

Where Malay Politeness is not Apparent: A Study of Front Counter Staff Interactions in Malaysian Public Hospitals

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Abstract

Although we know that stereotyping is not an accurate way to appreciate human beings, nevertheless, it is still used as a means to assess human behavior and consequently, misconceptions occur. One of the dominant groups living in Malaysia is the Malays who are often perceived more positively than others. Of the three dominant ethnic groups found in peninsular Malaysia, they are often described as a graceful community which places great emphasis on respect and care for the feeling of others and are imbued with refined behavior through appropriate upbringing and religious values. The Malay community tends to avoid conflicts and where possible, they would revert to peace. Often when expected to ask for things or to speak their minds, Malays would choose to put their meanings across indirectly or in a roundabout manner (Asmah Haji Omar, 1992; Jamaliah Mohd. Ali, 2000; Asma Abdullah and Pedersen, 2003; and Asrul Zamani, 2003) out of the need to maintain the face of the other party. The Malay community is quite cohesive in nature for many share the same religious beliefs and core values and 'bad' or 'poor' behavior is frowned upon because it reflects poor upbringing as others might interpret their poor behaviours negatively (Asrul Zamani, 2003). 'Bad' or 'poor' behavior implies behaving in ways that are not acceptable by society. This paper focuses on Malay Politeness as a notion of evaluation. The paper hopes to provide a reasonable justification to explain why some of these documented characteristics of the Malay community is less frequently manifested in the interactions of front counter Malay staffs observed in six public Malaysian hospitals. Spoken data were manually recorded and then transcribed into Roman alphabets for analysis and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory was adapted into the Malaysian context of politeness. Putting emphasis only on openings and closings in front counter services, our findings reveal that the Malay staffs are unconventional when interacting with outpatients. Possible reasons accounting for this phenomenon will be discussed in the paper.

Key words: Malay, polite, public hospitals, front counters, openings, interactions

Introduction

Politeness is an abstract concept but it is fundamentally linked to one's way of behavior or speech which is supposed to display proper etiquette of social behavior that is linked to showing good regard for other's feelings. When an individual demonstrates this quality via his speech or behaviour patterns, it can be deemed that that individual is being polite, hence socially acceptable. Irrespective of ethnicity, human behavior is often evaluated based on one's outward appearance like attire, speech and mannerisms and indirectly this places the individual as being of a higher or lower acceptability via society's norm. To be on the higher scale of acceptability implies that the individual concerned is relatively polite and vice versa. Aristocrats of most countries are expected to possess more refined manners than others because they are on the higher social scale. Likewise professionals and the educated groups may also be judged as being on the higher end of the society because they ought to be more refined, and so socially polite as a result of their profession and education. In the movie, 'My Fair Lady', the flower girl Eliza was depicted as a lower class individual but she was 'upgraded' by the professor who 'refined' her speech qualities. In hierarchical Malaysia, refinement and finesse is linked to class; the higher the class, the more refined the person is, and the more respect and social acceptability it creates. However, many on the lower social class may also be refined in their ways due to their upbringing. Refinement is reflected in how one behaves and carries oneself in public and inevitably, it cannot be divorced from speech behaviours. Further, in the Malaysian context, refinement of manners is an important factor for almost all the three ethnic communities but it is more so for the Malay society and community because it reflects their cultural values and upbringing. Although, refinement and finesse may seem to be a means

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used to gauge an individual's level of politeness, it is not true that the higher the class, the more refined the person or the lower the class the more uncouth the individual is. The term, class, is a subjective matter because as the world evolves and integrates class is now seen as connected to the amount of money one has in one's account, hence, it may not be an accurate gauge of human qualities. It would be more apt to say that a person's social grace including being polite is the result of his/her upbringing, cultural background and values instilled from young.

In Malaysia, the Malay community is depicted as a cohesive community probably because of their common and binding religion, Islam. In addition, the Malay culture is often perceived as a very refined society which emphasizes good breeding, proper mannerisms, and in the Malay terms, being *bersopan-santun*, *berbudi bahasa* and *beradab* which means being polite and refined.

Winston Churchill says that "Good-breeding is not confined to externals, much less to any particular dress or attitude of the body; it is the art of pleasing, or contributing as much as possible to the ease and happiness of those with whom you converse". The statement implies that one way to assess good breeding or politeness is through what one says. However, practices differ from one culture to another although in almost any society, there is a norm for what constitutes good breeding or politeness.

This paper aims to illustrate how Malay politeness is not apparent in the workplace environment of public hospitals. The findings of this paper seeks to demonstrate that stereotyping a particular culture is not healthy and more so at workplace environments such as public hospitals because the desire to project one's ethnic and cultural background may not be of importance as work demands take precedence.

Assumptions

In the context of this paper, politeness is described in terms of what one says to whom and in what context. In that sense, this paper focuses on linguistic politeness. Although cultural values are strongly embedded in the Malay community of Malaysia, we take the stand that people adjust to the environmental needs and more so in the workplace environment. We also take the stand that to manifest linguistic politeness would incur time because the

From the interactionist's perspective, the social environment is important and it cannot be refuted that the environment a person is in can affect how the person feels which in turn affects his/her thoughts and this indirectly influences the speech outcome.

Face threatening acts and Politeness

Brown and Levinson (1987) may have developed the concept of face and the theory of politeness in relation to face threatening acts where the face of the speaker or the hearer is at stake. They claim that certain actions might threaten the face of the hearer and they provide certain strategies which a speaker can use so as to mitigate such threatening acts. In social interactions face threatening acts can affect the outcome of the interactions.

In the Asian context, face threatening acts can be manifested verbally and non-verbally. In the Malaysian context which observes culture, values and hierarchy with intensity, face threatening acts are not encouraged because it denotes impoliteness. On the contrary, politeness is a much sought after quality and it is constantly ingrained into the citizens either by political campaigns or through media influence. From the various campaigns seen on televisions, Malaysia appears to be losing its grip on politeness. Not only are there numerous posters promoting polite practices in public and at work, television viewers are also constantly bombarded by similar advertisements under the façade of documentaries, dramas, advertisements and also sitcoms. Of late, Malaysia is also registering a high level of incidents which involve physical assaults carried out by primary and secondary school children including girls, road hooligans, *Mat Rempits*, (motorcyclist gangsters) as well as maids and employers. Malaysian political members seem to have the way (see Ngeow, Kuang and David, 2010) (2009) as they call each other names and label their opponents with animal names without any qualms.

Notion of Being polite

To be polite means to possess social grace and in social interactions, members do not carry out deeds or articulate words that are socially unacceptable. Similarly, members also make the effort to conform to the rules of social interactions that is, they provide evidence of their socially accepted ways by performing certain rituals. For instance, when one member meets another member, he/she can convey his/her social graces either verbally or nonverbally. From the former perspective, it can be a greeting of 'Hello or Hi', 'Good morning/afternoon/evening', '*Ni hao*', '*Assalamualaikum*', '*Apa Khabar*' or it can be an appropriate response to a vocalized thought which may be depicted by the examples below:

Malaysia is a very hierarchical society (see Hoefsted, 19...) and people talk tend to move around these areas. Titles are used often to show the social distance, and kinship terms are often employed to display politeness. In many cases, Malaysians also expect people to greet each, show some level of respect through eye contact or the language used. In addition, Malaysians dislike any form of impoliteness.

Politeness, thereof, its nemesis, impoliteness is an abstract notion because one cannot provide tangible measurements of politeness as Grade A, B, or C. However, in the context of people interactions, it is quite safe to say that people can be extremely polite or extremely obnoxious (impolite). Using this scale as an assessment, it is thus assumed that politeness can be assessed as polite, semi polite or way out impolite.

Polite refers to various strategies of communication including greetings, use of appropriate kinship terms, some sign of concern through tone although in the context of this study, tone was not focused. Nonverbal gestures like smiles, handshakes, and other caring movements are also considered as polite. Any absence of this followed by no eye contact or desire of speaker to offer help to the other party who requires the service is considered as impolite. Any degree between the two continuum is considered as semi polite.

Table 1: Model of Politeness in verbal transactions in the Malaysian context

A:	How are you?
B:	I am fine, thank you.
A:	<i>Assalamualaikum</i> (Arabic: I bring peace in my greeting.)
B:	<i>Mualaikum Salam</i> (Arabic: I give you peace in mine.)
A:	<i>Siensheng, ni hao.</i> (Mandarin: How are you sir?)
B:	<i>Ni hao.</i> (Mandarin: I am fine, how are you.)
A:	Good morning, aunty/uncle/ <i>makchik/pakchik/dik/kak</i> etc.
B:	Morning.

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in social interactions, initial responses on meeting another member of the society may also be in nonverbal forms such as looking at one's face on meeting and then smiling (not avoiding), nodding, waving, paying silent attention to the other member or person while in conversations is also a form of politeness because it shows acknowledgement of the presence of the other. In most cultures, politeness is a sign of respect and more so in the Malaysian context which often talks about showing respect for others. To show respect for another is another way of being polite socially although it is not clear if there is such a thing as being polite personally despite the concept of showing respect for self.

The Malay community

In the Malaysian context, communication can be of two main modes: direct or indirect. However, if politeness needs to be projected in order to illustrate respect for the other, then indirectness is the preferred mode in social interactions. Of the three dominant ethnic groups found in Malaysia, the Chinese are often depicted as being more direct, that is straightforward in the way they talk and convey their message and the Malays are often illustrated to be more indirect, that is they take the roundabout way to relay their meanings. The Malay community is also perceived as being more collective in nature bound by one common religion, Islam. It is also the more traditional of the three main ethnic communities because its cultural values seem to be more clearly manifested in the way they live and so, it is not surprising that the Malay culture is better documented than any others in this country. However, what are the major characteristics of the Malay community?

Asrul's (2003) description of the Malaysian Malays include words like tolerant, humble and unassuming. He has also said that they are people who have great hospitality and he has even developed an analogy linking the Malay's hospitality where 'even a monkey in the jungle is breastfed while her own children can go hungry' (Asrul, 2003, p. 50). Another characteristic of the Malaysian Malays are their high tolerance level and Asrul (2003) suggests that the Malays are so tolerant and accommodative that when approached by a less fluent Malay speaker like a Chinese or Indian, they would even switch to the manner of speech of the other party so as to suit their needs. Nonetheless, this is not without its drawbacks for Asrul claims that this has detrimental effects, but what exactly, Asrul did not define. Asrul was probably talking about the ideal Malay characteristics.

Sometime ago, Mahathir Mohammad produced a book and in it, he talks about the negative traits of the Malays one of which was their ability to 'forget easily'. When Mahathir was writing about this, he was referring to the modern Malays who in acquiring education from overseas had become so outspoken and bold that they sometimes overstep their boundaries and this has upset the more senior political leaders.

Asmah Haji Omar (1992) and Jamaliah Mohd. Ali (1995, 2000), two local scholars describe the Malays as people who have more refined manners, often taking care to say things in a manner that would not upset the other party. To say things upfront is seen as discourteous hence, most Malays would either refrain from saying something negative directly or if they have to, they may say it in a roundabout manner (Asmah Haji Omar, 1992). Malay people also abide by their customs and culture quite strongly so the use of particular greetings like 'assalamualikum', and 'Bismillah' are quite commonly heard between themselves. With other ethnicities, Malay people may revert to using common Malaysian terms like 'Good morning' and 'How are you' as social greetings.

David and Kuang (1999, 2005) have also found professional Malay staff to be indirect even in writing memos or emails while in looking at how Malay participants take compliments, Thilagavathi (2003) also discovered them to be less direct, choosing to downgrade themselves mostly when being complimented.

However, Lailawati (2005) claims that as the Malay people become more exposed to other cultures particularly through foreign education and media, the Malay people may also have become more individualistic. Lailawati (2005) carried out a small study to indicate that Malaysians are moving away from their high culture context to a low culture context and she mentions that people are influenced by other values which are picked up from travelling or influence. Her data show that Malaysians have moved along that continuum. This is not a surprising finding as psychologists like Bond and Hwang (1988) have discussed how the immigrant Chinese and their descendants' way of life had changed over the years due to their exposure to other cultures as well as the development of technology they experience in the host countries where they have emigrated to.

Otherwise, Ling (1995) who described the Malaysian Chinese ways did not deny the fact that some values are still being practiced by the immigrant Chinese in Malaysia but overall, many have also changed their lifestyles and values were compromised in some ways. As a result, although Confucianism might be the way of life for the family, nonetheless, exposure to other cultures and education have changed how they behave. Kuang (2007) and Kuang and David (2010) have also shown that young Malaysian Chinese have also become less and less like their fathers.

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Ahmad and Hussain (2006) who discuss how Malays values have influenced their decision making in purchasing goods also mention that Malay people carry certain characteristics which are quite unlike their Malaysian Chinese or Indian counterparts. All these reports have an influence over how people communicate and the findings of this study might just help to support that point.

Framework for analysis

Data will be analysed from only one perspective, politeness, thus data will be categorized as polite, semi-polite or impolite. As a continuum it is fair to say that where the data provides clear-cut instances of opening which are accompanied by greetings, use of appropriate titles or kinship terms which are also linked with high regard and respect, the data is termed as polite. Tone is not considered here due to the lack of facility to measure. Both verbal and nonverbal instances are also categorised likewise. Where some inclination of care and concern by the speaker is shown in enquiries or eye contact or handshake, it is categorised as semi polite. Any instance of an opening which illustrates a lack of these elements is thus seen as impolite.

Analysis of data

From the observations conducted of the transactions occurring between staff and patients, it appears that both verbal and nonverbal modes were employed. Each verbal interaction recorded may have both openings and closings made by either the hospital staff or by patients or one of these may be absent. The verbal transaction may be as short as single words like 'yes?' and 'no' or it may consist of greetings and then the actual conversation proper where the purpose of the transaction is performed. The nonverbal transactions comprise silence and some level of body gestures. Of the observations conducted on front counter transactions of staff in public hospitals, a total of 146 transactions was extracted for analysis. From the total, 64 (43.83%) of the transactions show that openings had been initiated by staff while 82 (56.16%) of the transactions were initiated by patients. This phenomenon is quite unlike normal public or social transactions offering services to the public.

The data, nevertheless, implies that Malaysian public hospital staff are less conventional with conversation openings. From the 64 openings initiated by staff, a pattern was also emerging. It was found that 19 (29.68%) of the openings could be described as polite, 13 (20.31%) could be labeled as semi polite, and 32 (50%) were considered as clearly impolite. This statistics suggest that most of the instances were impolite thus it may be seen as an indicator that front counter public hospital staff are generally impolite. Data is also presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Statistics of openings of staff

Polite	Verbal	18	19
	Nonverbal	1	
Semi polite	Verbal	12	13
	Nonverbal	1	
Impolite	Verbal	31	32
	Nonverbal	1	
Total instances of openings recorded			64

Table 2 also indicates that from the 64 openings located, 3 are nonverbal with only 1 case being a handshake conducted between two male participants. None was detected from the female participants. With more than three quarters or 62 of the transactions being verbal, it is thus deduced that words are an important aspect of openings in social transactions carried out in hospital front counters. Further, data shown in Table 2 imply that the majority of public hospital staff are more impolite than polite with half of them (32) being impolite and only around a quarter or 16.8% being polite and about 20.31% considered as semi polite. It is possible that public hospitals are much sought after by patients/clients on the lower wage scale, thus they would be more overwhelmed by work pressure, demands and stress. This could have indirectly impacted on their social skills and in this case the use of polite openings.

Our data also indicate that the majority of openings which can be considered as polite could be traced to our set of data which had come from two public hospitals that were located on the outskirts of the country. Illustrations are provided to show the kinds of polite or impolite openings being practised.

Table 3: Categories of Openings

Categories	Examples
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1. Polite (Verbal):	Greeting, offer help formally, uses appropriate address forms (egs. Uncle/aunty/pakchik/makchik/dik/kak).
2. Polite (Nonverbal):	Smile, Handshake.
3. Semi polite (Verbal)	Offers help informally (<i>Ya, ada apa hal?</i>)
4. Semi polite Nonverbal):	Smiles, nods then goes directly into the transaction like asking a question. No greetings or offer of help. Goes , goes directly into the transaction.
5. Impolite (Verbal):	Action that avoids eye contact or give any response to patients/clients.
6. Impolite (Nonverbal):	

Data is presented to illustrate some of the examples which were detected from the study. The column on the left indicates the turn of the utterances selected from the data, S refers to the staff and P refers to the patient/client involved in the transaction, gender and age were noted but this is not relevant at this stage of discussion. Translation provided for non-English data. The following section displays some examples of openings which are considered as polite and impolite.

Table 4: Examples Polite Verbal Openings

Turns	Transactions
5	S: Pagi, apa yang boleh saya bantu? (Good morning, can I help you?) P: Tumpang tanya mana tandas? (Excuse me, where is the toilet?)
7	S: Assalamualaikum. (smiles) (Greetings.) P: Mualaikum salam. (smiles) (Greetings.)
8	S: Ya, apa yang boleh saya bantu? (smiles) (Yes, how may I help?) P: Ya, cik, selamat pagi. (smiles) (Yes, miss, good morning.)
23	S: Good morning. P: Good Morning. I would like to go to wad <i>bersalin</i> (maternity ward), so should I go to this way?
10	S: Ya, <i>pakcik</i> ada apa hal? (Yes, uncle, what is the problem?) P: <i>Pakcik nak tanya</i> , (Uncle would like to enquire) <i>parking sini dah penuh</i> (all the parking bays here are full) <i>jadi kereta boleh letak kat mane lagi?</i> (therefore, where else can the car be parked?)
	S: Pagi. (Morning) P: Good morning. Saya nak buat blood test. (I want to do a blood test.) Sini ada buat tak? (Do you do it here?)
	S: Assalamualaikum. (dengan senyuman) (Greetings.) P: Mualaikum salam. (Greetings.) <i>Nak jumpa doktor ni.</i> (I want to see the doctor.) <i>Dah demam sehari, takut dapat denggi ni.</i> (I have been ill for a day, am afraid I get dengue.)
	S: Ya, pagi. (Yes morning.) P: Kak, (sister) <i>selamat pagi</i> (good morning). <i>Saya nak ambil report blood test.</i> (I want to take the report of my blood test.)

Note that Table 4 illustrates openings which made use of a number of elements:

- greetings (good morning, *assalamualaikum*, *pagi*)
- offer to help (can I help you, *ya*)
- enquiry (what is the problem)
- uses address forms (*pakchik*)

Table 5: Examples of Semi polite Verbal Openings

S: <i>Nak apa dik?</i> (Yes, brother, what do you want?)
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	P: Nak ambil resit. (I want to collect my receipt.)
03	S: Ya? (Yes? What can I do for you?)
	P: <i>Nak ambil ubat.</i> (I want to collect my medication.)

The examples illustrated in Table 5 are minimal instances and this suggests that this category of polite openings is not used frequently among the hospital staff. In the data presented in Table 5, it seems clear that the staff used openings which attempt to make an enquiry through the question form as in 'yes brother, what do you want?' and 'Yes, what can I do for you?'. The reason these two examples are deemed semi-polite is because both were preceded by an address form for example *dik* in Turn 78 and also because it offers a 'yes' as a form of acknowledging the presence of the patient as shown in 'yes'?

Table 6: Examples of Impolite Verbal Openings

2	S: Kamarul Hisham. P: (<i>Pesakit datang ke depan kaunter.</i>) (Patient walks to counter.)
05	S: Ambil ubat ini tiga kali sehari, masa lepas waktu makan. (Take this medicine three times daily after meals.) P: <i>Ubat ni lepas makan rasa mengantuk tak?</i> (Does the medicine make me drowsy?)
29	S: <i>Sudah bayar belum?</i> (Have you paid?) (Melihat borang pesakit. Staff scrutinizes form of patient.) P: <i>Sudah.</i> (Already.)
40	S: <i>IC nombor?</i> (Identify card number?) P: <i>Nanti ya</i> (Just a minute) 590709-xx-xxxx
9	S: <i>Nak apa?</i> (What do you want?) P: <i>Saya nak ambil resit.</i> (I want receipt.)
1	S: <i>Kenapa?</i> (What's wrong?) P: <i>Pening.</i> (Dizzy.)
4	S: <i>Kenapa?</i> (What's wrong?) P: <i>Demam panas tarik</i> (Have sunstroke.)

Data presented in Table 6 illustrate examples of impolite verbal openings. Note that the opening is considered impolite because they lack the elements used by polite verbal openings such as greetings, use of address forms, acknowledgement of patient's presence and also because it begins quite abruptly. The deficiency had been compromised through the use of directness such as:

- calling a patient/client by name as in roll call,
- giving instructions
- asking if transaction has been paid for
- identification
- crude enquiry (what do you want, what's wrong)

It appears that instances of impolite verbal opening are comparatively high and this could mean that at the workplace, social graces are overwhelmed by the need to get work done.

Table 7: Examples of Polite Non-verbal Openings

9	S: (smiles) Very pack today. P: One zero six.
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Note that only three instances of nonverbal openings were detected and this is one example of politeness being expressed through the nonverbal gesture of a smile followed by a personal comment. Due to the facial expression conveyed by the staff, the smile without words is deemed polite.

Table 8: Examples of Impolite Non-verbal Openings

	P: (passes the form) S: (talks a lot...)
0	P: (gives the form to the staff.) S: (returns the form.)
5	P: (gives bill) S: (takes bill and works on the computer)
7	P: (gives bill & money) S: (works on the computer and later gives change)

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39	P: (gives a document) S: (accepts bill) P: (gives money)
76	The staff takes the card from the lady and keep on talk to the staff sit beside her when she process the card. After that, she returns the card to that lady without said anything. The ladies also leave after collect the card without any word.

As is obvious, the transactions shown in Table 8 illustrate information that had been communicated to the patient/client without any use of words. Although silence here assumes the duty of speech and the expectations of both parties are impliedly understood, we take this application of silence as being impolite. Wong (2010) who looked and concluded from the kind of silence engaged by the Japanese and British subjects that silence may be employed within a communication process to depict particular meanings. Some silence, such as those observed by Japanese could be positive as in showing agreement or to maintain harmony but in the case of the British, it could be to show displeasure or disagreement. In the case of our findings, we do not think that the silence projected in the above transactions depict positiveness or negativeness. Rather, the silence was employed within their work context out of choice. Silence, was probably used to illustrate that lack of necessity to use words and this may be attributed to the nature of their job, their mental state of health at that moment and possibly due to their physical condition. We also come to the conclusion that in a high culture context, silence between parties within a transaction that involves a social context is not a preferred mode as people, such as Malaysians, like to have some sense of being appreciated or respect. This can often be gauged from the use of greetings, address forms or even an enquiry to show acknowledgement of the presence of the other. Thus, such types of openings were categorized as impolite.

Besides openings, this paper will also discuss the use of closings which will also be categorized by the elements shown in Table 9 below. . Examples are further illustrated.

Table 9: Categories of closings by staff

Polite	Verbal	27	27
	Nonverbal	0	
Semi polite	Verbal	3	12
	Nonverbal	9	
Impolite	Verbal	7	7
	Nonverbal	0	
Total instances recorded			46

From Table 9, it is clear that of the total observations made of the six public hospitals, only 46 of the transactions unveiled consist of closings, indicating that staff of public hospitals applied less closings. It is deduced that as a closure to a transaction, closings provide patients/clients with a sense of being respected or appreciated but clearly this is less practiced by hospital front counter staff of public hospitals. Of the 46 closings detected, 9 were nonverbal, indicating that 35 or 76.08% were verbal cases. Of this category, 27 or 58.69% were considered polite, 12 or 26.08% were considered as semi polite and 7 or 15.22% were deemed impolite. These figures indicate that, as a whole, Malaysian public hospital staff are generally more polite than impolite.

The tables below will shed light on the practice of closings by hospital staff and some examples are also provided in table 10.

Table 10 : Examples of Polite Verbal closings

27	P: (gives IC) S: <i>Terima kasih.</i> (Thank you.)
35	P: <i>Terima kasih noh.</i> (Thank you yes.) S: <i>Terima kasih. Bye.</i> (Thank you.)
36	P: <i>Terima kasih noh.</i> (Thank you yes.) S: <i>Sama</i> (Welcome)
73	P: <i>Terima kasih.</i> (Thank you.) S: <i>Sama-sama.</i> (Welcome.)
88	P: <i>Macam tu?</i> (Like that?) <i>Saya datang sekejap lagi...</i> (I will come later on .) <i>Terima kasih.</i> (Thank you.) S: <i>Sama.</i> (smiles) (Welcome.)

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92	P: Thank you. S: Welcome.
94	P: (Memberikan kad pengenalan kepada pegawai kaunter.) (Patient gives identity card to staff at the counter.) S: (Menyalin maklumat pesakit lalu memulangkan kad pengenalan kepada pesakit.) (Staff takes down particulars and then returns identity card to patient.) S: <i>Sila duduk dulu.</i> (smiles) (Please take a seat first.)
97	P: Ok. Thank you. S: Welcome.
118	P: Ok. Thank you. S: <i>Sama sama.</i> (Welcome.)

In this paper, it is stressed that the closings appear to be initiated by the patients who probably were very appreciative of the services or as a result of custom and habit. In that sequence, it could be said that closings, considered as polite markers here were not proactively created by the staff. Their responses were to reciprocate to the patients' closings. It seems clear that the elements present in these polite closings are simply :

Thank you
Welcome

Table 11: Examples of Semi Polite verbal closings

84	P: (give money) S: Ok.
98	P: Thanks. S: Ok.

Table 11 illustrates examples of semi-polite closings used by hospital staffs. From the examples given, it appears that this category of closing is also seldom used in practice and it is possible that staff attending to the patients had limited things to say other than 'ok' which is considered an acknowledgement. Thus, even though it may not be seen as polite, the fact that the staff showed acknowledgement implies that it is an attempt, thus it is categorised as semi-polite.

Table 12: Semi Polite Nonverbal closings

7	P: Ok, thank you. (take the balance) S: (nods)
34	P: <i>Terima kasih</i> S: (nods)
44	P: <i>Terima kasih.</i> S: (smiles)
74	P: <i>Oh, terima kasih ah.</i> (smile) S: <i>Ah</i> (smile)

It is common in the semi-polite category of openings, the practice of using semi-polite closings also seemed to be preferred hence, the small set of examples elicited. Data in Table 12 also show that hospital staff attending to patients are making attempts to reciprocate to the patients. Hence by the use of nonverbal means, their movements were considered as semi-polite because there were some body gestures to acknowledge the patients either with a nod of head or a smile.

Table 13: Impolite Verbal Closings

81	P: Thank you. S: <i>Duduk dulu, nanti kita panggil.</i>
102	P: <i>Hari ni ada appointment dengan dia.</i> S: <i>Duduk dulu, nanti kita panggil.</i>
115	P: <i>Sini.</i> (Memberikan kertas kepada pegawai kaunter.) S: <i>Duduk dulu, nanti saya panggil.</i>

Impolite closings refer to those transactions where serving staff gave directives to patients which in these three cases shown in Table 13 probably illustrate their impatience. Their directives basically instruct patients to be seated until they are called,

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Discussion of Findings

This paper argues that front counter staff in public hospitals are less conscious about social manners, in this case, politeness. The paper also attempts to indicate that due to work demands, social politeness is not in place and as a result of the findings, this paper seems to highlight that front counter staff of public hospitals used less openings and closings, both of which were treated as markers of social grace or politeness in the Malaysian context.

Table 14: Results of study

No.	Phenomenon	Frequency
1	Transactions with polite or semi polite opening and closing	23 (15.75%)
2	Transactions without polite or semi polite opening and closing	84 (57.53%)
3	Transactions with polite openings but no polite closings OR Transactions with polite closings but no polite openings	39 (26.71%)
	TOTAL:	146 (100%)

Table 14 is a summary of the findings from the study. It appears that out of the 146 instances of public transactions recorded from the observations of six public hospitals, only 23 (15.75%) were started by the staff and ended by the staff. Conversely, 84 (57.53%) of them were without any polite or semi-polite openings or closings. This indication implies that most front counter Malay staff on duty in Malaysian government hospitals do not start nor end their transactions/conversations politely. The data show that in most cases, it was often the patients who would greet or start or interrupt the staff by addressing the staff first. 39 (26.71%) were those transactions with either one polite opening or polite closing but not both.

In addition, data also suggest that the government hospital staff would ask for patients' details of information directly when needed. To do this, they might also give instructions or directions openly to the patients or they might also interrogate the patients directly without any form of opening.

Looking at the use of closings, it was also found that the front counter staff of public hospitals do not make it a point to thank the patients at the end of the transaction/conversation. In most cases, it appears that the patients would thank the staff by saying 'thank you' or 'terima kasih' first before they are reciprocated to by the staff either with 'welcome', 'OK' or 'sama-sama'.

To some extent, the data extracted and analysed suggest that the hospital staff of the east coast hospitals seemed to emphasise on the use of appropriate openings and closings but this has not been highlighted in the data presented above. The findings is small but it could indicate that hospital staff from the east coast may have more tolerance level which explains why they provided more openings and closings considered as polite. However, the limited data may need to be substantiated with further observations and more extensive data. Clearly, such a characteristic was not exhibited by the hospital staff of the other hospitals observed.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to show the use of openings and closings as markers of politeness. Data analysed were based on the observation of six public hospitals in Malaysia and data clearly indicate that in public or social transactions incurring front hospital staff serving patients the use of openings and closings are below the mark of expectations as those services offered by banks, travel agents or hotels. By the nature of the demand of their work, it appears that public hospital front counter staff are not able to execute the social characteristics of their culture and in this case, Malay politeness that has been asserted by various literature reports or studies. Clearly, the work demand exceeds the need to engage in social graces thus, data analysed has shown very obviously that the use of openings and closings as markers of politeness by public hospital staff is less common. Of the number of transactions analysed, it appears that less than a quarter instances contained both polite openings and closings. More than half of the data (57.53%) of these transactions were considered impolite because they were devoid of the two markers of politeness. This study comprises only six public hospitals out of many in the country and thus the findings may not be used to generalize. Further research may need to be conducted to substantiate the claims made by this paper.

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**Where Malay Politeness is not Apparent:
A Study of Front Counter Staff Interactions in Malaysian Public Hospitals**

(3rd International Conference in Multicultural Discourses, Hangzhou, China, August 27-29, 2010)

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Outline

- Background of Malaysia
- Aim
- Methodology
- Definition of politeness
- Previous descriptions of the Malays
- Findings/analysis
- Conclusion

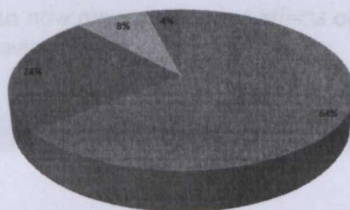
Introduction

Malaysia is:

- Multiracial – Malays, Chinese, Indians, others
- Multicultural- different cultures and festivals
- Multilingual – Malay, English, Mandarin, Tamil, regional dialects
- Hierarchical – There is a king and then sultans.
- Malaysia also confer titles like *Datuk, Tun, Tan Sri*

Demographics of Malaysia

Demographics of Malaysia
 ■ Malays ■ Chinese ■ Indians ■ others



Aim

- This paper looks at the extent of Malay politeness by focussing on front counter staff of government hospitals and their interactions with patients.
- To do that, the study thus looks at two structures of conversations:
 - Openings
 - Closings
- We wanted to see if the politeness norms of the Malay staff would be maintained in the workplace environment like hospitals.

- So how did we go about doing the job?

Methodology

- We observed 6 Malaysian government hospitals because 97% of staff would be Malays.
- We focussed on front counter interactions only – both verbal and non-verbal.
- We manually recorded our data.
- We used the broad conventions for transcribing data.
- We provided some apparent background details of the participants.

Background of Malaysian hospitals

The 6 public Malaysian hospitals were those in the peninsular:

- 2 from the north,
- 1 from the centre (capital),
- 1 from the south, and
- 2 from the east coast of peninsular Malaysia.

Majority of staff in the 6 hospitals are Malays but the patients were of various ethnicities.

Politeness is.....

- Let us now move on to what affects our behaviour at large?

Psychological perspective

Human behaviour is governed by the mind, and the thought affects the emotion which in turn affects the behavior including the speech outcome.

Based on this, it can thus be deduced that how one thinks affects how one behaves and eventually, it determines what kind of words would be articulated.

Interactionist perspective

- It cannot be refuted that the environment a person is in can affect how the person feels
- and this in turn affects his/her thoughts
- thus, they indirectly influence the speech outcome and also behaviour.

In the context of this paper

- We define politeness as the projection of good
- Having talked about how the human behaviour is affected, let us now move on to the definition of **POLITENESS**
- It can be verbal or non-verbal
- In the Malaysian context, a polite person is highly regarded and found more attractive.

Some understanding of politeness

- Politeness is an abstract concept.
- It is more easily seen but difficult to define.
- One's politeness can be gauged through one's verbal and non-verbal means like behaviour, attire, jewellery, and other embellishments.
- Politeness varies from culture to culture: What is polite to one society may be impolite to another.

Examples

- 1) The slurping of noodles is encouraged in the Japanese society but frowned upon among westerners and Malaysians.
- 2) Burping is a sign of appreciation for food among the Arabs but it is disliked by Asians.
- 3) Silence is respected by the Japanese but is found awkward by the westerners.
- 4) Directness is being frank among westerners but it is seen as face-threatening by Malaysians.

"Politeness is....."

"**Politeness** is developed by societies in order to reduce friction in personal interaction"

(Lakoff 1975:64)

"**Politeness** is the set of social values which instructs interactants to consider each other by satisfying shared experiences"

(Sifanou, 1992:86)

continue

"**Politeness** is a complex system for softening face threats"

(Brown and Levinson, 1978)

"**Politeness** is one of the constraints on human interaction and whose purpose is to consider others' feelings, establish levels of mutual comfort and promote rapport"

(Hill et al 1986:349)

The dictionary defines politeness

as

- The exhibition of considerate regard for others, i.e. being **courteous**.
- To be **courteous** simply means you avoid offending others and to do that you might have to refrain from being your true self i.e. if you feel like telling someone off for asking a stupid question, you don't because you are being courteous.

In the context of this paper

- We define politeness as the projection of good manners that are acceptable in the Malaysian society.
- It can be verbal or non-verbal.
- In the Malaysian context, a polite person is highly regarded and found more attractive.

Examples:

- Greetings/salutations (Good morning, Hello)
- The use of terms of address (Sir, Madam, uncle, aunty)
- Enquiry (Yes? Can I help you?)
- Positive facial expressions (Smiles, eye contact)

What are Malaysians like?

- Malaysians have often been described as hospitable, warm and friendly.
- Malaysians would generally welcome strangers to their homes without an iota of suspicion.
- Malaysians would go out of their way to make a stranger feel welcome.
- They also seem to go that extra mile to put their visitors at ease and many would refrain from offending them.

Norms in Malaysian ways

- Use greetings/salutations (Eaten already?)
- Use terms of address (Good morning, uncle!)
- Make eye contact, smiling, nodding
- Offer to help (Do you need any help?)
- Exhibiting high regard for others through appropriate behaviour.

For example, previously

- We used to offer our guests the best food in the house even though we may be deprived,
- We also used to offer guests our best rooms in the home to make our guests feel comfortable
- We would also avoid saying rude things to our guests even though they may be obnoxious.

But, TODAY, things have changed..

- I am not sure if all these are still happening in society.
- Honestly speaking, although I still follow some of these practices, I may occasionally speak my mind when my patience wears thin with my guests.

Continue

- Let us now move to some background knowledge about Malaysia.

Background of Malaysia

Malaysia is a very hierarchical society (see Hoefsted, 1984) and interactions among people talk tend to move around these areas.

Titles are used often to show the social distance, and kinship terms are often employed to display politeness.

continue

In most cases, Malaysians tend to focus on politeness quite a lot and many Malaysians still expect people to greet each other and to show some level of respect through eye contact.

In addition, Malaysians dislike any form of aggression such as rudeness in speech, and behaviours like excessive honking of car horns, shouting, arguing in public are still frowned upon.

Communication mode in Malaysia

In the Malaysian context,

communication can be either direct or indirect but it probably depends on where the person comes from.

“Face” is an important aspect of one’s dignity so any face-threatening acts is often mitigated through indirectness.

However,

- Different ethnic groups may behave in slightly different modes.
- In this paper we focus on the Malay community.

The Malay community

- The Malay community forms the bulk of the population of this country and their history is often traced back to the formation of Malacca in the 1400s.
- The behaviour of the Malay community is thus traced back to the relationship of the aristocracy and the common people of the sultanate in the early days.

Continue study

- The Malays are often described as a refined group due to their tendency to maintain decorum especially when hierarchy is involved.
- It is also part of the Malay family training to instil good values in their children and these values are based on their religion, Islam, in their children.

Continue

- Malay children are taught to respect their elders from young and to be kind and humble.
- They are also taught to avoid conflicts and
- To be helpful to those who need their help.
- Thus, the Malays are often seen as gentle, polite, respectful, kind and often very indirect in their linguistic forms.

Malay hospitality

- Asrul's (2002) description of the Malaysian Malays include words like tolerant, humble and unassuming.
- He also said that the Malay people have great hospitality and he used one analogy to describe this:
- "even a monkey in the jungle is breastfed while her own children can go hungry"
- (Asrul, 2002, p. 150).

Malay refinement

Asmah (1992) and Jamaliah (1995, 2000), two local scholars describe the Malays

"as people who have more refined manners, often taking care to say things in a manner that would not upset the other party"

To say things upfront is seen as discourteous hence, most Malays would either refrain from saying something negative directly or if they have to, they may say it in a roundabout manner (Asmah, 1992).

Malay greetings

Malay people also abide by their customs and culture quite strongly.

In their greetings with each other, the use of particular greetings such as '*assalamualaikum*' and '*insyallah*' are quite commonly heard between themselves.

With other ethnicities, Malay people may revert to using common Malaysian terms like 'Good morning' and 'How are you' as social greetings.

Malay Indirectness

David and Kuang (1999, 2005):

- found that professional Malay staff tend to be indirect even in writing memos or emails,

Thilagavathi (2003):

- detected that Malay women were less direct when given compliments by others, choosing to downgrade themselves mostly when being complimented.

Lailawati and her study

Lailawati (2005) claims that

- as the Malay people become more exposed to other cultures particularly through foreign education and media, the Malay people may also have become more individualistic.

continue

- Lailawati (2005) carried out a small study to indicate that Malaysians are moving away from their high culture context to a low culture context.
- She mentions that people are influenced by other values which are picked up from traveling or influence.
- Her data show that Malaysians have moved along that continuum

Ahmad and Hussain

- Ahmad and Hussain (2006) who discuss how Malay values have influenced their decision-making in purchasing goods also mention that Malay people carry certain characteristics which are quite unlike their Malaysian Chinese or Indian counterparts.
- All these reports have an influence over how people communicate and the findings of their study might just help to support that point.

Data Analysis

- In this study, we consider Malay politeness in the Malaysian context based on what is acceptable in the Malaysian environment.
- One way to detect politeness is through greetings and closings.
- In looking at openings and closings, we also look for greetings, use of appropriate address terms, offer of help, non-verbal approachability through eye contact and smiles.

Continue

Data will be categorized as

- (1) polite,
- (2) semi-polite,
- (3) impolite.

Criteria

- Using greetings is considered **polite**
- Using nonverbal gestures like smiles, handshakes, and other caring movements are also considered as **polite**.
- Giving eye contact is also **polite**.
- Absence of the above is considered **impolite**.
- Any degree between the two continuum is considered as **semi-polite**.

Initial contact and responses

- Below are some of the expectations of social responses on meeting a new member of society:
- Looking at one's face to acknowledge one's presence
- Smiling
- Nodding of head
- Waving or shaking of hand
- Listening

Sample Table

1.	A: How are you? B: I am fine, thank you.
2.	A: <i>Assalamualaikum</i> (Arabic: I bring peace in my greeting.) B: <i>Mualaikumsalam</i> (Arabic: I give you peace in mine.)
3.	A: <i>Xiansheeng, ni hao ma?</i> (Mandarin: How are you sir?) B: <i>Wo hern hao, ni hao ma?</i> (Mandarin: I am fine, how are you?)
4.	A: Good morning, aunty / uncle / <i>Imakcik / pakcik / dik / kak</i> etc. B: Morning.

- We shall now look at the general outcome of the data.

OPENINGS

•A total of 147 instances of transactions were elicited but only 64 of these transactions contained openings.

•Of this, less than half or only 43.84% of them contained openings which had been initiated by staff.

•56.16% were initiated by patients. (Table 1 is provided.)

Table 1:

Polite	Verbal	18	19
	Nonverbal	1	
Semi polite	Verbal	12	13
	Nonverbal	1	
Impolite	Verbal	31	32
	Nonverbal	1	
Total:			64

Continue

- From the 64 instances, 3 were nonverbal with only 1 case being a handshake conducted between two male participants.
- None was detected from the female participants.
- More than three quarter(s) or 61 instances of the transactions were verbal.
- Thus, it is deduced that words are an important aspect of openings in social transactions carried out in hospital front counters.

Continue

- Our data suggest that:
- 50% of the front counter hospital staff were considered as impolite,
- 29.69% were considered polite, and
- 20.31% were considered semi polite.

- Based on what????

- We provide the categories and examples

Categories	Examples
1. Polite (Verbal)	Greeting, offer help formally, uses appropriate address forms (egs. uncle / aunty / <i>pakcik / makcik / dik / kak</i>).
2. Polite (Nonverbal)	Smiles and handshake.
3. Semi polite (Verbal)	Offers help informally (<i>Ya, ada apa hal?</i>)
4. Semi polite (Nonverbal)	Smiles, nods then goes directly into the transaction like asking a question.
5. Impolite (Verbal)	No greetings or offer of help. Goes directly into the transaction.
6. Impolite (Nonverbal)	Action that avoids eye contact or give any response to patients/clients.

- Examples of polite verbal openings used

Turns	Transactions
85	S: <i>Pagi, apa yang boleh saya bantu?</i> (Good morning, can I help you?) P: <i>Tumpang tanya mana tandas?</i> (Excuse me, where is the toilet?)
87	S: <i>Assalamualaikum.</i> (smiles) (Greetings.) P: <i>Mualaikum salam.</i> (smiles) (Greetings.)
88	S: <i>Ya, apa yang boleh saya bantu?</i> (smiles) (Yes, how may I help?) P: <i>Ya, cik, selamat pagi.</i> (smiles) (Yes, miss, good morning,)
123	S: Good morning. P: Good Morning. I would like to go to wad <i>bersalin</i> (maternity ward), so should I go to this way?

110	S: <i>Ya, pakcik ada apa hal?</i> (Yes, uncle, what is the problem?) P: <i>Pakcik nak tanya,</i> (Uncle would like to enquire) <i>parking sini dah penuh</i> (all the parking bays here are full) <i>jadi kereta boleh letak kat mane lagi?</i> (therefore, where else can the car be parked?)
94	S: <i>Pagi.</i> (Morning) P: Good morning. <i>Saya nak buat</i> blood test. (I want to do a blood test.) <i>Sini ada buat tak?</i> (Do you do it here?)
95	S: <i>Assalamualaikum.</i> (smiles) (Greetings.) P: <i>Mualaikum salam.</i> (Greetings.) <i>Nak jumpa doktor ni.</i> (I want to see the doctor.) <i>Dah demam sehari, takut dapat denggi ni.</i> (I have been ill for a day, am afraid I get dengue.)
91	S: <i>Ya, pagi.</i> (Yes morning.) P: <i>Kak,</i> (sister) <i>selamat pagi</i> (good morning). <i>Saya nak ambil report blood test.</i> (I want to take the report of my blood test.)

*Closings provide patients/clients with a sense of being respected or appreciated but clearly this is less practiced by hospital front counter staff of public hospitals.

*However, from our observations made of the 6 government hospitals, hospital staff seemed to use more closings. Of the 46 instances elicited and which contained closings,

*58.69% (27) were polite closings

*26.1% (12) were semi-polite closings and

*15.21% (7) were impolite closings.

*Of the total of 46 transactions located, 80.43% were verbal cases, again indicating that words are important in the workplace environment.

*These figures indicate that, as a whole, Malaysian public hospital staff can be considered as more polite than impolite. Examples are provided in Table 9.

Table 9 : Examples of Polite Verbal closings

Turns	Transactions
27	P: (Gives identity card.) S: <i>Terima kasih.</i> (Thank you.)
35	P: <i>Terima kasih noh.</i> (Thank you yes.) S: <i>Terima kasih. Bye.</i> (Thank you.)
36	P: <i>Terima kasih.</i> (Thank you.) S: <i>Sama-sama.</i> (Welcome.)
73	P: <i>Macam lu? (Like that?) Saya datang sekejap lagi...</i> (I will come later on.) S: <i>Terima kasih.</i> (Thank you.) S: <i>Sama. (smiles)</i> (Welcome.)
94	P: (Patient gives identity card to staff at the counter.) S: (Staff takes down particulars and then returns identity card to patient.) S: <i>Sila duduk dulu. (smiles)</i> (Please take a seat first.)

*Closings are considered as polite markers and in our study, the closings made by the hospital staff appeared to be responses made to reciprocate to the patients' closings.

*The elements present in these polite closings were simple phrases of:

- (1) Thank you (*Terima Kasih*)
- (2) Welcome (*Sama-sama*)
- (3) Please take a seat first (*Sila duduk dulu.*)

Table 10: Examples of Semi Polite verbal closings

Turns	Transactions
84	P: (gives money) S: <i>Ok.</i>
98	P: <i>Thanks.</i> S: <i>Ok.</i>

Example 10 shows staff using 'OK' as a way of closing and it was not used frequently by the staff.

*It is possible that staff attending to the patients had limited things to say other than 'ok' which is considered as an acknowledgement.

*Thus, even though it may not be seen as polite, the fact that the staff showed acknowledgement implies that it is an attempt to be polite, thus we categorised it as semi-polite.

Table 11: Semi Polite Nonverbal closings

Turns	Transactions
7	P: <i>Ok, thank you.</i> (takes the balance) S: (nods)
34	P: <i>Terima kasih.</i> (Thanks) S: (nods)
44	P: <i>Terima kasih.</i> (Thanks) S: (smiles)
74	P: <i>Oh, terima kasih ah.</i> (Oh, thank you) (smiles). S: (smiles)

Table 3: Examples of Polite Non-verbal Openings

Note that the openings detected made use of a number of elements:

- i. Greetings (Good morning! *Assalamualaikum! Pagii!*)
- ii. Offer to help (Can I help you? *Ya?*)
- iii. Enquiry (What is the problem?)
- iv. Use of address forms (*Pakcik, ...*)

• Examples of semi-polite openings

Table 4: Examples of Impolite Non-verbal Openings

Table 4: Examples of Semi Polite Verbal Openings

Turns	Transactions
75	S: <i>Nak apa dik?</i> (Yes, brother, what do you want?) P: <i>Nak ambil resit.</i> (I want to collect my receipt.)
103	S: <i>Ya?</i> (Yes?) P: <i>Nak ambil ubat.</i> (I want to collect my medication.)

The reason these two examples are deemed semi-polite is because both were preceded by an address form for example '*dik*' in Turn 75 and also because it offers a 'yes' as a form of acknowledging the presence of the patient as shown in 'yes'?

Table 5: Examples of Impolite Verbal Openings

92	S: <i>Kamarul Hisham.</i> P: (Patient walks to counter.)
105	S: <i>Ambil ubat ini tiga kali sehari, masa lepas waktu makan.</i> (Take this medicine three times daily after meals.) P: <i>Ubat ni lepas makan rasa mengantuk tak?</i> (Does the medicine make me drowsy?)
129	S: <i>Sudah bayar belum?</i> (Have you paid?) P: <i>Sudah.</i> (Already.)
140	S: <i>IC nombor?</i> (Identify card number?) P: <i>Nanti ya</i> (Just a minute) 590709-xx-xxxx
79	S: <i>Nak ape?</i> (What do you want?) P: <i>Saya nak ambil resit.</i> (I want a receipt.)
81	S: <i>Kenape?</i> (What's wrong?) P: <i>Pening.</i> (Dizzy.)
24	S: <i>Kenape?</i> (What's wrong?) P: <i>Deman panas tarik</i> (Have sunstroke.)

Note that the openings were considered impolite because they lacked the elements used by polite verbal openings such as greetings, use of address forms, acknowledgement of patient's presence and also because it begins quite abruptly.

The staff's politeness had been compromised through their direct ways such as:

- Calling a patient/client by name as in roll call;
- Giving instructions;
- Asking if transaction has been paid for;
- Identification;
- Crude enquiry (what do you want, what's wrong).

Table 11 illustrates semi-polite but non-verbal closings.

This category of closing was also limited in instances.

•Although non-verbal, we considered the staff's non-verbal closing as semi-polite because there were some body gestures such as a nod of the head or a smile which we perceived as acknowledging the patients.

•Table 12 illustrate the impolite verbal closings.

Table 12: Impolite Verbal Closings

Turns	Transactions
81	P: Thank you. S: <i>Duduk dulu, nanti kita panggil.</i> (Sit down, we will call for you)
102	P: <i>Hari ni ada appointment dengan dia.</i> (Do you have an appointment with him today?) S: <i>Duduk dulu, nanti kita panggil.</i> (Sit down, we will call for you)
115	P: <i>Sini.</i> (Here.) (Gives a piece of paper to the staff.) S: <i>Duduk dulu, nanti saya panggil.</i> (Sit down, I will call for you)

•Impolite closings refer to those transactions where serving staff gave directives to patients which in these three cases are shown in Table 13, probably illustrate their impatience.

•Their directives basically instruct patients to be seated until they are called.

•We would now like to show you the findings as a whole.

Discussion of Findings

Table 13: Results of study

No	Phenomenon	Frequency
1	Transactions with polite or semi polite opening and closing	23 (15.75%)
2	Transactions without polite or semi polite opening and closing	84 (57.53%)
3	Transactions with polite openings but no polite closings OR Transactions with polite closings but no polite openings	39 (26.71%)
	TOTAL:	146 (100%)

It appears that out of the 146 instances of public transactions recorded from the observations of six public hospitals, only 23 transactions (15.75%) contained instances which were started by the staff and ended by the staff.

Conversely, 84 (57.53%) of them were without any polite or semi-polite openings or closings.

This indication implies that most front counter Malay staff on duty in Malaysian government hospitals do not start nor end their transactions/conversations politely.

The data indicate that in most cases, it was often the patients who would greet or start or interrupt the staff by addressing the staff first. 39 (26.71%) were those transactions with either one polite opening or polite closing but not both.

Data also suggest that the government hospital staff would ask for patients' details of information directly or when needed.

To do this, they might also give instructions or directions openly to the patients or they might also interrogate the patients directly without any form of opening.

In looking at the use of closings, it was also found that the front counter staff of public hospitals do not make it a point to thank the patients at the end of the conversation.

In most cases, it appears that the patients would thank the staff by saying 'thank you' or '*terima kasih*' first before they are reciprocated to by the staff either with 'welcome', 'OK' or '*sama-sama*'.

Table 6: Examples of Polite Non-verbal Openings

Turns	Transactions
49	S: (smiles) Very pack today. P: One zero six.

- Note that only 1 instance of polite non-verbal opening was detected.
- It was considered polite because the staff was smiling before she spoke.

Table 7: Examples of Impolite Non-verbal Openings

Turns	Transactions
9	P: (Non-verbal, Passes the form.) S: (Accepts but talking to someone else and not looking at P.)
20	P: (Gives the form to the staff.) S: (Returns the form.)
35	P: (Gives bill.) S: (Takes bill and works on the computer.)
37	P: (Gives bill and money.) S: (Works on the computer and later gives change.)
39	P: (Gives the document.) S: (Accepts bill.) P: (Gives money.)
76	The staff takes the card from the lady and keep on talk to the staff sit beside her when she process the card. After that, she returns the card to that lady without said anything. The ladies also leave after collect the card without any word.

•As is obvious, the transactions shown in Table 7 illustrate information that had been communicated to the patient/client without any use of words.

•In the Malaysian context, this is not a preferred mode of social or public transaction as people like to have some sense of being appreciated or respect which is often derived from the use of greetings, address forms or even an enquiry to show acknowledgement of the presence of the other.

•We now move on to looking at closings

Closings

- Of the 147 transactions we elicited, only 46 of them contained closings made by the staff.
- Table 8 illustrates our findings.

CLOSING

Table 8: Statistics of closings of staff

Polite	Verbal	27	27
	Nonverbal	0	
Semi polite	Verbal	3	12
	Nonverbal	9	
Impolite	Verbal	7	7
	Nonverbal	0	
	Total:		46