

STUDENTS' POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN ONLINE LEARNING CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT. In recent years, online learning platforms have grown rapidly and become one of the most common choices in the world. This study aims to reveal the politeness strategies chosen by students in the international online classroom with multicultural students in different countries. The interaction mostly happens on teacher-student discussion, peer-to-student feedback, and individual and class discussions in which the communication is based on writing format. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method and uses the theory of politeness from Brown and Levinson. The research results revealed that the most widely used strategies were positive politeness strategies (49%), negative politeness strategies (35%), off record strategies (8%), and bald-on record strategies (8%). The major factors that influence the use of these strategies are training and learning contracts that begin before class.

Keywords: politeness strategies; online learning.

INTRODUCTION

Many online classes provide learning services that involve many students from various parts of the world. Developing countries in Asia, such as China, India, Indonesia, are the main targets for online classroom providers to offer their services so that online learning in these countries is developing rapidly (Xiaoqing, Shijuan, Seung-hee, & Richard, 2010, p. 178). Specifically in Indonesia there are many online learning classes that provide learners with English lessons. This is because there are many factors that make students feel motivated to learn English (Ramadhan, A., 2021). Some of these factors include improving career, finding new friends or partners. However, there are some obstacles that students face when learning English online for example lack of confidence, lack of interaction with the teacher and the peers, and connection problems (Ramadhan, A., 2021). Therefore, many online learning classes started to make the lesson as similar as the face-to-face learning situation.

Nowadays, the majority of these classes have a learning procedure with the same flow as face-to-face classes, where there is teacher-student interaction, a discussion between students, assignments, and feedback. It must be realized that teachers' and students' different backgrounds allow for different characteristics, approaches, thoughts, and problem-solving. For example, in group work U.S students are more action-oriented and pragmatic in seeking results or giving solutions while Korean students are more social and contextually driven online, and Finnish students are more self-reflective and

theoretically driven (Kyong & Bonk, 2002). In terms of motivation Online students in the US showed a significantly higher motivation mean score than those in Korea (Lim, 2004). For this reason, it is ubiquitous in online classrooms to apply politeness strategies so that the class runs smoothly.

Politeness strategies are important because they can provide effective interaction between one person and another. Politeness strategy can be defined as an interpersonal relationship to promote human interactions by eliminating outcoming problems or confrontations which could be happening in people's communication (Yule, 1995: 106 in Mulaiwan et al 2021). In the context of teaching and learning, this strategy can make the class closer, less distant, friendly, and lively. Language politeness is an important element in communication because in most Eastern society, someone is considered to have a good character based on the politeness strategy they implement in speaking activity (Arfinda, M, and Himawan, R, 2015). In the EFL classroom, politeness enhances teaching, benefits the students, contributes to an effective learning process, and makes the atmosphere lively (Jiang, 2010). In addition, politeness is also a useful strategy to achieve and foster harmonious relationships and maintain mutually beneficial interpersonal relationships (Leech, 1983 in Mulaiwan et al, 2021). The politeness strategy itself has several types. For example, in the theory proposed by Brown and Levinson regarding Face Threatening Acts (FTA), there are four types of politeness strategies, namely Bald on Record, negative politeness, positive politeness, and indirect off record (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The four

strategies can be applied with different objectives in different situations. Seeing the importance of politeness strategies adopted by students from different backgrounds in the same class which the class made into a class and running smoothly, the research was conducted.

Several previous studies have revealed politeness strategies that are applied in an online and offline classroom. A study that discovered a teacher's strategy in English classrooms for EFL made students feel positive about learning and feel motivated to participate more in class (Sulu, 2015). Furthermore, research reveals the politeness strategies possessed by students in distance learning, which reveals the inability of students to provide appropriate politeness strategies that have a negative impact on the course of the class (Almoaliy, 2018). In Indonesia, it was found that teacher-student interactions in the English classroom revealed that teachers were more adapting positive politeness strategies and students adapting negative politeness strategies (Purnomo, 2019). Besides, the domination of a teacher increases the students' passivity, which needs to be emphasized about better interactions in the future. Politeness strategy in Indonesia is also included in using honorific tools. This is characterized by asymmetrical relationship between two unequal parties (Wadji, 2012 in Wudayati & Sudiyan, 2020). Honorific tools make speech partner feel valued and hopefully will give more appreciation and positive feedback to speaker (Al-Rawi & Al-Assam, 2018 in Wudayati & Sudiyan, 2020). This honorific expression is not happened in all society but mostly happen in Indonesia ethnicity and languages.

This research also focused on the politeness strategy yet the learning context occurs in online platform which involves various students from different backgrounds. This is important because students must understand politeness strategies in order to minimize conflict. Moreover, in online classes, students act as learners and have the responsibility of being ambassadors of the country who are feared to be labelled negatively if they cannot act properly. Therefore, this study aims to reveal the politeness strategy used in the interaction between teacher and students in international online classes. Further, it is also hoped that the research could describe the politeness strategies that positively contribute to an online class and determine whether the differences in cultural background influence the politeness strategies in an online academic setting. Thus, the research questions were: First, what kind of strategy

that international students in the online class mostly used. Second, the factors that influence the choosing of students' politeness strategy during the online learning process. The significance of this study will theoretically serve as references for similar research and help teachers broaden their horizons about what kind of teaching strategies can be applied in English and Indonesian classes for foreign speakers.

Language enables us to interact with each other and it has many functions. Some of the functions of language are to express opinions, ideas, identity and imaginations (Trihanto, A., et al, 2022). Language and culture have a very strong connection to the society thus it should not be ignored in the language teaching (Tuncel and Parker, 2018 in Susilo., et al, 2020) since language learners will study the cultures of the language they learned (Genc and Bada, 2005 in Susilo, E., et al 2020). Sociocultural meaning also has several meanings to be inside it's archaic expressions such as phatic communions, interjections, exclamations, and other kinds of emotions (Wiles, E., 2020). There are many forms of politeness expressions a student uses in class. Those expressions were in the forms of greetings, thanking, addressing terms, apologizing, and. This is used so that students can adjust to the classroom conditions and can build better relationships with teachers and their friends. Moreover, these results point to a boundary condition for the *politeness principle*—the idea that people learn more deeply when words are in polite style. At least for low-knowledge learners, the results are consistent with *social agency theory*—the idea that social cues, such as politeness, can prime learners to accept a web-based tutor as a social partner and therefore try harder to make sense of the tutor's messages (Bruce, Krista, & Richard, 2011). Besides those strategies, researchers also found that students' use vernacular language which were used as a softening mechanism for their presentation and combine the expressions that were categorized as positive and negative politeness fillers (Murni, 2019).

The use of expressions of politeness is indeed interesting if it is related to one's cultural background. Many studies have found that cultural differences will produce different expressions of politeness as well. For example, the Japanese speakers were more direct, and did not appear to be as appropriately polite as the Australians (Tanaka, 1988). In addition, other research also shows the difference between Chinese and American politeness strategies in dealing with problems. One of the reasons for this is the cultural differences in the western and eastern world.

Because usually in the eastern education system, teachers dominate the classroom and this method is done as an attempt to assess student performance and abilities (Zhang, 2007). In education in the east the teacher also has absolute authority over the students' questions, and the knowledge of students and students should not challenge the teacher during class (Biggs & Watkins, 1996). On the other hand, in the western education system, when students challenge their teachers, it is considered a process of dialogue, a process of self-improvement. and the desired process during class (Robinson, 1999). However, the findings have been criticized by George Leech saying that despite differences, each of the languages and cultures discussed herein constitute a more or less unified system in terms of politeness norms (Leech & Larina, *Politeness: West and East*, 2010).

The politeness strategy is not limited to face-to-face classes, but also online classes. The politeness strategy is not limited to face-to-face classes, but also online classes. Results show that politeness conventions in email, a text-only medium with little guidance in the academic institutional hierarchy, appear to be a work in progress, and native speakers demonstrate greater resources in creating e-polite messages to their professors than non-native speakers (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007). The politeness strategy is not limited to face-to-face classes, but also online classes. The polite version yielded better learning outcomes, and the effect was amplified in learners who expressed a preference for indirect feedback, who had less computer experience, and who lacked engineering backgrounds (Ning, et al., 2008). Therefore, it is very important to implement a suitable strategy in online classes, especially if you have students with different cultural backgrounds.

There are many experts who reveal politeness strategies. Some of the most well-known are (1) Lakoff Rules of Politeness, (2) Leech's Politeness Principle and maxim of interaction, (3) Brown and Levinson Face Saving / Threatening Act. The first maxim of politeness (1) has 3 sub rules, namely "don't impose" which relates to distance and formality, "give options" which relates to "hesitancy", and "be friendly" which relates to "equality" (Lakoff, 1973). Unfortunately, this notion has received a lot of criticism because it cannot explain the different theories of politeness that exist in different cultures (Shahrokhi & Bidabani, 2013). The second theory (2) states that the politeness theory has several maxims. They are the tact maxim which means maximizing the benefits of others, the generosity maxim which

minimizes profits for yourself, the modesty maxim which is praising others highly, the agreement maxim which is maximizing approval for others, and the maxim of sympathy which is maximizing sympathy for others (Leech, *Principles of Pragmatics*, 1983). This maxim has received praise and criticism, because experts argue that new maxims can always be added to this theory (Locher, 2004). The third theory (3) outlines the positive and negative faces (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This theory has also received some criticism for being too egocentric and incompatible with some collectivist cultures such as Japan (Werkhofer, 1992).

In this research, the theory that I will be used as a research perspective is Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness. Because in general, this theory is considered capable of explaining various perspectives that exist from various cultural points of view. This theory looks at the politeness value of the similarity of individualism, namely "self-esteem" which is manifested in "saving face" and "losing face" during social interactions (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This "face" is actually inspired by Chinese culture in the 19th century, the concept of face here means how someone wants to be seen by others when communicating or other people's views of the self-image or traits a person has as an adult (Hinze, 2012). Negative face-threatening acts are debilitated when a person does not maintain a strategic distance from or proposed to maintain a strategic distance from the obstacle of their interlocutor's flexibility of activity (Brown & Levinson, 1987). But positive face-threatening acts debilitate when the speaker or listener does not care about their interactor's sentiments, needs, or does not need what the other needs (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

METHODS

This research used qualitative research. The method used is a descriptive method involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Descriptive method used and functioned to see, review, know and describe something as it is at the time the research was held in a complex and holistic way (Creswell, 1994). The method of collecting and processing data is divided into several stages as follows:

Data Sources

This research used data, which is a student and teacher interactions in an international online class.

This online class is a collaborative class between the OPEN (Online Professional English Network) institution and the United States Embassy. The name of this online class is integrating critical thinking, and this course is conducted by the World Learning institution. Classes are held for eight weeks, where classes start from 29 September 2020 to 24 November 2020. This class is a free class that English teachers from all over the world can participate in who have successfully passed the selection stage. The selection itself is carried out by the United States embassy where prospective candidates are asked to fill out a questionnaire regarding the background of the class, they are able to teach and their English language skills. After a few weeks, teachers who have passed the selection stage will attend the online orientation stage for two weeks before classes begin. The teacher in this class is an American woman and students from various countries in the world.

The reason for the researcher joining this class is because the researcher is one of the participants of this class. In this class, researchers can clearly observe, discuss, and access all the conversations that occur between teachers and students. Because this class is not open to all parties, and it is impossible for non-participants to be able to access the talks. Currently, because the class has finished, the class has been deleted by the organizers, but participants are given the opportunity to download all the talks and materials that have been given. This class discusses improving critical thinking skills for teachers and integrating it with culture. This class consists of an American teacher and several Spanish, Mexican, Venezuelan, Indonesian, Chinese, Indian, Russian, Chinese, and Nigerian participants.

Every week the teacher posted assignments that must be completed by the students in the form of group discussions, writing personal comments on certain issues, and quizzes. Often the teacher asks the participants in the class to comment on each other and ask questions about things that are felt to be interesting that were said by each participant in the class. The interaction during the class were with the following criteria, (1) reciprocal response from fellow students and (2) response comments from students to teachers. The conversation is in the form of sentences that form the discourse, commentary discourse, the delivery of ideas, and ideas on a topic presented by the teacher. In identifying this data, the researcher will take statements made by students in response to conversations given by teachers and fellow friends in online classes in the form of

opening greetings, positive comments and negative comments, questions, and sentences that state agreement or disagreement.

Methods of Data Collection

In retrieving the data, the researcher used the observation and note-taking technique. First of all, the researcher read and paid attention to what information is disclosed by the participants in the online class for the following weeks, starting from week two to week seven. Interaction during class took place using written language only. This written form of communication occurred through teacher posts, student posts, and discussion forums. In analyzing the students' politeness strategies researchers analyzed the conversation by copying and downloading all the talks that have been available during the week. This analysis was followed by reading the text of the conversation and marking the politeness strategies written by the students. Then, the information was recorded and classified based on the types of expressions. After that the data were matched with the existing classification in the theory of politeness by Brown and Levison.

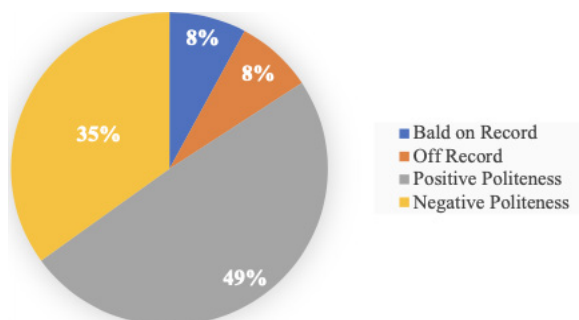
Methods of Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, the researcher classified the types of expressions based on the politeness strategies in the theory. Then, the percentage of the politeness strategies was calculated. After getting the percentage of the number of expressions that are most dominant based on politeness theory, then the researcher will see what causes politeness strategies to be more dominant than others. The researcher tried to see whether there is any intervention from the teacher that causes students to have this politeness strategy. In addition, the researcher will also try to reveal whether there are differences in politeness strategies that students from different country backgrounds have, given that the previous theory has been discussed that different perspectives on how to view modesty are different from if the individual comes from the West and the East. These results will then be narrated, discussed and drawn conclusions regarding politeness strategies in online classes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The discussion is divided into two main topics, the first is the use of politeness strategies in online classrooms and the second is the factors that influence the use of these strategies.

Politeness Strategies used by Students in International Online

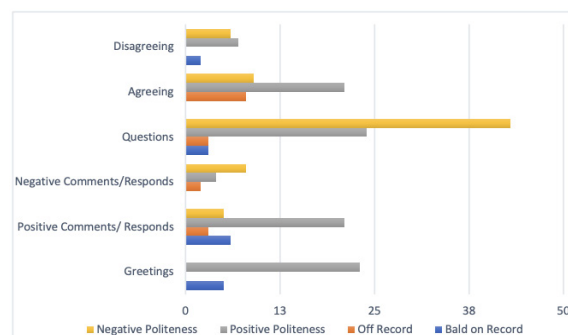


Picture 1. The Comparison of Politeness Strategies

The chart shows the use of politeness strategies that have been concluded from five meetings, and three kinds discussion forums, namely a discussion forum between teachers and students at the beginning of the week, discussion forum between groups, and the third is an individual discussion forum. It was found that the majority of politeness strategies that exist are positive politeness strategies and negative politeness strategies. This is because existing online classes are written based. So, it will be easier if the politeness such as positive and negative strategies are conveyed in writing. This politeness strategy is also one of the easiest strategies to understand without multiple interpretations. In addition, the “bald on record” strategy was avoided because it was considered impolite to other class participants. This strategy frequently utilizing such a procedure will stun or humiliate the recipient, and so this methodology is most regularly utilized in circumstances where the speaker includes a near relationship with the audience, such as family or near companions (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Whereas, the participants in this case were only students who did not know each other before, they came from different backgrounds, and did not have an intimate / close relationship.

The “off record” politeness strategy is also somewhat infrequent because in this strategy there is an implied meaning behind the previous words. This is quite difficult to find if it is only based on writing and without seeing the pragmatic aspects that actually occur by the speaker. The off-record strategies often indicate an implicature and modesty in communications (Yanti, 2017) so it is easier to be found in the spoken utterances. In this study, the number of off record speeches the researchers took was based on the inconsistency of the conversation and the content delivered in a discussion forum that was consistent and intense. So, it showed the true intentions of the speaker after going through the conversation process. Specifically, many positive

politeness strategies were conveyed when having a group discussion. Where they comment on each other’s work and provide input. In providing this input, the participants try to clarify and criticize the work of the other participants by highlighting the strengths of the person who is being criticized first. This strategy is considered good and suitable in online classes because this strategy keeps both parties able to convey what is meant and those who receive criticism do not feel inferior and can still accept the information conveyed. This strategy of politeness is also suitable to be implemented if the speakers do not know each other very well (Ress and Knight, 2008). In terms of negative politeness, it is conveyed especially when teachers and students give very positive feedback on comments which actually could be better or even do not meet the stated assessment criteria. This is usually done by teachers to keep the participants motivated and to keep their “faces” from embarrassing because negative comments will be read by all the participants. Negative politeness here is also useful for enhancing good relations and maintaining a positive class situation.



Picture 2. The Comparison of Politeness Strategies Based on the Students’ Utterance

This graph shows the comparison of utterances and comments given by students in an online classroom. It can be seen that the highest is negative politeness strategies and this occurs when students ask questions. The most widely used strategy is the negative politeness strategy in questioning. This is because the questions asked by students are indirect. Usually, students also ask for a more complete explanation or confirmation from other fellow participants. Sometimes there are also speeches that clarify by apologizing first. Also found were utterances that avoided the pronoun “I” when the participants tried to explain the background of their work. They are more likely to use the pronoun “we” which refers

to themselves and their colleagues, namely teachers.

The second is in terms of positive politeness strategies, which are quite common in every online class utterance. The usual positive politeness strategy is characterized by the use of the word “please”. This strategy also often appears when fellow participants and instructors give positive comments to the thoughts of others. Usually, these comments begin with praise and approval of the mindset that the other person has. In this case, both the instructor and the participants also always emphasize the similarity of the background, stories, and experiences that other participants have. This is quite important because it can maintain a harmonious class atmosphere and even increase the sense of empathy among fellow online class participants.

In the off-record strategy, many are found in expressions conveying approval and asking questions. In delivering approval usually begins with the words, “your idea is very interesting and I’ve never heard of an idea like this.” this actually implies that the speaker wants to say he does not agree with the opinions given by other speakers. but he puts it in the opposite way and also explains the reasons that support the argument. This was also found when the participants wanted to ask or reconfirm information that they found contradicting their circumstances. The least-used strategy in online classrooms at this time is the bald on record politeness strategy. This strategy was only found when the participants delivered greetings and a small percentage was found in this. The greeting that they usually say is limited to saying “great day” or “hello.” Sometimes many participants do not say the opening remarks, this is because the participants have different time zones and they emphasize that the most important thing is the point of the conversation. In addition, they also found similar strategies in asking questions and disagreements. This only occurs in one or two cases within five weeks, which may be very personal reasons that can be influenced by external factors that occur from the speaker. This strategy also happened when one of the participants gave a very honest comment or response to one of the other participants. Actually, this strategy is also important because it places a lot of emphasis on the values of honesty which is also beneficial for the participants because participants can immediately digest the information they want to show.

Factors Contribute to The Students’ Politeness During the Online Learning

In fact, it can be concluded that online classes have various students from different countries that have conducive learning conditions and have a

positive atmosphere. There are several factors that researchers believe contribute to this positivity. The first is a study contract set at the beginning of the lesson. At the beginning of each learning online students and class participants are trained and attend initial seminars on how they should follow online learning and respect fellow participants. This is also always reminded by the class instructors Every beginning of the week that they should respect each other, write comments politely, and not provoke fights. They should also always write their name and say it as they want to get a comment reply.

The second is the factor that those who take this online class are people who are already in the professional and adult realm so that they understand very well How to put themselves and implement politeness strategies. To sum up, it is clear that politeness strategy gives a crucial role in the process of learning either face-to-face or virtually. This is because in communication, human needs to obey and apply the communication ethics in a language. One of the ways is using polite language which means straightforward manner, does not offend ither, and in a proper grammar rule (Arfinda, M. & Himawan, R., 2021). Politeness is also important since it will maintain a good communication in the most subtle meaning. Since language is a combination of ideas, thoughts, and gestures to deliver an important information (Sugianto, A., et al., 2021). Therefore, in order to deliver and receive the meaning in those semiotics figures, one’s should really pay attention on the politeness manner they used.

CONCLUSION

All students also have a mutually supportive and positive relationship with each other. Politeness strategies that are widely applied by students in this case are positive and negative politeness strategies. This strategy was found when students asked questions and expressed their views, both agreeing and disagreeing. Politeness strategy is a very important strategy to be applied in the learning process both online and offline. In the online learning process, this strategy can be useful for maintaining classroom conditions, fostering empathy among fellow participants, and maintaining high learning motivation. Because in online learning usually motivation is only in the form of internal motivation and it is rather difficult for a teacher to provide external motivation other than inside other than when in class. This research discusses one online class that is quite successful in running its program from start to finish.

After examining the factors that support the success of this class, it can be concluded that differences in culture and country of origin do not cause significant differences. Understanding someone's cultures will be very beneficial for understanding their communication pattern since speech, time, and social condition are embedded in one's culture (Anggraeni, S., 2021). The strategies chosen by the students in the online class were basically the same each week, albeit with different people. This is because at the beginning of the learning system the instructor has emphasized how to interact properly and politely with the class. In addition, this is followed by all professionals who have been able to place themselves in online learning situations. So, it can be concluded that in online learning, it is better if the program applies training and provides guidance to students and instructors before the learning process begins. This can minimize problems that may arise in the future. Researchers believe the politeness strategy will be more different if it is in face-to-face learning. because students will feel a more dynamic class and can get to know class members more with each other. In the future, the researcher hopes that similar research can be carried out in a wider research domain and subject. Likewise, in collecting data it would be better if students also looked for reasons and motives in determining politeness strategies. To close this research studies, I also want to emphasize the role of technology (ICT) which provides great benefits in the learning process. From this research we can conclude that technology can unite students who learn from different places, make them interact with each other and with culture, and facilitate teachers in teaching. Especially in Indonesia, even though in urban and rural areas, the benefits and importance of using ICT in the learning process have been recognized. The use of ICT brings benefits for teacher and students as they help improving the quality of teaching listening, speaking, and vocabularies and reducing communication barriers between teachers' and students (Nurkadimah, N., 2020). Therefore, the findings of this research also confirm the importance and how the government and schools can support teachers and students in using technology for the learning process.

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