

Navigating Respect and Rapport: A Comparative Analysis of Teacher and Student Politeness Strategies in EFL Classroom

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Abstract

This study investigates how politeness strategies are used by teacher and students in the context of learning and teaching English in a tenth-grade high school in Banten's Lebak district. A qualitative research method was applied using field observation, field recording and note-taking as data collection techniques. The data were obtained from recordings of teacher and students' utterances in an EFL class in a tenth-grade high school. The resulting data were transcribed based on the tone of voice and body language used by teacher and students then analyzed using the interactive model and pragmatic equivalence method. The findings showed that teacher and students apply politeness strategies from Brown and Levinson's theory namely, positive politeness strategy, and negative politeness strategy.

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INTRODUCTION

Politeness plays a crucial role in classroom interaction and communication, particularly in EFL contexts. The significance of politeness lies in its ability to create a positive learning environment, foster mutual respect, and facilitate effective communication between teachers and students. As Jiang & Ren (2020) stated that politeness plays an important role in building interpersonal relationships between teachers and students which aims to increase student learning motivation.

Additionally, understanding politeness in the EFL classroom presents several challenges due to the variety of strategies employed by both teachers and students to show politeness. These strategies depending on the cultural background of the students, which is a challenge for students and teachers in applying politeness strategies in English classes (Park & Kim, 2023). In addition, teachers play an

important role in applying politeness to communicate with students. Friendly communication created by the teacher is something that must be done to build conducive and enjoyable learning so that it can encourage students' active participation and reduce students' anxiety in learning English. Agudo (2019) underlines that, friendly communication by teachers and a comfortable and supportive classroom environment can increase students' confidence in using English. It can be concluded that, teachers who use politeness strategies in the teaching process can make students comfortable and open to learning that students feel safe to speak English without fear of making mistakes.

These challenges in understanding politeness are closely connected to the study of politeness in pragmatics. Pragmatics, as a branch of linguistics, examines how context and implicit meaning influence communication. Within this field, politeness is viewed as a strategic conflict-avoidance mechanism used to maintain social harmony. The concept of politeness strategy, as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), suggests that individuals employ various linguistic and non-linguistic tactics to mitigate face-threatening acts and show consideration for others' feelings. These strategies can be categorized into positive politeness (showing approval and solidarity) and negative politeness (respecting autonomy and minimizing imposition).

Previous studies focused with politeness in EFL classroom has been conducted by Jiang and Wang (2023) conducted research in some universities in China, viewing teacher-student interactions in EFL classes. They found that teachers utilize to use negative politeness strategies, such as indirect requests, to send down pressure on students. However, students usually misinterpreted this as a lack of firmness, which sometimes decreased the effectiveness of instruction. Alonso-Martinez et al. (2022) tested the use of politeness in teachers' written feedback on student assignments in secondary schools in Spain. They showed that teachers who used positive politeness strategies in their feedback, such as compliment before criticism, showed to get better responses from students in the revision of their assignments. Kim and Park (2024) observed the use of politeness in online interactions between teachers and students while a distance EFL class in South Korea. They found that the existing of non-verbal sign often led to misunderstandings in politeness interpretation, especially in the use of emoticons and punctuation.

Despite these crucial insights, there found a significant research gap in the comparative analysis of teacher and student politeness strategies with the same EFL

classroom context. Most studies concerned on explored politeness in Chinese universities, Spanish secondary school and south Korean online environments. concurrently, limited of the research specifically testing Indonesian high school settings. Additionally, previous studies have focused on higher education or online and written interactions, usually neglecting the atmosphere of real-time classroom dynamics. This study search to provide important insights into how Indonesian cultural norms shape politeness strategies in these direct classroom interactions.

The objective of this study is to analyze how politeness strategies are used by both teachers and students in an EFL classroom setting. The study aims to identify and classify the types of politeness strategies used, based on Brown and Levinson's theory, including positive politeness, and negative politeness strategies. The research reach to provide a comprehensive analysis of classroom interactions, looking not just verbal communication but also tone of voice and body language. The study's objectives include operating a pragmatic analysis of the data, comparing politeness strategies used by teachers and students, and clearly informing teaching practices in EFL classrooms. Finally, the research aims to provide to a deeper understanding of dynamic communications and politeness in educational settings, which could have inference for improving teaching and learning experiences in EFL contexts. Thus, the present study pursues to answer these following research questions: "How politeness strategies are used by teacher and students in the context of learning and teaching English in a tenth-grade high school in Banten's Lebak district?"

METHOD

Research Design

The qualitative research method was conducted to find out the phenomenon of politeness in EFL classes in Indonesia. The qualitative research method is an appropriate research design because the data obtained are utterances delivered by teachers and students in the teaching and learning process at Lebak Banten high school. Based on Creswell (2018), qualitative approach allows in-depth exploration of complex phenomena such as the use of politeness in English language learning environment. The data used in this study were taken from transcripts of video recordings and field notes taken at five meetings.

Site and Participants

This research was conducted at SMAN 1 Malingping located in Malingping Sub-district, Lebak Regency, Banten Province. The participants in the study consisted of three teachers who taught in classes X-A and X-B. Tenth grade students are new learners who are in the transition period from junior high school to high school, the use of politeness patterns between teachers and students at this level is not yet fully formed which can affect the way they interact and show respect for teachers. Second, by choosing three parallel classes (A and B), the researcher can obtain more diverse and representative data regarding the practice of language politeness applied by teachers in the school. In addition, this selection also allows the researcher to observe whether there are variations in the use of politeness strategies by different teachers who teach at the same level.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection technique in this study using field observation, field recording and note-taking. The data were obtained from recordings of teacher and students' utterances in an EFL class in a tenth-grade high school. In this context, the researcher observed the communication, conversation, and interaction between teachers and students in class X-A,B at SMAN 1 Malingping, focusing on the use of politeness in their communication. The researcher notes the frequency of the use of polite words such as positive politeness and negative politeness, polite gestures and polite tone.

Data Analysis

The data analysis in this research uses three steps based on Saldana (2014), namely data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data condensation where data is selected, simplified, and abstracted for rich data; in data display is organized, compressed, and presented, data is then concluded and verified by comparing data from field notes, observation sheets, compared with data from post-observation interviews. Data from video recordings of observations were analyzed by transcribing the data. The transcription results consisting of politeness strategies were then selected in the form of quotations. Quotation. In addition, there are four codes used in the quotation, namely: Positive Politeness (PP), Negative Politeness (NP), Polite Gestures (PG) and Polite Tone (PT). The Politeness Theory proposed by (Brown & Levinson, 1987) was used to identify the politeness strategies used by teachers and students.

RESULT

Politeness strategies used by teacher and students in the context of learning and teaching English in X-A

In this classroom interaction at class X-A, the researcher observes multiple instances of politeness strategies used by both the teacher and students. There are approximately 15 occurrences of politeness strategies: 10 instances of Positive Politeness (PP), 2 of Negative Politeness (NP), 1 of Polite Gestures (PG), and 2 of Polite Tone (PT). These strategies are used during greetings, giving praise, addressing concerns, and encouraging participation.

Excerpt 1 (Teacher's utterance): "I **love your spirit**, Ulfah! You're so **enthusiastic**. Okay, let's start by reviewing last week's lesson. Sarah, **can you tell us** what you learned? Your **friends** also want to hear your opinion."

Politeness Strategies	Explanation
Positive Politeness (PP)	" <u>I love your spirit</u> " and " <u>You're so enthusiastic</u> " (Complimenting)
Negative Politeness (NP)	" <u>Can you tell us</u> " (Being conventionally indirect)
Polite Tone (PT)	The overall enthusiastic tone

Excerpt 2 (Student's utterance): "Alright miss, **is the material difficult** miss? **I'm afraid I can't learn** the material" "Guys, **let's give Sarah a round of applause**"

Politeness Strategies	Explanation
Negative Politeness (NP)	" <u>Is the material difficult</u> " (Questioning, being conventionally indirect)
Positive Politeness (PP)	" <u>I'm afraid I can't learn</u> " (Seeking agreement/sympathy)
Polite Gestures (PG)	" <u>Let's give Sarah a round of applause!</u> "
Polite Tone (PT)	The teacher's enthusiastic and supportive tone throughout Students' respectful tone when addressing the teacher

Based on the result and findings at the class X-A the analysis reveals a predominant use of Positive Politeness strategies, especially by the teacher. This aligns with Brown & Levinson's theory, suggesting an effort to create a supportive classroom environment by addressing students' positive face needs. This balanced use of politeness strategies, with a focus on positive politeness, seems to create a safe and encouraging learning environment. The teacher's approach aligns with modern pedagogical practices that emphasize supportive teacher-student relationships.

Politeness strategies used by teacher and students in the context of learning and teaching English in X-B

In this classroom interaction at X-B class, the researcher observes multiple instances of politeness strategies used by both the teacher and students. The conversation contains 9 utterances, with 5 from the teacher and 4 from students (including one group response). Both positive and negative politeness strategies are employed, along with polite gestures and tones. The strategies are used in situations of making requests, seeking clarification, offering suggestions, and responding to queries.

Excerpt 1 (Student-Teacher interaction): S. U7: "**Excuse me** miss. **Is it okay** if I ask you a question first?" and "Of course. **Please feel free** to ask your questions."

Politeness Strategies	Explanation
Negative Politeness (NP)	" <u>Excuse me</u> " and " <u>Is it okay</u> " Shows deference to the teacher's authority and minimizes imposition.
Positive Politeness (PP)	" <u>Please feel free</u> " Creates a welcoming environment, encouraging student participation.
Polite Tone (PT)	Encouraging the student's participation with " <u>Please feel free</u> "

Excerpt 2 (Teacher-Student interaction): "I understand. **If the class agree**, perhaps we can allocate a few minutes to discuss this further." "**Excuse me**, miss. **If I may suggest**, perhaps we could try to make some examples together on the board?"

Politeness Strategies	Explanation
Positive Politeness (PP)	"I understand. <u>If the class agrees</u> " acknowledging the student's concern and considering the entire class's opinion
Negative Politeness (NP)	" <u>Excuse me</u> " Shows deference to the teacher's authority and minimizes imposition.
Polite Tone (PT)	" <u>If I may suggest</u> " maintaining a Polite Tone in offering a collaborative solution.

Based on the results findings at the class X-B analyzing the entire conversation through the lens of Brown & Levinson's Politeness Theory reveals a rich use of various politeness strategies. While verbal politeness strategies are prevalent, the transcript in class X-B doesn't explicitly mention non-verbal gestures. In a classroom setting, these might include nodding, maintaining appropriate eye contact, or raising hands before speaking. This analysis reveals a classroom environment where both teachers and students actively use a variety of politeness strategies to maintain positive relationships and facilitate effective communication. The frequent use of both PP

and NP suggests a balanced approach to managing face needs in the classroom. The teacher's stay use of PP strategies stimulates student participation and makes a supportive learning atmosphere. Students, on the other hand, relying more on NP strategies, showing appreciation for the teacher's authority while still engaging actively in the learning process. In conclusion, these findings signify that a combination of politeness strategies plays an important role in maintaining a comfortable and productive classroom environment. They facilitate clear communication, stimulate student participation, and help manage the essential power dynamics between teachers and students.

DISCUSSION

The research objective of this study was to investigate how politeness strategies are used by teachers and students in the context of learning and teaching English in tenth-grade high school classes in Banten's Lebak district. Based on the researcher exploration related to the politeness used to communicate in English language learning in classes X-A and X-B of SMAN 1 Malingping, significant differences and influence were observed in the use of positive politeness, negative politeness, polite tone and polite gestures strategies. In Class X-A, where positive politeness strategies were mostly employed, teachers and students created a comfortable, charm, and warm classroom environment. Teachers often used humor, praise, and name-calling, fostering interpersonal secrecy with students. This approach corresponds with Zhang and Hardman's (2023) findings, which revealed that teachers using praise, humor, and name-calling can decrease students' anxiety when learning and speaking English, stimulating active participation in classroom activities. also, Chen et al. (2024) supported that positive politeness strategies create relaxed and non-rigid interactions between teachers and students.

On the other hand, in Class X-B, where negative politeness and positive politeness strategies were stable, a formal, informal and professional atmosphere was settled. However, verbal politeness strategies were popular in Class X-B, the transcript doesn't clearly mention non-verbal gestures. In a classroom setting, these might include weeping, maintaining suitable eye contact, or raising hands before speaking, which could have further impact for the overall communication dynamics. This observation halfway contradicts Jiang and Wang's (2023) research in Chinese

universities, where students frequently misinterpreted teachers' negative politeness as a lack of assertiveness.

Therefore, the findings align more nearly with Patel et al. (2024), indicating that cultural background impact the perception of negative politeness, with students in our context considering it appropriate for inspiring figures like teachers. The research also showed that a combination of positive, negative politeness, polite tone and polite gestures strategies, as observed in class X-A, can make an optimal learning environment. This aligns with an approach supports Rodriguez-Bonces and Smith's (2023) link between teachers' politeness strategies and student motivation in learning English, while also reflecting Yamamoto et al.'s (2023) observation that negative politeness can increase teacher credibility. In conclusion, this research contributes to the literature by providing insights into the specific context of tenth-grade high school English classes in Indonesia, offering an atmosphere understanding of how cultural and educational contexts influence the effectiveness of different politeness strategies. The findings indicating that educators have to strive for a balance between positive and negative politeness strategies, including both verbal and non-verbal composition, to maximize interact effectiveness and learning outcomes, preparing students for multi-communication situations in the future.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to investigate the use of positive and negative politeness strategies from Brown and Levinson's theory (1987) used by teacher and students when they communicate in learning English. The results of the research show that the politeness of the teacher has a positive impact on the motivation of students in learning English, the teacher is more dominant in using positive politeness such as calling students' names more often, giving compliment on students' work, and appreciating students when they ask or answer questions it can build a closer and great relationship between teacher and students. This approach succeeds in decrease students' anxiety and fear in learning English and making a relaxed, warm classroom atmosphere that supports students to actively participate in class sessions.

However, teacher utilizes negative politeness when giving material, this is characterized by the use of standardized and formal language, indirect requests, and a sense of unwillingness and professionalism of teacher and students as learners. The combination of positive and negative politeness has a crucial and mutual role to

create a comfortable, effective and communicative learning environment. As a teacher, teacher have to use politeness that is balanced and suitable with students' backgrounds. This can improve the quality of communication in the classroom so that it can contribute to better learning outcomes. This study emphasizes the importance of using effective and adaptive politeness strategies for teacher to teach English. For future research, it is recommended to further exploration on how the use of politeness strategies at the university level from a various student learning styles in a variety of diverse cultural contexts.

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