

Cultural values and understanding of politeness in British and Bambara lingua-cultures

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Politeness is one of the most important factors which maintain interpersonal relationships. It is used to avoid conflicts and confrontations and promote effective communication. Politeness is not limited to linguistics etiquette; it is much broader. It encompasses all types of interpersonal behaviour through which the face, feelings and interests of others is taken into account (see Leach 2014).

As numerous cross-cultural studies have shown politeness, despite its universal nature, is a culture-specific phenomenon, differences in politeness are caused by differences in social relations and values. 'Politeness has been referred to as 'a culture specific phenomenon' since its inception (Kaddar, Bargiela-Chiappini 2011: 2). As stated by Watts, even the lexemes *polite* and *politeness* and corresponding terms in other languages may vary in the meanings and connotations associated with them (Watts 2003:14).

The present study aims to compare how politeness is understood in British and Mali culture and define social factors and cultural values which impact this understanding. We will also analyze different conversational situations and discursive practices of English (BrE) and Bambara speakers (the language spoken in Mali) inside the family context as well as outside, including interaction between strangers, to show how politeness shapes communicative ethno-styles (Larina 2015, 2020).

The research questions of the study are as follows:

1. What is the link between linguistic politeness and culture?
2. Do people from different cultural background have the same understanding of what is polite or what is im/polite?
3. What is the important key factor in defining politeness?
4. How does the understanding of politeness by the Malians differ from the British one?
5. How does politeness shape communicative ethno-styles?

The English data were taken from secondary sources (Larina 2015, 2020, Leach 2014, Watts 2003, Wierzbicka 2006 and others). The Bambara data were obtained from 2 questionnaires, as well as interviews and observation. The first questionnaire was aimed at detailing understanding of politeness by representatives of Bambara lingua-culture and disclosing the main cultural values on which politeness is based in this culture. The respondents were asked to give a definition of politeness and give some examples of polite and impolite behavior. The second questionnaire designed in a form of Discourse Completion Task (DCT) was directed towards discursive data collection. The data were analysed drawing on Cultural Studies and Politeness

Theory with the focus on sociocultural, pragmatic and discursive approach to politeness. The questionnaires were emailed to 70 Bambara speakers and 50 replies were received

The findings have shown that Malian respondents in contrast to British ones represent we-culture and demonstrate we-identity (Larina et al. 2017). They value closeness, interdependence and solidarity rather than distance and independence observed in British culture (see e.g. Larina 2015, 2017, Watts 2003 among others). As a result, in contrast to British they understand politeness as demonstration of closeness, willingness to help and to spend some time together rather than keeping distance, showing good manners and respect to interlocutor's privacy.

The study argues that Malian understanding of politeness contributes to greater communicative accessibility of interlocutors and allows the participants in communicative events to behave more freely, openly, speak directly, which is not particularly favoured by the representatives of British culture and might be considered as imposition and violation of the norms of politeness. These communicative characteristics define dominant features of Bambara and British communicative styles.

The findings of this study once again confirm that it is impossible to neglect culture in the study of politeness. Politeness and culture are inseparable. People understand politeness in accordance with their cultural values and this understanding guides their behavior and shapes communicative styles.

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