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Politeness strategies and speech acts used when handling problems during intercultural encounters: A case study of Thai cruise embarkation officers

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Abstract

As cruise tourism is a global business requiring embarkation officers to communicate effectively, this study aimed to investigate politeness strategies and speech acts of Thai embarkation officers in handling problems during their intercultural encounters. Ten students majoring in Cruise Tourism performing embarkation duties at a Thai port-of-call were asked to complete a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) with six scenarios. The data were analyzed using the frameworks of politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987), speech acts (Searle, 1969), and intercultural communication (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 2001). The study revealed that the participants utilized three types of politeness strategies: negative, bald, and positive, respectively. To display politeness, four types of speech acts were performed. Representative speech acts were used the most since the participants were required to follow regulations while still pleasing the passengers, so they referred to rules set by the company. Expressive speech acts were used when they showed sympathy to passengers by apologizing. Commissive speech acts were utilized to order to promise that they would solve the problems at hand. Directive speech acts were also found since the participants were required to directly ask passengers to do what was needed. The participants were able to alter their behavior from that found in a high-context culture, using the type of direct responses that their Western passengers from low-context cultures use when communicating. The study's findings may assist educational institutions countrywide in preparing their graduates to function as effective communicators in global communication contexts.

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Introduction

Cruise tourism has grown significantly in the 21st century, with the number of cruise passengers worldwide increasing dramatically (Sun et al., 2011). Cruise manufacturers have built more cruise ships to respond to the immense demand, leading to an increase in job opportunities in the cruise industry. Following a temporary pause during the COVID-19 pandemic between 2020 and 2021, the cruise business triumphantly resumed its operations in 2022, and there are expectations of continued expansion in the coming years (Cruise Lines International Association [CLIA], 2020). With the cruise industry flourishing worldwide, the Thai government included a plan to expand the cruise business in Thailand in the 13th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2023–2027) in order to develop human resources and improve infrastructure in the cruise industry, particularly at the three ports-of-call for international cruise ships in Thailand: Laem Cha Bang, Phuket, and Samui (Office of the National and Social Development Council, 2023; Thangthong et al., 2019).

The international cruise industry can broadly be classified into two main sectors. The first is onboard operations, in which crew members hold various positions as waiters, housekeepers, butlers, bartenders, and casino staff members, for example. These crew members operate in a highly multicultural environment, assisting cruise passengers from a variety of cultural backgrounds. These crew members must therefore have a high level of English proficiency and possess advanced intercultural communication skills (Nomnian, 2014). The second sector, which is the focus of this study, involves port-of-call operations in which cruise ships dock at piers in various international destinations and cruise passengers are able to disembark from their ships in order to visit local attractions. New cruise passengers are also welcome to join the ships at these ports. Port-of-call staff members are required to provide service to cruise passengers during embarkation and disembarkation. Embarkation officers can be classified into three groups. Staff in the first group are employed by cruise agencies in various countries to carry out duties on board cruise ships. These embarkation officers usually operate on six-to-ten-month contracts. Staff in the second group are employed by port agencies in Thailand. They usually operate on long-term contracts but there are only a small number of staff in this category. Staff in the third group, some of whom were participants in this study, share similar conditions to those in the second group. However, they operate on daily contracts, performing their duties only on days when cruise passengers are embarking on or disembarking from cruises. They are often Thai university students majoring in Tourism, Hospitality, or Cruise Tourism (Thangthong et al., 2019). These Thai embarkation officers are required to use English to perform their tasks, which involve frequent interactions with foreign cruise passengers. Therefore, merely having a high level of English proficiency is insufficient. They also need to be strategic in politely communicating with passengers in various situations (Indahsari, 2019; Thurlow & Jarwoski, 2010).

Politeness is a significant concept in intercultural and interpersonal communication, commonly used in linguistic as well as sociolinguistic domains. Consequently, researchers have extensively studied politeness, both globally and in Thailand. Pan (2000) characterizes politeness as language that effectively displays a speaker's intention to lessen the potential risk of losing face. This aligns with Brown and Levinson's (1978) notion that speakers employ politeness in order to mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs). The purpose of such a strategy is to alleviate the interlocutor's sense of imposition during the encounter. Furthermore, several scholars, such as Scollon and Scollon (1995), confirm that politeness strategies have a solid foundation within various cultural values and individual' expectations concerning what is considered polite. Simply put, politeness is believed to have a strong connection with socially dependent features, particularly the beliefs and values of the interlocutors. The officers' adequate level of English proficiency and their successful deployment of politeness strategies together ensure that foreign cruise passengers have memorable experiences during their trips (Kim et al., 2012).

Although research studies have explored English proficiency needs, politeness strategies, speech acts, and intercultural communication in various discourse communities, this study attempted to investigate those aspects in the cruise discourse community which had been underexplored. Thus, this study fills a previous void in the existing literature. Also, this study recommends that the Thai government and stakeholders in the cruise industry equip their current and future employees with appropriate politeness strategies to use during intercultural encounters.

The Scope of the Study

This study explored only types of politeness strategies, speech acts, and the notion of intercultural communication found at the lexical level from participants' responses.

The Objective of the Study

The study aimed to investigate politeness strategies and speech acts used by Thai embarkation officers when handling problems during intercultural encounters.

Literature Review

When dealing with foreign cruise passengers, Thai embarkation officers may encounter communication problems. To study how they communicate, the politeness framework proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978), the speech acts framework by Searle (1969) as well as the notion of intercultural communication discussed by Hofstede (2001) and Hall (1976) were used to analyze their responses.

Brown and Levinson's (1978) Politeness Theory

Politeness theory is a sociolinguistic and pragmatic framework that seeks to understand the ways in which people manage and mitigate the potential negative consequences of face-threatening acts in communication. In other words, politeness theory explores how individuals maintain social harmony and avoid conflict in their interactions. The politeness study by Brown and Levinson (1978) places an emphasis on how politeness is displayed in the utterances of interlocutors. This framework is widely used in academic analyses of social environments in which formality is present.

The term "face" emphasizes the importance of linguistic politeness. The concept was initially proposed by Goffman (1967), and further developed by Brown and Levinson (1978). In pragmatic studies, key aspects of face include positive face and negative face. The term *positive face* refers to a desire for social approval, connection, and inclusion, while the term *negative face* refers to a desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition as well as the right to make independent choices.

The first strategy within the politeness theory is known as *on-record without redress (bald)*, and it is the most direct and unambiguous one. This strategy entails being straightforward and to-the-point without attempting to mitigate any potential face-threatening acts. When someone chooses a bald, on-record strategy, they are opting for directness and clarity in their communication, often at the expense of minimizing potential threats to the hearer's face (positive or negative). People typically employ this strategy when the urgency, clarity, or explicitness of the message outweighs the risk of face-threatening acts.

The second one is *on-record with redress (positive politeness)*. This strategy involves emphasizing commonalities, showing solidarity, and using language that seeks to make the interlocutor feel valued and appreciated. Compliments, expressions of agreement, inclusive language, and the highlighting of shared interests are examples of positive politeness. We often use positive politeness in situations where maintaining a positive social relationship is crucial. It helps to build rapport, create a sense of camaraderie, and foster a positive atmosphere in communication.

The third approach, known as *on-record with redress (negative politeness)*, is also associated with redress. It involves mitigating potential threats to the interlocuters' negative face by using indirect language, hedging, and expressing deference to their autonomy. Examples of negative politeness include the use of modals, such as could or would, making requests indirectly, apologizing, and acknowledging the imposition of a request. We employ negative politeness when we need to make requests, give directives, or convey potentially face-threatening information while minimizing the risk of causing discomfort or offense. It acknowledges the other person's need for autonomy and personal space. Figure 1 illustrates Brown and Levinson's (1987) FTA strategies:

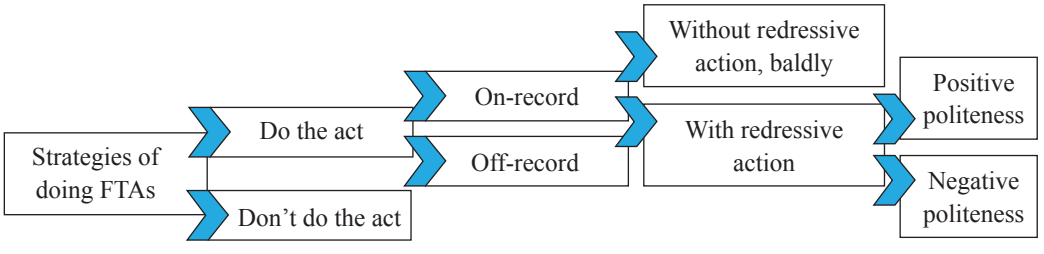


Figure 1 Strategies for doing FTAs
Adapted from Brown and Levinson, 1987

Redressive action refers to the efforts individuals make to repair or compensate for any harm they may have caused to the interlocutor's positive or negative face during communication. An FTA, such as a direct request, criticism, or imposition, may have an impact on the interpersonal relationship between the two parties as well as their respective needs. The subsequent response or behavior, known as redressive action, aims to repair any face-threatening damage and maintain social harmony. Apologizing is an example of redressive action. Offering an apology is a common redressive action when a message or behavior has caused offense, inconvenience, or hurt feelings. Apologizing acknowledges the impact on the other person's face and expresses regret. Another redressive action involves providing justification. Providing an explanation or justification for a potential FTA helps the speaker to clarify their intentions and reduce the perceived threat to the interlocutor's face. Moreover, offering assistance or cooperation is also considered a redressive act. If a direct request is made and is perceived as an imposition, the speaker may help or express a willingness to cooperate, thereby mitigating the negative face threat. Expressing gratitude is also a redressive action, in that it acknowledges and reciprocates positive face-enhancing behaviors. The last type of redressive action involves the use of positive politeness strategies. Employing positive strategies, such as emphasizing commonalities, expressing solidarity, or using inclusive language, can be examples of redressive action that aims to counterbalance the impact of an FTA.

The fourth politeness strategy is *off-record*. This strategy is also referred to as the indirect or hint strategy. It is a way of communicating that involves sending a message indirectly without making a direct request or statement. By allowing the interlocutor to save face or comply with a request without feeling obligated, this approach often mitigates potential face threats and maintains positive social relationships. The goal is to communicate a message while minimizing the imposition on the other person's negative face.

The fifth politeness strategy is to avoid doing FTAs altogether. When an individual has decided not to perform an action that could potentially threaten someone's face, several positive outcomes can be achieved. First, the individual is able to maintain a positive relationship with the other person. By avoiding face-threatening acts, one contributes to maintaining positive and harmonious relationships with others. In social and professional contexts that value positive interpersonal dynamics, this is especially crucial. Another benefit is that it reduces conflict. Face-threatening acts can lead to conflict or discomfort. Choosing not to engage in such acts helps to minimize the risk of misunderstanding, disagreement, or negative emotional reactions. The third advantage is that it preserves face. By using politeness strategies, one shows consideration for the other person's needs, which may include a desire for social approval, a need for connection (a positive face), or a yearning for autonomy and freedom, for example.

As service providers and representatives of authority, Thai embarkation officers need to directly communicate with foreign passengers during the embarkation process at their ports- of-call. Thus, politeness strategies are essential during their conversations. Oftentimes, they encounter difficult situations as well as passengers with both positive and negative faces, making their decisions to employ appropriate politeness strategies crucial.

Speech Acts

Politeness can be demonstrated using speech acts. In addition to producing utterances with words ordered in grammatical structures, humans also conduct certain actions by expressing these words in their interactions with others. Yule (1996) gives instances of where words can carry out actions. The statement "You're fired," for example, effectively terminates the employment of the worker being addressed. Speech acts are actions that utterances carry out. Austin (1962) presented the notion of the speech acts, and Searle (1969), a student of Austin's, expanded upon it. Three acts are involved in a speech act. Firstly, a locutionary act is one that results in a meaningful language utterance. Secondly, an illocutionary act is one that an utterance's communicative energy performs. Thirdly, a perlocutionary act is the result of speech that is intended by the speaker.

Searle (1969) divides speech acts into five categories based on their general purposes: declaratives, representatives, expressives, directives, and commissives. Declaratives are speech acts in which the speaker says something that can lead to a change, such as in the example above, "You're fired." Representatives convey the speaker's interpretation of the world based on their beliefs, e.g. "We need to comply with the rules and regulations." Expressives, involving joy or grief, for example, convey the speaker's emotional state. "I'm sorry to hear that" is an example of a spoken act that conveys sympathy. Directives are speech acts in which the speaker's goal is to persuade others to take action. "Could you open the bag for a manual inspection?" is one example. Commissives are speech acts in which the speaker promises to carry out actions later, e.g. "I will get back to you as soon as possible."

Yule (1996) distinguishes between direct and indirect speech acts. When a sentence structure and its function are directly related, an act of direct communication is accomplished. An example of a declarative sentence would be: "I'm hungry." This statement is used to declare how the speaker feels. When there is a difficult connection between a sentence's structure and its intended purpose, an indirect speech act is used. For example, the declarative sentence, "I'm hungry," might be used to indirectly request for food. Therefore, the employment of indirect speech acts is linked to the concealed meanings expressed through language.

Since the utilization of particular speech acts in conversation may affect the received meaning, Thai embarkation officers who use English as a foreign language need to be careful when choosing words to use in their conversations. Despite the intended meaning of speakers being positive, the speech acts that they use may lead interlocutors to perceive their messages differently. This demonstrates the power of the word choices that are used in different types of speech acts.

Intercultural Communication

Since politeness differs across cultures, intercultural communication can affect politeness during intercultural encounters. The notion of intercultural communication can generally be explained by referring to key cultural dimensions, focusing on Hofstede's and Hall's frameworks to understand communication and behavioral differences across cultures.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Hofstede (2001)'s model identifies five cultural dimensions: individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity vs. femininity, and long-term vs. short-term orientation. Individualistic cultures value self-reliance, while collectivistic cultures prioritize group harmony. With respect to the dimension of power distance, low-power cultures stress equality, whereas high-power cultures accept disparities in degrees of authority. Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance seek structure and avoid ambiguity, while those with low uncertainty avoidance are more comfortable with disorder. Masculine cultures emphasize competitive success, while feminine cultures prioritize relationships and care. Long-term oriented societies value perseverance, while short-term cultures focus on tradition and quick results. Thailand's culture is one characterized by collectivism, high power distance, low uncertainty avoidance, femininity, and long-term orientation. There is an emphasis on social harmony, humility, and patience. Hofstede's study has faced criticism for assuming uniformity within national cultures and using limited sample sizes. Critics argue that cultural diversity within nations is overlooked and that the study's narrow participant scope limits its applicability to broader cultural contexts.

Hall's Cultural Dimensions

Hall (1976)'s model contrasts high-context and low-context cultures, where the former relies on indirect communication and contextual cues (e.g., China, Japan, Korea) and the latter favors direct language (e.g., Germany, USA). Thailand is considered a high-context culture, in which there is an emphasis on indirect communication and face-saving behaviors. High-context cultures use spiral logic and prioritize respect for the others' face, while low-context cultures rely on direct speech acts and conflict resolution. As Ting-Toomey (1988) argues, differences also appear to exist in the respective ways in which high and low context cultures handle conflicts. Other researchers, however, adopt a more critical stance in relation to Hall's model. Scollon et al. (2012), for example, argue that its categorization of cultures is overly simplistic, suggesting that the analysis of context-dependent situations may be more useful in understanding communication nuances.

Intercultural encounters between Thai embarkation officers and foreign passengers involve communication between individuals whose respective cultures may display differences with respect to the linguistic features manifested in politeness and speech acts, as well as in relation to communication style. Therefore, it is crucial for parties on both sides to be aware of such differences in order to prevent unintentional and unnecessary conflict that may arise due to a lack of intercultural knowledge.

Previous Related Studies

Several cases exist of previous studies conducted with the goal of helping to improve various aspects of cruise tourism in Thailand. Monpanthong and Choibamroong (2015) discovered that service providers' engagement with foreign cruise passengers at ports-of-call affected the management of each respective port-of-call's performance in Phuket, Thailand. Thangthong and Khuanmuang (2020) found that many factors, including the behavior of staff members toward passengers on board cruises and at ports-of-call, affected passengers' perception

of their trips. This finding shows how personnel in the cruise industry, including embarkation officers, play an important role in shaping cruise passengers' experiences.

It is clear that politeness strategies, speech acts, and intercultural communication play key roles in communication between cruise staff and passengers. In a further example of a study conducted in the context of Thai tourism, Rattanapian (2015) revealed that Thai tourist police officers employed a combination of positive and negative politeness, as well as bald on-record and off-record strategies with foreign tourists coming for information at a Thai tourist information center. In an additional example of research relevant to this paper, Sodpiban (2002) revealed that foreign tourists were satisfied with how Thai hotel staff demonstrated politeness despite having trouble communicating with them.

Another way in which politeness is displayed relates to how speakers use word choices in conversation to achieve their intentions. Thus, speech acts are crucial in ensuring the conveyance of an intended meaning. In tourism contexts, Ganmanee et al. (2023) found that representative speech acts were mostly found in tourism slogans on online platforms based in various countries. Likewise, Izyra and Sartini (2023) revealed that assertive, directive, and expressive speech acts were used in online tourism promotion for the Indonesia and Malaysia Truly Asia campaigns. In a professional setting, Wattanawong (2023) ascertained that Thai hotel receptionists employed several types of speech acts in their conversations with hotel guests when dealing with complaints and responding to inquiries Such speech acts involved apologizing, suggesting, and requesting. These studies indicate the importance of speech acts in the tourism realm. All these studies employed Searle's (1969) speech act framework. This confirms that although much time has passed since the framework was originally proposed, it is still practical and continues to be widely used among scholars. Nonetheless, none of these studies explored the use of speech acts in the cruise industry. This study consequently aims to fill the gap in the literature and provide insightful results in order to help enhance communication by Thai workers in the cruise business.

Another important issue related to how politeness is understood and conveyed concerns differences in how speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds understand intercultural communication. Although there is a greater quantity of research concerning intercultural communication in Thailand today than in previous decades, a significant portion of this research is focused on pedagogical contexts. Some notable examples include Phongsirikul and Thongrin (2019), who investigated students' perspectives regarding their intercultural learning experiences in English classes; Wattanavorakijkul (2020), who evaluated the intercultural sensitivity of Thai university students participating in work and travel programs in the United States; and Nomnian and Jhaiyanuntana (2020), who investigated the intercultural communication strategies and obstacles faced by Thai undergraduate hotel interns.

In terms of customer satisfaction towards the intercultural communication of service providers, Tipmontree (2007) discovered that Thai tourist police officers struggled to understand cultural differences as well as different English accents. In the cruise tourism context, Khuanmuang (2022) found that Thai cruise ship staff possessed a high level of intercultural communicative competence due to their extensive exposure to multiculturalism in their workplace. However, it was found that they still needed to enhance their intercultural communicative competence in order to meet global standards. In the port-of-call context, Khuanmuang et al. (2024) found that Thai port staff had a low-to-moderate level of intercultural communicative competence, probably due to their lack of multicultural exposure. Since they were based in Thailand, their knowledge of intercultural communication was limited.

While these studies included observations made by participants in actual settings, their findings may not provide an accurate guide to how Thai embarkation officers would handle similar situations. This is because different discourse communities have their own communication practices. It is hoped that in addressing such issues, the current study will add clarity to an under-researched field of communication.

Methodology

Participants

The number of participants in a qualitative study can be limited in order to provide a body of rich information, as qualitative data can be purposively selected to serve the research objective (Battaglia, 2008; Gerring, 2007). Ten participants who were actual workers in the field were purposely selected to provide authentic and genuine data. They were selected based on two criteria. The first was their experience as embarkation officers. All of them were third-year Thai university students majoring in Cruise Tourism in Bangkok who had served at least under one daily contract with a port agency at Laem Cha

Bang Port-of-Call as embarkation officers. Aside from having experience as embarkation officers, they had also completed foundation-level English courses and an English for Seafarers Course required by the program. These selection criteria ensured the homogeneity of the participants. Participants were male and female students aged between 19 and 22.

Instrument

The Discourse Competition Task (DCT) was selected for the collection of data due to its advantages in allowing participants to write immediate responses in a timely manner. This is a rapid approach that is capable of collecting natural data based on the participants' thoughts (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). The DCT included six scenarios corresponding to problems frequently found during tasks commonly performed by embarkation officers. The selected scenarios were developed from imperial data obtained during informal interviews with three experts: a cruise tourism scholar and two full-time embarkation officers. The scenarios were validated by three experts in the cruise industry in Thailand, ensuring the content aligned accurately with the duties of embarkation officers. The scenarios represented problems often found during the performance of the following six tasks: 1. checking in, 2. dropping off baggage, 3. issuing baggage tags, 4. inspecting baggage, 5. issuing keycards, and 6. handling special requests. The DCT is displayed in Table 1.

Data collection

We collected the DCT data at a university in Bangkok in December 2023. The participants were asked to respond to six situations in writing within thirty minutes. The aim was to elicit responses from the participants. During the data collection period, we were present on-site to provide clarification where needed. Consent forms were signed prior to the data collection to ensure that all participants took part in the study on a voluntary basis. Approximately fifteen minutes prior to the data collection period, we casually talked to participants in Thai about their career goals and life in general. We made sure that the conversation did not provide any hints as to the nature and contents of the questions in each scenario. This rapport building was initiated in order to build trust between the two parties so that the participants would feel comfortable while undergoing the DCT session. Instructions for the data collection were explained to the participants in Thai so as to mitigate the potential for any misunderstanding. The participants did not need to provide their names, allowing them to

Table 1 Discourse completion tasks with six situations

Situation 1: A passenger is about to check in. She just finds out from a customs officer that her passport is about to expire in two months, which exceeds the passport validity period. As a result, she is unable to board the cruise. She insists that it is not her fault since she is not aware of such a regulation. What would your response be? You: ……
Situation 2: A passenger is about to drop off his baggage, but the number and weight of the baggage exceed the limit as per the baggage regulations. He appears very upset and wants you to check all his baggage. What would your response be? You: ……
Situation 3: You've just given baggage tags to a passenger. However, the passenger is confused about the tags, which are in two different colors. Additionally, he must collect each bag with a different color code in different locations. The passenger seems to find this troublesome and appears to be upset. What would your response be? You: ……
Situation 4: During baggage inspection, the machine detects some prohibited items. You need to ask permission from the passenger to do the manual inspection. However, he refuses and says that you do not have the right to go through his personal belongings. What would your response be? You: ……
Situation 5: A passenger is waiting to collect the keycard for his room. However, there is a technical problem with issuing the card. The room reservation is duplicated. Therefore, the system has mistakenly registered two passengers in the same room. You need at least half an hour to fix the problem. The passenger is angry and says that it is your mistake, not his. He does not want to wait. What would your response be? You: ……
Situation 6: A passenger is waiting for a wheelchair. However, the information does not show up in the system. We can assume that an error occurs during online reservation. As a result, you are unable to provide her with the wheelchair right away, and she must wait for half an hour. She is upset and says that she is certain that she has requested a wheelchair during the online reservation. What would your response be? You: ……

complete the DCT without concerns about disclosure of personal information. Because we did not have a personal or professional relationship with the participants, the researchers' presence did not affect the participants' interests. Although their first language was Thai, they needed to use English as a medium of communication while performing their duties as embarkation officers. Therefore, the DCT was completed in English.

Data analysis

We qualitatively analyzed the DCT data in order to explore types of politeness strategies used, following Brown and Levinson's (1978) framework to see how participants employed politeness strategies. We also analyzed the types of speech acts proposed by Searle (1969) in order to determine the language the participants used to convey their intended meanings. The incorporation of intercultural communication in conversation was analyzed using the intercultural communication framework by Hofstede (2001) and Hall (1976). An example of data analysis is presented in Example 1:

> "I'm deeply sorry about our mistake. I will talk to the manager about the promotion we can give you."
>
> (Situation 5, Response 3)

This response shows that the speaker is trying to cope with the passenger's negative face by using negative politeness. The speaker uses the phrase "I'm deeply sorry…" in order to mitigate any potential threat by apologizing. In terms of speech acts, the phrase "I will talk to the manager…" indicates a promise, and can therefore be considered commissive speech act. Moreover, the use of the pronoun "we" reflects the collectivism culture of the speaker to preserve mutual face.

Because the participants worked as embarkation officers for international cruise lines, the responses were in English, so we discarded minor grammatical and spelling mistakes that did not significantly alter the intended meanings. The goal of such encounters is mutual comprehensions, and grammatical accuracy is not essential.

After the data analysis, the interpreted findings were shown to the participants, providing them with an opportunity to confirm correct interpretation as well as clarifying any ambiguity.

Results and Discussion

As noted above, the main goal of the research was to investigate politeness strategies and speech acts used by Thai embarkation officers when handling problems during intercultural encounters. A summary of the findings is presented in Table 2.

The findings revealed that participants only used three politeness strategies. The most popular one was negative politeness with 39 responses (65%). The second most common one was bald with 18 responses (30%), followed by positive politeness with 3 responses (5%). In terms of speech acts, 4 types of speech acts were used in the responses. The most frequent type of speech acts was representatives, with 41 tokens (34.45%), while the least frequently used type was commissives, with 24 tokens (20.17%).

Politeness Strategies

Based on the findings of this study, negative politeness was found to be the most effective politeness strategy. This could be due to the participants' roles as service providers. However, several problems may occur during the embarkation process, as demonstrated in the six situations in the DCT. Passengers seemed to show negative face when encountering problems. As service providers, participants demonstrated politeness with redressive action in order to mitigate additional problems and to show that they were aware of the problems and were trying to solve them. Interestingly, although bald was the second most frequently used politeness strategy, the frequency was significantly lower than that for positive politeness. This could be due to the dynamic and fast-paced environment in the actual settings, where foreign cruise passengers tended to try and board their ships as soon as possible. However, since they were

Table 2 Overall politeness strategies and speech acts employed in all situations

Politeness strategies	Frequencies	Speech acts	Frequencies
A. Negative politeness	39 (65%)	A. Representatives	41 (34.45%)
B. Bald	18 (30%)	B. Expressives	31 (26.05%)
C. Positive politeness	3 (5%)	C. Commissives	24 (20.17%)
		D. Directives	23 (19.33%)
Total	60 (100%)	Total	119 (100%)

working in front-line, customer-facing roles, participants had to project politeness by redressing their words in order to communicate with passengers in a professional manner. Their performances would determine their success or failure during these intercultural encounters. The three types of politeness strategies are as follows.

A. On-record with redressive action (negative politeness)

Often, the Thai embarkation officers had to give commands to foreign cruise passengers who displayed negative face as they were not pleased with the situation. Thus, the participants needed to respond to negative face by referring to rules and regulations. However, the utterances were redressed by adding apologies. Doing so made the messages more polite. This type of approach is displayed in Example 2:

"We do apologize for the inconvenience. We suggest you to renew your passport before travelling to avoid travel disruption due to the regulations."

(Situation 1, Response 7)

"We apologize for this inconvenience. As the regulations, you should get rid of some stuff to fit the limit."

(Situation 2, Response 10)

Moreover, participants often employed modal verbs to indirectly express their thoughts. The use of modal verbs helps lessen the tension between interlocutors as it makes messages less direct and less imposing. This can be seen in Example 3:

"Sorry Miss, I could not able you to board the cruise. You must have to do your new passport."

(Situation 1, Response 4)

"Your baggage exceeds the limit. According to the regulation, we cannot check in all your baggage."

(Situation 2, Response 4)

B. On-record without redressive action (bald)

When participants gave directives, they often did not include apologies. This made the utterances sound more direct, as shown in Example 4:

"It was our policy, so you need to comply".

(Situation 3, Response 2)

"It is the regulation. You must do as I told you."

(Situation 3, Response 3)

These two utterances are more inclined to be classified as examples of the use of a bald strategy. This is because participants did not apologize but requested compliance with rules and regulations that all passengers needed to follow. Consequently, it is possible to claim that these Thai embarkation officers used a mix of negative politeness and bald-on-record strategies.

C. On-record with redressive action (positive politeness)

Some of the Thai embarkation officers employed a positive politeness strategy when dealing with problems by showing the passengers who complained that they understood how they felt. This created a sense of camaraderie between the Thai embarkation officers and the foreign cruise passengers, as demonstrated in Example 5:

"I'm sorry for this inconvenient and I'm truely truly understand your point, but we have to do this for everyone's safety. I hope you understand."

(Situation 1, Response 1)

"I'm sorry for this trouble. I understand that this can be confusing. Here, let me explain it for you."

(Situation 3, Response 4)

In brief, negative politeness was the most frequently used politeness strategy. This differs from the findings of Rattanapian (2015), who found that Thai tourist police officers primarily used bald strategy. This may have been due to their limited English proficiency and lack of experience in intercultural communication, especially with respect to politeness. Additionally, the results of this study showed that participants encountered difficulties when communicating in English, which was not the participants' first language. This corresponds with the findings of Tipmontree (2007), who found that the tourist police officers possessed poor English grammar and had difficulty understanding different English accents. This may also account for the negative politeness used by many Thai embarkation officers without any redress. When speaking in a concise and straightforward manner, they did not have to worry about any grammatical mistakes they may have been making. The findings from this current study also demonstrated that the Thai embarkation officers seemed to handle problems involving foreign cruise passengers rather well due to their use of negative politeness and their reasonable level of English proficiency. This may indicate that they are proficient in communicating during intercultural encounters to some degree.

Speech Acts

Representatives were the most frequently used. This is likely due to the fact that their duties revolved

around safety, requiring them to refer to the appropriate regulations when encountering unfavorable reactions from passengers. Expressive speech acts were the second most frequently used. This could be due to the nature of this service-related job, which emphasizes the need to please passengers by showing empathy and understanding. Thus, apologies were used regularly. The officers frequently made commitments in order to reassure passengers that they would personally resolve their problems. Due to the nature of the embarkation contexts, the officers also utilized directives when complying with specific regulations. Also, directive speech tended to be concise and direct. This may also have been due to the limited English proficiency of the participants. Thus, they might have felt uncomfortable producing longer utterances. This could have inadvertently turned actions intended to inform into actions intended to issue orders. Such factors may impact politeness in intercultural encounters.

A. Representative speech acts

Representative speech acts express representations of the world as the speaker believes it to be. We found that this type of speech act occurred with the highest frequency (34.45%). The subtypes of acts within this category include "informing and asserting" as showcased in Example 6.

"I apologize for the problem from online reservation system. The wheelchair will come to you in half an hour."

(Situation 6, Response 8)

The speaker informed the hearer about the online reservation system, which had caused the problem, so that the hearer could understand why the speaker was taking the action.

"I'm deeply sorry about our mistake. I will talk to the manager about the promotion we can give you."

(Situation 5: Response 3)

The speaker asserted an intention to help the hearer by talking to the manager about complimentary items that the speaker may have been authorized to give to the hearer in compensation for the inconvenience caused or the possibility of an upgrade for the hearer, so that the hearer could feel that their problem was being dealt with in a serious manner.

B. Expressive speech acts

Expressive speech acts ranked second in terms of frequency (26.05%). These are acts that state what the speaker feels. "Apologizing, expressing concern, and thanking" are the subtypes of this category of speech act. Linguistic strategies used to perform these acts involve the deployment of words expressing emotion as displayed in Example 7.

"We apologize for the inconvenience. It is about the online mistake. It does not show your wheelchair reservation on the screen. We will bring a wheelchair to you immediately."

(Situation 6, Response 6)

The speaker made an apology to the hearer for mistakes the company had made so that the hearer could feel that the problem had been acknowledged and that the staff member was sorry about it.

"We have baggage tags different color code in different locations for easily management. Please understand our regulations, thank you".

(Situation 3: Response 1)

The speaker expressed gratitude by thanking the hearer for understanding the situation so that the hearer could feel that the staff member appreciated their action in understanding the situation.

C. Commissive speech acts

Commissives are speech acts that speakers employ to make promises to themselves about future behavior. With a frequency of 20.17 percent, this kind of speech act came in third in the study. The "promising" subtype was identified as seen in Example 8:

"I'm apologize for the problem from online reservation system. The wheelchair will come to you in half an hour".

(Situation 6, Response 8)

The speaker promised to bring a wheelchair in half an hour so that the hearer could feel reassured that the wheelchair they had booked as part of their online reservation would arrive soon.

"I'm really apologize for this situation. The problem will be fixed soon. I will prepare some drinks for you during this time."

(Situation 5, Response 9)

The speaker promised to prepare some drinks for the hearer while they waited for the problem to be resolved so that the hearer could feel comfortable and relaxed while waiting.

D. Directive speech acts

Directives are speech acts that speakers use to get others to do things. The data revealed that this type of act was the least commonly used, with a frequency of 19.33 percent. Both "requesting" and "forbidding" subtypes were identified, as seen in Example 9:

"I'm so sorry for duplicated. It's a mistake from registered. Please calm down for a minute, we are fixing the problem now."

(Situation 5, Response 8)

The speaker requested that the hearer calm down while they tried to solve the problem so that the hearer could feel more relaxed while waiting for the problem to be solved.

"You having problem we inspect your baggage, you are not allowed to get in"

(Situation 4, Response 6)

The speaker forbade the hearer from boarding the ship due to a problem with the latter's baggage. Now the hearer knew they could not board the ship.

Intercultural Communication

In addition, many participants used the inclusive term "we" to represent themselves on behalf of the company. This could make utterances sound as if the speakers had adapted to using positive politeness. However, when reading carefully, the meaning of "we" in such examples does not represent speaker and hearer, which would create a sense of camaraderie. On the contrary, "we" in this case refers to the Thai embarkation officers and the cruise line, and does not include the foreign cruise passengers. Use of this term by officers suggests that the notion of collectivism is more salient than that of individualism in this context, reflecting cultural differences in the field of intercultural communication (Hofstede, 2001). Also, the employment of "we" entails other-face and mutual-face strategies which are prominent in collectivist cultures such as those of Thailand and many other Asian countries (Ting-Toomey, 1988). This is shown in Example 10.

"I'm deeply sorry about our mistake. I will talk to the manager about the promotion we can give you."

(Situation 5, Response 3)

"We apologize for the inconvenience. It is about an online mistake. It does not show your wheelchair reservation on the screen. We will bring a wheelchair to you immediately."

(Situation 6, Response 6)

Based on our understanding of low-context and high-context cultures, we found that most of the Thai embarkation officers used the direct style when performing their tasks. They seemed to go straight to the point and always justify their claims in order to make their speech actions more compelling instead of using indirect speech acts (Yule, 1996). Hall (1976) classified Thai people as belonging to a high-context culture, indicating their tendency towards indirect communication. The speech acts recorded in this study demonstrate that the Thai participants were able to adjust themselves to a different setting in which most of the passengers were from western countries, which have low-context cultures favoring direct communication. (Scollon & Scollon, 1995). However, the officers' ability to culturally adjust themselves contradicted the findings by Khuanmuang et al. (2024), who found that Thai cruise port staff had low to moderate intercultural competence. This could be because their study included many port-of-call positions. Embarkation officers tended to have a moderate level of comprehension of intercultural communication, which seemed to be enough to handle problems.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study aimed to investigate the politeness strategies and speech acts used by Thai embarkation officers when handling problems during intercultural encounters. Its findings can be analyzed in three key areas. The first one is the relationship between directness and empathy. The officers favored negative politeness and bald strategies in order to minimize inconvenience for passengers. This meant being clear and avoiding complex explanations. Likewise, directive speech acts and expressive speech acts were used to command passengers while showing sympathy. This showed empathy and acknowledged the passengers' situations, demonstrating a service-oriented approach. The second is the emphasis on clarity in the selection of speech acts. While dealing with negative face, the officers often relied on representative speech acts, including stating rules and regulations and referring passengers to their superiors. These straightforward statements ensured clear communication while showing the officers' intention to help. When they were unable to solve problems right away, the officers tended to use positive politeness to show that they understood how the passengers felt being in problematic situations. While doing so, the officers tended to employ commissive speech acts by promising that the problems would be solved. The third is the

incorporation of intercultural communication. When tackling problems, the officers could adjust to a culture different from their own by using a mixture of politeness strategies and speech acts. This strategic combination allowed the Thai embarkation officers to balance rule enforcement with concern for passengers, leading to the efficient resolution of various problems.

Recommendations

This study explored politeness strategies and speech acts by focusing on linguistic elements and asking participants to complete a Discourse Completion Task. The data, therefore, may not be as natural as that derived from other sources, such as audio recordings, observation, and videotaping, since effective communication includes both linguistic and non-linguistic elements. Future research may employ different methods for the retrieval of linguistic and non-linguistic evidence. Also, while the participants in this study were university students majoring in Cruise Tourism and operating under short-term contracts with a port agency, participants in future studies may include embarkation officers operating under permanent or long-term contracts. As these officers have more experience dealing with foreign cruise passengers on a regular basis, they may utilize different politeness strategies when dealing with problems during intercultural encounters.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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