees do not want to dwell on, elaborate or emphasize the foreign manager's mistake so as not to put him in a compromising situation. Instead, the employees highlight *offering* in their talk in order to remedy the incident, that way, saving the face of their superior.

Toward the end of Ann's talk, she employs a *protective measure* by asking her manager what should be done or what he suggests. In Goffman's (1999) explanation of *protective measures*, this is when one employs courtesies, making slight modifications of one's demands on others so that others will view the situation where their self-respect is not threatened. In Ann's talk, she clearly knows what to do in order to correct the mistake. However, she employs courtesy on her manager by asking him what he thought, in this way, the manager maintains the line that he takes and feels that his face is not threatened.

In my succeeding discussion of the *avoidance practices* manifested by the employees, I will present more examples of this kind.

Meanwhile, Scott consistently displays his directness and brevity in his talk. Again, he does not employ any *avoidance measure*, instead sticks to informing the manager what was wrong and what should be done about it. Scott fulfills the speech act with one short utterance. He acknowledges the event, thus, begins with the *challenge* phase of the *interchange* and immediately proceeds to the next phase *offering*:

Scott : Ah John you mentioned last week that the, we should use this design but we should have used this design from the beginning, this other design.

What was profoundly interesting in the result was the specific measure that the employees used in the *avoidance process*. Notice in Table 4 that the most frequently used face-saving practice is the *protective measure*, accounting for almost half of the face-saving utterances made by the employees in this specific speech act.

Table 4

Specific Corrective and Avoidance Practices Expressed in the Employees' Utterances when Pointing Out the Foreign Manager's Mistake

| Kind of Face-Work | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Corrective Process | 16 | 55 |
| Challenge | (8) | (27.5) |
| Offering | (8) | (27.5) |
| Avoidance Process | 13 | 45 |
| Protective measures | (12) | (41) |
| Defensive measures | (1) | (4) |
| | 29 | 100 |

The noticeably high frequency of use of the *protective measure* among the employees when pointing out their foreign manager's mistake may be safely interpreted as an obvious step to save the face of the manager. Their talk was designed to protect his self-image. Goffman (1999) enumerates the ways by which an individual can achieve this—and almost all of these ways are manifested in the employees' language—their utterances express protective orientation. I will enumerate the particular *protective measures* mapped by Goffman (which I also presented in the method section) and show evidences of such measures in the employees' talk:

▪ *Shows respect and politeness, extending to others any ceremonial treatment that might be due them.* Bob's expression of apology before pointing out the manager's mistake is a clear expression of politeness. Meanwhile, Ted's verbalizing what the manager is particular with and the manager knowing "the best way possible" are, to an extent, forms of flatteries and shows him extending to the manager ceremonial treatment which he thinks the manager is due:

Bob : So ah (..) ah I'm sorry to tell you this, but (.) it was your mistake. It was really your instruction, so what are we going to do now.

Ted : Um so since I'm, since I know that you're very particular on time and you want things done, you know the best way possible, uh if it so happens that we do something like this, you know in the future, it would be better if...

▪ ***Employs discretion—leaves unstated facts that might implicitly or explicitly contradict and embarrass the positive claims made by others.*** Mary's opening statement is an immediate suggestion on how to correct the mistake, instead of stating what the mistake was. Mary clearly employs discretion in her talk. She leaves the unstated fact that the manager made a mistake, for which she is making a suggestion. The same approach characterizes Rick's talk. He speaks of a problem about the design layout, but does not say what the problem is or what caused it (which was the wrong instruction given by the manager). In their discourse, Mary and Rick deliberately exclude information that may embarrass the positive claim of the manager, thus saving his face:

Mary : John, we, we should have (.) uh used the design layout number 2 for the project I'm doing right now.

Rick : John we have another problem regarding the design layout of, design layout number one. Ah as you can see here I created a uh (.) design layout number two and uh these are the reasons why design layout number one does not work.

▪ ***Employs circumlocutions or roundabout expression as a means of indirectness for evasion.*** Kay's talk lends itself to an interesting analysis. She begins with offering information to correct an implied mistake, without explicitly specifying the error. The first set of utterances immediately following her introductory sentence is a roundabout explanation of the details of the situation. She then tells the manager his mistake, albeit indirectly—*the tax law does not recognize the (.) the revenue distribution that you have prepared*. Thus, the manager prepared a wrong revenue distribution. After implicitly stating what the problem is, she continues with more explanations and details. In her talk, it may be safe to say that Kay employs circumlocution or wordy and indirect language:

Kay : John (.) the (.) the computation for income tax (.) um the (.) revenue that will be declared for the quarter's income tax return should be based on (.) the billing. The invoices that you issued this quarter should be declared as income this quarter. Um (.) it's the method of declaring the revenue using the revenue distribution (.) cannot be applied (.) um (.) during (.) cannot be applied in, in preparing the income

tax return. Um (.) so, the tax law does not recognize the (.) the revenue distribution that you have prepared and um if the cash, if the (.) if the customer pays (.) um makes a pre-payment, if the customer makes a pre-payment (.) that (.) pre-payment will still be considered as an income already even if you have not rendered the service because the money is already with you. You may (.) um you may do anything you would like to do with it.

▪ ***Phrases one's replies with careful ambiguity so that the other's face is preserved.*** Ann clearly knows what should be done in order to correct the wrong decision made by her superior, as expressed by her utterance *It should be the layout number two*. But toward the end, Ann phrases her talk with careful ambiguity, asking the manager a series of questions that seem to contradict the certainty that she displays at the beginning of her discourse. It may be safe to say that Ann does not intend to create ambiguous message or to contradict herself, but instead aims to preserve the face of her manager:

Ann : Hi John um (.) I just saw a mistake on my work but it was because you instruct, instructed me to do that, the layout number (.) one. It should be the layout number two. So, (.) um how am I gonna (.) deal with that, begin again, start doing that again all over again, or shall I continue with my other task, or what do you (.) what do you suggest?

▪ ***Employs courtesies, making slight modifications of his demands on or appraisals of others so that others will see the situation as one where their self-respect is not threatened.*** Kay's way of ending her talk is courteous, overly-courteous if I may note, since her suggestion on what the manager should do was quite loose—*you may do anything you would like to do with it*. But with the preceding detailed explanation in her talk, it can be deduced that the "loose suggestion" she makes is a modification of her demand on her manager so as for the latter not to think that the situation threatens his face or his self-esteem:

Kay : You may (.) um you may do anything you would like to do with it.

▪ *Before engaging in a potentially offensive act, provides explanations as to why the others are not to be affronted by it.* In the example below, Bob explains the circumstances that led him to the discovery of the manager's mistake. Bob's introductory explanation before saying his main message was an indirect way to cushion his manager of the potentially offensive act that he was about to engage in, i.e., pointing out his superior's error:

Bob : Um [clears throat] John, I'm already conducting the pre-QA [quality assurance] of the, of this website project. After (.) going on with the (.) specification sheet and the design layout that they've sent us, I found out that the design layout that you told me to do [clears throat] wasn't correct or wasn't right. The layout was supposed to be design layout number 2. so, uh with your instruction...

Insights

In performing the two face-threatening speech acts—breaking bad news and pointing out the manager's mistake—the employees are not restricted to practicing *corrective* process alone. They also employ measures of the *avoidance process*, thus displaying both *defensive* and *protective* orientations. Therefore, the employees' face-management strategies as expressed in their discourse incorporate the two kinds of face-work, where they shift from one repertoire of face-saving practice to another.

The fact that a few employees manifest only one kind of face-work in their discourse is not surprising. Holtgraves (1992) explains that individuals may differ in their assessment of a face-threatening act, which results in differences in the extent to which their speech is oriented toward preserving the face.

When breaking bad news, all employees begin their discourse with the interchange phase *challenge* with all of them admitting their mistake, acknowledging the misconduct that led to the face-threatening event. This face-saving practice appears to have a dual function: one, as a *corrective* measure, and two, as a *protective* measure. As a corrective measure, acknowledging the misconduct leads to the next phase, i.e., rectifying it,

thus ensuing the re-establishment of the ritual equilibrium. As a protective measure, the acknowledgment of the incident prevents the addressee or the manager from further probing, which is another face-threatening act.

A noticeable difference in the way the participants use the two kinds of face-saving practice surfaces when they point out their manager's mistake. In fulfilling this speech act, the employees' utterances display *protective measure* of the *avoidance process*. This measure accounts for almost half of the face-saving utterances made by the employees in this specific speech act. The employees displayed an overwhelmingly protective orientation, exerting much effort to protect the negative face of their superior. They also displayed a wide array of face-saving linguistic repertoire in keeping with what Goffman (1999) enumerates under protective measure, namely: (a) shows respect and politeness; (b) extends to the manager ceremonial treatment; (c) employs discretion and left unstated facts that might contradict the positive claims made by the manager; (d) employs circumlocutions or roundabout expression as a means of indirectness for evasion; (e) phrases one's replies with careful ambiguity so that the other's face is preserved; (f) employs courtesies, making slight modifications of his demands on or appraisals of others so that others will see the situation as one where their self-respect is not threatened; and (g) before engaging in a potentially offensive act, provides explanations as to why the others not to be affronted by it.

It is obvious in this context that power relation is a key variable in face management. Kim and Nam (1998) posit that in Asian culture, loss of face is greater when a superior is criticized by the subordinates than the other way around. Thus, subordinates are careful not to offend or infringe on those upon whom they are dependent, in this case their manager (Morand, 2000), thus the effort to orient towards negative politeness. Generally, politeness enables subordinates to show regard and discretion when faced with possible intrusion into the psychological territories of superiors (Morand, 2000). Thus, when interacting with higher-power addressee, such as one's manager, an individual uses "higher-ranked super-strategies" and adds more politeness and euphemisms (Makin, 2003). In simpler terms, low power actors such as employees are most likely to use linguistic politeness behaviors in order to minimize the possibility of conflict with superiors (Morand, 1996).

If we view the context using a cultural microscope, it may be safe to conclude that the Filipino value of respect to authority plays a part in the

employees' face-work for the specific speech act. Filipinos tend to be very sensitive to hierarchy or authority, and within formal organizations, authority is associated with the organizational status, and the age of the ranking official—managers and supervisors—are given due respect because they are in a position of authority (Jocano, 1999, p. 54). The act of pointing out their superior's mistake may be perceived by the Filipino workers as impolite and rude—which is why they aggressively employ *protective* face-work.

The findings of this study on this small group of Filipino employees show great potentials in explaining workplace interaction and face management between superior and subordinates in an Asian setting. I agree with Kim and Nam's (1998) proposition that face should be recognized as an important concept in studying organizational behavior in Asia. A misunderstanding of the complex dynamics of face in Asia is equivalent to the mismanagement of cross-cultural interactions (Kim & Nam, 1998) which can have counterproductive results in the workplace.

I am recommending future studies of much larger scale and of an expanded framework on face management not only to affirm the findings presented in this paper, but to come up with a more comprehensive set of data that can describe the many facets of face-work in the workplace. Indeed, to further investigate face-work at work.

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