

## A Puzzling Piece

In defining ourselves, we often go straight to our unique characteristics that best describe us as a person – some may say that they are smart, others would argue that they are talented, and some would say they are attractive. Of course, all of these might be true – because this is how we perceive ourselves; this is the image we want to be perceived by others as well. However, when others (Filipinos) define us to other people, their description or way of describing have a striking similarity: “*Ay si ano, oo, magaling makisama ‘yan.’*”, “*Naku, walang utang na loob ‘yan!’*”, “*Hindi s’ya marunong mahiya.*” Filipinos, more often than not, go straight on our ‘values’ or at least how we ‘act’ around them.

Growing up as a Filipino, I thought that the concept of *pakikisama*, *hiya*, *utang na loob*, *pakikipagkapwa*, and alike, are ‘universal’ values. Although some countries (mostly Southeast Asian countries) adapt the same culture, we still have a lot of concepts that are unique to us Filipinos. There are a lot of Filipino words that do not have an English equivalent, or has an English equivalent that do not nearly equate to its original Filipino meaning, an example of this is *kapwa*.

### ***What is the difference between kapwa and others?***

*Kapwa*, if translated in English is (similar to) **others**. But these two do not mean the same in Filipino language and culture. While **others** is simply referring to the opposite of self and separation of self from other people, **kapwa** means self and others and/or self in others. When we speak of *kapwa*, we recognize someone with shared identity, and do not “exclude” them from ourselves. This is also why in present era; Filipinos joke around their *kapwa* when they reject an act of kindness or offer and say “*Ito naman. Para ka namang others!*”

### ***What is the role of language in understanding culture?***

In the paragraph above, I have mentioned about Filipino words that do not have an English equivalent or translation, or if it does – it is somehow lacking or different in meaning. This, alone, shows how much the language can help in understanding the culture of a country. Language **shows what is valued** by a particular society. It narrates what is **important** in their culture by seeing words that do not have a clear translation; a single word that could only be explained in another language using a sentence or two; words that could have two pronouns; and words that could be inclusive and exclusive. This does not only refer to the Filipino language but can also be seen in others as well. For example, in Korean language, they have different ways to say “hello” depending on the closeness of the two persons talking. By this, we can conclude that Koreans value formality. In Filipino language, we have ‘tayo’ and ‘kami’, which both translates to ‘we’, but varies in level of inclusion. By this, we can say that Filipinos value insertion of others in a group.

We can conclude that language and culture are inextricably related. And you can’t learn one without first knowing the other.

### ***Explain the Filipino interpersonal behaviors.***

Aside from *kapwa*, the Filipino language and culture also has different terms for different levels of interpersonal relationships. *Pakikitungo* is the lowest one while *pakikiisa* is the highest.

In *pakikitungo*, Filipinos refer to this as uninvolved civility. Meaning they are civil with one another, but not nearly involved. *Pakikisalamuha* often refer to light level of interaction, while *pakikilahok* refer to interaction with participation. *Pakikibagay* is the level of conforming while *pakikisama* is the level of adjusting. What comes next is *pakikipagpalagayang loob* which involves acceptance, *pakikisangkot* which includes involvement, and lastly, *pakikiisa* which defines unity or being one with.

With these, we can conclude that Filipinos value the concept of interpersonal behavior which tackles not just the level of relationships, but also the level of involvement of the self.

***Is pakikisama same as pakikipagkapwa? Why or why not?***

In learning the Filipino language without embracing the whole culture itself, one may find it hard to differentiate *pakikisama* and *pakikipagkapwa*. But these two can be easily understood by learning the concept of interpersonal behaviors of Filipinos and how they perceive themselves in a certain level of a relationship.

Are they the same? No. *Pakikisama* is much smaller than *pakikipagkapwa*. *Pakikisama* only refers to ‘adjusting’ and ‘being along’ or ‘going with the flow’ with someone. While in *pakikipagkapwa*, it is both a conviction and a value. In *pakikipagkapwa*, Filipinos recognize the other as *kapwa*, which means they also accept and deal with them as their equal.

***What is the behavior of the Filipinos in the face of injustice and adversity?***

In the face of injustice and adversity, Filipinos recognize *pakikibaka* as a valid aspect of *pakikipagkapwa*. Filipinos know when and how to resist even at times they know they are powerless. Filipinos know when and how to join a struggle even when presented with risks. Because Filipinos do not fear oppression, they stand against it. “*Wag matakot, makibaka.*”

Indeed, the Filipino language is confusing at some point. But this also reflects that our culture is unique. And although puzzling, as metaphorical as it sounds, *kapwa* and understanding *pakikipagkapwa* completes the piece of understanding the puzzle of our culture.