

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Many ethnicities and cultures, with diverse backgrounds, not only in Indonesia, but also in other parts of the world, tribes and ethnicities live with one another. This phenomenon was later referred to as interethnic communication. Young Yun Kim (2017) stated that Interethnic communication is defined as an event of interaction between at least one of the communicators who considers the person they communicate with based on ethnicity, whether it's ethnic group membership or an out-group of ethnicity (Kim, 2017, p.2). Another definition is from Suyunova (2014), which states that Interethnic communication is a phenomenon that occurs between ethnolinguocultural communities, which happens with understanding that is shaped through the statement your way, my way, and our way (p.9).

Due to the distinctive ethnic markers between ethnic groups in interethnic communication that are embodied in one place at the same time, one form of reaction to it is cultural tensions and misunderstandings that might arise, especially among ethnic groups in long-term and daily contact. These ethnic clashes could be shown through the context of interactions. To understand that, the Contextual Theory of Interethnic Communication by Young Yun Kim (2017) provides a framework that explains how cultural background, context, and interpretive differences shape communication (p. 2). It explains that dissociative communication behaviors can cause conflict and associative communication behaviors can cause closeness between ethnic groups (Young Yun Kim, 2017, pp.

5-7). This continuum helps this research see the cultural gap between ethnic groups in interethnic communication and determine whether the utterance is dissociative or associative communication behavior. Moreover, this helps to explain how conflict and misunderstanding might arise, but can be mitigated through close-knit associative communication.

In terms of understanding interethnic communication, not only is contextual background needed, but also requires attention to linguistic and philosophical aspects because language is regarded as a heritage of an ethnic group that helps individuals see the world, while also embedding distinct cultural traits reflected in how they communicate (Suyunova et al., 2014, p.120). Therefore, it needs a linguistic aspect to help individuals minimize clashes that have happened in interethnic communication. One of the forms that can help to mitigate is politeness strategies. Not only in daily life, but politeness strategies also play a significant role in intercultural communication. This is also supported by Brown and Levinson (1987), who mentioned that, although there is the possibility of miscommunication, especially among ethnic groups, they still have the same universal politeness form to communicate (pp. 33-35). Therefore, using the politeness strategies theory by Brown and Levinson, this research sought to see how politeness strategies come as an associative behavior of communication that mitigates conflicts that potentially arise in interethnic communication.

This case can be found in several well-known American films, including “*My Big Fat Greek Wedding*”(2002). It talks about two families with different ethnicities, where the Portokalos family comes from an ancient Greek-American

family, and the Miller family comes from an Anglo-American family. Greek-American is tend to be more expressive in communicating. They love to discuss and argue with their opponent; they also see conversation as a field to debate, and gentleness rarely happens in their conversation (Broome, B.J. 1996, p. 72). This behavior of Greek-American communication leads to the Greek communicative style, which tends to be more expressive and emotionally open, reflecting collectivist cultural values. In contrast to Greek-American communication behavior, Anglo-Americans tend to be more considerate and polite. Anglo-American ethnic groups love to talk about their opponents' interests, such as sharing information and offering compliments. They also rarely use slang words when it comes to intercultural communication. This Anglo-American communication behavior leads to boundary-oriented communication and makes their communication seem more stiff or individualistic and not as expressive as Greek-American.

This characteristic of communication behavior is depicted clearly in the movie represented by the Toula Portokalos and Ian Miller family. Toula and the Portokalos family, as a Greek-American ethnic group, tend to be more vocal and expressive; they also often use loud tones and explicit utterances towards others, especially those with a different ethnic background. In contrast, Ian Miller and the Miller family, as an Anglo-American ethnic group, tend to be calmer and rarely use explicit words; they also tend to be more individualistic, so their communication style is boundary-oriented. The cultural and behavioral gap between them not only shows the difference between the two ethnic groups, but also shapes how they use

communication factors such as Power (P), Distance (D), and Rank of Imposition (R), which later influences the choice of politeness strategy used to mitigate conflict rise between them. The interaction between two contrasting ethnic groups in the movie and how harmony can still be maintained after several conflicts and misunderstandings is why this topic is interesting. This research combines politeness strategies as a linguistic aspect with the contextual background of the utterances to provide an understanding of how context in intercultural communication is important in defining the politeness strategies.

These two theories—politeness strategy by Brown and Levinson and CTIEC by Young Yun Kim are mostly used separately and rarely used together in interethnic studies of fictional characters. Although politeness strategies are widely studied, they rarely explain how contextual background in interethnic communication influences the use of politeness strategies. This research aims to prove that politeness strategies used in interethnic communication are not solely used without any reason or contextual background behind them. By integrating CTIEC and politeness strategies, this study not only examines the cultural context of interaction but also explains how such context influences speakers' choices of politeness strategies, particularly in relation to power (P), distance (D), and ranking of imposition (R).

1.2 Research Questions

This research combines politeness strategies as a linguistic aspect with the contextual background of the utterances to provide an understanding of how context

in intercultural communication is important for defining politeness strategies. So, the questions for this research are:

- 1) What type of politeness strategies are used in mitigating the conflict that happened between two different ethnic groups?
- 2) How are politeness strategies selected based on power (P), distance (D), and ranking of imposition (R)?
- 3) How does associative communication behavior within the contextual background of interethnic communication influence the interpretation of power (P), distance (D), and ranking of imposition (R)?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This research aims to explore politeness strategies among interethnic interactions to see how language roles overcome the cultural clash that occurred between the Greek American family and the Anglo-American family conversations caused by various contextual diversity. In detail, the purpose of the study is:

- 1) To identify the use of politeness strategies to mitigate conflict and cultural tension between two different ethnic groups.
- 2) To describe the reason behind politeness strategies that are chosen based on distance (D), power (P), and ranking factors (I).
- 3) To explain how the contextual background of interethnic communication influences the interpretation of power (P), distance (D), and ranking of imposition (R).

Using a qualitative approach, this study identifies utterances that show the use of politeness strategies to reduce conflict and maintain harmony within diverse cultural contexts in the film *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002)

1.4 Previous Study

Previous studies are classified by 1) previous studies with the same object of “My Big Fat Greek Wedding.” 2) previous studies with the same topic, which is politeness strategies in interethnic communication, and 3) previous studies with the same ethnic groups. These previous studies are concluded and classified by the researcher to highlight that this kind of research has been applied.

The first previous study is an article from Dewi, D., & Prihandini (2023) entitled “Patriarchy Culture of Toula’s Family in *The Big Fat Greek Wedding Movie* (2002)”, telling how the patriarchy culture in “My Big Fat Greek Wedding” is still strongly applied, especially by Mr. Gus Portokalos, Toula’s father. By defining through dialogs, scenes, gestures, and other elements, the researcher found that Toula’s family performed a private patriarchy where the system is restricted in the home area. The researcher also said that in the movie “My Big Fat Greek Wedding” men play a dominant role in society, including the decision about marriage, and limit it to the intra-ethnic environment (p.143) This behavior later influenced how Mr. Gus Portokalos sees someone based on their rank and position, which influences how Mr. Gus Portokalos communicates with other characters, both ingroup and outgroup characters, as someone weaker than him in the terms of position, this later influence the choice of his tone, gesture, and utterances Mr. Gus Portokalos use among the characters.

The second previous study examines politeness strategies in interethnic communication as applied to other objects. “National Culture and Politeness Strategies in Intercultural Communication Among Japanese and American Characters in ‘The Last Samurai’ Movie: A Cross-Cultural” by Nurilaila, E (2020) found that Positive Politeness was performed mainly by American people but none from Japanese people in “The Last Samurai” (p.12). This research also found that Off record is the most used by Japanese people (p. 12). The research paper later concludes that language and culture are interrelated and sometimes affect each other in intercultural communication (p.15). Another case is the article by Sulalah, A (2025) entitled “Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Analysis of Politeness Strategies Used by the Australian and Indian Characters in ‘Lion’”. The researcher found that there are significant cultural differences that exist between two different ethnic groups, influencing their use of politeness strategies. The researcher analyses various kinds of politeness strategies used by characters from Australia and India. The researcher also stated that understanding the other groups’ culture is important for achieving effective communication with other ethnic groups (p.47), and the significant cultural differences between two distinct groups influence their use of politeness strategies (p. 58).

The previous study is classified by those with the same topic, which is the function of politeness strategies in cultural communication. An article by Evariza (2024) entitled “Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: Understanding Politeness Strategies in Intercultural Communication”. Researchers found that politeness strategies in interethnic communication can be used as a tool to maintain social

norms, preventing conflicts and building respectful communications that can mitigate conflict. (p. 113). By virtual and digital interaction, the researcher states that politeness in interethnic communication helps to maintain a positive social order (p.115). Another previous study is an article by Handirani, P. et al (2025) entitled “Politeness Strategy in Cross-Cultural Communication: A pragmatic Approach”. The researchers examined the use of politeness strategies between Asian culture and European culture, and how the cultural norms and values influenced them. Through semi-structured interviews, the researcher found significant differences in politeness strategies between different cultures. (p.129) This also shows that understanding a person’s culture and values helps to maintain relationships in cross-cultural communication (p.131). Overall, understanding and respecting these differences can shape clearer communication and build stronger bonds between cultures.

Previous studies have found cultural diversity in several aspects, such as myth and patriarchy. Myth in *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002) is indicated as a family value of Greeks; a previous study also showed that men's superiority was depicted perfectly in the movie (Dewi & Prihandini, 2023; Kadarsih, 2006) In cross-cultural and intercultural communication studies more broadly, several researchers have also discussed politeness strategies and their role in managing interaction across cultures (Evariza, 2024; Handriani et al., 2025).

Based on the five previous studies, some research highlights how cultural markers such as myth and patriarchy influence how communication style is built. However, these studies do not really integrate politeness strategies with cultural

phenomena. Even though politeness strategies are applied in interethnic communication in some previous studies, the parameter of contextual background is rarely discussed. This results in a broad interpretation of whether politeness strategies are to maintain harmony or reduce conflict.

In addition, previous studies have only focused on real-life and virtual behavior communication, where the use of politeness has hardly been addressed. As a result, the relationship between contextual background and linguistic behavior remains underexplored. To address this gap, this study integrates politeness strategies by Brown and Levinson and Contextual Theory in Interethnic Communication (CTIEC) by Young Yun Kim to provide more structured and context oriented. With the Power (P), Distance (D), and Rank of imposition (R) factors, this research aims to be more precise about how politeness strategies function in interethnic communication.

Furthermore, this study employs a movie and a fictional character as its data source, as fictional characters provide more explicit and analytically accessible. Consequently, the data derived from fictional interactions can provide clearer insights into how communication strategies, especially politeness, are used to manage interethnic tension caused by various ethnic markers.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This research is limited to using the Politeness Strategy Theory by Brown and Levinson, with the focus of the research being restricted to two different ethnic groups, namely Greek-American and Anglo-American, represented by the

Portokalos family and the Miller family. This research uses all the utterances that potentially perform FTA and how politeness strategies responds to it, whether it is successful or less effective to be used in maintain harmony or reduce conflict resulting from miscommunication based on distance (D), Power (P), and Rank of imposition (R)

This study should not only identify the types of strategies but also explain how they are formed, the process of their use, the reasons behind their selection, and their overall functions in maintaining harmony within interethnic communication. This research is necessary because it gives a new perspective from a linguistic aspect, where language and context can be one of the tools for understanding interethnic communication.