

Politeness Strategies among EFL Learners: A Literature Review

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Many studies have been conducted on politeness strategies employed by EFL learners in social communication or classroom contexts. As a result, it is fascinating to analyze the extent to which scholars have explored this issue. By examining 20 published articles in reputable journals in a decade (2011 – 2021), this literature review study aimed to investigate the politeness strategies employed among EFL learners and the pedagogical implications of politeness strategies in EFL classrooms. The findings showed that there were five politeness strategies used in social communication, including positive politeness, bald on-record, negative politeness, off-record, and do not do FTA. Nonetheless, the latest strategy was not employed in the classroom context. Each strategy chosen by EFL learners was due to the power, social distance, age, and cultural background. These findings shed light on the pedagogical implication of politeness strategies, which should be implied in the teaching learning process and in designing the course and preparing the materials.

Keywords: Politeness, Politeness Strategies, EFL Learners, Pragmatics, Literature Review

Introduction

Learning a language is not just a collection of rules and applying them in meaningful utterances or sentences; it should be learned in the cultural context of its speakers (Aridah, 2015). This means that language is used to communicate among societies as a social interaction tool and to express someone's feelings (Fitriati & Lisa, 2019). Either for social interaction or feeling expression, there is a cultural context that limits someone to use the language to maintain the relationships between speakers in a comfortable interaction. As linguistic

interaction is necessarily social interaction (Yule, 1996), politeness is essentially needed in society to show respect to others.

Various empirical research has been done on politeness strategies among English Foreign Language (EFL) learners in various cultural contexts around the world. Different politeness strategies are employed in social interaction among EFL learners from heterogenous backgrounds concerning contextual appropriateness in expressing their feelings. Therefore, this study aims to examine the relevant research articles published in reputable journals in 2013 – 2021 to shed light on the main issues of politeness strategies used by EFL learners. It reports the literature review in regard to answering the following research questions:

1. How do politeness strategies employ among EFL learners?
2. What are the pedagogical implications of politeness strategies in teaching EFL learners?

Literature Review

1. Politeness

Being polite in the common sense means that we show good manners and consideration for others. This common behavior happens in all cultures with its own rules in the family environment, social environment, education, religion, and formal education. In EFL learning, politeness refers to linguistic politeness, which is taught in both oral and written communication in terms of how people choose to speak and how the hearers respond to their speech (Saputra, 2021). According to Lakoff (1973), politeness is what we believe is proper behavior in specific situations in order to create and maintain successful social relationships with others. Yule (1996) argues that politeness in interaction is a way to demonstrate awareness of another person's face. It means that politeness has a close relationship with human social life interaction. Thus, understanding cross-cultural politeness is very important to respect others on their differences and build friendship or solidarity. In short, politeness is one of the keywords in human interaction to consider other people's feelings.

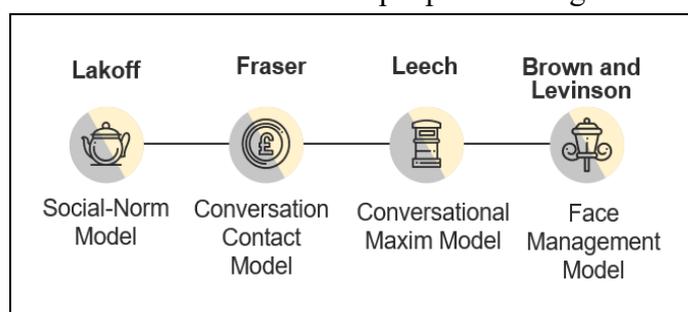


Figure 1. Politeness Theories

Thomas (2013) explained four politeness theories proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), Fraser (1978), Grice (1975), and Lakoff (1973) (See Figure 1). First, Lakoff proposed a social norm model in which standards of behavior in any society according to which addresser's politeness is measured. In this theory, politeness is measured to be a clearly informal way – a higher degree of formality implies greater politeness. Lakoff also states that

politeness is a system of interpersonal relations to reduce conflict, establish degree of mutual comfort, and demonstrate awareness of another person's face. Second, Fraser explained the conversation contact model in which interlocutors conduct a conversation to recognize rights and obligations that govern the interaction, which is negotiable, dynamic, and changeable. The rights and obligations determine how a participant is meant to behave. Third, Grice proposed a conversational maxim model to maintain a social equilibrium that some speech acts may harm. This theory concerns absolute politeness, indicating that speech acts are inherently polite or impolite. There are six kinds of maxim explored by Grice (See Table 1).

Table 1. Kinds of Maxim

Kind of Maxim	Description	Example
Tact Maxim	Minimize cost to other Maximize benefit to other	Have another sandwich *Hand me the newspaper
Generosity Maxim	Minimize benefit to self Maximize cost to self	You must come and have dinner with you *We must come and have dinner with you
Approbation Maxim	Minimize dispraise of other Maximize praise of other	Her performance was outstanding *Her performance was not so good as it might have been
Modesty Maxim	Minimize praise of self Maximize dispraise of self	How stupid of me! *How clever of me
Agreement Maxim	Minimize disagreement between self and other Maximize agreement between self and other	A: It is an interesting exhibition, isn't it? B: Yes, definitely *No, it was very uninteresting
Sympathy Maxim	Minimize antipathy between self and other	I am terribly sorry to hear that your cat died

The last is a face management model proposed by Brown and Levinson. They argued that in order to form social interactions, everyone must recognize the face of other people. This theory is the development model of FTA introduced by Goffman in 1963 in which Brown and Levinson suggest three basic notions of face, including face, FTA, and politeness strategies (Maros & Rosli, 2017). Face means a person's public self-image, which refers to the emotional and social sense of self that everyone has and expects everyone else to recognize. FTA is employed when a speaker says something that represents a threat to another person's self-image expectation. In contrast, politeness strategies are used when a speaker says something lessens the possible threat.

2. Politeness strategies

In achieving effective communication, the speaker should use politeness strategies to avoid misunderstanding, hurt feelings, and unpleasant things, and respect the others to avoid conflict

in the interaction between speaker and hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This means that politeness strategies show the speaker's behavior in the interaction. There are four strategies: bald on-record strategy, positive politeness strategy, negative politeness strategy, and off-record strategy (See Figure 2). The speaker can choose a suitable strategy that can be used to prevent threatening acts on the hearer's face.

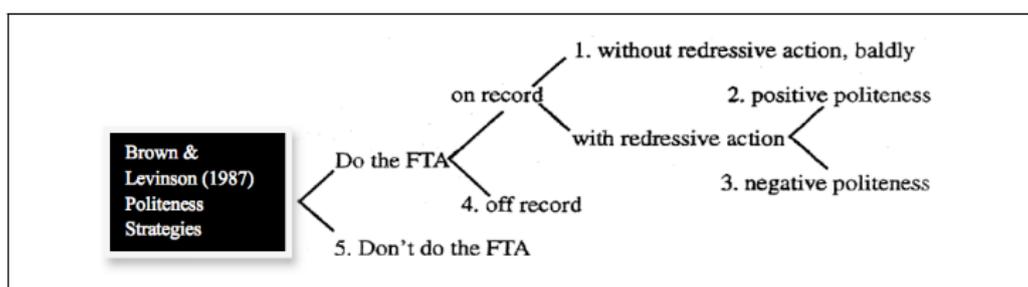


Figure 2. Politeness Strategies

The speaker uses bald on-record to transmit information or a message to the listener, as described by the first strategy. It normally makes no attempt to reduce the threat to the listener's face. Afterwards, using a positive method, the hearer's positive face is increased. It aims to build a positive relationship between the parties while also acknowledging and respecting a person's desire to be liked and respected. Then, as a 'redressive action,' negative politeness is used to focus on the hearer's negative face. This strategy reduces the number of requests made and respects a person's right to behave freely. The last method is an off-the-record strategy that allows the speaker to conduct FTA indirectly. It employs indirect language to insulate the speaker from the possibility of being imposed.

Furthermore, Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest five politeness techniques, i.e., people can speak indirectly, people can lie politely, people can use euphemisms, people can use modal tags to show that the speakers are about something, and people can use affective tags to show that the speakers concern about something. Accordingly, Wardhaugh and Fuller (2015) assert that while interacting with people, we must be conscious of both forms of face and, as a result, choose between two types of politeness. Firstly, positive politeness leads to efforts to create unity through friendship offers, compliments, and the use of casual language. We treat others as friends and allies, never imposing on them or threatening them in any way. Secondly, negative politeness leads to respect, apologizing, indirectness, and formality in language use; we employ a variety of methods to avoid any dangers to the face that others offer to us. As a result, politeness is used in particular communication situations. This is because the speaker will encounter a variety of people with varying personalities and levels of communicative ability while conducting the communication. Both the speaker and the listener must follow Leech's principle (Table 1) in order to achieve the purpose of communication.

Research Methodology

This literature review study investigated relevant research articles on politeness strategies published in reputable journals in 2011 – 2021. The articles were taken from nationally or internationally accredited journals. This study analyzed 20 research articles on politeness strategies used by EFL learners. Those articles were categorized based on the following aspects:

1. Politeness strategies employed among EFL learners.
2. Pedagogical implications of politeness strategies in teaching EFL learners.

Findings

Politeness is an essential part of communication, which is affected by the sociological norms of the speakers (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Studying language in its cultural context is important to bring intentions among speakers in order to understand each other (Utami et al., 2019). Thus, it is important to know politeness strategies used by EFL learners during the communication and teaching-learning process. This study reported and analyzed 20 research articles about politeness in relation to the use of politeness among EFL learners and the pedagogical implications of politeness strategies. Then a brief discussion was presented to get a new insight into politeness strategies among EFL learners.

1. Politeness strategies employed among EFL learners

The first discussion of politeness strategies among EFL learners was based on the cultural context. There were six articles in terms of using politeness strategies in its cultural situation. First, the study focused on how the Sasak people of Lombok Indonesia interact with each other in a natural situation. Yaqin and Shanmuganathan (2018) investigated the politeness theory in language communication which associated social reality and language use in real communities. According to the findings, the Sasaks have always been socialized to be polite in their conversations and to respect their elders and spouses. However, the majority of them lacked formal schooling. Furthermore, both the young and the old were treated with respect and replied correctly when conversing. The findings illuminated why interlocutors always provided more information than was requested or required.

Second, there were two articles that investigated politeness in Javanese culture in different contexts – Purwa Shadow Puppet Performances and Traditional Entertainments. The earlier was done by Rahmawanto and Rahyono (2019), who examined the dialogs between ‘wayang kulit’ characters to better understand the role that language plays in establishing harmony in this art form of puppet theatre. The results of the study proved that politeness in speaking was the determining factor for the realization of a harmonious atmosphere in conversation. This strategy was chosen by considering the context of the participants, the formality degree, and the type of speech act. Next, the later research aimed to describe politeness strategies and features in the procurement of traditional Javanese entertainment (Trihadmono et al., 2019). After analysing the data, there were four politeness techniques appeared: speaking indirectly, lying politely, using a euphemism, and using modal tags to show uncertainty. Those techniques were used in four politeness strategies, including bald on-record, positive politeness, negative

politeness, and off-record strategy as the medium of interaction, while impoliteness strategy occurred in a certain setting where politeness strategy has to appear.

Third, the study was conducted in the Banjar area; specifically, it examined the politeness distinction used by Banjarese youth in daily life (Arini, 2016). The study reported three levels of politeness in addressing the older people in Banjarese, which were affected by some factors, i.e., educational background and the parents' origin (family background). It was suggested that the Banjarese youth preserved the politeness distinction they used in daily life toward the older ones and did not change their behaviour in this globalization era as preserving good manners in Banjarese culture was considered essential. The young generation must update the latest technology without losing their good behaviour (Pratiwi & Ubaedillah, 2021). Fourth, the article took place in the Indonesian context, no longer in a specific tribe of Indonesia. The study aimed to find out the functions of 'maaf' in the Indonesian language from three Indonesian novels (Sumarti et al., 2020). The analysis found that 'maaf' had five functions, including regret, attention-getter, closing, request, and mocking or teasing. The different functions of 'maaf' in the conversation are due to the politeness strategies employed among the characters depending on power, relationships, age, and situation.

The last politeness strategies employed in cultural context happened in the Malaysian context as politeness is regarded as an important social factor in the Malaysian society, and measured the how individuals interact with one another (Hei et al., 2013). Furthermore, Hei et al. (2013) examined the public interactions of front counter personnel and patients in Malaysian private hospitals to determine the politeness strategies of the hospital staffs. The analysis indicated that the staffs employed more impolite openings, but they used more polite closings at the end of the transactions. Then, it was recommended that service industries had to emphasize the use of politeness markers by providing staff with training through courses or workshops, emphasizing service with a smile, focusing on the needs of patients, and awarding honorariums to staff who receive the most patients votes for being courteous. Indeed, the communication skills had to be taught and implemented in service industries (Pratiwi, Atmaja, et al., 2021).

Currently, email has been used extensively to communicate between students and teachers at the university level for academic purposes (Biesenbach-Lucas, 2007). There were three articles discussed in this study regarding politeness strategies in email. Firstly, Astia (2020) reported politeness strategies produced by international students in an Indonesian university. The students used a bald-on record for face-threatening acts (FTA). On the other hand, negative politeness was used to avoid the face FTA in giving complaints. Despite different cultural backgrounds, social distance (age and status) affected the choice of politeness strategies in email communication. Secondly, Balman et al. (2020) investigated politeness strategies in requesting through email employed by Indonesian students in Japanese universities. It was reported that different requesting strategies emerged according to the imposition of the students' requests. As the imposition of the request increased, the students showed a tendency to let the teachers interpret their intention in the emails. Thirdly, Najeeb et al. (2012) found that the students used various politeness strategies, i.e., positive and negative strategies when they examined email communication of Arab students in Malaysian universities. The results

revealed that the students had not acquired enough politeness knowledge. Therefore, it was important for teachers and institutions to provide compulsory email awareness-raising instructions at the beginning of the course in university.

The employment of politeness strategies in Twitter updates of EFL learners in Malaysia was the next subject examined in this study. Twitter is establishing as a valuable research tool for academics. On Twitter, Maros and Rosli (2017) discovered politeness and the most often used politeness strategies among female students. The individuals used four politeness strategies: bald-on record, off-record, negative politeness, and positive politeness. Because it encouraged interpersonal communication and expression, the last strategy was the most popular among the participants. These findings shed light on the awareness of misinterpretation in faceless virtual communication due to the lack of other communication cues, as well as the misuse of profanity, ambiguous indirect strategy, and failure that may create misfire in Twitter communication.

For Indonesian EFL learners, WhatsApp still becomes the most commonly used application to communicate and exchange information (Pratiwi, Zulkarnain, et al., 2021). Regarding politeness strategies in WhatsApp communication employed among Indonesians, Muzakky et al. (2021) examined the communication function of the non-face folded-hands emoji. The results showed that the folded-hands emoji emphasized message tone, conveyed politeness in the message, built soft interaction and perceived positive responsiveness. Furthermore, this emoji performed illocutionary forces in communication, i.e., thanking, apologizing, and requesting, and performed in situational interaction. A formal relationship exists between the speaker and the interlocutor, such as between a teacher and a student or between a leader and his or her team.

Considering the relation of politeness principles to translation strategies, an article from Ardi et al. (2018) investigated the translation of politeness markers in giving a command to the structuring of particular characterization in literary works and pedagogical implications. It was found that the translation of politeness markers contributed to the characterization to establish equivalence, variation, and explication techniques employed to the translation of politeness markers. This meant that the translators should be aware of politeness due to the cultural difference between the source language and the target language in order to get good accuracy and acceptability.

2. Pedagogical implications of politeness strategies in teaching EFL learners

Some empirical studies concerning politeness strategies in EFL classroom interactions have been conducted in various Indonesian contexts. Surono et al. (2021) conducted a study on kindergarten teachers about directive speech acts in parenting and politeness implication based on the schools' mission. The data were collected by interviewing ten teachers from 7 kindergartens in Yogyakarta province and observing the teaching and learning process through video recording. The findings of the study revealed that there were different politeness strategies by the teachers, which were affected by several factors, i.e., institutional missions, the number of classes taught by the teachers, the teachers' creativities, and cultural aspects. These findings implied that the development of politeness could be encouraged by empowering

the teachers through educating teachers, focusing on lingual aspects, enriching the school's missions, and behaving assertively, disregarding the cultural aspects.

At the junior high school level, Haryanto et al., (2018) explored the use of the politeness principle by the teachers during classroom interactions in the teaching and learning process of the English language. The activities were begun by observing seven meetings of classroom interactions through video recording and continued by interviewing the teacher and three randomly chosen students. After transcribing the recording, the results showed that the teacher used six maxims during classroom interactions: tact maxim, generosity maxim, approbation maxim, modesty maxim, agreement maxim, and sympathy maxim. The most dominant used in the teaching and learning process was tact maxim. The interview results showed that politeness principles created togetherness between teacher and students, built respect behavior of students, and helped students to have a positive attitude toward the lesson that obviously motivated them to participate more actively in the learning process. Thus, it was important to apply politeness strategies in teaching and learning.

There were two studies conducted in senior high school. First, a descriptive qualitative study exploring the politeness strategies in a 90-minute English lesson was done by Fitriyani and Andriyanti (2020) in Magelang. Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies analyzed the video recording data of two different classes. The data contained three politeness strategies: positive, negative, and bald-on record. They were performed mainly in giving instructions, encouraging, asking for something, requesting, asking for confirmation, and addressing, influenced by the age difference, institutional position, power, and social distance between teacher and students. This study indicated that Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies were suitable for classroom interactions in English lessons. Second, similar to Fitriyani and Andriyanti (2020), Senowarsito (2013) explored politeness strategies used by teachers and students in two 90-minute English lessons in Semarang. The additional finding was that the factor influenced politeness strategies: the limitation of the student's linguistic ability. In pedagogical situation, the findings shed light on an indispensable tool to examine politeness as students' character-building aspect in classroom interaction.

Shifting the research subject to a higher students' level, Abdolrezapour et al. (2012), Chiravate (2011), and Li et al. (2015) focused their studies on politeness strategies in undergraduate students to develop communicative competence. Abdolrezapour et al. (2012) examined how Iranian EFL learners interpret complaints. The activities were started with role-play interactions taken from ten American speakers, followed by a perceptive questionnaire to get the necessary data. Due to social characteristics of power and distance, more indirect complaints were viewed as more polite by EFL learners, whereas gender was not a significant factor in the judgment of politeness. These findings can help EFL teachers expand the range of politeness strategies that can be used in class to help students improve their communicative skills.

Chiravate (2011) investigated how Thai EFL learners differ from native English speakers in their usage of politeness strategies, as well as the evidence of L1 influence on learners' politeness strategies. A judgment task included 12 scenarios with varied social and psychological elements, each with six politeness strategies for expressing the request. The

results revealed that learners' use of politeness strategies differed from that of native speakers, with learners employing less politeness strategies than native speakers. These findings shed light on classroom activities conducted in the EFL setting in which teachers should be aware of cultural differences to develop students and intercultural communicative competence.

Furthermore, Li et al. (2015) investigated Chinese EFL students' knowledge and production of polite utterances. The findings revealed that the students' capacity to recognize and make contextually relevant utterances needed to be strengthened. Their pragmatic understanding of the importance of delivering courteous statements was positively related to their output. The students were more conscious of social power, but they struggled to realize communicative aims by employing appropriate methods and language elements. This meant that the learners' ability to develop suitable language could be predicted based on their pragmatic awareness. In terms of EFL instruction, teachers required to be aware of the impact of L1 transfer on the acquisition of L2 information.

Considering politeness strategies in job interviews, Tan et al. (2016) explored the face-related concept of politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) at job interviews. Eight final-year undergraduate students volunteer to participate a mock-interview session with a human resource manager from the banking industry. Following the transcription and analysis of the data, two politeness strategies were discovered. The first was recognizing and attending to the interviewer's interests, wants, needs, or goods, and the second was establishing a ground for solidarity. The findings highlighted three issues in the EFL teaching and learning process that learners should be aware of. To begin with, disagreements and negations may not always have bad consequences while teaching interview skills. Second, involvement in job interviews was more like a discussion than a passive activity in which interviewees sat and just answered questions. Finally, in order to retain a positive impression, it was essential for the students to learn and apply politeness skills to make apologies for the threat that had been made.

Banikalef et al. (2015) conducted a study regarding politeness strategies occurring in apology through an ethnographic observation in a Jordanian Arabic school. The findings revealed that the Jordanian speakers apologized through a wide range of apology strategies, ranging from taking responsibility to completely denying responsibility, influenced by social status, degree of severity, and social distance. These assisted teachers in developing the EFL materials and raised awareness about socio-cultural rules that governed the use of language functions.

Discussion

Revisiting a considerable number of articles discussed in this study, there are several strategies employed by EFL learners depicting the cultural background, medium of communication, and context of the situation in which the communication takes place. Generally, positive politeness becomes the most chosen strategy in communication among EFL learners. Then, it is followed by bald on-record, negative politeness, off-record, and not doing FTA. Specifically, there is no 'not doing FTA' strategy done in teaching and learning context, both by the teacher or learners. Furthermore, each strategy chosen by the speakers has its functions during the communication, which is affected by several factors, including power

(social status), age, social distance, degree of severity, cultural background, and family background (Salmon, 2021; Waluyo, 2019). In relation to power, language can be used to create domination in a particular context in order to contribute to our understanding of interaction in organizations (Nor & Aziz, 2010; Pratiwi et al., 2022).

Besides politeness strategies can be implemented during communication among teachers and EFL learners in the teaching and learning process, it is also recommended to consider politeness in other pedagogical situations (Kang & Yoon, 2020; Triki, 2002). First, the teacher can consider politeness during the choice of the materials as a guiding methodology in the organization of the materials. Second, politeness can be a source of linguistic explanation for apparently structural concerns. Third, politeness can be a salient component in teacher-training programs that deserve greater academic interest, especially in ESP circles relying on corpus data. Last but not least, cultural awareness and socio-cultural rules in politeness principles have to be taken into account for material developers in preparing resource books or modules.

Conclusion

This study presents and explores many studies on politeness strategies among EFL learners, both in daily communication and pedagogical implication during the teaching and learning process. The previous studies revealed that EFL learners were familiar with politeness in communication by applying politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). The majority of the learners used positive strategies, while the ‘did not do FTA’ strategy has never been used in the classroom context. However, a number of students used the ‘did not do FTA’ strategy in email communication which might be influenced by cultural background. The others strategies used were bald on-record, negative politeness, and off-record. Regarding the implication of politeness in the classroom context, teachers are strongly suggested to integrate the politeness into the course design and teaching material since politeness can be the linguistic source.

As much as this study intends to offer, this study has limitations to be acknowledged. The findings are limited to research articles published in a decade, 2011 – 2021. Future studies are suggested to develop a more detailed and systematic procedure of integrating politeness strategies in course design and teaching materials. Furthermore, this study calls for experimental research of the course design implementing politeness strategies in the teaching and learning process to find out the significance of enhancing students’ politeness in communication. Regardless, the raised research questions have been successfully addressed.

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