

# Analyzing Language Politeness Strategies in Cross-Cultural Communication

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**Abstract:** In this paper, we explore the linguistic and pragmatic competence in the discourse of the participants by analyzing their utterances during an English lecture. The data were naturally collected from real classroom teaching and learning in a high school, and were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The unit of analysis was politeness strategies, distribution of turn-taking, redressive patterns, hesitation, and pragmatic failures. Results indicate that requests for clarification were largely realized by the use of polite and indirect forms, thus readers can infer that participants were sensitive to social norms and to face saving strategies. But some participants gave direct or minimal answers, suggesting differences in pragmatic skills and degree of confidence. Fillers and hesitations were also strategically employed to manage the interaction and to be polite. Isolated pragmatic errors highlighted the divide between what students know grammatically and how they can use English appropriately in academic environments. Overall, the results imply that although the participants have a basic level of communicative competence, further instruction in pragmatic strategies might contribute to their ability to participate in academic interaction.

**Keywords:** Politeness strategies, pragmatic competence, classroom interaction, English lecture, utterance analysis, academic communication.

## Chapter one Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Language is fundamental for human relations not only for transmission of content but also as an instrument for placing social relations, intentions and attitudes (Crystal, 2003, p.12). In the world of academia, effective language use is more than just knowing the grammatical rules; it demands a sense of pragmatics and the ability to use the right communication tools (Hymes, 1972, p. 57). Students must learn to make requests, ask questions, agree and disagree respectfully, and engage in civil discourse with professors and classmates. These competences are required for good performance in classroom talk (Bachman, 1990, p.75). The focus on grammar and vocabulary in teaching English as a second language, many learners have difficulty in the pragmatic aspect of communication (Kasper & Rose, 2002, p. 45). They may be grammatically correct, yet meaningless to respond in a socially favored way. For example, a student may be rude when making a direct request or deciding his or her opinion but may be too hesitant to answer a question, which may limit his or her participation. These difficulties indicate a divergence between knowledge of linguistic rules and ability to convey communicative competence (Brown, 2004, p.121)

Turn-taking, meaning negotiation and engaging in discussion are all part of classroom interaction (Seedhouse, 2004, p.34). When students answer questions, ask for clarification, or share their views, they demonstrate their language and pragmatics competence. O's first language L1, cultural background and the previous exposure to English as an L2, are all factors that shape learners strategies when dealing with interaction, such as utilizing politeness markers, and other discourse

strategies (Hughes, 2003, p.45). These differences explain why some students perform better than others in class

## **1.2. Statement of problem**

An essential part of English communication in general and in the academic context, in particular, is not simply grammatical competence, but also pragmatic competence and language use. Many students with high vocabular and grammar scores report they cannot talk properly on the lectures and in class. They are faced with difficulties in terms of using politeness strategies and other aspects of interaction such as turn-taking and other interactional rules that they are expected to employ in genuine academic communication. This deficit in their ability to pragmatically use the language could cause confusion, lower the interaction rates, and cause them to feel left out in the class. For example it was observed a great heterogeneity among learners in the use of politeness strategies (indirect requests, hedging and agreement markers). Some learners may use too many direct forms that may sound impolite, while other overuse their contributions with too many hesitation markers. In general, these results seem to indicate that learners may not have complete grasp on the social and cultural expectations for how to conduct themselves in the EFL classroom. Therefore, their performance in lectures may not be an accurate reflection of their knowledge or competencies. In addition, earlier research suggests that learners tend to transfer strategies from L1 into English leading to pragmatic errors. This kind of interference relative to requests, clarifications or agreements and disagreements, etc., influences not only the form but also the pragmatic appropriateness of the utterances. These difficulties emphasize the necessity for pragmatic teaching to be a part of English language learning.

The issue becomes more pronounced in multilingual and multicultural classrooms, as students' diverse backgrounds shape their ideologies about what is polite and formal and how they should interact. Learners are likely to experience challenges in engaging in participation such as decrease of academic engagement, and communication anxiety, with inadequate consciousness and practices. Hence, the present study is conducted to explore the participants' English lecture utterances for their pragmatic characteristics and for potential regularities in politeness, turn-taking, and other interactional features. In this process, the study aims to close the gap between linguistic and pragmalinguistic factors of competence, which may provide interesting implications for the teaching and learning of EAP.

## **1.3 Aims**

The purpose of this research is to explore the pragmatic performance of Learners of English-medium instruction (EMI) students in English lectures, in terms of the speech acts they produce and the strategies they employ to achieve communicative success. More specifically, the study aims at:

1. To investigate the politeness strategies used in the participants' utterances, here defined as indirect requests, hedges, and agreement markers as a means for the learners to keep social face in the interaction in the classroom.
2. To describe interaction between lecturers and learners in lectures, focusing on patterns of turn-taking, questions, responses, and hesitations, in order to gain insight into learners' participation and communication in a salient genre of academic communication.
3. To determine the pragmatic strengths and weaknesses of learners during oral communication and to suggest the aspects in which they need more teaching and support to become competent in academic English.

## **1.4 Hypothesis**

Based on the related work on pragmatic competence and politeness strategies, the study proposes that: H1: During the English lectures, the participants' utterances would be dominated by polite and indirect forms as they are expected to know the sociocultural and socioacademic norms. H2: A

certain degree of diversity is expected for the frequency of employing politeness strategies, the frequency of turn-taking, and the type of interaction behavior between the three groups of examinees with different L2 proficiency and cultural background. H3: It is also expected that a number of respondents will produce pragmatic errors or minimal responses, revealing discrepancies between grammatical knowledge and pragmatic competence in academic discourse.

### **1.5 Procedures**

The research followed a systematic process to đảm bảo tính chính xác và độ tin cậy:

1. **PARTICIPANTS** The participants were Englishmajors attending lectures at [Institution Name].
2. The data were gathered by means of direct observation and audiotaping of classroom interactions, and concentrated on utterances that occurred during lectures.
3. The extracted utterances were transcribed and coded according to pragmatic features, politeness strategies and interactional routines.
4. A statistical and thematic analysis was performed to explore the frequency, patterns and emerging themes of the language of the participating students.
5. The findings were discussed in light of the aim of the study and previous research in applied linguistics.

### **1.6 Limits**

The study does have some limitations to be aware of:

1. Due to the sample size being confined to a particular group of students, the results of this study might not be applied broadly.
2. The study analyzes classroom talk during English-medium university lectures and does not consider written discourse or communication occurring outside the lecture.
3. Cultural and individual variation may also have had an impact on how participants perform pragmatically, so results cannot be interpreted as being solely a reflection of the learners' language proficiency.
4. Prior research constrained the observation time and few selected lectures were studied.

### **1.7 Value**

This study has theoretical and practical implications:

1. In theory it sheds light on how learners manage linguistic resources including politeness strategies and pragmatic competence in real academic context that they are wither related to communicative knowledge or be-particular-linguistic knowledge.
2. From a practical perspective, the results provide an understanding for English teachers to organize instruction to engage students in speaking activities and to raise their pragmatic awareness as well as to promote the effective interaction in the classroom.
3. The research identifies particular learners' difficulties, thus informing teaching focus and syllabus design for writing in academic English courses.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Politeness Strategies**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Politeness is a component of human communication, which is characterized by social, cultural, and relational influences (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.61). On the one hand, people use politeness to lubricate daily life and prevent interpersonal friction and on the other hand, it is used as a face-

saving device and/or politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Spencer-Oatey, 2008). If you were to ask what the key to successful second language learning and cross-cultural communication was, the answer might well be understanding politeness strategies, because decisions about politeness that are too far out of line there could result in misunderstandings, friction between people, and even damage to one's reputation as a person of good manners (Hinkel, 1999, p.57). The chapter outlines the theoretical framework of politeness in its typology and realization in academic/foreign language contexts

## **2.2 Definition of Politeness**

Politeness is a kind of linguistic strategy to avoid social conflicts and construct a harmonious interpersonal relationship (Leech, 1983, p.102). It is a manifestation of the speakers' concern for the social and affective needs of the addressee, i.e. 'face' the "face" of the addressee. It is possible to have two faces (positive and negative) at the same time (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.231). There are also politeness strategies which are used to save the faces of both the speakers and the hearers in an utterance (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.61).

## **2.3. Brown and Levinson's**

Theory of Face-Threatening Act (FTA) Brown and Levinson's (1987) argument is that politeness strategies serve to mitigate face threatening acts (FTAs), that is, acts that threaten either the hearer's face or the speaker's face. They distinguish between two kinds of politeness: Positive politeness: is the set of strategies intended to show solidarity, friendship, and common ground (compliments, shared language, co-operative principle) (Brown & Levinson, 1987 p.101).

Negative politeness: types of behaviour expected to reduce a threat to someone's face and respect an individual's need to remain autonomous, which can involve the use of hedges, indirectness, questions or modal verbs (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.129).

2.3.2 Leech's Politeness Principle In Leech (1983), the Politeness Principle, involving tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy, is proposed to counterbalance the effects of the conversational maxims. According to Leech, politeness is realized in maxims that help a speaker to process them, balance negative emotional behavior in exchanges, and promote social interaction and communion (Leech, 1983, p.112)

## **2.4 Kinds of Politeness Strategy Politeness strategies may be classified as the following:**

1. Bald-on-record: a face-threatening act is performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way without redressive action and with no minimisation of the threat of the face is to be received, but normally used among friends or intimates or when time is limited (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.68).
2. Positive politeness: is attempting to make the hearer feel good about themselves, their interests or possessions, with examples like "You did a great job" or "Would you like to join us?" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.102).
3. Negative politeness: cautious and indirect forms of speech that serve to reduce the imposition, such as "Could you possibly explain this point?" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.129).
4. Off-record (oblique) strategies: uses vague or indirect language; the receiver of the message needs to make an inference as to what the speaker wants to communicate by reading between the lines or deriving from hints or metaphors (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.140). These tactics tend to be mixed to some degree in application relative to social context, culture and the level of imposition (LoCastro, 2003 p.145).

## **2.5 Courtesy in Cross-cultural Communication**

Politeness strategies differ from culture to culture because each culture has its own identity based on its values, beliefs, and expectations (Hinkel, 1999, p.57). What's seen as polite in one culture may be considered rude or too indirect in another. For instance, in English speaking culture indirectness and hedging are often preferred in official communications or documentation but this is

not always the case in other cultures where being straightforward goes along way in offering clarity. It is important for English language learners to know about these different interactions so they can successfully participate in both academic and social interactions (Kasper & Rose, 2002, p.45). 2.6 Politeness in the Classroom In classrooms, politeness strategies are important to the smooth running of class between students and lecturers. Students use politeness strategies such as hedging, indirect questions, and markers of agreement to show respect, maintain face, and participate in ways that do not offend (LoCastro, 2003, p.145). This politer requests deans, course coordinators and tutors to give up their time and energy to analyse and give feedback to the students work in peace of mind mood. These methods are considered to promote participation, collaboration and communication on a higher level even in the field of academic genres (Bachman & Palmer, 2010, p.89)

**Table 1: Positive Politeness Strategies**

No	Realization of Positive Politeness Strategy	Example
1	Observing and caring for H (his needs, wants, interests, and possessions)	It's been a while since breakfast, so you must be hungry. What about lunch? (Brown and Levinson in Goody, 1978:103).
2	Exaggerating (sympathy, interest, and approval)	Good old Jim. The man I was hoping to see. I anticipated finding you here. Would you please give me a few minutes? (Watts, 2003:89)
3	Intensifying interest to H	What do you think I see when I descend the stairs? (Brown and Levinson in Goody, 1978:106)
4	Using in-group identity markers	Here's Fred, my old friend. Mate, how are you today? (Watts, 2003:89)
5	Seeking agreement	Is he alone at work there? (Brown and Levinson in Goody, 1978:113)
6	Avoiding disagreement	A: Small, what is she? B: She is petite, smallish, yeah, not really small but definitely not very big.  (Brown and Levinson in Goody, 1978:116)
7	Presupposing/raising/assserting common ground	You and I, Bill, don't appreciate being shoved around like that, do we? How about you go complain? (Watts, 2003:89)
8	<b>Offering, promising</b>	<b>I'll take you out to dinner on Saturday. (Watts, 2003:90)</b>
9	Being optimistic	I know you're always pleased to acquire a tip or two on gardening, Fred. Therefore, I wouldn't cut your lawn back so short if I were you. . (Watts, 2003: 90)
10	Including both S and H In the activity	Let's have a cookie, then. (Brown and Levinson in Goody, 1978:127)
11	Giving (or asking for) reasons	Jim, I believe you've consumed a little too much alcohol. Why not spend this evening at our house? ? (Watts,2003:90)

12	Assuming or asserting reciprocity	I'll do the lawn tomorrow after school if you help me with my math assignment, Dad. Watts (2003), p. 90 Dad, if you help me with my math assignment, I'll mow the lawn after school tomorrow. (Watts, 2003:90)
13	Giving gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding,	A: Have a glass of malt whisky, Dick. B: Terrific! Thanks.

### 1. Negative Politeness Strategy:

Such effects of condescension and negative politeness are estimated as “least visibility effect (type of negative politeness) on the negative face of the subject of imposition”. Negative politeness is applied when the impoliteness has to come from the sender of the message and in the same time the sender has to respect that this could be unwelcome by the receiver. One can be indirect, use hedges or interrogatives, downplay the imposition and apologize. As a result, distance and formalities are talculity of this t)echnique. Ten sub-strategies of politeness to attend to the hearer's negative face needs are proposed by Brown and Levinson.e. The following illustrates the realization of strategies in NP. ItB: Be conventionally indirect d) Question e) Hedge f) Be pessimistic g) Minimize imposition h) Give deference i) Apologize j) Impersonalize S and H k) State FTA as a general rule l) Nominalize m) Go or record as incurring debt, or as not indebting H.

**Table 2: Negative Politeness Strategies**

No	Realization of Negative Politeness Strategy	Example
1	Being conventionally indirect	Please let me know what time it is. (Watts, 2003:90)
2	Questioning, hedging	I wonder whether I could just sort of asking you a little question. (Watts, 2003:90)
3	Being pessimistic	I would like to discuss my paper with you if you have a moment this afternoon. (Watts, 2003: 90)
4	Minimizing imposition	Could I talk to you for just a minute?
5	Giving deference	I apologize, officer. I believe I may have parked incorrectly. (Watts, 2003:90)
6	Apologizing	Sorry to bother you, but...(Watts, 2003:90)
7	Impersonalizing S and H	A: The vehicle is parked in an area where parking is prohibited. B: Officer, it's mine. A parking ticket will be required. (Watts, 2003:90 )
8	Stating FTA as a general rule	You will have to pay a fee because parking on the double yellow lines is prohibited.. (Watts, 2003:90)
9	Nominalizing	Participation in an unauthorized demonstration is penalized by law. Madam, could you tell me your name and address?? (Watts, 2003 :91)
10	Going on record as incurring debt, or as not indebting H	I'll buy you a beer at lunch if you can simply fix a formatting issue I have. (Watts, 2003:91)

### 1. Off-record Strategy:

This strategy is about indirectness. The speaker does not pressurize the hearer. Therefore, the face is not threatened directly. In this system, the receiver is often required to read between the lines of what the sender is saying. The following procedure consequence off the record: "Signal Giving, Links Associations Giving, Gain Knowledge Presupposing, Attenuate Understatements, Exaggerate

Overstatements, Tautologize Through Using, Contradict Using With, Iron is Using, Metaphor is Me tongue is Common Sense), Rhetorical Questions, Ambiguous Statements, Vague Comments, and Stereotypes All Displaces-H and Ellipsis Ends Completaion"

**Table 3: Off-record Strategies**

No	Realization of Off Record Strategies	Example
	Giving hints	It's cold here.
1		
2	Giving association clues	Oh God, I've got a headache again.
3	Presupposing	I failed the exam yet again.
4	Understating	It's not that bad.
5	Overstating	
		What would the other say ? : Ah well, I don't know. I wouldn't like to repeat it because I don't really believe what they are saying. They just get a fixed thing into their mind. (Cutting, 2002:41)

6	Using tautologies	All crows are either black, or they are not black.
7	Using contradictions	Maybe David will go or will stay.
8	Being ironic	John is a real genius.
9	Using metaphors	Harry's a real fish.
10	Using rhetorical questions	Just who didn't he scold? " (Brown and Levinson in Goody, 1978:22)
11	Being ambiguous	John's a pretty smooth cookie . (Brown and Levinson in Goody, 1978:225)
12	Being vague	Perhaps someone did something naughty. (Brown and Levinson in Goody, 1978:226)
13	Over-generalizing	Mature people sometimes help do the dishes (Brown and Levinson in Goody, 1978:226).
14	Displacing H	Looks like someone may have had too much drink. (Brown and Levinson in Goody, 1978:226)

### Chapter Three The Test

This chapter is concerned with the test as a tool which was employed to gather data in this research. Testing is a crucial component of empirical research (in the linguistic and educational domains especially) because of the systematic and quantifiable nature of the evidence. The purpose, design and procedures of the test are outlined in the chapter. It also studies the principal features of good testing, with particular regard to validity and reliability. These factors are required for the test to be considered valid and reliable.

#### 3.1 Purpose of the Test

The test is intended with the aim of evaluating participant knowledge and performance constructs associated to the study objectives. The test is intended to evaluate particular linguistic and pragmatic components in a semi-structured fashion. Tests measure a person's skill, knowledge or performance in certain areas (Hughes, 2003, p.11). In this research, the test is used to obtain analyzable information that would enable to answer the the research questions and test the presented hypotheses. So that the test serves as the means for data collection and analysis.

### **3.2 Description of the Test**

The test is a battery composed of a limited number of very carefully constructed items representative of the content and goals of the investigation. The questions are designed to assess how well participants understand and can apply the concepts they are focusing on. Various question formats are included to provide a complete evaluation and to minimize guessing effects. The test questions are ordered from easy to more difficult to make it easier for the participants and lessen their nervousness. The instructions are clear and uniform for all subjects to know how to answer the items of the test.

### **3.3 Characteristics of a Good Test**

A test has to fulfill certain requirements in order for it to be considered good. Some of the most critical things to consider are validity, reliability, practicality, and objectivity. These qualities make the test measure what is desired to be measured and that too in a consistent manner. Special emphasis is placed on validity and reliability in this chapter, as these are the keys to the believability of research findings.

#### **3.3.1 Validity**

Validity is the degree to which a test measures what it purports to measure. Interpretation of the results of a test is valid to an extent to be meaningful and appropriate. Hughes stressing need for validity for a test to be serviceable (Hughes, 2003, p.26). Test results are used to determine success in education and research, and validity is important in making sure that the results are accurate. Related to question of validity: various aspects – content, construct, and criterion-related. Content validity assesses whether the contents of the test adequately sample the material covered in the course (Bachman, 1990, p.288). Construct validity investigates the degree to which a test is measuring the construct it purports to measure. Criterion-related validity informs us of the degree to which the test scores and an external criterion or measure are related (Brown, 2004, p.22). Increasing the validity would ensure greater confidence in the accuracy of the test results

#### **3.4.2 Reliability**

Reliability is the stability of the test scores from one application of the test to the next. Reliable tests yield consistent results when given to the same group under similar conditions. Reliability is the extent to which test scores are consistent and free from measurement error (Brown, 2004, p.20). Reliability matters because if you have an unreliable measure, you might as well have no measure at all. The presence of factors such as vague instructions, ambiguous questions, subjective evaluation interfere with the reliability of a test. Therefore, the reliability of the test is enhanced by a good test organization and a good scoring system.

### **3.4 Test Administration**

The test was taken in fairness and uniformity of under the controlled conditions. The complete instructions were the same for all forms of the test, and the testing time was sufficient. The room where the participants were tested was set up to limit distractions and any environmental variables. These methods were applied to eliminate sources of error and to increase the precision of the data acquired. Good administration is an important factor in determining the quality of the test results.

### **3.5 The Analysis of the Utterances Which Were Uttered by the Participants During the English Lecture**

#### **Paragraph 1**

During the lecture a participant said: “Can you tell me that part again?”

The utterance was directed politely at the lecturer. It demonstrates a polite solicitation for clarification without any offence.

The application of modal verbs and the polite form please with the message of the imperative reflects the awareness of the conventions of the academic politeness. It reveals the participant’s

awareness of the authority of the lecturer and the power relation in the classroom. The speaker assumes a softening stance toward his positive face when he employs the impersonal and indirect way of speaking. This mechanism corresponds to Brown and Levinson's notion of negative politeness as an effort of minimizing a threat. In formal academic discourse, such utterances can be said to express emerging pragmatic competence (Gläser, 2011)

### **Paragraph 2**

Another participant said: "I can't make head or tail of this." Duffy's exchange is typical of many: Look, no politeness. It acted as a concise statement of bewilderment.

This bluntness would be considered normal in a native context, but it may seem too strong in a non-native speaker classroom. The minimal use of politeness strategies indicates the opposite. In its pragmatics, it is more important to be clear than to be gregarious. This is the kind of remark that underlines the dilemma learners confront when trying to be communicatively effective yet suitably polite. It also illustrates how learners' linguistic confidence affected their use of direct and indirect language.

### **Paragraph 3**

Few of the participants responded in a more extended form to questions with brief statements, including: "Yes" and "No, I don't think so." Such lines of text are both minimal and underdeveloped

Minimal responses are often a sign of tentative participation or insecurity in language use. Although communicatively efficient, they prevent the emergence of subtle forms of knowledge. Pragmatically, such positioning-response sequences advance a limited participation and positioning as a respondent to questions, that is, they are not positionally active. In terms of participants' strategies, they serve to maintain face and risk avoidance. They also imply that for there to be lively interaction in the defined classroom context, students need not only pragmatic, but also linguistic, competence

### **Paragraph 4**

Hesitant remarks were such as "Um... maybe it could be this" when opinions were given by the participants. There were pauses and fillers in these statements

Hesitations denote the respondent's processing of thoughts and his intentional construction of answers. They operate as face-saving device which seems to protect the speakers from being locked in to an answer too early. In a classroom setting, such utterances express uncertainty as well as politeness (34c). They also represent a kind of learners' evolving capacity to acquire pragmatics in situ (interaction). This shows the capacity to be both accurate and polite (M12A1)

### **Paragraph 5**

Some sentences are pragmatically inaccurate, for example: "Repeat it again" or "Say it more clear." They are comprehensible but not grammatical.

These expressions reflect first language interference and a partial understanding of the pragmatic rules in English. Although the illocutionary force is obvious, the unsuitable means demonstrates insufficient competence in academic discourse. Such utterances underline the contrast between grammatical knowledge and its pragmatic use. Such findings point to relevance for a focused training on how to communicate effectively in a formal classroom. The learners can still be seen to be developing the skill of matching grammar, meaning, and politeness effectively.

### **Paragraph 6**

Participants employed agreement markers such as "Yes, exactly" or "That's what I mean." These utterances helped to feed the discussion. In analysis:

These sayings show operation competence, so are actively involved in the classroom talk. They represent a speaker who is able to appropriately take part in, and support, the point of the speaker. Pragmatically, such answers may reinforce social solidarity and conversational harmony. They are signs of tentative confidence and taking English for academic purposes. This demonstrates why it is important to teach pragmatic strategies in addition to grammar and vocabulary."

### **Conclusion**

Equally important for the successful communication are the politeness strategies, but they are heavily affected by socio-cultural and demographic factors. In intercultural communication, it is possible that politeness in one culture may be interpreted as impoliteness, too elaborated or insincere politeness in other culture. Usage of honorifics, immediacy of cues, length of utterances, things said and not said, directness and indirectness in politeness strategies, hedging of statements, different intonation patterns across languages can be seen as manifestation of core cultural values like individualism, collectivism, power distance and so on. Recognition and comprehension of such distinctions is vital in the communication to eliminate conflicts and uplift mutual understanding. Speakers, by adjusting their language and behavior to the cultural needs of their addressees, go face-threat of situations, keep harmony, and develop stronger interpersonal as well as institutional relationships. In the end, investigating language politeness strategies underscores the value of cultural awareness, adaptability and compassion in international communication and we should bear in mind that to say is not to say but how to say is to say.

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