



TEACHER AND STUDENTS' POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN EFL CLASSROOM INTERACTIONS

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Abstract

This research explores the manners in which both teachers and students utilize politeness strategies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Interactions at SMAN 12 Sinjai. A descriptive qualitative research approach was employed, with data gathered at classroom observation of a 90-minute session from one class of 30 students chosen at random. The results identified three main politeness strategies: positive politeness, negative politeness, and bald-on-record strategies. The interactions were predominantly led by the teacher, with politeness strategies being shaped by factors such as age differences, roles within the institution, power relationships, and social distance. However, this research fills a gap in existing literature by examining a local context, shedding light on the way politeness strategies are used in Indonesian EFL classrooms. The implications of this study indicate that teachers should recognize the importance of politeness strategies to improve communication and create a welcoming learning environment.

Keywords: *politeness strategies, EFL classroom interaction*

Introduction

Interaction in the classroom is an essential aspect of the learning experience, especially in English as a foreign language setting. Successful communication within the classroom not only aids in the dissemination of knowledge but also promotes a positive learning atmosphere. Celce-Murcia (2007) asserts that communicative competence is vital for language learners to articulate their thoughts effectively and clearly. Nonetheless, numerous EFL learners face difficulties in communicating, such as anxiety over making errors and concern about receiving negative feedback from classmates and instructors (Al-Jamal & Al-Jamal, 2020). Such obstacles can discourage students from engaging actively in discussions within the classroom. Consequently, comprehending the intricacies of classroom interaction is vital for teachers who seek to improve student involvement and educational results.

Politeness strategies are crucial in influencing classroom interactions, as they assist in managing social connections and reducing face-threatening behavior. Brown and Levinson (1987) introduced a framework for understanding politeness in communication that consists of positive politeness, negative politeness, and bald-on-record strategies. Positive politeness strategies aim to uplift the listener's self-worth and create a feeling of friendship (Jayanti & Mahmud, 2024). Research by Khusnia (2020) indicates that when teachers employ positive

politeness strategies such as greetings or affirmations, students feel more valued and motivated to participate actively. Negative politeness strategies seek to lessen the burden on the listener and honor their independence. Conversely, bald-on-record strategies entail straightforward communication that does not soften the message's effect. Effectively applying these strategies can foster respectful and constructive engagements between students and teachers.

On the other hand, negative politeness strategies focus on minimizing imposition and respecting autonomy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). For instance, using indirect requests allows students to maintain their dignity while engaging with their teachers (Surani et al., 2025). This approach not only fosters respect but also encourages collaboration within the learning environment.

Prior studies have emphasized the significance of politeness strategies in educational environments, especially within EFL classrooms. Research by Khusnia (2020) and Mahmud (2020) indicates that the application of politeness strategies notably impacts the quality of interactions between teachers and students. Moreover, Jayanti & Mahmud (2024) found that positive politeness was the most frequently implemented strategy during interactions between teachers and students in EFL classrooms. This suggests that fostering an inclusive environment through polite communication can significantly enhance engagement levels among learners. These findings suggest that when instructors utilize politeness strategies, students are more inclined to feel esteemed and appreciated, thereby motivating their active participation in class activities. Nevertheless, there remains a lack of literature that examines the specific use of these strategies in local environments, like SMAN 12 Sinjai. This study seeks to fill that void by investigating the politeness strategies identified in EFL classroom interactions at this particular institution.

In Indonesia, the way people communicate is greatly shaped by cultural traditions and social hierarchies. Respect and hierarchy are very important in Indonesian culture, especially within educational environments where teachers hold significant authority (Mahmud 2019). Therefore, students tend to adopt negative politeness strategies to avoid putting pressure on their teachers and to keep a respectful distance. It is crucial for teachers to comprehend how these cultural elements influence politeness strategies in the classroom to foster an inclusive and supportive educational atmosphere.

Additionally, the way students interact in the classroom can change due to age differences, roles within the institution, and the level of social closeness (Etae et al., 2016). For example, younger learners might use different politeness strategies than their older peers, as their understanding of social norms and power relationships develops over time. This research will examine how these variables affect politeness strategies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Interaction at SMAN 12 Sinjai, offering valuable information about the complexities of communication in this particular environment.

The importance of this study lies in its ability to influence teaching methods and improve communication effectiveness in EFL classrooms. By analyzing the politeness strategies used by both educators and pupils, this study seeks to enhance the current knowledge in discourse analysis and language teaching. The outcomes will not only deepen the understanding of classroom interactions but also provide practical recommendations for teachers aiming to create a more respectful and interactive learning space.

In conclusion, this study looks into the politeness strategies present in EFL classroom interactions at SMAN 12 Sinjai, filling a notable gap in existing literature related to local contexts. The focus on communication dynamics within this specific setting is intended to

improve our comprehension of how politeness strategies can enhance effective learning and instruction in EFL classrooms. The insights from this study benefit educators, researchers, and policymakers within the realm of language education.

Research Methodology

A descriptive qualitative research design was used in this study to investigate the politeness strategies seen in classroom interactions at SMAN 12 Sinjai. This method aims to gain a better understanding of the views, feelings, perspectives, and attitudes of the participants involved (Lodico et al. 2010; Nassaji, 2015). The main objective of this research was to gather, analyze, and interpret data collected from a 90-minute English lesson, with a specific focus on the exchanges between an English teacher and 30 eleventh-grade students. The data consisted of spoken utterances during the teaching and learning process, enabling a thorough examination of the politeness strategies utilized in the classroom setting.

The individuals involved in this research comprised a single English educator and a deliberately chosen group of thirty learners from the eleventh grade of a public senior high school situated in Sinjai, Indonesia, during the 2018/2019 academic period. The method of data acquisition involved recording video footage of classroom observation of the English lessons, which served as an abundant resource to pinpoint the politeness techniques in the speech of the participants. The analysis phase encompassed transcribing the recorded exchanges and selecting pertinent excerpts that demonstrated the identified techniques. For organizing the analysis, coding was utilized, using abbreviations like T for the teacher, S for individual students, Ss for groups of students, and U for specific utterances. The extracted excerpts were then examined and interpreted based on Brown and Levinson's politeness strategy framework established in 1987, which offered a structured approach for comprehending the nuances of politeness within classroom interactions.

Results and Discussion

Results

This study's outcomes highlight the diverse politeness strategies utilized by both the educator and the learners during English as a foreign language interaction in SMAN 12 Sinjai. The analysis is divided into three primary strategies: positive politeness, negative politeness, and bald-on-record strategies. Each category is exemplified by excerpts from the classroom exchanges, which provide a comprehensive insight into the practical application of these strategies.

1. Positive Politeness Strategy

Strategies of positive politeness are defined by behaviors that boost the positive face of the listener, ensuring they feel valued and esteemed. This research uncovered multiple instances of positive politeness:

Excerpt 1

T. U1: Assalamu'alaikum, morning students.

Ss. U1: Wa'alaikumsalam, good morning Ma'am.

T. U2: Nice day, isn't it? How have you been?

Ss. U2: Fine, Ma'am.

T. U3: Ok, let's start our lesson.

In this interaction, the teacher extends a warm greeting to the students through both a cultural salutation and a friendly question about their well-being. The students show respect by addressing the teacher as "Ma'am. " This exchange embodies positive politeness by cultivating a welcoming environment and building rapport. The greetings and inquiries about the students' well-being not only create an encouraging atmosphere for the lesson but also promote more open engagement from the students. By integrating cultural phrases like "Assalamu'alaikum," the teacher recognizes the students' cultural backgrounds, thereby reinforcing their sense of belonging in the classroom. This approach effectively diminishes the psychological gap between the teacher and the students, fostering a cooperative learning environment.

Excerpt 2

T. U4: How about this sentence? We can make a causative sentence, right?

T. U5: Next, after the subject you are going to put?

Ss. U3: To be.

T. U6: Is it to be? Always to be? Come on.

Ss. U4: Causative verb.

T. U7: Correct. Nice.

The instructor's incorporation of affirmative expressions like "Correct" and "Nice" serves to acknowledge the students' answers, which aligns with the assertion by Jayanti & Mahmud (2024) that positive politeness fosters a sense of belonging and encourages active participation among students. This is supported by the findings of Mahmud (2020), which suggest that when teachers employ positive reinforcement, it significantly boosts students' confidence and willingness to engage in classroom discussions. This practice not only enhances the confidence of the students but also strengthens a positive educational atmosphere, illustrating the success of positive politeness approaches within classroom engagement. By endorsing the students' replies, the instructor cultivates a welcoming environment where learners feel at ease to participate. The use of collective language, including phrases like "we can make," further highlights collaboration and joint learning efforts. Such a method not only increases student involvement but also builds a sense of community within the classroom, empowering students to take chances with their language skills.

2. Negative Politeness Strategy

Strategies of negative politeness focus on reducing the burden on the listener, thereby honoring their negative face. The following examples showcase the implementation of negative politeness in a classroom setting:

Excerpt 3

T. U11: May I have one again?

S1. U1: Yes.

In this excerpt, the educator utilizes a courteous request by phrasing it with "May I," which mitigates the demand and shows respect for the student's independence. This indirect method exemplifies negative politeness by lessening the possible imposition on the student. By forming the request this way, the educator acknowledges the student's right to decline, thereby honoring their autonomy. This tactic illustrates the teacher's understanding of social dynamics and promotes a respectful dialogue. The usage of "May I" reflects a suitable formality that aligns with the teacher-student relationship, reinforcing boundaries while simultaneously nurturing a cooperative environment.

Excerpt 4

T. U12: Next, the causative verb should be?

S2. U1: Object.

T. U13: Ok object, alright. Can you correct this?

S2. U2: Alright, Ma'am.

The instructor's wording "Would you mind correcting this?" represents an indirect request for the student to give feedback. It demonstrated respect for students' autonomy and reduced potential face threats (Surani et al., 2025). This finding is consistent with research by Sunarya (2020), which highlights that effective use of negative politeness can lead to increased student motivation and participation. Furthermore, according to Khusnia (2020), employing negative politeness strategies allows students to feel more comfortable in expressing their thoughts without fear of judgment, thus promoting a more interactive classroom environment. This approach honors the student's position and avoids outright commands, which might feel imposing. By making an indirect request, the educator allows the student to feel more in control during the interaction, providing the freedom to respond affirmatively or negatively. This strategy not only upholds the student's dignity but also encourages them to be more involved in the learning experience. The courteous inquiry builds a sense of partnership in education, appreciating the student's input and contributions.

Excerpt 5

T. U21: Can I open this? (Pointing at the curtain)

S5. U1: Yes, Ma'am. Should we open all?

T. U22: Yes, class, please open the curtain, we are no longer using the projector, and for us to use it, we need the sunlight now.

In this exchange, the teacher's expression of "Can I open this?" serves as a courteous inquiry, and the inclusion of "please" further mitigates the directness of the command. This illustrates a sensitivity to the social interactions occurring and emphasizes

the importance of keeping a respectful distance. The teacher's request for permission to draw back the curtain indicates a consideration for the students' emotions and viewpoints. By encouraging student involvement in the decision-making, the teacher promotes a cooperative atmosphere. The term "please" not only increases the request's politeness but also affirms the teacher's role as a guide rather than an authoritarian figure within the classroom.

3. Bald-On-Record Strategy

Strategies that are bald-on-record entail straightforward communication that does not strive to lessen the effect of the message on the listener's dignity. The following example exemplifies this strategy:

Excerpt 6

T. U27: Ok, class, please listen, so that there will be no repetition. Are you ready?

Ss. U11: Yes, Ma'am.

The phrase "Alright, pay attention to avoid repeating," given by the teacher, serves as a prime illustration of the bald-on-record strategy. This instruction, though straightforward, is suitable within the classroom setting due to the authority the teacher possesses. The students show their agreement, reflecting their willingness to follow along. Additionally, Mahmud (2019) emphasizes that using bald-on-record strategies appropriately can help establish clear expectations for student behavior during lessons, thereby enhancing classroom management. This method proves effective when directness and clarity are crucial for maintaining discipline and focus in the educational environment. The authority of the teacher is bolstered through such explicit communication, which fits well within the context of the lesson. Nevertheless, it is vital to complement this directness with consideration for the students' emotions, ensuring that the classroom continues to be a nurturing space for learning.

Table 1. Politeness Strategies in EFL Classroom Discourse

Politeness Strategy	Number of Excerpt	Example
Positive Politeness	4	Use of address terms like "Ma'am" and expressions like "Let's start."
Negative Politeness	8	Indirect requests such as "May I have...?" and "Can you help me?"
Bald-on-Record	2	Direct instructions like "Listen carefully."

An examination of classroom exchanges at SMAN 12 Sinjai uncovers a diverse array of politeness tactics utilized by both educators and learners. Strategies that reflect positive politeness contribute to a nurturing and motivating atmosphere, whereas negative politeness strategies respect the autonomy of the students. The employment of bald-on-record strategies signifies the teacher's dominance and the accepted practices within the classroom

dynamic. These observations highlight the crucial role that politeness strategies play in promoting effective communication and improving the educational experience within EFL classrooms.

Discussion

The results of this research indicate a frequent application of both positive and negative politeness strategies during the EFL classroom interactions at SMAN 12 Sinjai. Positive politeness methods, including greetings and affirmations, contribute to a friendly and motivating atmosphere, supporting Brown and Levinson's (1987) claim that these techniques help raise the self-esteem of the audience. For example, the teacher's friendly greetings and expressions of gratitude, such as "Nice" and "Correct," not only acknowledged the students' input but also promoted further engagement. On the other hand, the frequent use of negative politeness strategies, such as indirect requests and modal verbs like "May I" and "Can you," reflected the students' understanding of social hierarchies while wishing to maintain a degree of respectfulness towards the teacher. This observation aligns with earlier studies by Khusnia (2020) and Mahmud (2020), which emphasized the significance of politeness in enhancing effective communication within educational environments.

When comparing the current findings with earlier research, it becomes clear that the application of politeness strategies in EFL classrooms is shaped by cultural and situational aspects. For instance, while Khusnia (2020) identified a predominance of negative politeness strategies among university students, this research shows a similar trend in high school students, indicating that an awareness of social dynamics crosses various educational tiers. However, this current investigation also sheds light on Indonesia's distinct cultural context, where respect for authority figures is deeply rooted. This cultural consideration may clarify why students tend to favor negative politeness strategies more often than their peers in Western educational contexts, where direct communication may be more widely accepted (Ardi et al. 2020). The findings emphasize the necessity for educators to be mindful of these cultural distinctions during classroom interactions.

The findings of this research hold great importance for both educators and policymakers involved in language education. Gaining insight into the politeness tactics utilized by teachers and students allows educators to foster a learning environment that is more inclusive and respectful, thereby encouraging greater student involvement. Moreover, the results indicate that teacher training initiatives ought to integrate communication strategy training that is sensitive to cultural differences. Nevertheless, this study comes with certain limitations. It was carried out in one school with a particular demographic, which may restrict the applicability of the results. Future studies should widen the scope to encompass a variety of settings and include a diverse array of student groups to achieve a fuller understanding of politeness strategies within EFL classrooms.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has shed light on the politeness techniques evident in EFL classroom interactions at SMAN 12 Sinjai. The results signify that employing both positive and negative politeness strategies is crucial for effective communication and the establishment of a nurturing learning atmosphere. Positive politeness strategies, such as greetings and

supportive feedback, boost student involvement, while negative politeness strategies demonstrate students' recognition of social hierarchies and their intent to respect the authority of the teacher. In light of these findings, it is advised that educators remain aware of the politeness strategies they adopt in classrooms and take into account their students' cultural backgrounds. Teacher training programs should highlight the significance of highly effective communication approaches that endorse respect and inclusivity. Furthermore, ongoing research is essential to investigate the application of politeness strategies in various educational environments and cultural contexts, which will enrich our understanding of classroom dynamics in EFL settings.

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