

A Politeness Strategies in EFL Interaction of Indonesian Students and Lectures

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ABSTRACT

A Through language, we can see someone's behavior from their way of speaking. The way speakers behave well can be achieved by paying attention to important aspects of communication; this is called the politeness strategy. Even though many studies have been conducted on a similar topic, this study proposes a further analysis to investigate the politeness strategies. The data sources analyzed were brief messages written by students and lecturers sent to their WA groups and student-lecture utterances in classroom interaction. These messages and utterances were then analyzed based on qualitative content analysis techniques informed by Brown's and Levisohn's (1987) theory of politeness strategies that are used by ELF interaction of Indonesian students—lecturers' interaction in online and offline in the classroom (DEMİR, 2021). This study aimed to collect, analyze, and interpret the data that was collected through the WhatsApp application and student-lecturer interaction. A descriptive-qualitative method was used to find out the politeness strategy used in EFL interactions with Indonesian students and lecturers. There were four politeness strategies found, such as the positive politeness strategy, the negative politeness strategy, the bald on record strategy, and the off-record strategy. The positive politeness strategy was found to be the most frequent strategy used in student and lecturer interaction in WhatsApp groups and classrooms. The most frequent strategies used by students and lecturers in their interaction were politeness strategies such as greetings, using in-group identity markers, seeking an agreement, offering promises, being optimistic, and giving gifts.

Keywords: Politeness, EFL, language, strategy, interaction

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is a very important thing in interaction and can be used as a means of communication. In linguistics, the process of human communication with each other is called conversation. The use of language in different contexts and situations, since the inability to communicate appropriately and politely in social interaction may have bad impacts on the interlocutors, through language, we can see someone's behavior from their way of speaking. The way speakers behave well can be achieved by paying attention to important aspects of communication; this is called the politeness strategy. Leech (2014) stated that politeness is the fundamental principle of social rule (Brown, 2015). It means that humans must know who they are communicating with and how to convey them correctly so as not to cause misunderstanding and ambiguity, let alone communicate with lecturers or teachers. Meanwhile, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), it refers more to the face (Bacha et al., 2021). They define politeness as a regressive action on the feelings of each individual about self-worth (self-esteem) or self-image.

Today's phenomenon of politeness can occur everywhere, either in the family, workplace, or campus, as well as on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, and WhatsApp. One of the most extensively used text messaging applications is WhatsApp (WA). This application allows users to send text messages, make video and voice calls, share media files, and engage in group chats. It became necessary to maintain people's connection with each other; they became more fearless in their words, feelings, and thoughts. Zahra et al.

investigated ELF undergraduate students' politeness strategies in online classroom interaction (Zahra et al., 2023). Ambarwati et al. (2019) investigated the politeness strategies used in the Facebook interactions posted by women (Ambarwati et al., 2019). Both of the findings showed that the use of politeness strategies in classroom interactions implies positive results; for instance, it could create effective communication between teachers and students that contains respect values, improve their interactions, and lessen the interference in their communication. Politeness strategies developed as 'a humanistic learning'. They elaborated it on the social media platform as a process to show how people choose proper speech, keep the power in communication, and maintain the attitude to save the interlocutor's face.

Politeness is influenced by social status, age, gender, familiarity, and situation. Spolsky (1998) stated that there are some elements that influence people's politeness: language styles, registers, and domains that exist; slang and solidarity; as well as language and gender (Hamod & Challob, 2023). These characteristics influence how politeness is expressed between speakers and listeners. Numerous studies in the area of gender and linguistic politeness reveal that males and females do, in fact, differ slightly in this regard. Millar (1983) has studied gender behaviour regarding the social and symbolic dynamics of Bugis society and stated that men should behave aggressively and formally, whereas women need to behave cautiously and informally (Millar, 1993). According to Brown in Mills (2003), women, in general, are more polite than men (Arif et al., 2018). Since women are

more involved with building rapport amongst group members and making sure that discussion flows naturally, their distinct conversational goals can cause breaks in communication or misunderstandings (rapport talk).

However, learning English means knowing not only how to speak and write but also how to behave linguistically. As stated by Yule (1996) speech act is an action performed by utterances. In teaching and learning process, it is important to understand the meaning of the utterance, the teacher and the students should have the same background knowledge, share the same experience, understand the goals of conversation, and able to observe the context of the conversation. When doing communication in a classroom, the teacher will also use politeness strategy through their speech acts that will affects the situation of learning. Thus, EFL teachers must be concerned with how the students' speech acts. As stated by Yule (1996) speech act is an action performed by utterances (Santosa & Kurniadi, 2020). In teaching and learning process, it is important to understand the meaning of the utterance, the teacher and the students should have the same background knowledge, share the same experience, understand the goals of conversation, and able to observe the context of the conversation (Rahmayani & Dwiuliana, 2018). When doing communication in a classroom, the teacher will also use politeness strategy through their speech acts that will affects the situation of learning. That is why politeness has been studied intensively during the last four decades. It is very important to learn pragmatics so the lecturer-student interaction can speak and behave appropriately in particular situations and contexts. Consider

politeness in conducting the teaching and learning process in order to build harmonious and close relationships with one another. Referring to the phenomenon above, the purpose of this study is to investigate the politeness strategies in the ELF interaction of Indonesian students—lecturers both online and offline in the classroom.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The basic concept of politeness is a common phenomenon in social communication. Holmes (1995) defined politeness as a behavior that occurs in society to make people respect each other and reduce the possibility of conflict or dispute between members of society (Fitriyani & Andriyanti, 2020). Another scholar, Lakoff (1975), stated that it tends to reveal only one gender, namely a woman's language (Namaziandost & Shafiee, 2018). She suggested that women's speech is characterized by certain linguistic features, and women use them more than men, so that females are considered more polite than men. Yule (1996) stated politeness is used to show cognition of other people's faces, which occurred in their interaction with the interlocutors (Silitonga, 2022). In addition, Brown and Levinson (1987) conceptualize the face as people's impression that they need to be free and appreciated in a certain respect (Bacha et al., 2021). Therefore, it indicates that every person tends to keep each other's self-image in public to avoid getting offended or annoyed by others.

Prior to this study, a number of comparable studies had addressed language politeness strategies in EFL interactions. However, these studies focused primarily on the politeness strategies of student-lecture interactions

in the classroom and when they sent text messages to the WA group. Hamood's research is entitled "Gender Difference in Politeness Strategies through Online Chatting Experienced by EFL Students in Al-Anbar Distinguished Schools" (2023). The findings of this research indicated that male and female students use politeness strategies differently. The female participants used more politeness strategies, but their employment of these strategies was not sufficient because their knowledge of these strategies was poor. In this instance, the researcher examines the ELF interactions of Indonesian students—lecture conversations in the classroom and WhatsApp group chats. Other research conducted related to politeness strategy is from Sianturi et al., "The Students Strategies in Online Learning Interaction: Exploring Politeness in Google Classroom during the COVID-19 Pandemic" (Modesta et al., 2021). It discussed politeness strategies based on the platform used in online learning. The result of this study showed politeness strategies were based on the subject of communication, in this case, the students and educators. The implication is that a politeness strategy is needed to help the students get engaged in the real world, understand someone's culture for the interaction, and ensure the effectiveness of the online learning process. In other studies by Arif et al. (2018), they are focused on identifying types of politeness strategies used in the classroom (Arif et al., 2018). The study was conducted at junior high schools, while this study was conducted at the university level. This study has a similar framework in which it investigated politeness in the classroom; however, rather than the classroom setting, this study also focuses on student-

lecturer interactions in a WhatsApp group.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

A descriptive-qualitative method was used to find out the politeness strategy used in EFL interactions with Indonesian students and lecturers. A qualitative method was chosen because it allows researchers to identify issues from the perspective of participants and understand the meanings and interpretations that they give to behaviour. A qualitative research aims to comprehend social phenomena, including language phenomena, by producing descriptive data in the form of words (Suktiningsih, 2017). It does not require a huge number of respondents (Bekele & Ago, 2022). Accordingly, if there are between 5 and 50 participants, he believes that the qualitative data is sufficient. The data source in this study is from various writings taken authentically from the text messages sent to students and lecturers through the WA group messaging application and their interactions in the classroom.

This study aimed to collect, analyse, and interpret the data that was collected sentence through messages written by students and lecturers sent to their WA groups and student-lecture utterances in classroom interaction. The researchers collected the data by following the step from Sudaryanto (2015), namely note-taking and observation (Afriana et al., 2023). Therefore, in order to obtain genuine and reliable information, the data was collected covertly using note-taking and observation. For this activity stimulus and inducement were provided in an ongoing conversation. The observation is done by observing the languages used when

students and lectures interactions in their WA group and in the classroom, which contain politeness strategy. After that, the data is recorded based on the data classification that has been made. Data analysis was carried out by applying the distributional method. The analysis was done after the data was collected and classified properly. Furthermore, data interpretation is done and the interpreted data is then presented informally. The results of the analysis are formulated in words. The data analysis technique can be done through data reduction by summarizing, selecting the main things, focusing on the important things, and looking for themes and patterns. Finally, they were then analysed and presented qualitatively using the theories of politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987).

Furthermore, this study focused on the politeness strategies used by the lecturer and students in WhatsApp group interactions and in the classroom. Thus, this study explored the forms of utterances that contain politeness strategies in terms of words, phrases, or sentences.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Politeness strategies used by Indonesian students and lecturers in the EFL classroom cover all types of politeness strategies suggested by Brown & Levinson (1987). The findings revealed that there were four politeness strategies used by students and lecturers, such as the positive politeness strategy, the negative politeness strategy, the bald on record strategy, and the off-record strategy. The positive politeness strategy was found to be the most frequent strategy used in student and lecturer interaction in WhatsApp groups and classrooms. They

applied this strategy, such as in greetings, using in-group identity markers, seeking an agreement, offering promises, being optimistic, and giving gifts, which were dominantly used to show their thanking, approval, and interest in the interlocutor. Some students also used this to show appreciation to other students. This study also found that positive politeness occurred in the use of address terms in lectures and students' interactions. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the address term such as 'Class' is categorized as a strategy of 'group identity marker' (Meiratnasari et al., 2019). This was used by the lecturer in her interactions with students, which led her to create polite and respectful communication with the students. There are four types of politeness strategies that students and lecturers use in their WA group. Those were bad-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. The details are presented below: The research results and the comprehensive discussion are deeply and clearly presented. Results can be presented in figures, graphs, tables and others that make the reader understand easily. The discussion must be clearly and deeply conducted. The discussion can be made in several sub-chapters.

4.1 Positive politeness

According to the results, the positive politeness strategy is the most recurrent strategy among student and lecturer interactions. The researchers discovered that there were four data points that contained positive politeness strategies used in WhatsApp and presentation group interactions. A variety of positive strategies were used by students and lecturers. Positive politeness is a strategy oriented towards satisfying

the hearer's positive face. The speaker shows his or her appreciation, approval, familiarity, and interest to build closeness with the hearer. This strategy is commonly used to get closer to someone by saying something that shows familiarity and approval. There are 15 sub-strategies of positive politeness, but this study only found 6 sub-strategies used by students and lecturers, such as greetings, using in-group identity markers, seeking an agreement, offering a promise, being optimistic, and giving gifts. The elaboration of each data point is presented below:

Greeting

Datum 1:

Lecturer: "**Hello everyone, good morning.** Just a friendly reminder, **please** prepare yourself the zoom class will be starting in 10 minutes today."

Students: "**Good morning Ms.** Ok Ms."

The next sub-strategies are welcoming and farewells. This strategy was used in the opening and closing of a conversation or presentation. From the data above, it was shown that the lecturer who became the presenter of the class used greetings before the class started. This expression tends to be used to open the learning activity. In English, "Good morning" is one of the greetings used by students, and it was necessary for them to greet each other by using English daily and during learning activities. After greeting, the lecturer instructed the students to prepare themselves before the class started. This instruction was used when the lecturer asked students to follow her commands before a learning activity. Meanwhile, the word please above is used to soften the command that is given by the lecturer.

Datum 2:

Presenter: **Good morning, Ms. Nila** I would like to remind you that we are from the 1st group will do the presentation today. (WhatsApp group 20/8/2023)

On this occasion, the head of students from the first group became a presenter. He reminded his lecturer in a polite way; the student used the address term 'Ms' in good morning, Ms. Nila. The term Ms, which was used by the student, represented respect and indicated they wanted to be polite to their lecturer who was in a higher position than them.

Datum 3:

Lecturer: Ok, if there is no more question, I think that's all for today. Thank you for joining the class. See you next week. **Good morning and have a great day everyone.**

Students: Thank you, Ms. Good morning.

From the utterance above, it can be seen that the lecturer used the expression of farewell greeting in English, using the word "Good morning and have a great day, everyone". This kind of greeting was mostly used when the lecturers wanted to close their class.

Use in-Group identity marker

Datum 4:

Lecturer: **Ok class**, now let's open Q and A session. I give you 15 minutes.

From the data above, the lecture showed the instructions by saying "OK class, now let's open a Q&A session". In this utterance, the lecturer used the term "class" to refer to the audience. This address term was used to show their friendliness. She also wanted to create a polite interaction by using the expression "let's" in her instruction. This indicated that she included herself in the activity, so

she created an interaction without making the students feel pressured.

Seek an agreement

The next sub-strategy is seeking agreement. This strategy included the way to get common ground with the interlocutor. Students and lecturers applied this strategy when the students, as presenters, showed their agreement with the audience to show that they understood the material being conveyed and shared the same opinion.

Datum 5:

Student 1: Well, in my opinion, **I think** literature is something about idea, imagination that written in the text Ms.

Student 4: Me too, **I think** literature is written text that shares idea include various of fiction and nonfiction genre

Lecturer: **Very good.**

In the example above, it can be seen that students and lecturers were using some ways of expressing their agreements. They used "I think" to demonstrate that they were of the same opinion as others. The expression "very good" also shows that she agrees with the student's statement to be of the same view. This kind of expression was mostly used by the presenter when giving compliments towards the understanding of the audience and to complement their effort for being active and participating during learning activities.

Offer, Promise

Datum 6:

Student: Is there anything I **could** do Miss?

Based on the data above, the student used a positive politeness strategy. It shows that the student asks his lecturer in a positive way. He uses the

model verb" could" to seek information in a polite way.

Be optimistic

Datum 7:

Student: We **hope** you enjoyed and learned something new with the presentation today.

In this statement, the student used the term "we," referring to him and other presenters and audiences, to show that both of them contributed to the conversation. The expression of "hope" showed his optimism to the other students by expressing his hope within his statement.

Giving gifts

The students and lecturer used to give gifts as the next sub-strategy when they thanked the other students. This strategy was also used to appreciate the audience's effort in being active during the class activity. It was usually applied by giving praise, so they would feel appreciated and increase their positive feelings. It is mostly used at the end of a conversation in WhatsApp and at the end of a learning activity. This study is in line with Leech (2014), who stated that 'thank you' often indicates the end of a conversation.

Datum 8:

Student: Ok miss, **thank you** very much for the information.

Datum 9:

Student: Good afternoon miss, doing fine.

Thank you.

Datum 10:

Student: **Thank you** so much for the support and permission Ms.

Datum 11:

Student: That's all from us. **Thank you**, now it is the turn for next group.

Lecturer: Ok, well done. **Thank you** all for the explanation.

From those data, it can be seen that the students and lecturer thanked the presenter and audience in a positive manner to show their kindness and respect. These kinds of expressions were mostly used by the students when giving compliments and for being active and participating during presentations or via WhatsApp. Students usually say “thank you” when they want to close the presentation.

Bald on record politeness strategy

The next category is Bald on record. It is stating something to the point that means the speaker says explicitly, clearly, simply, and directly with what she/he wants. The speaker states or tells something true, not less or more than is required, is relevant to the topic discussed, and avoids ambiguity. This strategy was used when the presenter asked the receivers directly to do something she or he wanted, although she or he used a mitigating device in her or his command.

Data 12:

Lecturer: Now you will have a quiz. **Don't cheat, do it by yourself and don't forget to write down your name and your student number.**

Students: Ok miss.

In the data above, the lecturer gave some instructions to the students. It consists of baldness on record. It indicated that the lecturer was able to use these kinds of politeness strategies in a single turn. In relation to the bald on record strategy, the lecture said, “You will have a quiz,” which was a task-oriented sub-strategy from bald on record. She also said, “Don't cheat; do it by yourself and don't forget to put your name and student number,” which is an example of a bald on

record sub-strategy warning. The reason she used this was to give a clear and effective direction on what students needed to do.

4.2 Negative Politeness

The next strategy is negative politeness. It is oriented to satisfy the hearer's negative face concerning respect behaviour and not impose it on the hearer. In conducting this strategy, the speaker should stress the listener's relative power to maintain social distance. Based on the data, there were only 3 sub-strategies found for the negative politeness strategy. This strategy concerns respecting behaviour and imposing it on the hearer.

Datum 13:

Student : **Can you go back to the previous slide, please?**

Presenter : Of course.

From the data above, the student used different kinds of negative politeness strategies. He used the word “please” to soften the instruction. In this expression, the student tried to be more polite by using modal verbs when he was requesting or asking the presenter. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the use of the word “please” is used to indicate conventionally indirect instruction. Being indirect can be realized by including the insertion of an internal “please”.

Datum 14:

Student: Good afternoon miss. **Sorry** if I'm repeating myself again but there seems to be a confusion regarding the subjects.

From data 13 above, the student said “sorry” to express his apology when he wanted more explanation regarding

the subjects. In line with Yule (1996), negative politeness tends to include an apology for the imposition or interruption. This strategy is used when someone apologizes at the beginning or during the last part of the meeting or conversation.

Off record (indirect)

The last strategy is off-record. According to Yule (1963), off-recording is stating something indirectly, usually using hints or clues that need to be guessed or interpreted by the hearer. The speakers allow the hearers to give more than one interpretation of what the speakers say. Based on the research, we found one data point that applied off-record strategies.

Datum 15:

Lecturer: Ok, Abiyu. Do you know how many kinds of literature?

Students: **There any many** miss

There is only one sub-strategy, called being vague, found in this research. From the data above, it is still ambiguous and vague since she didn't mention the exact number of kinds of literature. According to Craig et al. (1986), when applying this strategy, the doer made a statement but did so in a vague way, leaving the interpretation of the comment open to the addressee.

5. CONCLUSION

This study is a research of politeness strategies in EFL students-lecturer interaction in the classroom and WhatsApp group. There are four types of politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) that are used by students and lecturers in their interactions. Those were positive politeness, negative politeness, and baldness on record, and off record. The most frequent strategies used by students and lecturers in their interaction were

politeness strategies such as greetings, using in-group identity markers, seeking an agreement, offering promises, being optimistic, and giving gifts. Giving gifts was the dominant sub-strategy used by students to thank and show appreciation to other students. The occurrence of negative strategies in the majority of the data signified that the students were aware of the differences that occurred between them and their lecturers. The findings indicated that Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies were suitable to be applied in the classroom and online interactions in the Indonesian EFL classroom context. Furthermore, the findings of this study could be a contribution to other EFL lecturers to teach their students how to show polite behavior in communication both online and in the classroom to achieve effective classroom interactions.

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