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Politeness Strategies by Thai EFL Tertiary Learners in an Online Forum

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ABSTRACT

Politeness is influenced by cultural perspectives across cultures. Studies of politeness strategies in intercultural communication have often highlighted cultural speech acts in conversation discourse in various situations. This study investigates cultural politeness between Thai students and an expatriate lecturer and its features of Thai and Western speech acts in an online forum, a learning platform which has recently been introduced in Thai EFL university context. Due to variation in the cultural politeness of interlocutors, Thai students' politeness strategies are possibly misinterpreted in another culture, or they may fail to communicate illocutionary force in intercultural communication. The participants were 146 Thai EFL undergraduate students and an American lecturer, who was teaching an English and American cultural background course. The online entries were theoretically analysed and the findings were supported with data from focus-group interviews. The results show that the student participants were most likely to use Positive politeness, followed by Bald-On-Record politeness, Negative politeness and Off-Record politeness strategy when posting online entries to the lecturer. For features of Thai-Western politeness and speech acts, the respect phenomenon affected the language use of politeness strategies in posing intercultural difficulties. The analysis contributes to the overview of Thai and Western features of cultural politeness in a Thai online EFL setting.

Keywords: Politeness strategies, intercultural communication, speech acts, Thai EFL learners, online forum

INTRODUCTION

At tertiary level, university programmes have to be modified to include ability to communicate in multicultural encounters in order to achieve communicative competence. Hence, Thai students are required to be highly skilled in intercultural

communication (Commission on Higher Education, 2008). The education plan of Thailand has been revised periodically to keep up with the rapid changes in technology (Wongsothorn et al., 2003; Darasawang, 2007). At tertiary level, e-learning utilisation is employed in various manners. Blended learning or a combination of e-learning and face-to-face classroom meeting are widely applied because some institutions possibly have problems with bandwidth and students are not proficient to access the system. However, language instructors in universities have been urged to take part in online platform as a medium to enhance students' learning experience and to harness this platform for students in learning English. Students are expected to interact competently with Thai instructors and English native teachers. Most courses offered by English language departments are taught in English, but compulsory courses of the faculty as well as other courses in university are taught in Thai.

Large numbers of native speakers of English are hired as contract teachers, and are mostly assigned to teaching culture, literature, listening and speaking courses in order to provide real communicative situations for students to practise English language skills. In terms of instructional materials, the contract teachers are also involved with Thai teachers to design learning materials for the students to promote self-study.

It is generally noted that for eight universities in southern Thailand, there are at least one or two expatriate teachers to facilitate students' learning experience in the Department of Western Languages. These teachers agree that cultural classroom awareness should be primarily considered when entering the Thai educational system as it affects the use of English politeness norms to lack or overuse politeness features taken place in technological tool in the online forum. From the above description, it is obvious that English language teaching at the tertiary level in Thailand not only focuses on English-speaking cultural exposure but also encourages educators to gradually utilise online forums as platforms for effective teaching and learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Politeness is significantly related to word selection to fit the right situations (Holmes, 2001; Cutting, 2002). Within the context of politeness, using the word "please" for an inappropriate situation, Holmes (2001, p. 267) suggested,

> *Being polite is a complicated business in any language. It is difficult to learn because it involves understanding not just the language, but also the social and cultural values of the community. We often do not appreciate just how complicated it is, because we tend to think of politeness simply as a matter of saying please and thank you in the right places.*

This is to say showing politeness not only focuses on word choices; social and cultural concerns are also important. Additionally,

Cutting (2002, p. 44) supported the concept of politeness in pragmatic perspective. She viewed politeness as "the choices that are made in language use, the linguistic expressions that give people space and show a friendly attitude to them. This anecdote shows how important it is to be seen to show a friendly attitude, if one wants to save face and be appreciated in return." Her definition of politeness is concerned with careful word selection to please others and to be treated well by others.

A study of speech acts of requests in e-mail communication by Etae (2007) compared the ways of making requests in face-to-face interactions with a superior in an academic discourse with making requests digitally via e-mail. The findings revealed that although electronic communication provides a venue for informal use, Thai student participants highly used polite forms that were influenced by Thai cultural and social constructions. Openings and closings were commonly utilised in the student e-mail communication. Indirect politeness strategies composed of Negative politeness and Off-Record politeness were preferred by the Thai student participants.

Considering politeness studies in the Malaysian context, it is noted that direct request strategies used by grandparents were applicable among three generations; the grandfather and grandmother, the daughter and three sons, the daughter and a son. Kuang (2008) explained that Positive politeness is a preferred strategy used by them because most of them were children, and direct requests were easily

understandable. She noted that these speech acts of politeness were analysed based on Malaysian Chinese politeness culture, power distance in parent-child interaction and concepts of Chinese beliefs, which were all of crucial importance in interpretation.

Al-Shboul et al. (2012) investigated whether Jordanian EFL postgraduate students used refusal strategies in a way similar to Malay ESL postgraduate students using the Discourse Completion Test (DCT). They found that the Jordanian EFL postgraduate students and the Malay ESL postgraduate students had almost the same strategies and frequency in performing refusals. The most preferred strategies among the Jordanians and the Malays were excuse, reasoning, explanation and expressing statement of regret. In addition, they noted that the Jordanian participants hardly showed 'gratitude' to the person who held equal and lower status in refusing invitations while the Malay participants expressed more 'gratitude' to an inferior interlocutor in performing refusals.

Politeness has also been studied in terms of discourse patterns and speech levels in the Japanese context. Moriizumi (2010) examined the relationships (rational closeness and social status) among situational features, face concerns and requesting strategies using the situation model predicting face concerns and linguistic strategies. It was noted that rational closeness influenced four face concerns: self-autonomy, self-approval, other-autonomy and other-approval, but there was no direct relation to language

use. Social status had a negative impact on the other-autonomy face (the Positive face), direct and plain forms of requests. The other-autonomy face request had no influence on the request expressions. The self-approval face request presented the use of indirect requests while the other-approval face request related to the direct and plain forms of requesting. This implies that there is a strong cultural context in Japanese face theories.

In interpreting the politeness strategies in Taiwanese context, Yin et al. (2011) provided important insights into the Chinese culture of Taiwanese in performing politeness strategies in physician-patient communication in order to help in the improvement of the quality of medical treatment as patients are believed to be key informants in providing symptomatic details for the physician in determining medical treatment procedure. This study presented that the politeness strategies mostly used in clinical treatment were Bald-On-Record politeness followed by Positive politeness, Negative politeness and Off-Record politeness. This perspective of Taiwanese politeness strategies implies that in the Chinese culture of the Taiwanese context, power distance in parent-child interaction and concepts of Chinese beliefs were of crucial importance in interpretation.

Language use, intercultural communication and politeness are primary concerns in English teaching in Asian contexts. Studies have shown that the understanding of diverse cultural behaviours in a particular cultural and educational setting have been emphasised in order to perceive students' interaction locally (Adamson, 2005; Baker, 2008). These two studies revealed significant insights into the interface between Thai and Western cultures, particularly their communicative practices and their perceptions of each other. The findings stress the difficulties in mediation between Thai and Western politeness found in the Thai context that can lead to cultural misunderstanding. Thus, it is important to consider intercultural transformation locally and globally, which is the requirement for foreigners before participating in Thai culture.

Intercultural relations involves "discourse communication between or among individuals" i.e. people from different cultural backgrounds that possibly leads cultural difficulties shaped by their inborn culture (Scollon & Scollon, 1995, p. 125). Kramsch (1998, p. 81) related a concept of intercultural or cross-cultural relations with the 'culture shock' people possibly encounter in communication because another culture might not be familiar to them as they are from a different cultural group. She also supported intercultural deals with people from different "social or ethnic origin, age, occupation, or sexual preference." These cultural variations posit distinctive views of the world to a particular cultural group because its social constructions are different. In relation to this, intercultural communication is generally understood as "communication between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct enough to alter the communication

event" (Samovar & Porter, 2004; p.15). This eventually distorts communication if the message and the hearer are from cultures that are unfamiliar to one another.

THE STUDY

This qualitative case study explored a real-life situation in a particular context and relations between the situation and its context of the target members (Yin, 2009). It investigated the types of politeness strategies employed by Thai students with an English native-speaker lecturer in an online forum. It also studied the cultural features and speech acts of Thai-Western politeness in the online forum.

The 'Thai-Western' politeness in this study refers to the situation of Thai students engaged in the dimension of English-speaking cultures. The most difficult part for Thai students is the strong influence of Thai cultural norms in controlling their way of thinking in an academic discourse community, using shared terms and a common knowledge base. Being exposed to two cultural dimensions affects the English writing skills of Thai students as they have contradicted linguistic notions of politeness.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework for politeness deals with the concepts of 'face', proposing that 'face' comprises two components, positive and negative face. Positive face relates with the desire of the speaker's existence to be noted and responded to in communication whereas negative face allows the speaker the right to communicate his or her real want. Brown and Levinson's model for politeness was found appropriate for this study because of its universality, detailed description of linguistic strategies and the focus of the actor's intention. Brown and Levinson's (1987) four strategies of politeness were subsequently to analyse particular linguistic features in utterances. This framework, therefore, is able to claim universality for the concept of 'face' in any culture with different degrees of face threatening acts (FTAs). In addition, Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies are completely applicable to fit possible politeness expressions that are categorised into various politeness sub-strategies. Furthermore, Brown and Levinson's framework, emphasising the speaker's situational context, unlike Leech's (1983) politeness model, focuses on the hearer's conditions of communication.

In order to investigate the features of Thai-Western politeness, Hofstede's (1980) cultural constructs were additionally applied. Hofstede's theory was primarily used because his five cultural constructs are easily applied to understand the speech acts and politeness of both Thai and Western cultures. The politeness usage of Thai and Western communities connects to people's behavioural patterns that influence societies. His cultural constructs were utilised in this study to differentiate between cross-cultural groups. In addition, Hofstede's (1980) theory is suitable for capturing the features of two contrasting cultural groups, where East meets West in the speech acts of politeness in the online forum. His theory may examine national cultures as it concerns the five cultural constructs

explaining national cultural differences and their national consequences. In addition, using Hofstede's cultural constructs in the Thai online forum would help to provide an overview of Thai and Western cultural features of politeness in the online platform.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants for this study comprised 146 EFL undergraduate students. These Year Two and Three students majored in English at a public university in southern Thailand. The participants were of Thai ethnicity with different religious backgrounds. They enrolled in the English and American Cultural Background course, which ran for 16 weeks or a semester. A component of the course included participation in an online forum. The students shared opinions related to the course activities in the forum that were set up by the English native lecturer. The participants are encouraged to express their opinions, thoughts, viewpoints and opinions on the topics posted online by the lecturer. The online forum, which was titled "Culture Class", was created to support English language learning for the English and American Cultural Background course.

Data Collection and Analysis

Research data comprised 146 online entries and four focus group interviews with the students and eight classroom observation sessions. The English native-speaker lecturer used the online forum with all four groups of the students. This tool functioned as a platform to communicate issues and topics related to the content of the course (Table 1) that was posted in the online forum. The posts consisted of four questions for the four different groups.

Topic 1 was posted to 23 students of group A. Topic 2 was posted to 41 students of group B, topic 3 to 44 students of group C and topic 4 to 38 students of group D.

Table. 1
Topics Posted in the Online Forum

Group	Topic	Number of students
A	If you won a prize to travel abroad for three months with unlimited expenses, would you go to the United States or to Great Britain? What would you want to see and do there?	23
B	There are many universities and colleges in the USA and in Great Britain. If you were offered unlimited scholarship to study in either place, where would you go and why?	41
C	Fast food is something that has come from Western culture. It is especially popular in America. What is your experience with fast food in Thailand? Do you enjoy eating it? How often do you eat it and what do you like to eat?	44
D	I would like to know about your experience with listening to spoken accents. Do you find it easier to understand the typical American accent? What is your experience with learning spoken English?	38

The lecturer also had face-to-face sessions with the students and explained the details of the online task and the marks allocated for the tasks.

Focus-group interviews with the student participants were arranged one week after the course was complete (week 17) in order to confirm the participants' reasons of how and why they preferred a particular strategy when interacting with the English native-speaker lecturer. Two groups of five and six students each volunteered to participate in the interviews. Fifteen interview questions were designed based on the analysis of the online postings and related literature by the researcher.

The class observations were conducted eight times throughout the semester for each group. The researcher obtained permission to gain access to the classrooms as a non-participant observer. After the researcher finished the fieldwork at a research site, all the field notes that involved interpretations of the situations (Creswell, 2008) were transcribed into written text. Themes that emerged from the data were used to answer the research questions.

FINDINGS

Table 2 shows the types of politeness strategies used by the 146 Thai EFL tertiary students with the English native-speaker lecturer.

The most frequently used politeness strategies were Positive politeness (63.1%), followed by Bald-On-Record politeness (16.4%), Negative politeness (13%) and Off-Record politeness (7.6%). The data

from the online entries revealed that the most significant strategy used by Thai students was Positive politeness. There were three sub-strategies found in the participants' online entries out of the eight politeness sub-strategies listed by Brown and Levinson (1987). They were: "Avoid disagreement" (P1), "Use in-group identity markers" (P2) and "Presuppose, raise and assert common ground" (P3). Each sub-strategy had minor categorisations.

"Avoid disagreement" (P1) contained "Hedging opinions" (P1.1) and "Pseudo agreement" (P1.2). "Use of in-group identity markers" (P2) included "Contraction and ellipsis" (P2.1) and "Use of in-group language or dialect" (P2.2). The sub-strategy of "Presuppose, raise and assert common ground" (P3) conveyed place switching (P3.1).

The most preferred sub-strategy of Positive politeness was P1, "Avoid disagreement", where the students used "Hedging opinions" (P1.1) 45.9% and "Pseudo agreement" (P1.2) 6.2 %. The students chose phrases like "think", "really + adjective", "to be interested in", "in my opinion", "I kind of like" and "personally" to express hedges according to Brown and Levinson's politeness features. "Pseudo agreement" (P1.2) was employed by using "so", "the reason why I choose", "that's why" and "then" in their online postings. "Use of in-group identity markers" (P2) was the second sub-strategy of Positive politeness that was used by the student participants. It consisted of "Contraction and ellipsis" (P2.1) 5.5% and "Use of in-

Table. 2
*Politeness Strategies and Sub-Strategies of Politeness Used by Thai Students in an Online Forum Adapted
from Brown and Levinson's (1987) Theory*

No.	Politeness strategies	% Politeness usage
1	B	16.4
2	Ps	
	P1 Avoid disagreement	
	P1.1 Hedging opinions	45.9
	P1.2 Pseudo agreement	6.2
	P2 Use in-group identity markers	
	P2.1 Contraction and ellipsis	5.5
	P2.2 Use of in-group language or dialect	4.1
	P3 Presuppose / raise / assert common ground	
	P3.1 Place switch	1.4
	Total	63.1
3	N	
	N1 Be conventionally indirect	
	N1.1 Degrees of politeness in the expression of indirect speech acts	4.8
	N1.2 Politeness and the universality of indirect speech acts	2
	N2 Question, hedge	
	N2.1 Prosodic and kinesic hedges	2.7
	N2.2 Hedges addressed to Grice's Maxims	1.4
	N3 Apologise	
	N3.1 Admit the impingement	1.4
	N3.2 Beg forgiveness	0.7
	Total	13
4.	O	
	O1 Use contradiction	6.2
	O2 Give association clues	0.7
	O3 Be incomplete, use ellipsis	0.7
	Total	7.6

Key: P = Positive politeness   B = Bald-On-Record politeness   N = Negative politeness   O = Off-Record politeness.

group language or dialect" (P2.2) 4.1 %. The participants shared opinions using short forms such as "I'm", "I'll" and "I don't" as contractions. "Ellipsis" was presented in the participants' online entries as "the United States of America of course", "I'm sure the USA" and "USA, Howard University".

For "Use of in-group language or dialect" (P2.2), the participants interacted with the lecturer using different varieties such as "gonna ≠ would like to", "first ≠ gonna" and "wanna ≠ would like to". The next sub-strategy of Positive politeness was P3, which was "Presuppose, raise and assert

common ground". "Place switch" (P3.1) using "here" was also found in the online postings.

Bald-On-Record politeness (B) ranked second out of the four politeness strategies. The participants selected B strategy in sharing opinions with the English native-speaker lecturer (16.4%). The students' communication was neutral, with no particular politeness features. The messages were short, complete and clear.

Negative politeness (N) was the third ranked politeness strategy, which are "Conventionally indirect" (N1), "Degree of politeness in the expression of indirect speech acts" (N1.1) and "Politeness and the universality of indirect speech acts" (N1.2). The participants utilised "Degrees of politeness in the expression of indirect speech acts" (N 1.1) using "would like to" (4.8%), followed by "Politeness and the universality of indirect speech acts" (N1.2), repeatedly stating "want to" in the messages (2%). The second Negative politeness strategy was "Question and hedges, prosodic and kinesic hedges" (N2.2) and "Hedges addressed to Grice's Maxims" (N2.2). The participants expressed verbal hedges such as "haha", "umm", "hahaha", "ah haaaa", "errrr" as "Prosodic and kinesic hedges" (2.7%). "Hedges addressed to Grice's Maxims" was applied using "I think" and "I thought" in the participants' online entries (1.4%). The third Negative politeness strategy was "Apologize" (N3). There were "Admit the impingement" (N3.1) and "Beg forgiveness" (N3.2). The participants used "Admit the impingement"

by saying that "My English grammar not strong sorry kub" and "well but I will try and improve for getting better" (1.4%). The final particle "kub" means "sir", which is used in Thai language to show politeness in communication and to signify distance between the speaker and the reader. However, "Beg forgiveness" was presented as "sorry for my mistake" to minimise the students' social status (0.7%).

Off-Record politeness (O) ranked as the last politeness strategy that the participants chose. It consisted of "Use contradiction" (O1), "Give association clues" (O2) and "Be incomplete, and use ellipsis" (O3). The most preferred strategy among the Off-Record strategies was "Use contradiction" (6.2%) such as "however, ...but…", "I know…, but…" and "there are…, but…". "Give association clues" (O2) and "Be incomplete, and use ellipsis" (O3) were secondary sub-strategies that were selected by the participants. They related the topic of discussion to giving related clues as "all of my story is my reply" (0.7%). Some participants showed incompleteness of communication, using "I love it." at the end of the message (0.7%).

DISCUSSION

The features of politeness strategies in the participants' online entries were based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory.

Positive Politeness

The results of the present study revealed that the most used strategy of Positive politeness was hedging opinions. This

strategy was largely drawn with respect and with consideration for the hearer's face in Thai context. Two reasons were given by the participants in the interview for why they utilised this strategy. Firstly, they realised that respect was the most important rule in performing politeness acts in any situation with elders; hence, the students used the most face-saving strategy, which is Positive politeness, in their interactions with the lecturer (Goffman, 1967). Seniority of the lecturer over the students affected word choices and the degree of politeness that shaped the language use of the speaker. Formality of word choice, greetings, titles addressed and final particles in utterances was a way to show politeness for the lecturer in the online entries. The formality between the lecturer and the students was counted as a sort of politeness representation to show respect to the lecturer. Thus, Thai cultural norms on politeness knowledge influenced the students' decision to select a politeness strategy.

The observation data also revealed that the participants responded with hesitation in their replies to the lecturer, reflecting quietly for a few minutes, then looking at each other, and finally discussing with students nearby. It is possible that the students may have been too conscious of the fact that their classroom participation was being monitored by the lecturer. The students performed the face-saving strategy of keeping silent, nodding and trying to speak up in response to the lecturer's questions. Goffman (1967) referred to situations where the speaker tries to avoid face threat by leaving or taking

action not to encounter with the hearer in order to save face. The student participants agreed and understood the lecturer's words to save the lecturer's face in order to show that they had accomplished intercultural communication with the lecturer.

Bald-On-Record Politeness

The Bald-On-Record politeness strategy of Thai student participants showed two outstanding features of Brown and Levinson's (1987) Bald-On-Record strategy i.e. non-minimisation of face threat and power difference between the speaker and the hearer.

The findings presented that the utterances of participants' online entries were authentic, contextual, relevant and clear in response to the question. In this situation, the participants wanted to do the FTA with maximum efficiency more than their desire (want) to save the lecturer's face. They may have been more concerned with engaging in efficient communication with the right target reader, who was the English native speaker. The interview data strengthened the idea that the participants chose the most appropriate politeness strategy for interacting with the native speaker, which was to express meaning in the Western conversational style i.e. to be direct, simple and flexible. It can be inferred that the participants were conscious of their selection of politeness strategy with the target reader from a different cultural milieu. In addition, power difference between the speaker and the readers was seen in the titles of address that were used by the student

participants. The power difference seen in the use of the Bald-On-Record strategy implied the superior power of the lecturer. It played a crucial role in determining how the Thai students responded to their lecturer. In relation to this, the participants used their full name and student code to maintain formality in Thai greetings to save the lecturer's face. A degree of personal space between the interlocutors was clear in the utterances.

Negative Politeness

The strategy of degree of politeness in the expression of indirect speech acts was widely utilised by the participants. They emphasised the importance of the lecturer's space through distancing styles as indirect utterances to share opinions with the lecturer. The participants may have inferred that the distance between the interlocutors implied deference through politeness, and Negative politeness was used by the Thai students mostly through word choices that indicated distance in order to emphasise the space of the superior in communication. This was confirmed by the interview data as the participants agreed to use only formal writing when speaking with and writing to the lecturer because the degree of space could differentiate between superior and inferior classes in communication. Moreover, some students additionally mentioned that they would ask for allowance and opinions from the lecturer about the degree of word choice before making a decision to use it with the lecturer. This was done to make sure that the words selected were acceptable to the lecturer. The participants added that degree of word choice to use with the lecturer and friends can imply degree of politeness in writing in the online forum. Hence, some participants prepared a preliminary draft of the online entries, which they sent to the lecturer in order to receive his approval, and then revised the drafts and made corrections to possible grammatical mistakes and word selection. The participants were clearly worried about encroaching into the lecturer's personal space. They tried to present greater distance between themselves and the lecturer through the degree of word choice.

Off-Record Politeness

Using contradiction was the most used strategy among the students when it came to Off-Record politeness. This strategy also relates to indirect communication, which is the common conversational style of Thais influenced by cultural norms. This trait of local culture particularly leads to communication traits. In Thai communication, direct and straight-out utterances are not broadly acceptable in interaction, and are sometimes considered rude, especially when speaking with elders. This Off-Record strategy was used by the students in this study to decrease face threat by giving face consideration to their lecturer by using indirectness to soften their utterances.

The interview data also made it clear that the English native-speaker lecturer found difficulty in interpreting the Thai

students' communication with him. He said that it was difficult to grasp the real intention of the students as the students usually used indirect communication in interaction, even in requests, questions, comments, apologies and demands. This situation possibly led to incomplete functional speech utterances of the interlocutors (Searle, 1969; Van Dijk, 1977).

However, the indirectness of the Off-Record strategy was not mostly used with the lecturer in the online entries because the participants were concerned with two considerations. These considerations were also referred to by Goody (1978) in considering FTA conditions. As the participants were assigned to share opinions in the online forum with the lecturer, the online postings, therefore, were written to communicate the content of FTA; the participants then became aware of the personal space of the lecturer, who held a higher social position. The want to maintain the lecturer's face in communication was higher than the want to communicate the content. The face needs of the lecturer in Thai context affected the participants in that they did not interact as they wanted to, but according to the task requirement.

CONCLUSION

Interestingly, the cultural value of the respect phenomenon of the Thai students was predominantly displayed in every degree of the politeness strategies they used. The value of respect ranked from the most polite to the least polite strategy (Positive,

Bald, On-Record, Negative and Off-Record politeness strategies).

Respect was clearly shown through the use of indirectness and ambiguity to in order to maintain the personal space of the lecturer as one who held a higher position.

This study provided several useful guidelines for future research. First, this study explored politeness strategies by Thai student participants in interactions with an English native-speaker lecturer in an intercultural context and a Thai online environment. Future research is recommended to study different patterns in online interaction between local students and native-speaker lecturers.

Second, this study was conducted on politeness strategies of EFL students in intercultural communication with an English native-speaker lecturer; hence, there was no comparison between politeness strategies of the students with Thai lecturers teaching English. This would provide a Thai cultural overview of Thai EFL students' politeness strategies used with Thai lecturers. It would be interesting to conduct a study to compare the politeness strategies of Thai students with English native-speaker instructors and Thai lecturers.

This study of intercultural politeness strategies contributes to the understanding of how speech acts of politeness strategies in Thai EFL learning are performed in an intercultural online context. In this study it was obvious that the use of Thai cultural norms and the reluctance of politeness representation highly affected classroom

interaction as lesson evaluation and comprehension checks were difficult to manage in enabling mutual understanding between the expatriate lecturer and the Thai students. This study raised awareness of intercultural cultural classroom behaviours in Thai EFL communication in an online context.

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