An Analysis of Politeness Strategies used by the Students in Conversation

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Abstract

Politeness is influenced by cultural background, social background, historical and geographical elements. Encouraging students regarding the importance of having politeness strategies in communicating will develop their awareness not only in communicative competence but also cultural awareness, and build their character values. This research aims to explore the use of politeness strategies that occur in English class interactions for first semester students of the Early Childhood Education Study Program in 2022. This research uses a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the politeness strategies used by teachers and students in their interactions. The participants in this study were an English teacher and 32 students. The data in this research are utterances that contain politeness strategies. The data was taken from a 90 minute English lesson which was video recorded. The results showed that there were 7 citations containing three politeness strategies: positive politeness strategies, negative politeness strategies and bald-on-record politeness strategies. The interaction is dominated by the teacher. In addition, the politeness strategies that occur in class interactions are influenced by several factors such as differences in age, institutional position, power, and social distance.

Keyword: Classroom Interactions, Politeness, Politeness Strategies

Abstrak

Kesantunan dipengaruhi oleh latar belakang budaya, latar belakang sosial, unsur sejarah dan geografis. Mendorong pembelajar tentang pentingnya memiliki strategi kesantunan dalam berkomunikasi akan mengembangkan kesadaran mereka tidak hanya dalam kompetensi komunikatif tetapi juga kesadaran budaya, dan membangun nilai-nilai karakter mereka. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi penggunaan strategi kesopanan yang terjadi dalam interaksi kelas bahasa Inggris untuk mahasiswi semester pertama Program Studi Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini tahun 2022. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif deskriptif untuk mengeksplorasi strategi kesopanan yang digunakan oleh pengajar dan mahasiswi dalam interaksi mereka. Partisipan dalam penelitian ini adalah seorang pengajar bahasa Inggris dan 32 mahasiswi. Data dalam penelitian ini adalah ucapan-ucapan yang mengandung strategi kesantunan. Data diambil dari pelajaran bahasa Inggris 90 menit yang direkam dengan video. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat 7 kutipan yang mengandung tiga strategi kesantunan: strategi kesantunan positif, strategi kesantunan negatif dan strategi kesantunan bald-on-record. Interaksi didominasi oleh pengajar. Selain itu, strategi kesantunan yang terjadi dalam interaksi kelas dipengaruhi oleh beberapa faktor seperti perbedaan usia, posisi kelembagaan, kekuasaan, dan jarak sosial.

Kata Kunci: Interaksi Kelas, Kesopanan, Strategi Kesopanan

Introduction

The friendly environment that is built by teachers to create a more pleasant teaching and learning atmosphere might be misinterpreted by the students. Therefore, teachers have to put boundaries in order to avoid misinterpretation. Students also should pay attention to the way they communicate with their teachers. Thus, the occurrence of politeness strategy in the classroom interactions is important. Politeness is a behavior that occurs in society to make them respect each other and reduce the possibility of getting conflict or dispute between members of the society (Holmes, 1995; Lakoff, 1975; Sifianou, 1992). Therefore, politeness strategy can contribute to the success of effective communication in the classroom.

Politeness is influenced by cultural background, social background, historical, and geographical elements. Thus, it is important to pay attention to politeness since we live in a country that consists of different ethnic groups that have their own culture and norms regarding how they should interact with one another. Besides that, the awareness of differences in social power or distance should be encouraged when communicating with other people. Encouraging the students related to the importance of having politeness strategy in communication will develop their awareness not only in communicative competence but also cultural awareness, and build their character values. Especially for students from the first semester Students of Early Childhood Education Program Department which tend to get easily influenced by their environment either in the real or cyber world in a positive or negative way. Referring to the phenomenon above, the purpose of this research is to investigate the teacher and students' politeness strategies in English classroom interactions.

Research Method

A descriptive qualitative research design was used to find out the politeness strategies used in classroom interactions. Descriptive qualitative research design focuses on gaining deeper understanding related to the opinions, feelings, perspective or attitudes of the participants under the research (Lodico et al., 2010; Nassaji, 2015). Moreover, this kind of research has a goal to show a summary of specific event that is experienced by individual or groups of individuals. This research aimed to collect, analyze, and interpret the data that were collected through a 90-minutes English lesson. This research was conducted to investigate the politeness strategies used by an English teacher and the students in their classroom interactions. Therefore, the data in this research were in the forms of utterances which were uttered during the teaching and learning activity.

Research Findings
1. Positive Politeness Strategies

The finding discovered that there were 2 excerpts that contain positive politeness strategy used in the classroom interactions that explained and presented as follow.

Excerpt 1

T. U1: *Assalamu'alaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh, good morning students*

Ss.U1: *Wa'alaikumsalam Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh good morning Sir*

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

Ss.U2: *Fine Sir*

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

In excerpt 1, in the opening part of the lesson, the students used the address term *'Sir'* in *good morning Sir* (Ss.U1) and *Fine Sir* (Ss.U2). The addressing term *'Sir'* which was used by the students represented the respect they have to their teacher who has higher position than them. It also indicated they wanted to be polite in interacting with her. Moreover, in excerpt 1, the teacher also showed academic instruction by saying *Ok, let's start our lesson* (T.U3). In this utterance, the teacher wanted to draw a polite interaction by using the expression *'let's'* in his instruction. It indicated that he included himself in the activity so he created an interaction without making the students felt pressured.

Excerpt 2

T.U4 : *Is there any question?*

Ss.U3 : *No Sir*

T.U5 : *So let's do the group task in 15 minutes*

The teacher expressed polite instruction to the students in *so let's do the group task in 15 minutes* (T.U5). The utterance sounded friendly to the students although it indicated instruction. It is because the teacher added *'let's'* in his utterance which made the students did not feel pressured. The use *'let's'* also indicated that the teacher involved in the activity. As a result, the flow of their interactions occurred more politely. Moreover, the students also used address term *'Sir'* in their response. They wanted to show respect to their teacher and it caused their interactions happened in a polite way.

2. Negative Politeness Strategies

The finding discovered that there were 4 excerpts of negative politeness strategy occurred in the classroom interactions that explained and presented as follow.

Excerpt 3

T.U6: *May I have one?*

S1.U1: *Yes*

The politeness strategy also showed in the act of asking permission in the utterance *May I have one?* (T.U6). Here the teacher wanted to ask for something in a polite way. The utterance used to create a polite request to a student in an indirect way. This kind of utterance signaled that the teacher wanted to show his good manner which is considered as the indicator of being polite.

Excerpt 4

T.U7: *Anyone wants to try to solve number 3?*

S3.U1: *Me Sir, Can I?*

T.U8: *Okay thank you*

T.U9 : *Any students want to answer number 4, 5, 6? Come on, any volunteer?*

In excerpt 4, a student offered his volunteer by saying *Me Sir, Can I?* (S3.U1). The utterance drew the polite strategy in the interaction between the teacher and the student. The use of the modal *'Can'* indicated the student's

indirect request. This strategy showed that she was aware of their different level or power. Thus, by using indirect request she wanted to be polite in showing her response to the teacher's offer.

Excerpt 5

T.U10: *How many of you in this class?*

Ss.U3: *32*

T.U11: *Ok I will divide this class into 8 groups. So how to decide the groups?*

S4.U1 : *What about counting Sir? Can we count?*

T.U12: *Counting? Do you agree all of you?*

Ss.U4: *yes Sir*

T.U13: *Ok please count until 8*

In this excerpt, a student expressed politeness strategy in her utterance *can we count?* (S4.U1). Here she indirectly performed a request to her teacher. The indirect request which was shown in the modal *'Can'* indicated that the student showed respect to her teacher which has higher social status than her. The teacher also modified his direct instruction using the word *'Please'* in his utterance *'ok please count until 8'* (T.U13). The polite expression *'Please'* has a function to soften the teacher's instruction to the students.

Excerpts 6

S8.U1: *Sir could you give us extra time, please?*

Ss.U9: *Yes Sir please*

T.U14: *Alright, 5 minutes more, deal?*

Ss.U10: *Alright Sir thank you*

In this excerpt, a student performed negative politeness by saying *'Sir could you give us extra time, please?'* (S8.U1). In this utterance the student tried to negotiate with her teacher but she turned it politely by using indirect request and the word *'Please'*. Using indirect request will minimize the imposition of the

request to the teacher. In addition, since the teacher has more power than the rest of the students so the indirect request was used to create a polite interaction.

3. Bald-On-Record Strategy

There was only one excerpt that contained bald-on-record strategy in the classroom interactions. This strategy only employed by the teacher as explained and presented below.

Excerpt 7

T.U15 : *Ok listen so that there will be no repetition. Are you ready?*

Ss.U11 : *Yes Sir*

In excerpt 13, the teacher used academic instruction but it was more directive. In the utterance *Ok listen so that there will be no repetition* (T.U15) the teacher gave the instruction to the students to pay attention to her. Even though the teacher directly instructed the students to do something, but it did not give pressure to the students. It is due to the fact that the teacher has institutional power in the classroom so his instruction was acceptable.

Discussion

All the excerpts which are shown in the finding section demonstrate the politeness strategies performed by the teacher and the students in their classroom interactions. The findings revealed that there were three politeness strategies occurred in their interactions, namely positive politeness strategy, negative politeness strategy, and bald-onrecord strategy. Based on the theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), the writer found that the strategy of positive politeness occurred in the use of address term in the teacher and students interactions. The address term such as 'Sir' according to Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 107) is categorized as a strategy 'use in-group identity marker'. Hyakawa (1978) in Gan et al., (2015) explains that address term is used to define or classify the interlocutors in a definable category. Therefore, the address term *'Sir'* which was mostly used by the students in their interactions showed that they wanted to address their teacher who is considered as a respectable person in an honorable term. This strategy leads them to create a polite and respectful communication with the teacher.

The utterances that include the expression *'Let's'* have a function as positive politeness because the expression includes the speaker and the hearer in the activity (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 127). They elaborate that the expression *'Let's'* is considered as *'we'* form, further they explain that using such expression indicates that the speaker can 'call upon the cooperative assumption and thereby redress FTAs'. Thus, the academic instructions which contained the expression *'Let's'* employed positive politeness strategy because both of the interlocutors are engaged in one activity and it reduces the gap between them.

The finding also revealed that negative politeness strategy occurred in the classroom interactions. This strategy can be seen in the indirect requests which were uttered both by the teacher and the students. The use of the expressions *'May I', 'Can I', 'Can you', 'Can we', or 'Could you'* which are considered as asking for something according to Brown and Levinson (1987) has a purpose to express indirectness in their speech. Further, Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 132) explain that being conventionally indirect means that the speaker has conveyed his or her actual wants without interfering with the hearer's negative face because the utterances are performed in the phrases or sentences which have unambiguous meanings. Thus, the occurrence of this strategy in the classroom interactions showed that teacher and the students uttered their speech respectfully to prevent being offensive.

Another strategy that was used in the classroom interactions was bald-on-record strategy. It was shown in excerpt 7 when the teacher gave a direct instruction to the students. The teacher showed his institutional role in his utterance *'Ok listen so that there will be no repetition'*. Senowarsito (2013) believed that direct instruction causes pressure on the students as the hearers, because the face-threatening act is not avoided or reduced by the teacher. In line with Senowarsito's opinion, Karimnia and Khodashenas (2018) also shared the same opinion that direct instruction which is commonly in the form of imperative sentences could negatively threaten the hearer's face. Consequently, it may be affected and damaged negatively because his or her freedom of action is restricted. Related to this case, Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 97) argue that the speaker emphasizes face threatening acts to the hearer because the speaker has more power. Moreover, in the classroom interactions, the teacher has the authority to control his students

because he has power in the class. Therefore, he can use bald-on-record strategy in his instructions.

The result of this present research which revealed that the politeness strategies occurred in the classroom interactions was in line with some previous studies on politeness (Khusnia, 2017; Mahmud, 2019; Rahayuningsih et al., 2019; Senowarsito, 2013). Moreover, in this study, the finding also revealed that negative politeness strategy was mostly used in the classroom interactions with 4 out of 7 excerpts found. Negative politeness occurred to be the most used strategy in the classroom interactions because the interactions occurred between the teacher and the students who have many differences such as their age, power, or institutional position. Moreover, since this strategy is used to redress the negative face of the hearer, thus it was occurred the most to show the respect behavior or actions from the speaker to the hearer.

Conclusion

This research revealed that the teacher and the students used three strategies of politeness by Brown and Levinson (1987) in the classroom interactions. Those strategies were positive politeness, negative politeness, and bald-on-record strategy. The strategies were performed mainly in the situation of giving instructions, encouraging, asking for something, requesting, asking for confirmation, and addressing. In addition, the use of politeness strategies in their interactions were influenced by some factors like age difference, institutional position, power, and social distance between them. Those factors influenced their interactions mostly occurred using negative politeness strategy.

Moreover, the occurrence of negative politeness strategy in the majority of the data signified that the students were aware of the differences that occurred between them and their teacher. Their awareness also showed that as Indonesian people they chose the strategy in the communication that would not interfere with their teacher who has a higher position than them. Therefore, the findings indicated that Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies were suitable to be applied in the classroom interactions in the Indonesian EFL classroom context.

Furthermore, the findings of this study could be a contribution to other EFL teachers to teach their students how to show polite behaviour in communication in the class to achieve effective classroom interactions.

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