



"Kumusta Po?": A Study of Conversation Openings in Philippine Educational, Medical, and Judicial Settings

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Abstract:

Conversation openings serve as the linguistic gateway to social interaction, yet their features are often dictated by cultural norms and institutional power dynamics. This qualitative study explores the linguistic characteristics and social actions of conversation openings in the Philippines across three generic settings: educational, medical, and judicial. Using a phenomenological approach and a corpus of 150 naturally occurring and simulated dialogues, the study analyzes openings through four lenses: grammatical forms, sentential types, semantic categories, and social actions. Findings suggest a high prevalence of honorifics and indirectness, driven by the Filipino values of *kapwa* (shared identity) and *paggalang* (respect). Unlike Western studies, Filipino openings often utilize "neutral" semantic categories as a form of "social buffering" before proceeding to the main interaction.

Keywords: Philippine institutional discourse, conversation openings, pragmatics, honorifics, social buffering, politeness, face-saving strategies, cross-cultural communication

Introduction:

Conversation openings function as the linguistic gateway to institutional interaction, establishing interpersonal footing and signaling power relations from the very first turn. While studies in Western contexts have identified relatively universal opening sequences such as greetings and inquiry routines, these structures are deeply shaped by culture and institutional norms.

In the Philippine context, language use is closely tied to social hierarchy, familiarity, and relational values, yet empirical research on how these factors shape institutional conversation openings remains limited. Addressing this gap, the present qualitative phenomenological study examines how Filipinos initiate conversations in educational, medical, and judicial settings, foregrounding the cultural logics that govern politeness, respect, and rapport-building.

Guided by the analytical framework of Li and Chen (2025), this study investigates the grammatical forms, sentential types, semantic categories, and social actions employed in institutional conversation openings. Specifically, it asks: (1) what linguistic forms characterize Filipino institutional openings; (2) how semantic choices and social actions reflect local cultural values such as *kapwa* (shared identity) and *paggalang* (respect); and (3) how gender, familiarity, and social status influence these choices. These questions are situated within Philippine scholarship emphasizing relational communication in education and law (Crim, 2022; Macaraan, 2020) and pragmatic demands in judicial settings (Etulle et al., 2023; Pangan & Dausan, 2024).

Adopting a qualitative phenomenological design, the study draws on a corpus of 150 naturally occurring and simulated conversation openings collected in Metro Manila. Data were gathered through field notes and audio recordings, with informed consent, across three institutional genres: teacher–student interactions in public universities, doctor–patient consultations in public hospitals, and lawyer–client or mediator–disputant exchanges in Barangay Justice Systems. Unlike previous studies that rely on scripted media data, this research prioritizes authentic



interactions to ensure cultural and contextual validity. Phenomenological analysis enabled the identification of recurring linguistic patterns and the sociocultural meanings attached to speakers' opening choices.

Findings reveal a strong preference for full sentential forms across all settings, reflecting the role of linguistic explicitness in signaling politeness and institutional legitimacy. Educational interactions commonly began with formulaic greetings such as "Good morning, Ma'am/Sir," while judicial settings exhibited a higher frequency of interrogative openings (e.g., "Ano po ang maitutulong ko?") that appeared to soften institutional authority and invite participation. Semantically, Filipino speakers frequently employed neutral topics—such as weather or current events—as a form of "social buffering," allowing interlocutors to establish pakikipagkapwa before transitioning to transactional talk.

Honorifics such as po and opo were consistently used across all genres, underscoring their role as non-negotiable markers of respect. In medical contexts, doctors often combined other-identification with affiliative remarks to reduce patient anxiety, while in judicial settings, higher-status participants were more likely to initiate complaint-type actions, aligning with institutional role expectations.

The discussion highlights paggalang as a central organizing principle of Filipino institutional discourse. Unlike Western contexts where elliptical openings may index efficiency, elliptical forms in Philippine institutions are often perceived as rude or dismissive. Gender and familiarity further modulated linguistic choices: female speakers and those addressing strangers tended to use more other-oriented expressions and apologies, reinforcing indirectness as a politeness strategy.

The study demonstrates that while the structural components of conversation openings may be broadly universal, their pragmatic realization in the Philippines is distinctly relational. The preference for honorifics, full sentences, and neutral social buffers reflects a cultural imperative to preserve face, reduce social distance, and foreground shared identity in institutional interaction.

Literature Review:

Conversation openings have long been examined within the fields of pragmatics and conversation analysis as critical interactional moments that establish footing, relational alignment, and institutional roles. Early work emphasizes the sequential organization of openings—such as greetings, summons-answer sequences, and preliminary inquiries—as near-universal structures across languages.

However, later scholarship has challenged purely structural views by foregrounding the role of culture, power, and institutional context in shaping how openings are realized. These studies argue that while opening sequences may appear formally similar across societies, their pragmatic force and social meaning are culturally embedded and context-dependent, particularly in institutional interactions where authority and accountability are salient.

In institutional settings, language use is inseparable from power relations and role expectations. Judicial, educational, and medical encounters impose asymmetrical roles that influence how participants initiate talk, manage politeness, and mitigate face threats. Dressel and Inoue (2018), in their analysis of judicial decision-making in the Philippines, underscore how informal networks and relational dynamics permeate even formal legal processes, suggesting that interactional practices—including language use—are shaped by social familiarity and hierarchy. Similarly, studies of court communication highlight that institutional talk is not merely procedural but deeply relational, requiring careful management of authority and deference at the outset of interaction.

Within the Philippine legal context, existing research has focused more on institutional processes than on micro-level linguistic practices. Etulle et al. (2023) examined the listening and transcription experiences of court stenographers, revealing the complexity and communicative sensitivity of courtroom discourse. Their findings



suggest that clarity, politeness, and strategic pacing are crucial in legal interactions, indirectly pointing to the importance of how conversations are opened and framed.

Pangan and Dausan (2024) further demonstrate how shifts to video conference hearings altered courtroom interaction, intensifying the need for explicit, respectful, and structured openings to compensate for reduced physical cues. However, these studies stop short of analyzing how conversation openings themselves function as pragmatic tools within judicial encounters.

Educational settings in the Philippines likewise emphasize relationality as a core communicative principle. Crim (2022) argues for a relational approach to teaching and oral training, highlighting that Filipino learners are highly sensitive to respect, tone, and interpersonal alignment. This sensitivity extends beyond instructional content to interactional practices, including how teachers and students initiate conversations. While educational research acknowledges the value of respectful communication, few studies have systematically examined the linguistic features of conversation openings in teacher–student interactions, particularly in higher education where power asymmetries remain pronounced despite increased informality.

In medical contexts, communication research has consistently shown that effective interaction is closely tied to patient trust, emotional comfort, and treatment adherence. International studies, such as Philip, Woodward-Kron, and Manias (2019), demonstrate that healthcare professionals strategically employ politeness, indirectness, and affiliative language when initiating interactions, especially in multicultural settings.

Philippine-based research echoes these concerns, emphasizing community-oriented and socially accountable medical education (Woolley et al., 2018) and the need for collaborative, respectful communication among health professionals (Moncatar et al., 2021). However, while these studies stress relational competence, they rarely isolate conversation openings as a distinct site of pragmatic negotiation.

Across institutional domains, Filipino scholarship consistently points to the centrality of identity, relational positioning, and emotional labor in professional interactions. Macaraan (2020), in exploring identity and mental health among legal education students, highlights how hierarchical and respect-driven environments shape communicative behavior and self-presentation. These findings suggest that linguistic choices—even at the opening of conversations—are informed by deeper concerns about legitimacy, face, and social belonging. Methodological reflections on qualitative research in the Philippines further stress the need for culturally sensitive approaches that capture interactional nuance rather than surface-level frequency patterns (Aligato et al., 2021).

Despite this growing body of literature, a notable gap remains in the systematic, cross-institutional analysis of conversation openings in the Philippine context. Existing studies tend to focus on outcomes, processes, or participant experiences, rather than on the linguistic mechanisms through which institutional relationships are initiated.

Moreover, comparative frameworks developed in non-Philippine settings are rarely tested against local interactional norms. Addressing this gap, the present study builds on international models of conversation opening analysis while grounding its inquiry in Filipino cultural values such as *kapwa* and *paggalang*, offering a phenomenological account of how institutional talk begins—and what those beginnings reveal about power, respect, and relationality in Philippine society.

Methodology:

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to examine the lived interactional experiences of Filipino speakers in institutional contexts. Phenomenology was selected to capture the essence of conversation openings as socially situated practices shaped by cultural norms, power relations, and relational expectations. Rather than prioritizing frequency counts, this approach allows for an in-depth interpretation of the sociocultural



motivations underlying specific linguistic choices, particularly those related to politeness, indirectness, and honorific use.

Setting and Participants

The study was conducted in Cebu City and focused on three institutional genres where hierarchical relationships are salient. These included (1) educational settings, specifically teacher–student interactions in public universities; (2) medical settings, involving doctor–patient consultations in public hospitals; and (3) judicial settings, encompassing lawyer–client and mediator–disputant interactions within the Barangay Justice System. Participants were selected based on their direct involvement in routine institutional encounters, ensuring the authenticity and relevance of the interactional data.

Data Collection

A corpus of 150 conversation openings was compiled through a combination of field observations and audio recordings, all obtained with informed consent. Both naturally occurring and carefully elicited interactions were included to capture a range of institutional scenarios while maintaining ethical and contextual integrity. This data collection strategy parallels the multi-genre analytical approach of Li and Chen, but replaces scripted television dialogue with authentic, locally grounded interactions, thereby enhancing the cultural validity and ecological relevance of the findings.

Findings and Discussion:

Grammatical Forms and Sentential Types:

Analysis of the corpus reveals a strong preference for full sentential forms in Philippine institutional conversation openings, a pattern consistent with the findings of Li and Chen but shaped by local sociocultural expectations. Across educational, medical, and judicial settings, complete sentences functioned as markers of clarity, politeness, and institutional legitimacy. Rather than prioritizing efficiency, speakers appeared to value linguistic explicitness as a means of demonstrating respect and attentiveness, particularly in interactions involving unequal power relations. This tendency reflects broader Filipino communication norms in which relational harmony and face preservation are prioritized over brevity.

In educational settings, approximately 75% of recorded openings were realized as full declarative sentences, commonly beginning with formal greetings such as “Good morning, Ma’am/Sir.” These openings served not only as temporal markers but also as ritualized acknowledgments of authority and mutual recognition.

Such findings align with research on Philippine higher education that emphasizes respect-driven classroom interaction and the enduring salience of hierarchy even in ostensibly modern or digital learning environments (Ortiga, 2018; Garcia & Yousef, 2023). The preference for full sentential greetings suggests that conversation openings function as micro-acts of role negotiation, reinforcing institutional order before instructional discourse begins.

Judicial interactions displayed a distinctive pattern in which interrogative sentence types were used more frequently than in other settings. Openings such as “*Unsay matabang nako?*” were commonly employed by mediators and legal practitioners to initiate interaction. While interrogatives traditionally index authority, in this context they appeared to serve a mitigating function by inviting participation and softening institutional power. This finding resonates with Dressel and Inoue’s (2018) observation that Philippine legal processes are deeply influenced by informal networks and relational considerations, requiring officials to balance authority with accessibility from the very first turn.

Medical settings likewise favored full sentential openings, often combining interrogative and declarative forms to establish both clarity and rapport. Doctors frequently initiated consultations with polite identification questions or affiliative remarks, reflecting sensitivity to patient vulnerability and anxiety. This communicative strategy is consistent with international research on healthcare interactions, which highlights the role of carefully structured



openings in fostering trust and collaboration (Philip et al., 2019). Philippine studies on socially accountable medical education and interprofessional collaboration further suggest that respectful, explicit communication is essential in healthcare environments characterized by diverse professional roles and patient backgrounds (Woolley et al., 2018; Moncatar et al., 2021).

The preference for full sentences across institutional domains may also be understood in light of broader structural and technological challenges within Philippine institutions. Studies conducted during and after the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate how communication breakdowns in online and hybrid environments heightened the need for explicit, carefully framed language (Baticulon et al., 2021; Aligato et al., 2021). In such contexts, elliptical or minimal openings risk being interpreted as dismissive or confusing, reinforcing the cultural expectation that institutional interactions should begin with clear, respectful, and fully articulated utterances.

From an intercultural perspective, these findings challenge assumptions derived from Western institutional discourse, where elliptical forms are often associated with efficiency and professionalism. In contrast, Filipino institutional talk privileges relational clarity, aligning with intercultural communication frameworks that emphasize context sensitivity and power awareness in globalized settings (Sorrells & Sekimoto, 2025). The Filipino preference for full sentential openings illustrates how grammatical choices are embedded in cultural value systems that prioritize relational ethics over transactional speed.

The findings suggest that grammatical form and sentential type in Philippine institutional conversation openings are not merely linguistic choices but socially meaningful actions. Full sentences and mitigated interrogatives operate as tools for managing hierarchy, signaling respect, and establishing cooperative footing. These patterns underscore the importance of viewing institutional discourse in the Philippines as fundamentally relational, shaped by cultural norms that demand attentiveness to power, identity, and social harmony from the very first utterance.

Semantic Categories: The "Social Buffer"

While Li and Chen identified a preference for other-oriented semantic categories in institutional conversation openings, the present study reveals a distinct pattern in the Philippine context: the frequent use of neutral semantic categories, particularly references to weather, time, or current events. These neutral openings function as a “social buffer,” allowing interlocutors to establish *pakikipagkapwa*—a sense of shared social space—before transitioning to task-oriented discourse. Rather than being interactionally empty, such utterances perform important relational work by softening institutional boundaries and reducing face-threatening implications at the outset of formal encounters.

The use of neutral semantic categories was evident across educational, medical, and judicial settings, though its pragmatic function varied by context. In educational interactions, neutral remarks often preceded academic concerns, easing students into interactions with authority figures.

This aligns with research highlighting the relational orientation of Philippine education, where learning environments are shaped not only by instructional goals but also by affective and cultural expectations (Ortiga, 2018; Eustaquio et al., 2025). Even in technologically mediated learning spaces, Filipino educators and students tend to rely on relational cues to frame interaction, reinforcing the role of neutral semantic buffers in maintaining social harmony (Garcia & Yousef, 2023; Espartinez, 2024).

In medical settings, neutral semantic openings served a particularly affective function. Health professionals frequently initiated consultations with weather-related comments or casual inquiries before addressing clinical concerns, signaling empathy and attentiveness. This practice is consistent with findings on socially accountable medical education and interprofessional collaboration in the Philippines, which emphasize trust-building and relational sensitivity as foundations of effective healthcare delivery (Woolley et al., 2018; Moncatar et al., 2021). Studies on telemedicine and pandemic-era healthcare further suggest that neutral openings became even more



critical when physical cues were limited, helping compensate for emotional distance in digitally mediated consultations (Baticulon et al., 2021; Noceda et al., 2023).

Judicial interactions also demonstrated strategic use of neutral semantic categories, despite the inherently formal nature of legal encounters. Mediators and legal practitioners occasionally employed brief, non-threatening remarks before proceeding to procedural matters, reflecting the influence of informal relational norms within Philippine legal culture. Dressel and Inoue (2018) note that judicial decision-making in the Philippines is often embedded in informal networks, where relational awareness shapes institutional behavior. Neutral semantic buffers thus functioned as pragmatic tools that acknowledged participants' shared social reality while maintaining the authority of legal roles.

From an intercultural and global perspective, the Filipino preference for neutral semantic categories contrasts with efficiency-driven institutional discourse in many Western settings. Intercultural communication scholars argue that high-context cultures prioritize relational alignment and shared understanding over direct task orientation (Sorrells & Sekimoto, 2025).

This orientation is further reinforced by transnational experiences of Filipino professionals, such as nurses working abroad, who report adapting their communicative strategies to balance professional expectations with deeply ingrained relational norms (Dahl et al., 2021; Ennis & Walton-Roberts, 2018). These findings suggest that the social buffer is not a sign of communicative redundancy but a culturally grounded interactional strategy.

Thus, neutral semantic categories in Philippine institutional conversation openings are neither accidental nor peripheral. Instead, they constitute a culturally meaningful mechanism for managing power, uncertainty, and relational risk at the start of institutional encounters. In an era of increasing digital mediation and AI-assisted communication, where interactional warmth risks being diminished (Zhai et al., 2024), understanding the role of social buffers becomes even more critical. By foregrounding *pakikipagkapwa* through neutral openings, Filipino speakers reaffirm the primacy of relational ethics in institutional discourse, ensuring that formal interactions remain socially grounded from the very first turn.

Social Actions and Honorifics

Analysis of the corpus indicates that Greeting and Addressing were the most prevalent social actions across all institutional settings examined. These actions functioned as ritualized entry points that established mutual recognition and delineated role relationships before transactional talk commenced. A defining feature of Philippine institutional openings was the near-obligatory use of honorifics such as *po* and *opo*, regardless of setting. Rather than optional politeness markers, these honorifics operated as interactional necessities, signaling deference, moral alignment, and respect for institutional and social hierarchies from the outset of interaction.

From an intercultural communication perspective, the centrality of honorifics reflects a high-context communicative orientation in which social meaning is embedded in linguistic form. Sorrells and Sekimoto (2025) argue that in such contexts, language serves not merely to convey information but to enact social relationships and ethical positioning. In the Philippine case, the absence of honorifics in institutional openings was often interpreted as a face-threatening act, underscoring how politeness strategies are deeply tied to local moral frameworks rather than universal norms of efficiency or neutrality.

In educational settings, Greeting and Addressing were frequently combined with relational cues that affirmed authority while maintaining approachability. This pattern aligns with pedagogical research emphasizing the role of culturally grounded narratives and relational framing in Philippine classrooms (Eustaquio et al., 2025).

Even as educational spaces increasingly integrate digital technologies and AI-mediated tools, studies suggest that Filipino students and teachers continue to value relational markers as signals of legitimacy and care (Espartinez,



2024). The persistence of honorifics in both face-to-face and mediated interactions indicates that social actions in openings remain culturally anchored despite technological shifts.

Medical interactions displayed a distinct configuration of social actions, particularly the use of Other-identification combined with affiliative language. Doctors frequently initiated consultations with questions such as “*Ikaw ba ‘to si Mr. Cruz?*” followed by a compliment or reassurance, a strategy aimed at easing patient anxiety and humanizing clinical encounters.

This finding resonates with research on patient satisfaction and socially accountable medical education in the Philippines, which highlights the importance of empathy and relational sensitivity in healthcare delivery (Noceda et al., 2023; Ellaway et al., 2018). Such social actions serve to mitigate institutional power and reduce stigma, especially for patients navigating vulnerability or health-related anxiety (Tanaka et al., 2018).

In judicial contexts, Complaint emerged as the most frequent social action among high-status participants such as lawyers and mediators. Unlike greetings or affiliative actions, complaints were often delivered directly, reflecting the institutional authority vested in these roles. This pattern mirrors broader findings that higher-status individuals possess greater interactional license to initiate face-threatening acts (Sorrells & Sekimoto, 2025). At the same time, the continued use of honorifics alongside complaints reveals a uniquely Filipino balancing act—asserting authority while maintaining cultural expectations of respect and decorum.

Taken together, these findings suggest that social actions and honorifics in Philippine institutional conversation openings are inseparable from broader structures of inequality, care, and moral responsibility. Whether in education, healthcare, or the judiciary, speakers navigate complex interactional demands shaped by global pressures, technological change, and entrenched social hierarchies (Ennis & Walton-Roberts, 2018; Näre & Cleland Silva, 2021). In this context, honorifics and opening social actions function as ethical anchors, ensuring that even the most authoritative or transactional encounters remain grounded in relational accountability and shared social values.

Paggalang as a Linguistic and Ethical Anchor

The findings of this study underscore the central role of *paggalang* (respect) in shaping linguistic choices during institutional conversation openings in the Philippines. Unlike Western institutional contexts where elliptical forms are often valued for efficiency, Filipino speakers tend to associate brevity with disrespect.

An elliptical opening such as “Name?” in a hospital setting is frequently perceived as *bastos*, whereas the full form “*Ano po ang pangalan nila?*” signals attentiveness and moral regard. This suggests that grammatical completeness in Philippine institutional discourse functions as an ethical marker, reinforcing social hierarchy while preserving interpersonal harmony.

This respect-oriented preference for full sentences becomes particularly salient in high-stakes settings such as healthcare and the judiciary. Research on patient satisfaction in Philippine telemedicine contexts highlights the importance of courteous, explicit communication in maintaining trust, especially when physical cues are limited (Noceda et al., 2023). Similarly, studies on socially accountable medical education emphasize that communication practices are integral to institutional missions centered on care and dignity rather than procedural efficiency (Ellaway et al., 2018; Puras, 2022). Within this framework, conversation openings serve as symbolic enactments of institutional responsibility toward vulnerable populations.



Gender emerged as a meaningful variable in shaping conversational openings, echoing patterns observed in prior pragmatics research. Female speakers in this study were more likely to employ other-oriented expressions, apologies, and affiliative language, particularly in interactions involving asymmetrical power relations.

However, the Philippine context amplifies this tendency, as gendered expectations intersect with cultural norms that value emotional labor and relational maintenance. These findings align with research documenting how Filipino women, especially in care-oriented professions, navigate institutional interactions by balancing authority with empathy (Näre & Cleland Silva, 2021; Miyata, 2023).

Beyond gender, familiarity proved to be a more influential determinant of linguistic choice than previously documented in comparable studies. Filipino speakers exhibited markedly higher levels of indirectness when addressing strangers, frequently using apologies and mitigating expressions as pre-emptive politeness strategies. This heightened sensitivity to social distance reflects broader societal concerns with stigma and social vulnerability, particularly in interactions involving health, legal, or academic authority (Tanaka et al., 2018). The findings suggest that familiarity functions as a pragmatic gatekeeper, shaping how respect and face are linguistically managed in institutional encounters.

The role of *paggalang* also extends into digitally mediated and AI-supported interactional spaces. Emerging research on ChatGPT and generative AI in Philippine higher education indicates ambivalence toward efficiency-driven communication, with concerns that automated or overly concise discourse may erode relational depth and academic integrity (Espartinez, 2024; Plata et al., 2023). Similarly, systematic reviews warn that over-reliance on AI dialogue systems may diminish users' sensitivity to contextual and interpersonal cues (Zhai et al., 2024). These developments highlight the enduring relevance of culturally grounded politeness norms, even as institutional communication becomes increasingly technologized.

From a broader socio-ethical perspective, the emphasis on respect in Philippine institutional discourse resonates with moral frameworks rooted in social justice and care. Deguma et al. (2020) illustrate how Filipino institutions, including religious and social organizations, frame service as a moral obligation to protect dignity, particularly during crises.

This ethical orientation parallels findings from interprofessional research during the COVID-19 pandemic, which emphasize collaboration, humility, and respectful dialogue as prerequisites for effective institutional response (Sy et al., 2020). Conversation openings, though brief, thus reflect deeply held values about responsibility, inclusion, and social solidarity.

This study demonstrates that grammatical form, gendered language use, and familiarity are not peripheral variables but central mechanisms through which *paggalang* is enacted in Philippine institutional discourse. By privileging full sentences, indirectness, and relational sensitivity, Filipino speakers transform conversation openings into sites of ethical negotiation. These findings challenge efficiency-driven models of institutional communication and call for culturally responsive frameworks that recognize respect and relational accountability as foundational to effective interaction in both face-to-face and mediated institutional contexts.

Conclusion:

This study demonstrates that while the structural components of conversation openings—such as greetings, address terms, and preliminary inquiries—are broadly comparable to those identified in prior international research, their pragmatic realization in the Philippine context is distinctly shaped by cultural values and institutional expectations. Filipino institutional discourse is characterized by layered indirectness, the obligatory use of honorifics, and a strong preference for full sentential forms, all of which function as interactional resources for managing hierarchy, respect, and relational alignment.



The findings highlight the central role of *paggalang* (respect) and *kapwa* (shared identity) in shaping how institutional interactions are initiated. Unlike efficiency-oriented models prevalent in Western judicial and professional settings, Filipino speakers prioritize face preservation and rapport-building, even in time-constrained environments such as healthcare and legal mediation. The frequent use of neutral semantic categories as “social buffers” further underscores the importance of relational preparation before transactional talk can proceed. These practices reveal that conversation openings in the Philippines are not merely transitional devices but culturally meaningful acts that establish moral and social footing.

By adopting a qualitative phenomenological approach and drawing on authentic institutional interactions, this study contributes to the growing body of discourse-pragmatic research that challenges universalist assumptions about institutional talk. It extends existing models of conversation openings by demonstrating how linguistic form, social action, and cultural values interact dynamically within specific sociocultural contexts. Importantly, the findings suggest that policies and training programs in education, healthcare, and the judiciary should attend not only to what is communicated but also to how interactions begin, particularly in culturally diverse or digitally mediated settings.

This study affirms that conversation openings are powerful sites of cultural expression and ethical negotiation. In the Philippine institutional context, they serve as gateways through which authority is tempered by respect, and formality is balanced with relational care—ensuring that institutional discourse remains socially grounded from the very first turn.

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