Face in Intercultural Communication: A Qualitative Meta-Synthesis

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Abstract

Although the concept of 'face' has recently been the focus of attention in language pragmatics, face theory and research have dealt with the individualistic rather than social aspects of human interactions (Arundale, 2013). In order to assess the epistemological and methodological dimensions of the face in recent literature, this qualitative meta-synthetic study examines the concept of the face in intercultural and multicultural communicative interactions. A total of 13 intercultural face studies published in two leading journals, *Journal of Pragmatics* and *Intercultural Pragmatics*, were identified, and a thorough qualitative content analysis was conducted to identify the core themes and commonalities. The emerging themes portrayed the concept of face as culture and language specific, relational, interactional, and location-specific, co-constructed, and negotiated by the participants in the ongoing discourse activities. The study nominates some methodological aspects of face for further studies in the intercultural pragmatics research area.

1. Introduction

Considering face-related actions such as "face-saving", "face-losing", and "face threatening acts" (FTA) in daily communicative discourses of different language contexts, the notion of 'face' turns into an emergent aspect in daily communicative interactions. The consensus is that this notion is of crucial importance in certain Asian societies, though not quite limited to the Asian contexts (e.g., Dumitrescu & Andueza, 2018). However, as Janney and Arndt (1992) observed, "a fundamental preoccupation of people around the world is maintaining or protecting their face" (p. 27).

Introducing the concept of the face into discussions of sociolinguistics and pragmatics, Goffman (1967) conceptualized it as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (p. 5). He noted that "one's face is a sacred thing, and the expressive order required to sustain it is, therefore, a ritual one" (p. 19). Goffman concluded that interactants act in such a way as to save their face as well as that of the other members in their everyday language use. Similarly, deriving their notion of the face from Goffman (1967), Brown and Levinson (1987) felt the need to conceptualize face in socially engaging environments where participants might encounter with "the mutual vulnerability of face" (p. 61).

Janney and Arndt (1992) argued that "threats to face whether intended, accidental or even imagined" (p. 28) result in interpersonal conflicts and communication breakdowns as well. It is also claimed that face-work must take place when a face-threatening act occurs (Goffman, 1967). As a set of practices utilized by people to save face, facework is divided into two orientations: a defensive orientation which saves one's face, and a protective orientation which saves the others' face. The notion of face is thus at the heart of politeness since "a polite behavior requires participants to attend to each other's face" (Bremner, 2012, p. 4469).

1.1. Objectives of the Study

The present meta-synthesis study attempts to provide a comprehensive picture of the concept of face in intercultural pragmatics research. Examining the recent conceptualization of face, the study reviews the nature and scope of intercultural face research and examines the way pragmatics researchers explore and conceptualize the concept of face. The study also aims to apply a qualitative meta-synthetic approach to capture the emic and relational nature of face in the realm of intercultural pragmatics.

1.2. Research Questions

Situated within intercultural pragmatics, this meta-synthesis addresses the following research question.

1. How does recent research conceptualize epistemological and methodological aspects of the face?

2. Litreture Review

2.1. Brown and Levinson's Conceptualization of Face

Modern politeness research has its roots in the original work of Lakoff, Leech, Brown, and Levinson (Eelen, 2001). The politeness theory and research will be thorny to explore if one fails to consider Brown and Levinson's (1987) *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Like Lakoff and Leech, Brown and Levinson (1987) framed their concept of politeness within Grice's cooperative principles (CP). They conceptualized politeness as "a tool for describing the quality of social relationships" (p. 55). Aiming at developing a single universal framework of politeness, they contended that "we want to account for the observed cross-cultural similarities in the abstract principles which underlie polite usage" (p. 57).

Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory draws on the notion of a "Model Person" (MP), defined as "a wilful fluent speaker of a natural language, further endowed with two special properties, rationality and face" (p. 58). According to Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 61), a person's face is "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself", consisting of a 'negative face' which refers to "the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction, i.e., freedom of action and freedom from imposition", and a 'positive face' which entails the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants" (p. 61).

Brown and Levinson (1987) further claimed that face can only be fulfilled by participants' actions in the discourse, meaning that "it will, in general, be to the mutual interest of two MPs to maintain each other's face" (p. 60). This perspective is in line with Grice's CPs, which suggest that participants will make use of a cooperative approach to communication and will anticipate the same cooperative act from the side of other participants. As mentioned above, Brown and Levinson's (1987) model is based on the idea that communication is naturally a threatening enterprise. In other words, acts which pose threats to individuals' face are known as face-threatening acts (FTAs). Thus, the interactants should adopt appropriate strategies for dealing with FTAs. Brown and Levinson (1987) also proposed a set of strategies ranging from "bald on-record" performance of an FTA to more redressive strategies that "give(s) face" to the addressee and "attempt(s) to

counteract the potential face damage of the FTA" (p. 69). Positive politeness strategies included complimenting or expressing solidarity with the hearer, while negative politeness strategies were "essentially avoidance-based," and featured by "self-effacement, formality and restraint" (p. 70) and involved apologies, hedges, softening mechanisms, etc. Additional sociological dimensions of Brown and Levinson's (1987) model focused on the social distance among the participants, relative power relations, and degree of imposition.

Recent research has critiqued the universality of Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness, as it fails to consider the interactional nature of communication and situates face in particular linguistic environments (see Arundale, 2006). Arundale (2006), for instance, calls for an interactional view of the face and demonstrating that face is "an emergent property of relationships, and therefore a relational phenomenon, as opposed to a social psychological one" (p. 201). In light of Arundale's (2006, 2013) call for a relational and interactional perspective on face theory, the present qualitative meta-synthesis examines the concept of face in intercultural and multicultural communicative interactions based on a corpus of academic papers published in Journal of Pragmatics and Intercultural Pragmatics from 2010 to 2016.

3. Method

3.1. Identification of the Primary Studies

Two international peer-reviewed pragmatics journals, namely *Journal of Pragmatics and Intercultural Pragmatics*, were chosen and a corpus of articles published from 2010 to 2016 was collected.

First, all the articles published in these two journals during the 2010-2016 period were collected. Next, the titles, abstracts, key-words, and research questions of the articles were scanned. During this process, the researchers searched for terms and phrases such as the face, face-work, face-saving, face-threatening, face-maintaining, face-enhancing, positive face, and negative face. Third, once the relevant studies were identified, the abstract and methodology sections of the articles were carefully screened to arrive at a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria. It should be noted that the total number of articles in these two journals were 1326, from which 1137 articles were published in the *Journal of Pragmatics,* and the remaining 189 articles were published in *Intercultural Pragmatics*.

3.1.1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Based on the initial screening of the studies, a set of criteria were deployed to help the choice of final study corpus. The most noteworthy criterion was whether the study represents the concept of face in dynamically

occurring interactions. Moreover, the qualitative screening inquiry delved into the depth of interactions to realize how the interactants shape and reshape the face. Thus, the inclusion criteria were as follow:

(i)The study had to be based on the live interactions among the participants; interactions in virtual environments were excluded.

(ii) The interactions had to be among participants from various cultural backgrounds; only intercultural studies were included in the study.

(iii) Qualitative studies were included only; quantitative ones were excluded.

Table 1 outlines the research foci of the corpus included in the study drawing on the screening criteria. It is notable that the corpus in focus went through an iterative process of analysis to ensure that all the articles were rightly included or excluded.

Table 1
Distribution of Face Studies in the Journals

Articles Year	All papers related to Face/ Percentage	Face in Intercultural Studies/Percentage	Face in Speech Acts/Percentage	Face in Interactions/ Percentage
2010	19 (26 %)	1 (8%)	3 (33%)	4 (20%)
2011	20 (27%)	4 (31%)	3 (33%)	8 (40%)
2012	8 (11%)	1 (8%)		2 (10%)
2013	12 (16%)	6 (46%)	2 (22%)	1 (5%)
2014	7 (9%)		1 (12%)	2 (10%)
2015	7 (9%)	1 (8%)		3 (15%)
2016	1 (2%)			
J. of Intercultural pragmatics	8 (11%)	3 (23%)	1 (12%)	
J. of Pragmatics	66 (89%)	10 (77%)	8 (88%)	20 (100%)
Total	74	13	9	20

3.2. Data Coding

The final sample consisted of 13 studies (10 from Journal of Pragmatics and three from Intercultural Pragmatics). Coding criteria of the corpus in focus are shown in Tables 2 and 3. Table 2 summarizes characteristics of the studies in terms of author, year of publication, journal of publication, and research setting and participants. In order to ensure the reliability of the coding procedure, the primary studies were coded multiple times.

Moreover, Table 3 displays the main data collection instruments and data analysis techniques used in in the corpus.

3.3. Data Analysis

Through the initial phase, qualitative content analysis was used to provide a detailed description of how recent research conceptualizes face in terms of theory and methodology. Qualitative content analysis was conducted multiple times to arrive at common themes and categories related to face in intercultural communicative encounters.

Table 2
Characteristics of the Included Studies

Author (Year)	Journal	Research setting	Participant
1. Grainger, Mills, & Sibanda (2010)	Journal of Pragmatics	Natural context (a community singing group)	1 Zimbabwean English speaker, 20 British English speakers
2. Knapp (2011)	Journal of Pragmatics	A German university	28 Students from 14 countries
3. Ladegaard (2011)	Intercultural Pragmatics	Jewelry fair in Hong Kong	1 Danish buyer, 34 Chinese sellers
4. Schnurr & Chan (2011)	Journal of Pragmatics	Authentic discourse in 2 workplaces in Hong Kong and New Zealand	Unspecified
5. Copland (2011)	Journal of Pragmatics	An adult educational college in the UK	Four trainer Nine trainee
6. Angouri (2012)	Journal of Pragmatics	Meeting data from 2 workplaces	Two interviewee
7. Dobs & Blitvich (2013)	Journal of Pragmatics	Natural classroom discourse	93 multi-level multi-racial participants
8. Yu (2013)	Journal of Pragmatics	The interactional context at university	Six university student (2 American, 2 Australian, 1African, 1 Hungarian)
9. Lee (2013)	Journal of Pragmatics	A university in Seoul	60 Korean, 20 English
10. Reiter (2013)	Journal of Pragmatics	Telephone conversation in a commercial setting	Unspecified (agents and clients speaking different varieties of Spanish)
11. Schnurr & Zayts (2013)	Intercultural Pragmatics	Authentic data from work places in Hong Kong	Multicultural participants
12. Žegarac & Spencer-Oatey (2013)	Intercultural Pragmatics	Two meetings in the UK	Six British academics, Two Chinese Professors
13. Wang & Spencer-Oatey (2015)	Journal of Pragmatics	Spontaneous discussions during a trip to the USA	20 Chinese officials, American participants

Table 3
Data Collection Instruments and Data Analysis Techniques

Author (Year)	Data collection instrument	Data analysis
1. Grainger, Mills, & Sibanda (2010)	Audio-recording, Interview	Interactional sociolinguistic method, Ethnography, Conversation analysis
2. Knapp (2011)	Audio-recording, Observation, Students' self-reports, Interview	Conversation analysis
3. Ladegaard (2011)	Audio-recording, Interview	Conversation analysis
4. Schnurr & Chan (2011)	Audio-recording, Video-recording, Observation, Interview, Documents, Questionnaire	Multi-methods
5. Copland (2011)	Audio-recording, Video-recording, Interview, Field-notes	Ethnography, Conversation analysis
6. Angouri (2012)	Recording data, Interview, Observation	Ethnography, Interactional sociolinguistics
7. Dobs & Blitvich (2013)	Audio-recording, Video-recording, Observation, Discussion	Micro-ethnography
8. Yu (2013)	Video-recording, Verbal and non-verbal data	Conversation analysis, Multimodal interaction analysis
9. Lee (2013)	Scores, Role play, Retrospective verbal reports	SPSS, quantitative procedures, Conversation analysis
10. Reiter (2013)	Audio-recorded calls	Ethnography, Conversation analysis
11. Schnurr & Zayts (2013)	Audio-recording, Video-recording, Observation, etc.	Conversation analysis
12. Žegarac & Spencer-Oatey (2013)	Video-recording	Conversation analysis
13. Wang & Spencer-Oatey (2015)	Audio-recording, Video-recording, Interview, Documents	Ethnography

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

In order to qualitatively synthesize the most prominent findings of intercultural face studies in the given period, a summary of the findings of the

studies is in order. In the first article, Grainger, Mills, and Sibanda (2010) examined the nature of face in the interactional management of a meeting between a Zimbabwean English speaker and British English speakers in a community singing group. Using conversation analysis, ethnography and interactional sociolinguistic methods, they found that how participants were concerned with in interaction was dependent on cultural understandings of which characteristics of the face were dominant in particular circumstances. The researchers argued that since assumptions of the face are deep-seated and invisible, there is a need for a culture-specific investigation of the face. Grainger, Mills, and Sibanda concluded that consideration of the layers of context in which a conversation takes place is a must for every analysis of face.

In the second article, Knapp (2011) focused on the problems of learning and teaching via English as a lingua franca at a German university and suggested that in many cultures, protecting the privacy of the ideas is face-saving while publicizing some ideas and ambiguity which leads to misunderstanding are sources of face-threat. Knapp noted that in communications, raising awareness of culture-related differences is essential, and culture-specific interpretations have to be treated with care.

Ladegaard (2011) advocated the mixture of micro and macro contextual values and norms and discourse analysis of authentic business negotiations. Acknowledging the importance of cultural value systems and negotiators' cultural background, Ladegaard argued that gaining interlocutors' approval, building rapport, having a common goal, and creating a positive atmosphere contribute to the understanding of face in cultural value systems. He stressed that culture should be seen as a dynamic performance rather than a static concept.

Working on authentic discourse in two workplaces in Hong Kong and New Zealand, Schnurr and Chan (2011) examined the strategies adopted by the subordinate listeners to solve the face-threatening situations emerging from self-denigrating humor or teasing behaviors. The researchers utilized various data collection methods to explore how listeners respond to humor in asymmetrical relationships. They found that the appropriateness of strategy employment is dependent, to a large extent, on the socio-cultural context in which the interaction occurs, as well as on the appropriateness and acceptability of the ways of interactions in a specific workplace or a community of practice (CofP). Their analysis emphasized the importance of micro-level factors on rapport management and a combination of rapport management with a CofP framework to learn whether such an approach offers valuable perceptions of how face-work is accomplished and sociality rights are negotiated in various contexts.

Copland (2011) looked into the negotiation of the face in post-observation feedback conferences on an initial teacher training program at an adult education college in the UK. She suggested that linguistic ethnography provides a useful theoretical framework to analyze face as a negotiable concept at the level of interaction. The researcher argued that situated and contextual detail is pertinent to the analysis of face in interactions and knowledge of genres and generic conventions assist the interactants in face-threatening situations. She concluded that "it is only possible to analyze face, face threat and even face attack in terms of the on-going discourse and the context of the feedback conference" (p. 3842).

Drawing on data from two projects on workplace discourse, Angouri (2012) explored managing disagreement in problem-solving meeting talks. The author found that that disagreement can function as a threat to face in multicultural workplaces. Thus, sensitivity to face needs and consideration of contextual, professional, and sociocultural orders are the most central factors helping interlocutors manage their relational needs.

Dobs and Blitvich (2013) used a genre approach to inspect the role of face-threat witnesses in small-group discussion practices among adolescents in natural classroom discourse. Drawing on a micro-ethnography of multi-racial multi-level students, Dobs and Blitvich showed how face-threat witnesses play a role in the co-construction of impoliteness in interactions. Highlighting the multi-functionality and dynamicity of face and politeness in interactions, the researchers proposed a model for practical response options to assess participants' responses to and evaluations of impoliteness.

Yu (2013) examined how self-mockery is conducted via verbal and nonverbal expressions using analytical conversation methodology and multimodal interaction analysis. The researcher demonstrated that face-saving and shared amusement are two main interactional functions of self-mockery.

Lee (2013) investigated fluency difficulties in Korean EFL learners' oral refusals by examining the effect of social factors such as power and social distance on measures of processing speed and appropriateness. Lee argued that fluency difficulties are the result of a combination of cognitive and socio-linguistic factors. One interesting finding of this study was that the concept of self-face causes power-low refusals to be more difficult to perform than power-high refusals.

Reiter (2013) examined how telephone conversationalists launch, develop and revisit a complaint in a Latin American for-profit commercial service encounter over a long stretch of talk. It was found that "complaint is carefully initiated and made explicit as soon as it becomes clear that the other party does not align with it" (p. 231).

Schnurr and Zayts (2013) examined how refusals are constructed and negotiated in multicultural workplaces in Hong Kong. The researchers examined in detail how Hong Kong Chinese subordinates negotiate issues of face and power relations when refusing their expatriate superiors. By analyzing authentic audio- and video-recorded spoken workplace discourse and a corpus of emails collected in multicultural workplaces in Hong Kong, Schnurr, and Zayts found that refusals are complex, multifaceted communicative activities that are carefully negotiated among participants.

Žegarac and Spencer-Oatey (2013) examined a critical incident from a meeting that took place at the beginning of an intercultural project partnership. It was demonstrated that these communication situations "are fragile in that they can put pressure on the participants to be more self-oriented (i.e., self-centered) and, therefore, less cooperative" (p. 433).

Finally, Wang and Spencer-Oatey (2015) explored the gains and losses of the face as perceived by Chinese government officials during a three-week delegation visit to the USA. Adopting an ethnographic approach, they found that group face is of crucial importance in delegation meetings. Wang and Spencer-Oatey concluded that face is both ephemeral and enduring and is co-constructed in interactions.

4.2. Discussion

Located within intercultural pragmatics, the present qualitative meta-synthesis was conducted to assess the epistemological and methodological dimensions of the face in recent publications (i.e., 2010 – 2016) in *Journal of Pragmatics* and *Intercultural Pragmatics*. The essential question motivating this study was how recent research conceptualizes face in terms of epistemology and methodology. Thorough qualitative content analysis resulted in three major themes related to the conceptualization of face. The first concern was the importance of culture in understanding face. The second relates to a reconsideration of the face in pragmatics research. The third is about methodological considerations related to intercultural face research. Each theme is elaborated below.

4.2.1. Culture-specific Understanding of Face is Central

As a dynamic concept, culture plays a central role in intercultural communication, and a culture-related understanding of the concept of face is of particular importance. Acknowledging the behavior-specificity within each culture, Gudykunst (2000) argues that there are systematic similarities and differences among cultures, and there should be room for individual negotiation of macro contextual norms. The role of culture is consolidated by an argument put forward by Schnurr and Chan (2009) stating that "rather than viewing culture as a static concept it needs to be more productively

understood as a dynamic performance which people incorporate in their various workplace activities while at the same time adhering to norms of relational work" (p. 152). Based on the findings, this meta-synthesis might contribute to face in intercultural understandings from several angles. First, we found that face, albeit a universal phenomenon, is currently discussed in terms of cultural variability and the specificity within it. As Arundale (2010) notes, face interpretation is relational and interactional through which interactants attempt to reduce the social distance between them in their negotiations. This might mean that culture-specific interpretations of face aspects that contribute to the co-construction of meaning in interactional events need to be explored in other settings than Eurocentric Western-centric generalizations (Grainger, Mills, & Sibanda, 2010; Žegarac & Spencer-Oatey, 2013). Related aspects of face including the nature of the settings, activity types, generic conventions, cultural backgrounds, personal experience, and style were found to play a key role in the negotiation and co-construction of face in intercultural communications (e.g., Dobs & Blitvich, 2013; Grainger, Mills, & Sibanda, 2010; Ladegaard, 2011). As stated, this meta-synthesis reveals that intercultural discourse communication is complex and multi-faceted. This implies that researchers need to dedicate further attention to the culture-sensitive elements, participants' identity, style, experience, and their shared cultural background.

An important consideration is that sole attention to intercultural differences is not the whole story. Attention should also be given to intra-cultural differences as the people within the same culture interpret the norms and expectations differently within their culture (Schnurr & Chan, 2011). To explore face and face-work strategies within inter – and intra – cultural negotiation and the way those strategies are achieved and accomplished, researchers should not put reliance on a single so-called universal framework for all cultures. As alluded to earlier, future research needs to combine different frameworks in a range of other neglected multicultural contexts (e.g., workplace environments, educational settings).

The naturally occurring interactions among individuals from multiracial and multicultural backgrounds were chosen intentionally since such authentic settings represent face in its interactional dynamics. These interactional settings raise awareness of culture-related differences in the perception of interlocutors contributing to the negotiation and co-construction of the face.

4.2.2. Face Seems to Need Reconsideration

The analysis of face research entails close attention to related notions of politeness, framing, footing, and identity. In other words, dualistic theories of face setting up a dichotomy of the face in terms of positive and negative (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987) appears not to be applied to culture-specific

discourses. This arises the argument that face may require to be reconsidered at various culturally situated discourse and multifoci levels as well. In support of this argument, Grainger, Mills, and Sibanda (2010) note that, "when we try to apply a model of dual face to culturally situated discourse, we find that it may not be wise to overlook group face in favour of individual face, nor to dichotomise aspects of face as if they were alternatives" (p. 2169). In their examination of the previously neglected Southern African dimension of face, Grainger et al. (2010) observed that,

> In our data it seems that connectedness to the group, identifiable by southern Africans as the attitude of *ubuntu*, can be arrived at through the interactional deference strategies of *hlonipha*. Thus, we find that *Arundale's notion of a dialectal relationship between connectedness and separateness is more explanatory of southern African face*. Furthermore, rather than treat dimensions of face as either present or absent in an interaction, we prefer to see them as either *foregrounded* or *backgrounded* by the participants (p. 2169, emphasis added).

Drawing on the rapport management framework (Spencer-Oatey, 2000) and communities of practice, Schnurr and Chan (2011, p. 20) maintain that listeners' responsive strategies that are used to "resolve tension and to manage sociality rights as well as to do face-work" need to consider participants' quality and identity. The authors note that rapport management strategies should take into account "both the wider socio-cultural context in which they occur as well as the specific norms and practices that characterise interlocutors' communities of practice" (p. 20). Referring to this study as a single example, it is argued that researchers such as Spencer-Oatey (2000), Arundale (2006), O'Driscoll (2007), Terkourafi (2007), and Geyer (2008) now use alternatives to Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) reflections on the face. Some of whom emphasize the universal nature of face but seek to conceptualize it more culturally all-embracing. Most of these studies still make a distinction between the face that is concerned with membership with others, and face that is concerned with the separation of oneself from others. Arundale (2006), For example, speaks of 'connectedness' and 'separateness', O'Driscoll (2007) of 'connection/ belonging' and 'separation/individuation' and Terkourafi (2007) of 'approach' and 'withdrawal'. According to Grainger et al. (2010), "this seems to suggest that there may be at least some merit in Brown and Levinson's model, despite its western bias" (p. 2159). Nevertheless, Arundale (2006) stated that we do not have to consider these aspects of the face as detached from each other. In order to be universally applicable, they should be viewed in a dialectal relationship and that,

> they are derived from a conceptual framework that not only explains human relationships as sustained within the matrix of communication that comprises a culture, but also anticipates that many diverse types of relationships will be

found within a single culture, and very importantly across cultural groups (p. 205).

Furthermore, more recently, Haugh (2009) called for theorizing face as an interactional and emergent phenomenon. He contends that:

> Face is interactional in a number of different senses. In its most basic sense, face is interactional in that it presupposes evaluation by others of the behaviour of individuals as well as groups [...].Without interaction there can be neither behaviour to evaluate nor others to make those evaluations. [...] Face is interactional in a more technical sense as well in that it emerges through interaction as a joint accomplishment of interlocutors [...]. In other words, we can say that *face is co-constituted in interaction* (p. 6, emphasis added).

In summary, it is revealed that researchers need to examine different cultural groups' interactions, their resources for establishing relationships with other cultural groups, and how such groups connect and situate themselves within a particular cultural group. This necessitates researchers to analyse face aspects in ongoing contextualised discourse within the multifarious cultural setting (Copland, 2011). As we already noted, culture- and language-related differences in participants' perception are important issues in the conceptualization of face.

4.2.3. Methodological Considerations of Face in Intercultural Research

The descriptive analysis of the studies revealed that most of the intercultural face studies utilized audio and video interaction recordings, observations, interviews, and field notes. Of the studies examined, only a single study, Lee (2013) applied a mixed-methods research design, and a range of methods including linguistic ethnography, conversation analysis, and interactional sociolinguistic procedure was utterly abandoned.

Another methodological aspect, discussed earlier, relates to the research setting. The results underscore a lack of particular attention to micro – and macro – level contextual values in the study and discussions of the face. A pragmatic approach to cross-cultural negotiation certainly encompasses the element of culture. As Mey (2004, p. 45) astutely observed, "since pragmatics is about culture, and culture is rooted in pragmatics, the intercultural dimension, both in its theoretical aspects and its practical applications, has to conform with pragmatic principles in order to be acceptable and appropriate inter-, not just intra-culturally".

Multicultural negotiations, therefore, present us with a more comprehensive account of face research. As noted in Table 2, face studies were conducted in naturally occurring situations using authentic data and face-to-face interaction (for example, workplace, jewelry fair, political

context). Schnurr and Zayts (2013) advocate that researchers require to carry out more studies using authentic data from real contexts. Despite the advantages offered, classroom discourse analysis is rare among intercultural studies. Teacher-student interaction is argued to be as a useful application of discourse-analytic tools dealing with issues like miscommunication and misunderstanding, and pragmatic failure. These issues may interconnect with various cultural values in the classroom to reveal cultural and sub-cultural differences (Edwards, 2010). Educational settings such as school and university might reveal additional information about interaction management and face-enhancement as well. There is, however, the need to develop research designs to examine such educational contexts.

It is argued that face is significant in societies (Spencer-Oatey, 2000), especially in negotiations. On the one hand, the importance of context and local practice is highlighted (Angouri, 2012; Reiter, 2013), on the other hand, examining a wider variety of socio-cultural contexts brings into picture several aspects concerning the notion of face. It is also noted that not only socio-cultural background affects face negotiation, but also media of communication, normative ways of interaction, the content of the interaction, and the relationships between participants are demonstrated to be of particular importance (Schnurr & Zayts, 2013). As Copland (2011) notes, the face should be analyzed at the level of interaction within its situational and contextual details leading to an enhancement of our perception of the face. This indicates that face is a negotiable concept between the participants. Macro- and micro-contextual information provide us with a better and richer understanding of ongoing negotiations (Ladegaard, 2011; Schnurr & Chan, 2009, 2011). Schnurr and Chan (2009) argue that "in addition to the expectations and norms of relational work that apply to the macro-context (i.e., the wider society...), it is of crucial importance to consider the specific ways in which these expectations and norms are enacted and responded to on the micro-level" (p. 152).

Wang and Spencer-Oatey (2015) also draw our attention to the interactional and dynamic nature of face, stating that it is vital to examine "the face perceptions which extend beyond actual interactions, including the strategic planning of facework and reflections of ongoing gains and losses" (p. 61). So, culture-specific value systems and the contextual norms need to be demonstrated in intercultural encounters as influencing negotiation progress, negotiating behaviour and the process of inferencing (Cheng & Warren, 2003; Ladegaard, 2011; Schnurr & Zayts, 2013). It is, therefore, necessary to acknowledge the important role of cultural value system and contextual factors that co-construct interlocutors' behaviour. An example of a particular situational factor can be participants' various social roles. According to Spencer-Oatey (2000), when participants are engaged in an

interaction, they frequently assume clearly defined social roles, and "these roles not only partially determine the power and distance of the relationship but also help specify the rights and obligations of each role member" (p. 37)

In regard with socio-pragmatic factors affecting intercultural encounters, several considerations can be taken into account including negotiators' perceived social similarity and difference, frequency of contact, familiarity, power and distance, and cost-benefit considerations (Ladegaard, 2011; Lee, 2013; Spencer-Oatey, 2000, van Meurs & Spencer-Oatey, 2007).

An important conclusion is that raising awareness of the diversity of contexts influencing communication can be examined in future research. This, therefore, demands that future face studies would need to provide detailed contextualized information about culture-bound differences. Pragmatic awareness, for instance, in intercultural EFL situation, is an issue in need of consideration (Knapp, 2011).

5. Conclusion and Implications

This meta-synthetic study was an attempt to examine the concept of face in intercultural environments from both the epistemological and methodological perspective. Since there was no meta-synthesis in this regard, the present study seems to shed light on some aspects of the face such as language and culture specificity/sensitivity of the notion of face, co-construction of face, dynamicity of face, and the interactional nature of the face. It is also important to note that researching local and contextual intracultural aspects of the face from a participant's perspective can increase our understanding of face. Concerning the methodology adopted by researchers in the realms of pragmatics in general and face studies in particular, it is noted that most of intercultural face studies employed mainly audio and video interaction recordings, observations, interviews, and field notes and procedures like including linguistic ethnography, conversation analysis, and interactional sociolinguistic procedures were not used while it seems a more comprehensive understanding of face is achieved through ethnographic, conversation analytic, and interactional sociolinguistic studies in a range of different communicative contexts.

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