Politeness Strategies in Teacher-Student Interaction in An EFL Classroom Context

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POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTION IN AN EFL CLASSROOM CONTEXT

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Abstract: This study explores politeness strategies used by teacher and students in two 90-minute English lessons in a senior high school. The data were video-recorded from two different classroom settings where English is the object and the medium of teaching learning process. The analysis is based on Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies. The result shows that teacher and students basically employed positive, negative, and bald on-record strategies. Teacher and students' perception on social distance, the age difference, institutional setting, power, and the limitation of the linguistic ability of the students has contributed to the different choices of politeness strategies. The students tend to use some interpersonal function markers. Linguistic expressions that are used in classroom interaction are addressing, encouraging, thanking, apologizing, and leave–taking.

Keywords: politeness strategies, pragmatic perspectives, classroom interaction

One of the aims of learning English as a foreign language is to be able to communicate. Learners should have communicative competence that comprises not only linguistic competence, but also socio-cultural, interactional, formulaic and strategic competence (Celce-Murcia, 2007, p. 45). Socio-cultural, interactional, and strategic competences refer to the speaker's pragmatic knowledge. This paper approaches classroom interaction from a pragmatic perspective. The pragmatic perspective can be particularly defined as knowledge of communicative action and how to carry it out, and the ability to use language appropriately according to context (Kasper, 1997). Language classroom can be seen as socio-linguistic environment and discourse communities in which interlocutors use

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various functions of language to establish a communication system, and the teacher-student interaction is believed to contribute on students' language development (Consolo, 2006, p. 34).

This study focuses on politeness strategies in teacher-student interaction in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom context. Learning a foreign language involves not only knowing how to speak and write, but also how to behave linguistically. Therefore, the teacher-student interaction in class is influenced by their pragmatic knowledge, how to behave and respond in different situations and contexts. Pragmatic competence is defined as the ability to communicate effectively and involves knowledge beyond the level of grammar. Bardovi-Harlig (cited by Grossi, 2009, p. 53) argues that the classroom is a place where pragmatic instruction can occur. In order to be successful in communication, it is essential for second language learners to know not just grammar and text organization but also pragmatic aspects of the target language (Bachman, 1990). Pragmatic knowledge has a close relationship with knowledge of socio-cultural values and beliefs.

Classroom instructions with awareness in pragmatic aspects of social interaction can be very useful for learners. It can be challenging to find useful teaching materials and to integrate pragmatics into an existing syllabus. The challenge for foreign language teaching is how to arrange learning opportunities in such a way that they benefit the development of pragmatic competence in foreign language (Kasper, 1997).

The knowledge of politeness is important in classroom teaching of a foreign language. Moreover politeness can have an instrumental role in the social interaction. Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory places politeness as a universal face-threatening strategy. Politeness strategies used by teacher and students in the class can play an important role in learning and teaching process. This study aims at describing politeness strategies used by teacher and students in two 90-minute English lessons in senior high school in natural contexts. The following briefly discuss the concepts of politeness and politeness strategies relevant to the study.

POLITENESS

The basic concept adopted in this paper is politeness developed by Brown & Levinson (1987). They assume that each participant is endowed with what

they call face, which is developed into negative face and positive face. One's negative face includes claims to territories, to freedom of action and freedom from imposition. One's positive face involves the needs for social approval, or the want to be considered desirable by at least some others. It is based on the presumption that, as part of a strategy for maintaining their own face, the mutual interest of participants in a conversation is to maintain their face from others.

Speech act can be categorized as polite if the speech: (a) does not contain any speakers' coercion or vanity, (b) gives the option to the speaker to do something, (c) provides comfort and is friendly to the hearer (Lakoff, 1990 cited in Jumanto, 2008, pp. 44-45). Furthermore, Lakoff explains that cultural differences will provide a different emphasis on each rule. Culture will affect the strategy on (1) social distance characterized by impersonality, (2) deference characterized by respect and (3) camaraderie characterized by assertiveness. Brown and Levinson (1987) found that politeness expressed differently among languages. Politeness is based on intimacy, closeness, and relationships, as well as the social distance between the speaker and the hearer. They distinguish politeness strategies into two: positive politeness strategy used to show intimacy, closeness and relationships, and negative politeness strategies are used to show the social distance between the speaker and the hearer. Leech (in Jumanto, 2008, pp. 44-45) proposes politeness maxims that basically involve the strategy of keeping the face in the interaction, by maximizing the positive things to others and minimize the positive things in yourself, which are generally based on four notions: cost and benefit, dispraise and praise, disagreement and agreement, and sympathy and antipathy.

Gu (1990) puts forward the concept of Chinese politeness, which emphasizes the notion of face. Face in the context of China is not considered as psychological desire, but as societal norms. Individual behavior must conform to the expectations of society on respect, modesty, and warm and sincere attitude. Ide (1989) shows that politeness is the basis for maintaining and improving communication. According to Ide (1989), politeness is based on status and social level, power and structures of kinship, and situation (formal or informal). Blum-Kulka (1992) proposes the theory of politeness that is based on cultural norms and cultural scripts, and considers that the concept of desire (face wants) is tied to a particular culture. Politeness is influenced by P

(power), D (distance), and R (relationship), and also affected by speech events. Meanwhile, Arndt and Janney (1985) propose the theory of politeness on the basis of merit. Politeness is the use of the right word or phrase in the proper context, which is determined by the rules that are prevalent in society. Watts (2003) states that politeness is determined by the relationship between behavior and suitability convention, not by specific linguistic forms. Thomas (1995) introduced the Pollyanna principle that requires a person to use the best way to say something, and talk about things that are fun.

It can be summarized that politeness is the use of an appropriate word or phrase in the appropriate context, which is determined by the rules that are prevalent in society. In social interaction, to maintain politeness is to maintain harmonious and smooth social interaction, and avoid the use of speech acts that are potentially face-threatening or damaging. The principle is based on the use of politeness intimacy, closeness, and relationships, as well as the social distance between the speaker and the hearer. People choose and implement certain values in certain pragmatic scale, according to the culture and conditions of the existing situation in social interaction.

POLITENESS STRATEGIES

The concept of politeness strategies developed by Brown and Levinson (1987) is adapted from the notion of "face" introduced by a sociologist named Erving Goffman. Face is a picture of self-image in the social attributes. In other words, the face could mean honor, self-esteem, and public self-image. According to Goffman (1955), each participant has two needs in every social process: namely the need to be appreciated and need to be free (not bothered). The first need is called positive face, while the latter is negative face. Face Threatening Act (FTA) intensity is expressed by weight (W), which includes three social parameters – first, the degree of disturbance or rate of imposition (R), in terms of absolute weight of a particular action in a particular culture. For example, the request "May I borrow your car?" has different weights from the request "May I borrow your pen?" The second and third social parameters include the social distance (D) between the speaker and the hearer, and authority or power (P) owned by interlocutors (Renkema, 1993, p. 14). FTA threatens the stability of the intensity of communication; politeness in this case

can be understood as an effort to prevent and or repair damage(s) caused by the FTA. The greater the threat to stability, the more politeness, face work technique, is necessary. Face work which aims at positive face is called 'solidarity politeness', while face work that deals with negative face is known as 'respect politeness' (Renkema 1993, p. 13). In connection with this strategy politeness, Brown and Levinson (1978) show that there are five ways to avoid the FTA. The five strategies are sorted by degree of risk 'losing face'; the higher the risk of losing face, the less likely the speaker did FTA. In this case, Renkema (1993, p. 15) gives an example of this strategy.

a. Hey, lend me a hundred dollars. (Baldly)
b. Hey, friend, could you lend me a hundred bucks? (Positive politeness)
c. I'm sorry I have to ask, but could you lend me a hundred dollars? (Negative politeness)
d. Oh no, I'm out of cash! I forgot to go to the bank today. (Off the record)

Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987) classifies five strategies: to follow what it says, bald on record, (b) perform speech acts using positive politeness (refers to the positive face), (c) perform speech acts using negative politeness (refers to the face of a negative), (d) indirect speech act (off the record), and (e) do not do speech act or say anything (do not do the FTA). In connection with this politeness strategy, here are the possible strategies for doing FTAs.
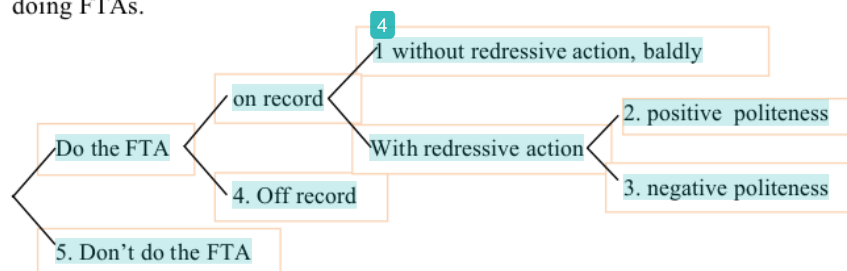

Figure 1. Possible Strategies For Doing FTAs (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 69)

METHOD

This study deals with describing politeness strategies used by teacher and students in two 90-minute English lessons in senior high school in natural contexts. The data were video-recorded from two different classroom settings where English was the object and the medium of teaching learning process. The subjects were two non-native English teachers (42-year-old male and 36 year-old female) and 59 students in two different classes. The students in the English lesson were the 11th graders of a state senior high school in Semarang, *SMA Negeri 2.*

The pragmatic analysis was based on Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies. The data were analyzed based on the model analysis introduced by Spradley (1980), which involves making a domain analysis, a taxonomic analysis, and a componential analysis, and discovering cultural themes. This analysis focused on the teacher's and students use of the politeness strategies for dealing with FTAs. The researcher was concerned with the verbal expression of politeness that is, the use of words and sentences or any other linguistic markers. Verbal expressions uttered by the speakers were recorded in an audiovisual recording set and they were then transcribed into orthographic symbols from which verbal signals could be identified. At the same time of the recordings process, field notes were taken to help the researcher better identify the existence of non-verbal signals. However, the non-verbal signals were considered as supporting information in the discussion. Other steps were to conduct a peer discussion and verification in order to have deeper insights into this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this research, as the object of the study was speech acts used by teacher and students in English classroom interaction, English has a double role of being both the medium of instruction and the object of study. The interaction between teacher and students was conducted in English, but the interaction among the students mostly used Bahasa Indonesia and or Javanese. The interaction in the classroom was still largely dominated by the teacher. The teachers dominated in giving instruction, giving explanation, showing appreciation, encouraging, motivating, and answering student's questions. The students mainly responded to teacher's instruction, questions and encouragement.

The findings show that politeness strategies were generally employed by teachers and students to reduce face threat. They employed positive politeness, negative politeness, and bald on-record strategies as well. Similar to Ide (1989) and Blum-Kulka (1992), politeness is based on status and social level, power and structures of kinship, situation (formal or informal), and considers that the concept of desire (face wants) is tied to a particular culture. Their strategies were largely influenced by their cultural background, Indonesian and Javanese, in which the power relation between teacher and students is often unequal – teacher is deemed to be more respectable than students; thus, students should act in a way that they will never threaten the teacher's face.

Positive Politeness Strategies

Excerpt (1) is an example of a student-teacher conversation in the classroom interaction.

(1) Teacher   : Okay, good morning, class.
    Some students   : Good morning, ma'am.
    Teacher   : How are you today?
    Some Students   : I am fine, and you?
    Teacher   : I am not good.
    Student (female)   : hwow!
    Student (male)   : Hwow!

It can be identified that both students and teacher in opening session employed positive politeness strategies as in strategy 4: Use in-group identity markers (Brown and Levinson 1987, pp.107-108). It was done by using group identity marker "class" for calling students, and the students use "ma'am" to call a female teacher who was considered as a respectable person. Calling "class" instead of "children" or "students" could be categorized as a positive politeness strategy, that is, teacher did not position herself as the more powerful or keep a distance from students. The strategy was to reduce the threat of face (of dignity) of students. Similarly, referring to "ma'am" for female teacher, the students gave respect and feel close to the teacher as well. This set of data indicates that the two parties have good emotional relationship. This was further demonstrated in the utterance 'I'm fine, and you?' 'I'm not good' and followed by an expression of sympathy 'hwoow' from the students. This expres-

sion is done with exaggerated intonation, stress and some aspects of prosodic to show sympathy (Brown and Levinson 1987, p.104). In addition, because of the limitations of utterances to express something, it was possible to express politeness non-verbally. Non-verbal forms of politeness were shown by the teacher walking over towards students with a friendly facial expression. This form of politeness was also expressed by the students by responding to the teacher's greeting enthusiastically.

The teachers' perception on learner-centered concept in teaching learning process influenced the teachers' perception of the need to employ politeness strategies. Student-centered activities gave students opportunities to participate and interact in the class. The teacher thought that it was a must for a teacher to be emotionally close to the students. It would help him/her to communicate with students. Because of the students' cultural background, teacher was still placed as a respected elder person and institutionally teacher was the single authority in teaching learning process in the class. The finding shows that the teachers and students felt that the power difference between them was quite small, but the students give respect to the teachers.

(2)	Teacher	: Yea … okay, so far any questions?
	Students	: (no answer)
	Teacher	: Hello…?
	Students	: Hello … Ma'am.
	Teacher	: Any question?
	Students	: No, Ma'am.

Excerpt (2) shows that the social distance and the power inequality of the students and the teachers were small. It can be seen from the students' response on the teacher's directing student's attention 'Hello..?', they responded by repeating the same expression 'Hello..' followed by personal marker 'Ma'am'. It means that the students felt close to the teacher but still gave respect to her.

(3)	Teacher	: What the… or what are the positive sides of an advertisement?
	Students	: (no answer)
	Teacher	: Is it something entertaining?
	Some students	: Yea….a….a….
	Teacher	: Okay, a…a…a… Such as… ?

Student	: Sukses?
Teacher	: Aku nggak ngomoooong…itu
Some students	: ha..haha (*laughing*)

In the excerpt (3), the code switching engaged by both teacher and students indicated that they were joking. In line with positive politeness strategy (Strategy 8: Joke) introduced by Brown and Levinson (1987:124), joking is one of the positive politeness strategies indicating that the interlocutors are close enough. They mutually shared background knowledge and values. The teacher's response indicates that the teacher tried to minimize student's positive face. She wanted to make her students feel comfortable and feel that they were close to each other.

Giving weight to the students' participation on giving opinions, feelings and ideas reduces the power of the teacher on her/his better knowledge and experiences. It can be illustrated in the following dialogue (4). The teacher tried to give opportunities to the students to participate in the learning process. She wanted her students to be involved and active in discussing the subject. Such activities would reduce the teacher power in the classroom interaction.

(4) Teacher	: Okay, but er..er..er.. have you ever talked about the positive sides …of advertisement?
Students	: Yeah !!!
Teacher	: What are they? What are the positive sides of ..er.er. ad.. advertisement?
Students	: (no response)
Teacher	: What are the positive sides of advertisement?
Students	: Product!
Student 1	: New product!
Teacher	: Yea, we can get… what?
Students	: Information…
Student 1	: New product…
Teacher	: Okay, new product! What else?
Students	: The function!
Teacher	: The function. Yea, that is information, new product.. What else?

The limitation of the linguistic ability of students may also have contributed to the difference in strategy choices. Sometimes, the students used short expression in their response(s) to the teacher's question(s), because of inadequate

knowledge or skills in English. There were some utterances violating the politeness principle, quality maxim, one of Grice's maxims (Renkema, 1993), yet they were acceptable in the classroom. Both the teachers and students tried to make their contribution as required. Moreover students tended to use some interpersonal function markers, such as cooperation, agreement, disagreement, response, reaction, checking understanding, and confirmation. The followings were some interpersonal function markers found in teacher-students interaction in the classroom. For example, some cooperation and agreement markers were found in the excerpt (5).

(5) Teacher   : Viewers. …. Okay, what else?
      Students   : Advertisement……
      Teacher   : Advertisement…… ? yeah!
                       Okay, advertisement interrupts the program on the TV.
                       Do you agree?
      Students   : Yes……
      Teacher   : Okay, but a…a…a… have you ever talked about the positive sides … of advertisement?
      Students   : Yeah !!!

Some interpersonal function markers were also employed by teachers and students in their interaction, such as disagreement markers like in the excerpt (6).

(6) Teacher   : Have you heard about her news?
      Students   : No, never
      Teacher   : About her problem?
      Students   : No, never

Other interpersonal markers used by teacher and students in the classroom were reaction markers, understanding markers, confirmation markers, and some textual function markers such as topic switching, turn taking, repairing, and opening markers.

On the other hand, because of their pragmatic awareness, the teacher used indirect speech acts in classroom interaction. Excerpt (7) shows that indirect speech act '*I want you to…a..a… make an advertisement of gadget.*' was an instruction to the students to make an advertisement of gadget and '*I .. give you opportunity to create what gadget you're going to make.*' was also a teacher's

request to the students to create an advertisement of gadget they were going to make.

(7) Teacher   : Now, today… I want you to…a..a… make an advertise-
                     ment of gadget.
                     But… this gadget is unused gadget. What I mean is like
                     this " Doraemon "
     Students   : Doraemon
     Teacher   : You know Doraemon?
     Student   : Thank you ma'am
     …..*Students started to work…*
     Teacher   : Have you finished?
     Student   : Yes
     Teacher   : So, I .. give you opportunity to create ((...construct adver-
                     tisement of..)) what gadget you're going to make. It can be
                     anything. It can be machine in your imagination… Okay,
                     then you have to create or you have to make the adver-
                     tisement of (this kind of*) gadget. Okay? So, you may
                     create any gadget ((..advertisement of gadgets..)) you
                     want, of course.

The linguistic forms that internally modified a speech act to soften the il-locutionary force of statement in the excerpt (6) can be found on the expression '*I want you to make an advertisement of gadget*' and '*I give you opportunity to create what gadget you're going to make*'. The solidarity markers that support knowledge of the participants were expressed as '*You know Doraemon?*', and '*Thank you mam*'.

Linguistic expressions used in classroom interaction were addressing, thanking, apologizing, encouraging, and leave–taking. The teacher chose to address the students with the student's name rather than unspecified markers '*student*' or '*guys*' to establish a close relationship.

(8) Teacher   : Okay. Almira... read the text!
                     Everybody, please listen to your friend's reading the text!

In excerpt (8), the teacher used an explicit politeness marker *please* to modify her instruction, but still used a bare imperative form '*…read the text!*' This, together with the addressing marks of 'proper name' could be interpreted as a modifying strategy.

Negative Politeness Strategies

Negative politeness strategies are intended to avoid giving offense by showing deference. These strategies include questioning, hedging, and presenting disagreements as opinions (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Excerpt (9) was an example of one of the occasions where the teacher softened his direct expression with the conventionally polite expression '*please*'.

(9) Teacher : The first speaker. Come on. Please come here.

In Excerpt (10), teacher tried to modify direct expression with polite expression in order to attempt to avoid a great deal of imposition on the students. She used expression '*a little*' to lessen the imposition by implying that the students were not asked to do very much.

(10) Teacher : e…e..e.. yea! Before we start our class today, I would like to review a **little about** err..err..err.. the materials we have discussed together. Hmm.. do you still remember the…err…err… readers' letter ?

Students : Yes ..!!!

Another strategy that was often used as a negative politeness strategy to emphasize both the speaker's and the addressee's personal involvement in the matter was creating imperative expression. The teacher used modifying elements and politeness markers in his talk. He expressed his request to the student in a polite way by using the word '*please*'.

A common way in which the teacher softened her requests, the teacher first used the affirmative form to satisfy a request; then, she lessened the power of the message by creating an impression of option, in that sense serving as a politeness device, as in the excerpt (11).

(11) Teacher : Ok,… yeah! err..err..err because now we are err..err..err.. we talk to the ..you know the writing cycle. So, it's time for you to produce your own advertisement but don't worry to do that individually, you will err..err..err.. work in groups. Ok!

Bald on-record strategies

The teacher's authoritative role in the class was reflected when she gave commands and instructions, and made requests. Through the choice of direct

strategies for giving instruction (excerpt 12), the teacher imposed and created pressure on the students.

(12) Teacher   : Bring your note!. Come on…!. The time is not enough.
Second, Ratih!, come here!.
Vera! …come here!

In the classroom context with its asymmetrical power relationship, teachers were in the position of institutional power and it could be argued that this gets partly expressed through the use of direct strategies. The expression '*bring your note!*' indicated that the teacher did not try to minimize the threat to the students' face. These strategies were common and acceptable in classroom interaction as they felt that they had a close relationship.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The interaction in the classroom is still largely dominated by the teacher such as giving instruction, giving explanation, showing appreciation, encouraging, motivating, and answering students' questions. The students performed mainly in responding to teacher's instruction, questions and encouragement. Because of the limitation of the linguistic ability, the students tend to use some interpersonal function markers, such as cooperation, agreement, disagreement, response, reaction, and confirmation, and use non-verbal expressions. The linguistic expressions in verbal interaction of both teachers and students are addressing, thanking, apologizing, encouraging, and leave–taking. In the classroom interaction, the social distance created by age difference and institutional setting is still strong.

The politeness strategies employed are positive politeness, negative politeness, and bold on-record strategies. The positive politeness strategy is performed mainly by reducing the threat of face using group identity markers and expressions of sympathy, showing respect and establishing a close relationship, and friendly and enthusiastic facial expressions. To reduce power, the teachers try to give weight to the students' participation on giving opinions, feelings and ideas. They also use indirect speech acts and solidarity makers to soften the illocutionary force of their speech acts. The negative politeness strategies are applied in making imperative expressions, softening the direct expressions with

the conventionally polite expression '*please*', lessening the imposition and the power of the message, using the affirmative form to satisfy a request, and creating an impression of options. These strategies include hedging and presenting disagreements as opinions. While bald on record strategy is mainly employed by the teachers in giving commands and instructions, and making requests. This strategy is applied by using direct speech acts, not trying to minimize the threat to the students' face, and imposing and creating pressure on the students.

The results of the study should be an indispensable tool to examine politeness, which is an important aspect of student character building in classroom interaction. Politeness is an initial step to develop positive personal and social attitudes. Through discreet use of politeness, one can soften the language behavior in any speech events in turn.

In fact, in EFL classrooms, the English language becomes an object of learning, rather than a tool of communication during the lesson. It focuses on its linguistic and semantic features rather than on pragmatics. Teacher never conveys pragmatics issues of language use to his/her students' attention. In other words, it is necessary to think again the nature of interaction in EFL classrooms.

It is suggested that further studies examine and dwell on the opportunities to learn pragmatic skills together with language skills, and the opportunities to develop EFL pragmatic ability in language classrooms and student's pragmatic awareness.

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