**ELT IN FOCUS**

# UNTANGLING TEACHER'S POLITENESS IN EFL CLASSROOM: A CASE AT A VOCATIONAL SCHOOL IN KARAWANG

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**Abstract**

This research aims to untangle kinds of politeness strategies used by an English teacher in an EFL classroom. In this paper, the researchers used qualitative method. The research involved an English teacher at a vocational school in Karawang. The data collection was carried out by observing an English teacher in two classroom meetings and was recorded through video. The results showed that the English teacher's politeness strategies included four types of politeness strategies, i.e. positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on-record, and off-record. In conclusion, the teacher must politely untangle issues to the students. Politeness strategy will help the students develop their English communicative skills regarding how to use language relevant to the context.

**Keywords:** *politeness, pragmatics, vocational school*, *EFL*

## INTRODUCTION

An instrument of communication for the teachers and the students is language. When they use language in the classroom, they must adjust to their school environment. To achieve the classroom's objectives, many elements have to be taken into consideration. One thing that should be taken into account in classroom learning is the use of language in the classroom, which should be polite. The achievement of politeness in communication vis-à-vis the use of language in the classroom that becomes inevitable for teachers and students. Today, the interaction in class is going well as the teacher communicates his with clarity and

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politeness. This means that interaction between teachers and students has a significant impact on student's motivation for learning. An interactive classroom challenge among teacher-students is ethics. This means that the language used by the teacher is crucial for students to acquire a better understanding.

As part of this research, the researchers conduct research on the theme of teacher's politeness of language to students in the classroom. In this study, the researchers put the emphasis on the strategy of English teachers in classroom. Earlier research was undertaken by Heriyawati, Siba, & Sulistyo (2019) on the politeness of teachers in the ELT class with many

cultural backgrounds. Khusnia (2017) discussed polite strategies for establishing positive values in students' EFL class. Peng et al. (2014) examined how teachers apply polite strategies when using the language in classroom in China.

Grounded in the setting as reported previously, the subject in this research is restricted to the types of politeness strategies used by an English teacher in the schoolroom in one vocational school in Karawang. Meanwhile, the problems of this research can be formulated as follows, what types of politeness strategies used by an English teacher in classroom interaction? Thus, this research is attempt to untangle the types of politeness strategies used by an English teacher in ELT classroom.

## Language teaching in the classroom

Learning is essentially a process, that is, the process of regulation, of organizing the environment around students so that it can grow and encourage students to accomplish the learning process (Pane & Dasopang, 2017). This statement means that learning activities are an interplay between teachers and students to achieve a specific objective. In this context, speaking politely is something that must be put into practice by teachers to students and vice versa. The teacher's attitude and politeness towards students in learning activities inside and outside the classroom is important and cannot be ignored in order for communication to become fluid and not hindered. The language politeness of the teacher towards the students can be carried out linguistically, as teacher's utterance and not linguistic as gestures.

## Politeness teaching strategy in the classroom

In the context of communication, politeness is an issue which neither the speaker nor the listener can ignore. Politeness were considered a dynamic mechanism to soften the menacing actions

of the face. This statement is in line with Goffman (1967), which emphasizes that the key thinking behind this hypothesis is the impression of 'face'. By and large, Lakoff (1976) described politeness as forms of behaviour that evolved in societies to reduce friction in personal interaction. Leech (1983) describes politeness as an effort to create the possibility of impolite beliefs and opinions as small as possible. In a similar vein, Yule (2016) believes that politeness can be defined as showing one's conscience and consideration towards another person.

As well, Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 92) divided politeness into four types: positive politeness strategy, negative politeness strategy, bald-on-record strategy, off-record strategy. The researchers untangle the type below:

1. Positive strategy is a solidarity-oriented strategy indicating a close relation between speaker and hearer;

2. Negative politeness seeks to lessen the face threatening cost of particular speech act;

3. Bald-on-record strategy pays little attention on the effort to minimize the threats;

4. Off-record strategy has the purpose of taking some of the pressure off of on the addressee's face wants.

Brown & Levinson (1987) categorize politeness strategy into: 1) notice; 2) exaggerate; 3) intensify; 4) use in-group identity markers; 5) seek agreement; 6) avoid disagreement; 7) presuppose common ground; 8) joke; 9) wants; 10) offer, promise; 11) be optimistic; 12) include both speaker (S) and hearer (H) in the activity; 13) give reasons; 14) assume or assert reciprocity; 15) give gifts to hearers.

The feature of negative politeness strategy, Brown & Levinson (1987) split

into: 1) are conventionally indirect; 2) question, hedge; 3) be pessimistic; 4) minimizes imposition; 5) give deference; 6) apologize; 7) impersonalize speaker and hearer; 8) state the face threatening act; 9) nominals; 10) go on platters.

Furthermore, bald on record has characteristics such as non-minimization of the face threat. Welcoming & greeting is a particular case within the bald on record. The last type is off record. The characteristics of-record is 1) give hints; 2) give clues; 3) presuppose; and 4) understate.

## METHOD

### *Research design*

This research is regarded as a qualitative descriptive study, as it shows the quality of the learning situations experienced by an English teacher. The researchers directly observed the learning of English taught by an English teacher at a vocational school in Karawang. Alwasilah (2003) supports the view that qualitative research is natural. According to Alwasilah's point of view, the researcher applied qualitative research because it was natural setting that the researcher observed what the English teacher said to students during teaching and learning process at a vocational school in Karawang.

On top of that, the type of investigation is descriptive. Sukmadinata (2009) reported that there is a descriptive study to describe phenomena. The researchers used a kind of description to disentangle the politeness of the teacher's language in the process of learning English in one of Karawang's vocational schools.

### *Research site and participant*

The subject of this study was an English teacher from the 10th grade vocational school in Karawang. Selecting this location takes into account a number of research factors. First of all, the school is cooperative, so it is expected to help researchers do the research as it should. Second, the school's English teacher is enthusiastic about the idea of developing knowledge about politeness in language learning process.

### *Data collection techniques*

Research was carried out with due consideration given to the classroom learning process. The researchers directly came into the schoolroom. This strategy would make it possible for researchers to consider, discover and record classroom activities, no doubt in terms of classroom teaching and learning. The researchers have served as passive observers. This entails that the researcher has not been involved in in-class teaching and learning activities. In this observation was made on four occasions at different meetings to obtain different and more detailed results. Finally, the researchers also recorded in-class interaction using video to reach the data.

### *Data analysis*

The analysis of the data was based upon the theory of Brown and Levinson (1987). This analysis focused on the teacher's use of positive politeness strategies to cope with face threatening acts (Henceforth: FTA) during classroom interaction. Data were also developed through a recorded classroom interaction on video.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, some findings were made, such as positive politeness strategy, negative politeness strategy, baldness and off-record. The researchers untangled the data by developing a polite strategy and pedagogical involvement in this segment. This discussion can be described as follows:

## *Positive Politeness Strategy*

In this research, there are three outcomes of positive strategies are used by an English teacher in the EFL class. The information can be unravelled here:

> **Data 1**
> Teacher : A good afternoon, everybody?
> Students : A good afternoon sir
> Teacher : It's really cool today, isn't right? How are you everybody?
> Student : Going well, *thank God*
> Teacher :
> *Alhamdulillah*. Well let us begin the lesson today.

On the basis of data 1, the teacher opens by greeting. An English teacher chooses "everyone" to make it more general. Teacher applied a positive strategy to reference students with "everyone" that has a neutral meaning. The word "Alhamdulillah" softens the expression of the teacher. In the teacher's statement, "well" means that the teacher active and interactive to motivate students to learn English lesson. This view is consistent with the perspective from Pane & Dasopang (2017) that teachers and students have achieved a specific objective.

> **Data 2**
> Teacher : Today, let's learn the simple present?
> Teacher : Describing the time as it is now, is, am, are.
> Student : *Tobe*
> Teacher : Exactly correct. A good effort. **Am, is, are,** is what is called of **tobe** form in the simple present at time.

The data 2 illustrates that the teacher appreciates to the student's answer with the phrase "exactly correct". In addition, the teacher also complimented the student with "a good effort". This compliment encouraged students to have a more positive mind for learning English undoubtedly. The initial sentences were given because the teacher used a strategy of positive politeness in response to the student's statement. As an implication for pedagogy, this strategy helps students increase their sense of self by learning English.

> **Data 3**
> Teacher: Habitual action is an occasion of simple present tense, right? we have reached an agreement?
> Student: We do agree.
> Teacher: That's good.

On the basis of data 3 shows that the teacher again ascertains the comprehension of the students of this material. That is what emerges from the term "we have reached an agreement". In the Brown & Levinson's theory, the agreement is one of the type politeness strategy and the teacher did it easily. Afterwards, the teacher complimented the students and said "That's good". The compliment of the phrase "that's good" is besides one of the principal politeness strategies. As a result, the teacher has repeatedly made a positive polite strategy. The effect of pedagogical involvement in the ELT class corresponds to the specific objective interaction between them.

## *Negative Politeness Strategy*

The researchers found a polite negative strategy as many as three pieces of evidence. The researchers untangle of the data like:

> **Data 4**
> Teacher: Salsa, that's an inappropriate answer!
> Student: I'm sorry about that.

What can be drawn based on the data 4 is the teacher did implement a

negative polite strategy to one student by referring to one name. The impact of using this strategy in the context of teaching the English language classroom as the student's face is under threat and such a way can be avoided by the teacher. To avert such a negative polite strategy impact, it was better if the teacher used another strategy such as "Ok, everyone, the Salsa's answer reaches the correct…?". The illustration is smooth when compared with what the teacher said above.

> **Data 5**
> Teacher: I'm not sure any of you can do it faster?
> Students: --- (Silent)

Established on the data 5, the researchers discovered that the teacher was pessimistic. He suggested that the students could not accomplish the task quickly. Pessimistic nuances in teaching and learning EFL in the classroom is better avoiding to the teacher because it will doubt to the students. As well, the teacher may use a different diction to refer to "I am not..." as similar to the above example. This assertion is backed up Brown & Levinson's theory about politeness strategy. They recommend us to avoid pessimism and personalization with regard to communication. To create a robust nuance in the ELT class such accusation for students were best avoided because it had a negative impact on students in learning English.

> **Data 6**
> Teacher: I cannot hear of my voice.
> Teacher: Don't be noisy!
> Students: Yes sir.

As the data 6 showed the teacher did a negative polite strategy. The fact can be understood from the phrase "I cannot…" and "don't be noisy". Such strategy will challenge the ability of students to learn English. In Brown & Levinson's theory, the teacher's strategy can be categorised as negative politeness. Therefore, such a

strategy is preferable to change to prevent the potential risk of FTA.

### Bald-On-Record Strategy

The researchers discovered two strategies bald-on-record in the interaction class.The data can be presented such as:

> **Data 7**
> Teacher: You answer in front of the class.
> Student: Yes sir.
> Teacher: Pleased.

> **Data 8**
> Teacher: Sit down!
> Student: Ok sir.

Based on data 7 and 8, two bald strategies were identified. Teacher asked student to respond in front of the classroom. This can be understood using data 7. Meanwhile, the instructor asked students to do something immediately. This can be viewed using data 8. In Brown and Levinson's point of view, both of them can be categorized into bald-on-record strategy. In participation in ELT pedagogy, the bold strategy is best avoided by teacher to students because students have less ability to acquire objective learning.

### Off-record

The researchers found one data and it can be presented such as:

> **Data 9**
> Teacher: You can pass the simple past just fine, so your present is great.
> Student: Many thanks, sir.

The researchers discovered that one of the key parameters for determining politeness off record is the understanding and the interpretation of the students on what the teacher intends. On the basis of data 9, the teacher presupposes the ability of a pupil to distinguish between the simple

past and the simple present. The teacher appraised of one student's skill; it entails the teacher does presuppose to student's value. In Brown and Levinson's view, it can be categorized into off record. In the ELT, the objectivity of these students would need to be proven by testing, not speculation.

**CONCLUSION**

The types of politeness strategies used the English teacher involved four types of politeness strategies by Brown and Levinson (1987) theory. The kind were, positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on-record and off record. The English teacher uses positive politeness as much as negative politeness around each type has 3. Meanwhile, bald on record occurs at 2 times and off record occurs 1. Most of the students seem to be happy if their English teacher used positive politeness strategy rather than other types. By focusing on the strategy of politeness, teachers consider paying attention to the language used to their students. This means that students will be positive in developing their skills in learning ELT in the classroom if the teacher can reduce the FTA to students. The involvement of politeness language used by the teacher to students in the ELT classroom is mandatory. Therefore, disparaging of politeness in the ELT classroom for the teacher is a misconception.

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