

Turn-Taking Model for Filipinos' High-Context Communication Style from *No-Answered* and *Non-Answered* Questions in Faculty Meetings

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ABSTRACT

Interrogativity is a linguistic property in all world languages. It is inherently related to the 'question-answer' tandem of turn-taking. One notable feature of turn-taking is the adjacency pairs, where the question-and-answer sequences are part of. The canonical turn-taking model by Sacks et al. (1974) highlights the obligation to answer the questions. In this paper, however, we report the many cases of no-answered and non-answered questions in faculty meetings using the analytical framework of Conversation Analysis. We show that the Filipinos' high-context communication style has impinged on the occurrences of these types of answers. We then illustrate a turn-taking model for this type of communication, wherein a straightforward answer is no longer obligatory, but becomes optional within the frame of high-context communication style of the Filipino context. The questioning party can just "let it go" and accept the indirect response as a legitimate and true answer to the question. Towards the end, we argue that the results may convey that the faculty meeting, which is considered as an institutional talk, has resembled ordinary mundane conversations, where questions are oftentimes taken for granted.

Keywords: Conversation Analysis; faculty meeting; Filipino communication style; high-context communication; question-answer system

INTRODUCTION

Every language has the concept of interrogativity (cf. Siemund, 2017). Its concept that is related to questioning has an inherent social action, "designed to seek information and accomplished in a turn at talk by means of interrogative syntax" (Heritage, 2002, p. 1427). But because each language has its own linguistic constructions of the questions that Heritage (2002, p. 1427) refers to as a "social normativity that is frozen in grammar – a grammaticalized normativity", it is predictable that the actual of questioning has its pragmatic functions and consequences specific to a sociolinguistic environment.

From the point of view of Conversation Analysis (CA), a question is the first-pair part of the adjacency pair, with answers as an expected and a default second-pair part (Englert, 2010) in order to satisfy the first part, making the hearer accountable to answer it (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973). One notable feature of turn-taking is the adjacency pairs, where question-and-answer sequences are part of. Adjacency pairs are related to the concept of togetherness. Schegloff (1968) maintains

that the first item deserves the second item; without the second pair-part, the first pair-part may be construed as unsuccessful or just being unattended to.

The question-answer system is common in debates, ceremonies, proceedings, testing sessions, meetings, and other rule-governed conversations. In the context of psychotherapy, McGee et al. (2005) maintained that questions can provide clients with the chance to join the conversation. Similarly, Heritage (2010) maintained that physicians have to deploy questions that can boost a compassionate relationship and interaction with their patients. Aside from these pragmatic roles of questions in conversations, unanswered questions should be prescriptively avoided to do away with possible ambiguities, uncertainties and misunderstandings.

There is a growing bulk of studies that look into the case of unanswered questions. Interestingly, Stivers and Rossano (2010) illustrated that the sanction such as “I want Tamaryn *tuh* answer that damn question” successfully elicits an apology, then resulting in the expected answer. Stivers (2001), on the one hand, asserted that the cases of unanswered questions may be tolerable in doctor-patient interactions when a parent answers on behalf of his child. The case for unanswered questions may challenge the widely held notion maintained by the pioneering figures of CA. Sacks et al. (1974) make a stronger claim in their household article entitled “A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-Taking for Conversation” that the selected hearer is placed under such obligation to speak and take the next turn when he or she is selected by the current speaker. A speaker’s intentional or unintentional failure to answer would be treated as a pure violation of the conduct, and may be considered as an affront to the first speaker.

Native Filipino speakers in the Philippines belong to this high-context communication style, where digression, indirectness and circumlocution happen in any discourse. Barnes (2007) believed that the type of communication in the Philippines belongs to the high-context communication style that is marked with indirectness. In our axiomatic claims as native Filipino speakers, directness is in fact common in both ordinary and institutional conversations. A straightforward question like “Where are you now?” hardly gets a straightforward answer and is often answered indirectly by Filipinos with, “I am almost near” or “I am coming.” This characteristic of a high-context type of communication expects the hearer to infer the subtleties of the intended meaning.

These features of the high-context communication style among Filipinos, arguably, may neatly sit well with Goffman’s (1959) concepts of self-presentation. Goffman (1959, p. 104) delineates the cooperation of team members as “not in relation to a social structure or social organisation but rather in relation to an interaction or series of interactions in which the relevant definition of the situation is maintained.” In this present study, the kind of answers to the question may relate to Goffman’s assertion that any member of a team has the power to break away from the normative structure and conduct of the team. Furthermore, in this study’s focus on faculty meeting interactions, the no-answer and non-answers may be considered as inappropriate conducts, especially when one concedes that a meeting as an institutional talk needs straightforward answers to all questions raised during this institutional discourse. Hence, from these normative expectations and obligations, any type of communication style, either high or low, can get in the way of the achievement of the practices of institutional interactions, such as the exchanges at a faculty meeting.

Likewise, the Filipino psychology of the manner of answering questions in a roundabout manner is an attempt not to offend others. It could also be seen negatively in the following statement by Enriquez (1992):

The predisposition to indirectness of Filipino communication was regarded as being dishonest and socially ingratiating and reflecting a deceptive verbal description of reality rather than a concern for the feelings of others. (as cited in Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000, pp. 49-50).

No-answer is a type of answer that includes gazing at one's notes, gazing at the questioner, unrelated sequences, and gazing at someone else. On the other hand, *non-answer* includes "I don't know," repair, inserted sequences, indirect replies, "maybe", shrugs, laughing, and question-reply. Questions and their responses were investigated from rich linguistic features of 10 world languages such as Tzeltal, a Mayan language in southeastern Mexico (Brown, 2010); Lao, a Laos language (Enfield, 2010); Dutch (Englert, 2010); Japanese (Hayashi, 2010); Danish (Heinemann, 2010); Ꞇǃkhoe Haiǃom, a Khoe language of the Khoisan family spoken in Northern Namibia (Hoymann, 2010); Yéǃǃnye, a Papuan language (Levinson, 2010); Italian (Rossano, 2010); American English (Stivers, 2010); and Korean (Yoon, 2010).

For example, in Japanese language, non-answer response is repair initiation, including the answer caused by a lack of knowledge/information being requested (Hayashi, 2010). Stivers (2010) also documented cases of non-answer questions from an American context from different types of questions such as polar questions (16%), Q-word (24%), and alternative (38%). While these accounts came from different linguistic backgrounds, these studies alert language users that *no-answer* and *non-answer* are a form of violation to the normative straightforward answers.

Due to the recurring pattern of *no-answer* and *non-answered questions* as culled from the faculty meetings, this study challenges the established notion that questions are obliged to be answered. We propose a model with some socio-pragmatic elements via cultural orientations. A model has been proposed to dispel the possibility of confusion triggered by a lone word, "obligation" (Sacks et al., 1974). Because the main cause of the *non-answered* question is the indirect discursive pattern among Filipino interlocutors, this model hinges on some linguistic-cultural rhetoric. It is in this manner that the confusion of the word "obligation" maintained by Sacks et al. (1974, p. 704) will be dispelled. To illustrate, the following is their main argument:

If the turn-so-far is so constructed as to involve the use of a 'current-speaker selects-next' technique, then the party so selected has the right and is obliged to take next turn to speak; no others have such rights or obligations, and transfer occurs at that place.

Similarly, a basic rule of adjacency pair operation states:

given the recognisable production of a first pair part, on its first possible completion, its speaker should stop and a next speaker should start and produce a second pair part from the pair type of which the first is recognisably a member. (Schegloff & Sacks, 1974, p. 74).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

With these backdrops in mind, our paper reports the cases of *no-answered* and *non-answered* questions in faculty meetings conducted bilingually, that is, English-Tagalog in a higher education institution in the Philippines. After illustrating the instances of circumlocution as demonstrated in the types of answers, we propose a rather straightforward turn-taking model, where Sacks et al.'s (1974) obligation to answer the question becomes optional within the frame of a high-context communication style of the Filipino context. Part of the proposal is the short enhancement of the original turn-taking model by Sacks et al.

No model, to our knowledge, has laid out how questions have to be answered within the high-context communication style within the Philippine speech community. We argue that this rather simple model should be made clear in the Philippine speech community even if it belongs to a high-context communication style. This model may dispel possible miscommunication both in ordinary and institutional interactions especially that regardless of the nature of interaction, questions always deserve straightforward answers. This study remains novel in the sense that languages remain distinct from one another. Brown (2010), in fact, mentions that world languages have different structural, cultural and sociopragmatic constructions of the speakers' utterances.

METHODOLOGY

The features under study were culled based on the corpus-driven analytic methodology of Conversation Analysis, which includes the descriptions of recurring patterns such as (but not limited to) turn-taking, turn construction unit, transition relevance places, adjacency pairs, and the overall organisation of the talk (cf. Munalim & Genuino, 2021). Microscopic and case-by-case sequential talk features of the discourse are described in great detail using the analytical method of CA (Sacks et al., 1974). Schegloff (2010) crystallises that researchers should not “sacrifice the detailed examination of single cases on the altar of broad claims... to examine the detailed analysis of single cases as episodes with their own reality, deserving of their own rigorous analysis without respect to their bearing on the larger argument for which they are being put forward” (p. 42). Earlier on, Schegloff (2009, p. 389) also maintains that “one does not go to work on a corpus of data to conduct quantitative or statistical analysis and arrive at findings; rather, one works up to the data case by case.” Thus, the limited case of corpus is acceptable in CA (cf. Munalim et al., 2022).

This study analysed five faculty meetings from three departments held at a private university in Manila, Philippines. The total duration of meetings lasted for 5 hours and 50 minutes. School A had three meetings that lasted for two hours, while School B and C lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour. This unequal number of minutes is not consequential to the analysis because the tradition of CA does not normally adhere to statistical irregularity of the talk. Meanwhile, the five sets of meetings are acceptable in the CA orientation given the microscopic nature of CA. Lastly, the agenda of the meetings were not uniform. School A and B focused on the accreditation of their departments while School C focused on the matters related to the commencement of the academic year. The differences of the agenda are accepted in CA because the enterprise of CA is directed at describing microscopic practices and features of the talk in an aggregate, and thus not comparative in nature.

The selection of the participants was based on the official number of faculty members from each of the three departments, who were present during the meeting. The deans of the departments chaired all the meetings. The choice of a faculty meeting from the university where the researcher is connected was intentional for three reasons. First, CA investigates human behaviour from inside the system, thus avoiding the imposition of the researcher's constructs. Second, some concerns ranging from personal to managerial which are only exclusive to the invited and employed participants may transpire during the meeting. Lastly, CA tries to mitigate the possible “observer's paradox” when the target participants would behave unusually and would deliberately modify their linguistic behaviour during the recording.

Meanwhile, the profile of the interlocutors during the meetings is presented in Table 1 below to alert the readers of the local conditions in this academic community:

TABLE 1. Local conditions between the chair and the subordinates

Local Conditions	Relationships
Power (in meetings; default)	Chair > S2
Distance (in meetings; default)	Chair > S2
Distance (default knowledge as Chair)	Chair > S2
Distance (age)	Chair < Reg; Reg > S2
Distance (accreditor's knowledge)	Chair < Reg
Distance (years of teaching experience)	Chair > S2; Chair < Reg
Ranking (in meetings; default)	Chair > S2
Ranking (academic; accreditor)	Chair > S2; Reg > S2; Reg > Chair

*S2- subordinates; > - greater/higher/older than; < - lesser/lower/younger than

The audio-video recording of the faculty meetings was done overtly. Data were transcribed using the selected transcription conventions by Jefferson (2004). Names were anonymised in the presentation of results. To assist non-Tagalog speakers, an English glossary of terms was indicated accordingly. Lastly, we employed both quantitative and qualitative descriptive CA analysis of the pattern of *no-answered* and *non-answered* questions to identify and describe the microscopic features and sequential organisations (Schegloff, 2009) of the question-answer sequences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

THE PATTERNS OF NO-ANSWERED AND NON-ANSWERED QUESTIONS AND THEIR ANSWERS

As presented earlier, *no-answer* is a type of answer which includes gazing at one's notes, gazing at the questioner, unrelated sequences, and gazing at someone else. On the other hand, *non-answer* includes "I don't know," repair, inserted sequences, "indirect replies", "maybe", shrugs, laughing, and question-reply. The ensuing sections will pinpoint these types of answers.

While Table 2 shows that the *answered* contains higher cases of answers, the study is more interested in the cases of *no-answer* and *non-answered* questions. While it also divulges that both members and the chairs beget higher cases of answered questions, this paper is more interested in the higher cases of *no-answers* and *non-answers* to the questions raised by the meeting chairs. It appears that the chair is obliged to answer questions from her members, but not the other way around.

TABLE 2. Sorts of answers across question types

Types	Sorts of Answers		
	No Answer	Non-Answer	Answer
Polar	54	76	157
Wh-Q	5	36	49
Alternative	0	3	5
Repeat	0	0	3
<i>Total</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>115</i>	<i>214</i>
Parties	No Answer	Non-Answer	Answer
Faculty	40	57	93
Members	19	58	121
<i>Total</i>	<i>59</i>	<i>115</i>	<i>214</i>

This section discusses the case of *non-answered* questions under the question types and dimensions. Not all the chair’s and faculty members’ questions were answered during the meeting. When the types of non-answered questions were perused, it was found out that the members actually answer the questions, but in an indirect way – a discourse pattern common among Filipino interlocutors.

Wh-questions, to be specific, may demand a new set of information. Interestingly, it received a total of 36 non-answer occurrences. When these types of questions are quantitatively analysed, it turns out that they were dominated by the “what” or “ano” questions. The analysis of the *what/ano* questions vis-à-vis their dimensions revealed that they are predominantly questions with epistemic stance domains. In terms of the social actions or socio-pragmatic functions, they are predominantly used to request for confirmation. Therefore, the higher hits of *what/ano* questions from the group of the members substantiate the claim that members have lower epistemic status, allowing themselves to subject to a lower epistemic stance with the linguistic resources hemmed in their questions.

Based on the thematic lexical terms culled from the *what/ano* questions, there is enough evidence to show the lower epistemic stance of the members. Table 3 shows that within the managerial domains, the members’ questions particularly fell lower than that of the chairs. The “documents,” “decisions,” and “approval” are examples of words loaded with responsibilities that the deans solely have access to.

TABLE 3. Epistemic domains based on what/ano questions

Group	Epistemic Domains		
	Personal	Academic and Professorial	Managerial
Chairs	room assignment, students’ names	seminars, university week, department week, implications for grades	documents, diploma, procedures, decisions, approval, late enrollees
Members	definition of terms, words, etc.; date, students’ family name,	courses, topic for lecture, implications for grades, extra lecture, subjects	criteria for the accreditation, committee, exposure and field trips due to moratorium

On the other hand, one member’s lower epistemic stance is illustrated at line 949 from Extract 114 in Table 4 below. At line 949, Melvs asks a question with an “unknowing” persona. This gesture is top-down in nature, i.e. official memoranda are announced from top officials to be communicated to the subordinates. Chair3 shows congruence to Melvs’ questions by answering at line 950.

TABLE 4. Corpus 5, Extract 114

Corpus 5, Extract 114: School of Social Work			English Gloss
943	Chair 3	Okay na Sir? ((gazing at Melvs))	Is it already okay Sir?
944	Melvs	((nodding))	
945	Chair 3	So ‘yon po ah ang mga updates.	So are they the updates?
946		Ah should you have any other concern or other mat[ters?]	

947	Melvs		[Meroon] ako Madam.	I do, Ma'am.
948	Chair 3		Yes, Sir.	
949	Melvs	->	Ano na po ang status sa exposure?	What is the status of our exposure?
950	Chair 3		Ay Sir, until now po ang exposure [natin]ay 'di pa nali-lift.	Ay Sir, until now the status has not been lifted.
951	Rain		[Oo wala]	No, not yet.
952	Chair 3		Ah in fact, nagpapaalam kami kay SVPAA dahil 'di ba kami 'yong nagha-handle ng ano community extension?	Ah in fact, I sought permission from SVPAA because we are handling the community extension, right?

TABLE 5. Corpus 2, Extract 58

Corpus 2, Extract 58			English Gloss	
951	Chair1	->	Ako ang tanong ko sa inyo Ma'am is it okay with you?	My question to you Ma'am: is it okay with you?
952			Kasi ako, lagi tayo collabora[tive.]	Because we always collaborate.
953	Reg		[Oo.]	Yes
954			Pero ako as part-[time]	But I am only part-time.
955	Chair1		[O]	Yes.
956	Reg	*	[n'on] hanggang member lang ako[ha (h)]	I can only participate as member.
957	Chair1		[Okay] [yun]	Okay, that is it.
958	Reg	*	Ka[hit] SAAN.	Whatever (committee)
959	Chair1		[kasi]	Because

Extract 58, line 951 in Table 5 above shows that Chair1 structures her question with the explicit phrase, "...ang tanong ko sa inyo..." ((My question for you...)), which is supposed to press Reg to answer the question. Firstly, Reg receives the preface by saying "Oo" ((Yes)) which is not a true answer yet. The proceeding lines at 954 to 958 do not satisfy Chair1's candid question. Although the next turn does not satisfy the first of the adjacency pair, the talk continues smoothly, and is well taken by the Chair.

TABLE 6. Corpus 2, Extract 10

Corpus 2, Extract 10			English Gloss
175	Reg		Oo ((nodding))'asan <i>Yes, where?</i>
176	Meth	->	Ma'am, is Dr. Brag, is Dr. Brent on leave?
177	Chair1	*	Ngayon daw ang dating Ma'am sabi niya oh ah <i>She said she is coming back today.</i>
178			Sa so 'yon ang (.1) nakalagay kasi Ma'am dun let sa response <i>Because it is what has been indicated in the response Ma'am.</i>

On the one hand, Chair1 is being questioned when Meth, at line 176 in Table 6 above, presupposes that Dr. Brent is on leave. At line 177, Chair1 confirms this presupposition by citing the date of return. This line also fails to provide the appropriate answer to the question.

TABLE 7. Corpus 2, Extract 30

Corpus 2, Extract 30			English Gloss
426	Meth		An[other school]
427	Reg		[Sa Pasay] In Pasay
428	Meth		[and not CRES]
429	Fil	->	[Are you]are you referring to the EDCES na kung saan andoon sila Ma'am Jane? Jane is there?
430	Meth	*	Ma'am Jane is transferred last (.) nito lang 'noong vacation [to another elemen]tary school. to another elementary school.
431	Fil		[Ah iba na Ma'am] Ah, it is a different principal
432	Chair1		((attempts to clap her hands to summon to stop))

At line 429 of Extract 30 of Table 7, Fil asks a question that should be answerable with a 'yes' or 'no'. Meth answers by attempting to deflect the focus by mentioning the status of the principal assigned at the division school. Fil reacts to this status at line 431, but does not attempt to go back to the topic of the question. In short, this is a proof of indirectness because the answer, although related to the question, does not satisfy the stem of the question. In fact, Fil asks about EDCES because, historically (two months ago), from the emic perspective, Dr. Fil is also connected with another EDCES, which may not be the campus that Meth is referring to. Meth's answer at line 430 presupposes that she and Fil are referring to the same school by mentioning the name of the principal. Fortunately, the reaction of Fil confirms this presupposition when he appears convinced that they both are referring to the same school and the same principal.

Another precise analysis also reveals that the other non-answered questions are followed by other inserted sequences, either to support the questions, which are also closely related to indirectness among Filipinos. This sense of indirectness could be explained in Extract 33:

TABLE 8. Corpus 5, Extract 33

Corpus 5, Extract 33			English Gloss
543	Chair3	-> 'Yon 'yon ang sinabi niya? ((gazing at Zel))	Is that what she said?
544	Zel	Siguro baka puwedeng ano ma: malinawan ano ba Tala[ga] 'yong nangyayari=	It would be better if we are enlightened about what is going on here.
545	Chair3	[Sige] Ma'am=	Sure Ma'am.
546	Zel	=Oo	Yes

At line 543 of Table 8, Chair3 confirms the number of hours for the graduate classes. “Niya” refers to the director of the graduate programme. Chair3 is eliciting a true answer here, thus, a K- persona because the graduate programme is not the territory of her epistemic authority. Zel at line 544 fails to answer this by only inserting related sequences within the issue at hand. The Chair does not demand for an answer even if the question is important in its own right and intention. She concedes anyway at line 545 for the need to confirm the number of academic hours per subject.

TABLE 9. Corpus 5, Extract 112

Corpus 5, Extract 112			English Gloss
933	Vilma	-> Pero Ma'am with the: with the new board of examiners, do you think 'yong susunod na board exam will be maraming mababago na ang mga questions? ((gazing at Chair3))	But Ma'am, with the new board of examiners, do you think the next board exam will have a lot of changes in the questions?
934	Zel	With sabi ni Ma'am Ching=	According to Ma'am Ching
935	Vilma	Kasi ganoon din ((inaudible++	Because it remains the same...
936	((unanswered; inserted sequences in long stretches and utterances; next turns are narrative of circumstances ((information withheld due to sensitive matters))		

Lastly, Extract 112 of Table 9 demonstrates that the Chair employs indirectness, which means she also allows indirectness to rule in the meeting. Inserted sequences deflect the course of the action, and are a digression from the question, as can be traced at line 934. Vilma asks a seemingly important question because it involves the contents in the board examination. Chair3 takes the serious question for granted by not elaborating the issue. Instead, Zel grabs the speaking turn as a collaborative completion (Schegloff, 2000), and narrates her knowledge about the specific topic (*N.B. Not transcribed amid the sensitive information, but the succeeding turns do not depart from the topic*).

The other three sample extracts of inserted sequences are presented in Table 10. The readers are advised that the three parts do not demonstrate the turn-taking between Chair2, Chair3, and Rain. Instead, these are three separate exchanges of turns between the Giver (first column) and

the Recipient/Responder (third/fourth column). The fifth column shows the inserted sequences that do not seem to directly answer the questions raised by the Giver.

TABLE 10. Sample indirect / inserted answers

Giver	Question	Recipient	Responder	Answers
Chair2	Vina: You should do it one month after the enrollment /// Chair2: Isn't it that too soon?	Vina	Vina	kaya nga, two months after the enrollment. ((<i>That is why two months after enrollment.</i>))
Chair3	Do you have any suggestion para sa general assembly? Para this time paiba-iba naman ((<i>...so that this time it would be different.</i>))	Members	Hans	Bahala na sila 'don. (<i>We will leave them up to them.</i>)
Rain	Direkta? Halimbawa ((<i>Directly? For example?</i>))	Chair3	Chair3	((gazing at Melvs now)) puwede po bang department mo o kailangan librarian? ((<i>Is one's department okay or a librarian should be there on our behalf?</i>))

Furthermore, the no-answered questions are mostly demonstrated through gazes at the questioners, but at the same time making the exchange rapid due to a high degree of eye contact. From the recordings, it is clear that there were a number of embodied features such as gazing at one's notes, gazing at the questioner, unrelated sequences, and gazing at someone else. Questions also receive a mix of vocal and non-vocal responses in Dutch conversations (Englert, 2010) which fail to satisfy the questions raised. Perhaps, this case can be traced back to the spatial arrangement during the meeting, for example, as shown in Figure 1.



FIGURE 1. Spatial meeting set-up

The spatial set-up in Figure 1 makes the interactional progression of questions and the turn-taking of the adjacency pairs smooth. The quick period of mutual gaze is also called a *gaze window* (Bavelas & Gerwing, 2011), where responses from the listeners are likely to be the next relevant turn, but does not hasten the demand for the answers. Amid this spatial arrangement, it cannot be argued that the absence of answers is the lack of understanding because there are also cases of repair questions. These repairs can be easily requested because the setting of the meeting favours them physically, not to mention that there is only a maximum of seven members, except for the School of Arts and Sciences. The micro collaboration through gazes could have been used to demand for more answers through silent pauses.

TABLE 11. Corpus 2, Extract 29

Corpus 2, Extract 29		English Gloss
413	Chair1	Noong last time ng accreditation natin, I took care of everything about noong Community Engagement [and ah ah]
414	Fil	[Ma'am Ma'am] how about the course?
415		[Ah aa::]
416	Chair1 ->	['Di ba Sir kasama ka noon?]
417	Fil ->	((gazing only)) A::re you still doing (.) the outreach at the J:JRES?
418	Chair1 *	'Di na Sir, tapos na= Not anymore Sir, we've done it.

Furthermore, Fil at line 417 from Extract 29 of Table 11 still feels the right to a turn and an opportunity to continue even if the question of Chair1 has not been answered. When the video is checked, Fil does not use any nod before he claims the turn. What is only recorded is that Fil gazes at Chair1 without even offering some ritualistic apology as he evades the question from a chair. From these adjacent turns, Fil receives an answer to his question after he ignores the answer of the chair.

OVERALL DISCUSSION

Given that the indirectness is directly associated with the politeness principle, it is a wonder why the questions in the meeting were not directly answered when these questions do not demand the recipients to “play safe.” Interestingly, when the questions are examined in great detail using politeness theory, it is found that almost all of the 388 questions do not have any serious and inherent meanings that could break the positive face of the hearers. There are no inherent disaffiliative questions that may challenge, reproach, criticise, or disagree with the recipient of the questions. No special lexical items are also recorded that demonstrate any disaffiliative act, and no questions could possibly lead to “self-incrimination,” a condition quotidian in legal proceedings and hearings. Neither are there questions whose answers require the hearers to take some responsibilities.

The unanswered questions deserve a bit of discussion. The turn-taking system laid by Sacks et al. (1974) states that the generic turn constructional units (TCUs) hint at hearers for possible turn-transition, that is, an utterance with recognisable completion at the later part. Although these TCUs, including other signals and regulators for turn-taking, are obvious to yield the answering turns, the selection for the next speaker is successful but filled with many cases of no- and non-answer sequences.

The unanswered questions warrant a central attention in CA and socio-pragmatics. It is argued that all questions either in ordinary or institutional talk are legitimate, and deserve the right answers, but the data imply that the questions have been trivialised, and even questions with simple default responses have been unattended to. When the actual social actions are embedded in the unanswered questions, the questions are predominantly confirmation, not information-seeking, and preference and epistemic knowledge from the domain aspects. Without these answers, hearers who fail to answer are never sanctioned for their failures to answer, unlike the prevalent case of sanctions in ordinary conversation especially among familiar speakers. Amid these unanswered questions during the meeting, no account for the rationalisation of the failed answer is provided given the fact that this is a different type of talk, one that is academic in nature.

Although the no- and non-answered cases may echo the study by Norlin et al. (2007) where there were unanswered questions during the paediatric visits that were considered an institutional talk, the faculty members in this present study apparently do not have barriers to answer the questions. In fact, the questions analysed previously have mostly epistemic and preference dimensions, and mainly asked to seek confirmation. Even if the questions are only meant for confirmation, and that answers may be irrelevant or already given, members should still feel the obligation (Sacks et al., 1974) to answer the questions. For example, the “known answers” in the meeting amid the dominance of questions that are only used to confirm the state of affairs should not be treated like a classroom institutional talk where a teacher asks questions not in search of information but for students to guess the answer.

A TURN-TAKING MODEL FOR HIGH-CONTEXT COMMUNICATION STYLE: A PROPOSAL

Schegloff and Sacks (1973, p. 74) maintain that “a basic rule of adjacency pair operation is: given the recognisable production of a first pair part, on its first possible completion, its speaker should stop and a next speaker should start and produce a second pair part from the pair type of which the first is recognisably a member.” Power and Martello (1986, p. 29) historically criticised that the turn-taking by Sacks et al. (1974) has “serious weaknesses.” One of the criticisms from the model is the “current-speaker-selected-next techniques,” where Power and Martello argued that “this claim is false, and be refuted by counterexamples” (see pp. 33-36).

We argue that this striking word, “obligation” may not be at all applicable for the Filipino context with a high-context communication style. To establish this proposal, “Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education” by Kaplan (1966) has to be reviewed. No two or more languages share exactly identical rhetorical styles due to cultural differences. Figure 2 shows that Kaplan (1966) characterises the discursive patterns in terms of being linear, direct, to the point, parallel, embedded, not hierarchical progression, digressive, or liberated. The Asian or Oriental discursive pattern, of which the Philippines’ is a part (others use the term ‘Pacific Islander’), approaches the argument in a circular, respectful, indirect, and non-assertive way.

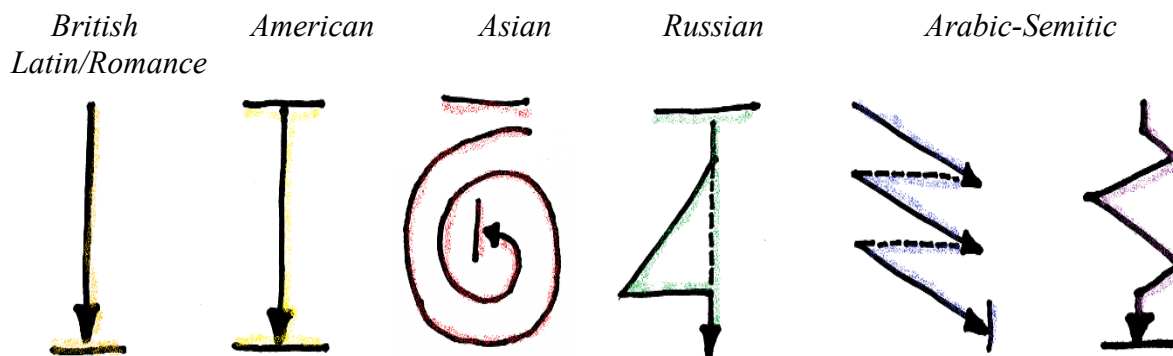


FIGURE 2. *Discursive pattern by Kaplan (1966)*

Although it may be seen that orality and literacy are different, these two aspects look compatible with and are translated into the pattern of the way people organise their thoughts in order discourses. Hence, both modes of language operate in likeness in discursive formats.

Therefore, the model has been proposed. Figure 3 shows that the high-context communication style among Filipinos is the demarcation line from the socio-pragmalinguistic view that dismisses the "obligatory" answer (Sacks et al., 1974) from a "pure" theoretical CA. This is hugely consequential to digressive, indirect, roundabout, and spiral answers that form an oral discourse pattern. Therefore, the supposed obligatory answer (O1-) becomes an optional (O2+) response to the question.

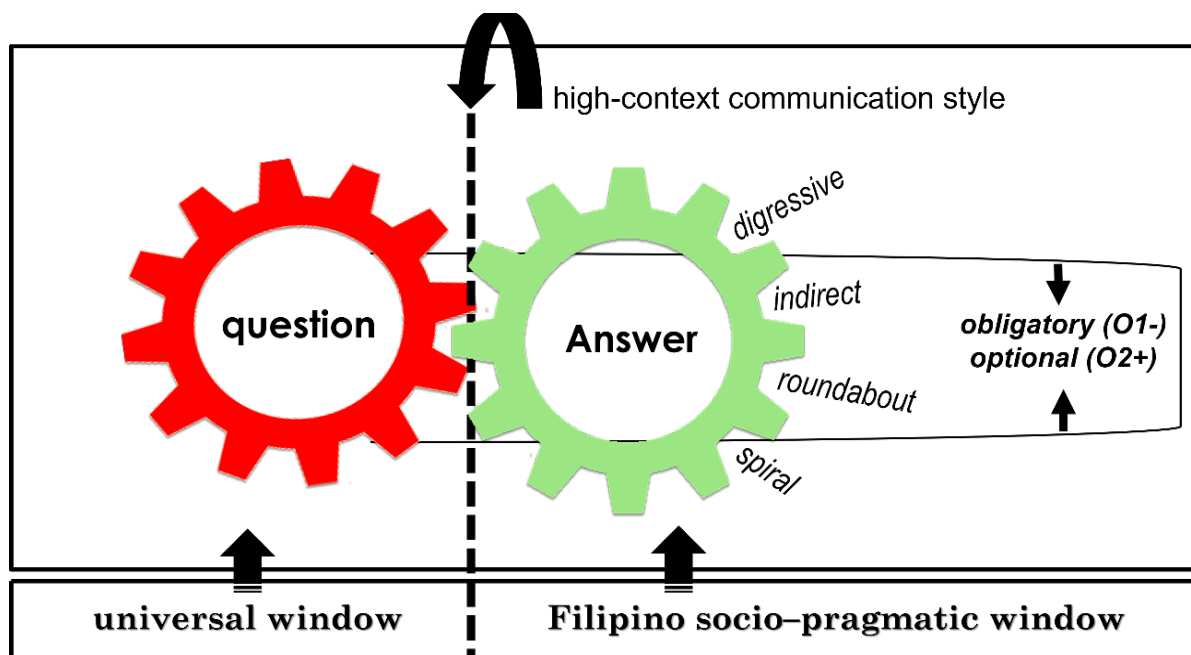


FIGURE 3. A model for an optional (o+) response

Socio-pragmatics is a user-oriented science of language that centers on the context of language, and how the production and understanding of talk is shaped by context (Mey, 2001). Social context is the site of information transfer, that is, transfer depends on the social, cultural, situational, and conversational context. And because pragmatics requires the use of linguistic and social context, the flow of the conversation depends on how these utterances are understood and inferred accordingly. From the analysis assembled above, we showed the cases of no-answered and non-answered questions in a faculty meeting. Hernandez (2000) critically looked at the case of adjacency pairs within the Philippine context. As illustrated in utterances made by Filipino interlocutors, the cases of the violation of the adjacency pairs were demonstrated through long pause, dispreffereds, temporary exit, and embedded questions within another question-answer. All of these features boil down to the Filipino socio-pragmatic information and the inherent high-context communication style.

Hence, given the indirectness of Filipino speakers, the questioning party can just “let it go” and accept the response as a legitimate answer to the question given the high-context of communication style in Philippine culture. If the questioning party is not satisfied, he or she can demand for a straightforward answer by asking the same question again to delineate the agenda. Employing this manner should be treated with caution amid the inherent face-saving threats, especially that the interlocutors in this institutional talk are professional teachers who deserve to be respected not only morally and professionally, but also ‘socio-pragmalinguistically’. That is, the socio-pragmatic local and academic conditions such as power, distance, ranking, and some politeness principles should be considered in one’s attempt to demand for the answers.

However, there is a good caveat that needs to be taken very carefully with regard to the suggestion to just “let the questions go” and get them unanswered in this academic encounter where explicit answers are rather normative. This caveat that needs to be considered is the fact that there are too many multiple realities in and out of the faculty meeting itself that even the participants of the meeting would not know themselves. These other multiple and nuanced

realities, for sure, are rather latent, such as (but not limited to) the sociopolitical, socioeconomic and academic orientations of the participants across specific speech communities, not only in the Filipino-dominated community where this study was conducted. The other elusive local conditions are far beyond the scope of our subjective, hermeneutic and interpretive enterprise even if this study looked at the data from an emic perspective. “Letting it go” remains a grey area with regard to the question-answer system in this high-context communication style among the Filipinos.

CONCLUSION

When speakers construct social actions and pragmatic intentions, they calibrate their questions linguistically that are still accepted within their speech community, but the socio-cultural aspects may suggest that even an ideal question is not an assurance that right answers will be mobilised and generated. The obligation, the right, and the eligibility to answer questions are now challenged. Even if the meeting is an institutional talk, one cannot demand another person to answer due to the inherent face-saving threats that may be attached to these demands. Moreover, we also argue that the patterns of Filipino indirectness and circumlocution convey that the faculty meetings are marked with a high degree of the types of questions in ordinary conversations, which are often unattended to. To close, we have figured out the turn-taking model for Filipinos’ high-context communication style, and we hope that future studies may use the results of this study for more comparative studies, especially those languages that fall within the Filipino’s communication style. We also hope that future studies will be conducted to further analyse the practical applicability of the turn-taking model for Filipinos’ high-context communication style on the various types of communicative events and contexts, considering the different social and institutional roles of the interlocutors.

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