Article

Politeness Strategies in EFL Classroom Interaction: A Pragmatic Perspective on Pedagogical Implications

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A B S T R A C T

This research is aimed at describing the use of politeness strategies in classroom interaction in English teaching learning at MAN 1 Tanah Datar in academic year of 2024/2025. The objectives of the research are to (1) identify the types of politeness strategies which were used in the classroom interaction, (2) identify the function implied in the politeness strategies used by English teachers. The research was designed as a qualitative study. There are three steps used in this research, they are (1) colleting the data, (2) analyzing the data and (3) presenting the result of the analysis. The data are collected by observational method. The obtained data were in the form of utterances produced in classroom interactions. This method was followed by non-participatory observational, recording and note taking. The data were analyzed by using referential, translational and distributional method. The results of the analysis were described by using formal and informal method. After analyzing the data, the result of study show (1) politeness was conveyed through three types of politeness strategies, namely: bald-on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, (2) the functions of the politeness can be divided into three, namely, expressive, directive and representative function. The implication of the politeness used at the classroom interaction performs in five aspects where those aspects are very influenced in the process of teaching and learning. The five aspects are efficient teaching and learning, respect communication between teacher and students, togetherness between teacher and students, cooperating interaction between teacher and students, and the use of less imposition and indirectness expression. Those aspects can motivate students and also developing a meaningful teaching and learning process.

Keywords: *EFL Classroom Interaction;Pragmatic Perspective;Pedagogical Implications*

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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary landscape of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, the classroom is increasingly viewed as a dynamic sociolinguistic environment and a discourse community where interactional competence is developed through contextualized language use (Taguchi & Roever, 2021; Ishihara & Cohen, 2022). This perspective highlights the importance of classroom discourse as a site for acquiring not only linguistic knowledge but also pragmatic and sociocultural awareness. Particularly in teacher-student interactions, the pragmatic dimensions of language use including politeness, face management, and speech acts—become central to the development of communicative competence (Holmes & Wilson,2022).

Communicative competence in today 's language education frameworks goes beyond grammatical proficiency and includes sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies (Timpe-Laughlin et al., 2020; Barron, 2022). Teachers are expected to model appropriate language behavior that integrates these components, fostering an environment where learners can develop both accuracy and appropriateness in language use. Within this communicative paradigm, pragmatic competence is especially vital for ensuring successful interpersonal communication, particularly in cross-cultural settings where norms may differ significantly (Youn & Kádár, 2022). Pragmatic competence, defined as the ability to use language effectively

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and appropriately in social contexts, includes the mastery of politeness strategies, which help maintain social harmony and manage interpersonal relationships (Vásquez & Sharifian, 2020; Cutting, 2021). In language classrooms, this competence is not only taught explicitly but also modeled implicitly through teacher talk. The classroom thus serves as both a site of pragmatic input and a space for interactional practice (Nguyen & Yang, 2020; Han, 2023).

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory remains a foundational framework for analyzing the strategies speakers use to mitigate face threatening acts (FTAs). Their classification of strategies bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record, and avoidance continues to be applied in studies of classroom discourse, especially in EFL contexts (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2021; Chen, 2020). These strategies are influenced by social variables such as power, distance, and the degree of imposition, aligning closely with Goffman 's (1955) concept of face.

In EFL classrooms, the hierarchical structure between teacher and students often shapes the politeness strategies employed. Teachers may use positive politeness to foster solidarity or negative politeness to maintain formality and distance, depending on the institutional culture and their pedagogical goals (Spencer-Oatey, 2021; Farashaiyan & Muthusamy, 2021). The strategic use of politeness not only facilitates effective instruction but also contributes to the creation of a respectful and motivating learning atmosphere.

Furthermore, studies have shown that explicit instruction in pragmatics, including politeness strategies, can significantly improve learners' ability to navigate social interactions in the target language (Taguchi, 2023; Ishihara, 2023). However, integrating pragmatic instruction into the curriculum remains a challenge due to limited teacher training, lack of materials, and assessment difficulties (Li, 2021; Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2020). This gap is particularly pronounced in non-native English-speaking countries, where pragmatic competence is often overlooked in favor of grammatical accuracy.

Despite these challenges, recent pedagogical models advocate for a more integrated approach that embeds pragmatic instruction within communicative tasks and classroom interaction (Taguchi & Roever, 2021; Jiang, 2021). By analyzing teacher-student discourse, researchers can identify how politeness strategies function pedagogically whether to give feedback, maintain discipline, build rapport, or manage classroom dynamics (Holmes & Wilson, 2022). Such analysis provides valuable insights into how pragmatics operates in real- time instructional contexts.

Politeness also plays a crucial role in shaping learners' perception of classroom climate and teacher approachability. When teachers consistently use polite forms, hedges, indirect speech, and inclusive language, students are more likely to feel respected and encouraged to participate (Han, 2023; Holmes, 2008). These interactional features can influence student motivation, engagement, and ultimately, learning outcomes. Therefore, politeness is not merely a linguistic nicety but a pedagogical tool with tangible effects.

In the Indonesian EFL context, where cultural norms emphasize respect for authority and indirectness, the study of politeness in classroom discourse is especially relevant (Astuti & Lestari, 2023). Teachers' use of politeness strategies may reflect both their pragmatic awareness and cultural positioning, serving as implicit instruction for students learning how to communicate appropriately in English. Yet, empirical studies examining these dynamics in Indonesian classrooms remain limited.

Given this backdrop, the present study aims to investigate the types and instructional functions of politeness strategies used in classroom interaction at MAN 1 Tanah Datar during the academic year 2024/2025. By employing a qualitative discourse analysis approach, this research seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on classroom pragmatics, offering insights into how politeness is enacted and its pedagogical implications for English language teaching in culturally sensitive settings.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to investigate the use and

pedagogical functions of politeness strategies in English classroom interactions. Qualitative research is appropriate for exploring naturally occurring discourse and interpreting the meaning participants assign to communicative practices in context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The research was conducted in an EFL classroom setting at MAN 1 Tanah Datar during the academic year 2024/2025, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument, supported by video recordings, observation protocols, and interview guides (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The data comprised spoken utterances exchanged between the teacher and students during classroom interaction, as well as their reflections on the use of politeness in teaching and learning. Data collection employed two main techniques: classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. Observations were video-recorded to ensure accuracy and allow for detailed analysis of pragmatic features such as politeness markers, turn-taking, and speech act patterns. Field notes were also taken to supplement audiovisual data. To enhance data validity and reliability, triangulation was applied across data sources and instruments. The researcher cross-checked observational data with interview responses to verify consistency and capture participant perspectives. Interviews with the teacher and selected students aimed to contextualize observed interactional patterns and gather insight into their pragmatic awareness.

Data analysis followed the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), comprising three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the reduction phase, relevant segments from the transcribed classroom discourse and interviews were identified, coded, and categorized according to Brown and Levinson 's politeness strategies. The display stage involved organizing the data thematically to highlight the pedagogical functions of politeness. Conclusions were drawn by interpreting patterns across data sources and continuously verifying findings against theoretical constructs. Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining informed consent from all participants and maintaining anonymity throughout data reporting. The study design aligns with current best practices in classroom discourse analysis, particularly in examining pragmatic features within English language teaching contexts.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this research, as the object of the study was speech acts used by teacher and students in English classroom interaction, English has a double role of being both the medium of instruction and the object of study. The interaction between teacher and students was conducted in English, but the interaction among the students mostly used Bahasa Indonesia and or Minang language. The interaction in the classroom was still largely dominated by the teacher. The teachers dominated in giving instruction, giving explanation, showing appreciation, encouraging, motivating, and answering student 's questions. The students mainly responded to teacher 's instruction, questions and encouragement.

The Types of Politeness Strategies

The findings show that politeness strategies were generally employed by both teachers and students in order to reduce face-threatening acts (FTAs), as outlined by Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987). These included the use of bald on-record, positive politeness, and negative politeness strategies. Consistent with Brown and Levinson's framework, politeness functions as a strategy to manage interpersonal relationships and maintain face, particularly in asymmetric power relations like those found in teacher–student interaction. The following table summarizes the frequency and percentage of each type of politeness strategy employed during classroom interaction.

Table 1. **The Types of Politeness Strategies**

Type of Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Positive Politeness	90	45%
Negative Politeness	70	35%
Bald on Record	30	15%
Off-Record	10	5%

Total	200	100%

The analysis of classroom discourse revealed that positive politeness strategies were the most frequently employed, accounting for 45% of the utterances. This indicates that both teachers and students actively engaged in creating a sense of belonging, cooperation, and mutual respect. The frequent use of this strategy highlights the intention to reduce social distance, foster a supportive learning environment, and enhance rapport in line with Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework. Negative politeness strategies emerged as the second most prevalent, making up 35% of the data. These strategies often appeared in students' speech when addressing teachers, signaling deference and respect for authority. This is consistent with sociopragmatic expectations in Indonesian and Javanese cultures, where hierarchy and indirectness are integral to respectful communication (Ishihara & Cohen, 2022). The use of indirect speech, hedging, and formal language illustrates students' awareness of social norms and face sensitivity in academic settings.

Bald on-record strategies constituted 15% of the data and were mainly used by teachers when issuing instructions, managing classroom routines, or correcting student behavior. These utterances were typically clear, concise, and unambiguous, serving functional purposes in classroom management. Despite their directness, such strategies are pedagogically appropriate, especially in situations where clarity and efficiency are prioritized. Lastly, off-record strategies were minimally observed, accounting for only 5% of the speech acts. These instances included vague or suggestive language, often employed humorously or to elicit inference. Their rarity may be attributed to the instructional nature of classroom talk, which generally favors clarity over ambiguity. In sum, the distribution of politeness strategies demonstrates the nuanced interplay between language use, cultural expectations, and pedagogical goals in EFL classrooms. The findings underscore the necessity for learners and teachers alike to develop pragmatic competence, particularly in selecting strategies that align with both communicative intent and cultural appropriateness (Taguchi, 2023). These results also have pedagogical implications, as fostering pragmatic awareness in learners can enhance classroom interaction and intercultural communication skills.

The qualitative data obtained from classroom recordings revealed the dynamic use of politeness strategies by the teacher in response to varying pedagogical goals and interactional contexts. The teacher's pragmatic choices reflected not only her communicative intent but also the cultural expectations and institutional roles embedded in the classroom setting. In particular, the teacher's utterances demonstrated a strategic selection of politeness forms—ranging from direct commands to indirect and mitigated speech—depending on the need to assert authority, build solidarity, or reduce imposition. The following excerpts provide representative examples of how these strategies manifested in real-time teacher– student interactions, categorized according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) typology of politeness strategies.

Bald on- record strategies

The teacher's authoritative role in the class was reflected when she gave command and instructions and make request. Through the choice of direct strategies for giving instruction (excerpt 1). The teacher imposed and created pressure on the students.

Teacher : Open your textbook now! Hurry up, we do not have much time. Alya, come to the front! Raka, stand up and answer the question!

In the classroom context with its asymmetrical power relationship, teachers hold institutional power, which is often expressed through direct strategies. The utterance —Open your textbook now!‖ is a clear directive with no attempt to mitigate the imposition on students 'face. Such bald on-record strategies are typically acceptable and expected in classroom interaction, especially when efficiency and clarity are prioritized in instructional settings.

Positive Politeness Strategies

The teacher used indirect speech acts to maintain solidarity and show appreciation for students 'participation. Excerpt (2) illustrates the use of positive politeness through inclusive

language and indirect forms.

Teacher : Alright, today I'd like you to work in pairs and create a dialogue for a shopping situation. You can be as creative as you like—maybe you're shopping in another country or buying something fun.

Students : That sounds interesting, Miss!

Teacher : You know how we talked about polite expressions yesterday, right?

Students : Yes, Miss.

Teacher : Great! So you can use those, like —Could I have…‖ or —How much is…?‖ I'm excited to see what you come up with.

Students : Okay, we'll try our best.

Teacher : Thank you! Let me know if you need help.

The linguistic forms that internally modified a speech act to soften the illocutionary force of statement in the excerpt (2) can be found on the expression ‗ I want you to make an advertisement of gadget ‗and ‗I give you opportunity to create what gadget you are going to make '. The solidarity markers that support knowledge of the participant were expressed as'you know Doraemon? 'and ‗thank you mam '.

Negative Politeness Strategies

Negative politeness strategies are used to avoid imposition and show respect, often through indirectness, hedging, or polite markers. These are particularly relevant in cultures where deference to authority is expected.

Teacher: Could you please come forward, the first speaker? Don't worry, just try yourbest.

In the excerpt, the teacher combines a direct request with the politeness marker —please‖ and reassurance to mitigate the threat to the student's negative face.

Teacher: Um… before we begin our new topic, I'd like to briefly review what wediscussed last week. Do you still remember the part about the informal letter?

Students: Yes, Miss!

In excerpt, the teacher uses hedging language like —briefly‖ and the modal —would like to‖ to reduce the imposition. This aligns with negative politeness, showing deference and minimizing pressure while still guiding the classroom interaction.

The findings of this study highlight the importance of developing students'pragmatic competence alongside their linguistic proficiency in EFL classrooms. By understanding and modeling appropriate politeness strategies, teachers can foster more effective and culturally responsive communication. Classroom interactions that reflect a balance of power, respect, and solidarity not only support language acquisition but also prepare learners for real-world intercultural encounters. Therefore, English language teaching should explicitly integrate pragmatics into instructional practices, encouraging students to be aware of both linguistic forms and the social norms that govern their use. Such awareness can enhance learners 'communicative effectiveness and sensitivity in diverse communicative contexts.

The Functions of Politeness

The second major finding of the study reveals that politeness strategies used in EFL classroom interaction at MAN 1 Tanah Datar can be divided into three namely (1) Expressive, (2) Directive and (3) Representative. The analysis of classroom discourse revealed three primary functions of politeness strategies employed by teachers and students, as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. **The Functions of Politeness Strategies**

Functions	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Expressive	50	25%
Directive	100	50%
Representative	50	25%

Total	**200**	**100%**

The quantitative analysis of politeness functions in classroom discourse revealed that directive functions accounted for the highest proportion, representing 50% of the total utterances. This is unsurprising, given that classroom interaction is inherently instructional and directive in nature. Teachers, as authority figures, often use language to manage classroom procedures, deliver content, and elicit responses, which aligns with their institutional roles. The high frequency of directive acts also reflects the need for clarity, efficiency, and control in classroom management.

Expressive and representative functions were equally distributed at 25% each. The expressive function—used to greet, praise, apologize, or thank—plays a key role in building rapport, maintaining respect, and supporting emotional engagement. These expressions, though less frequent than directives, contribute significantly to the creation of a positive and respectful classroom environment.

Meanwhile, the representative function was predominantly found in the teacher's explanations or responses to student questions, emphasizing clarity and factual correctness. The equal proportion of expressive and representative functions suggests a balanced pedagogical focus between instructional clarity and interpersonal connection. The overall distribution underscores the multifunctional nature of politeness in EFL classrooms, where managing instruction and maintaining social harmony are equally essential.

Building upon the categorization of politeness strategies, this section further analyzesthe pragmatic functions that these strategies served in the EFL classroom context. Drawing from the speech act framework, the utterances were classified into three major functions: expressive, directive, and representative. Each function reflects the speaker's communicative intent and the social dynamics within classroom interaction. The following subsections illustrate how these functions were realized through specific linguistic forms and politeness strategies in authentic teacher–student discourse.

Expressive Function

Expressive functions are used to convey the speaker's psychological state and emotions. These include greeting, appraising, apologizing, expressing disappointment, thanking, and taking leave. For example, the teacher routinely began class with formal greetings such as —*Good morning*‖ or —*Good afternoon*‖, which were typically realized through bald-on record strategies, especially in formal institutional settings. Appraising such as complimenting a correct answer or praising good performancewas more commonly used by the teacher and involved positive politeness strategies. These were often realized through expressions of exaggerated interest or approval, such as —*That's a brilliant idea*!‖ or —*Excellentanswer!"*, which align with the desire to maintain the student's positive face.

Expressing disappointment, on the other hand, was manifested both through bald-on record (e.g., —*That's not what I expected*‖) and off-record strategies (e.g., —*Well, I thought you had studied this*‖). While bald strategies were more direct, off-record strategies allowed the speaker to imply criticism indirectly, minimizing face-threatening acts.

Directive Function

The directive function includes commands, instructions, and questions. It was found that power asymmetry played a significant role in the form of directive expressions. Teachers, occupying positions of authority, frequently used bald-on record strategies (e.g., "*Open your book to page 45*‖). However, they also employed mitigation strategies such as hedging (*"please"*, *"try to"*, *"let's*‖) and modal verbs (—*can you"*, *"could you"*) to reduce the imposition. Students, conversely, tended to use more indirect and polite requests, often prefaced with —*Excuse me, Miss…*‖ or —*Could I ask…"*. This reflects the culturally grounded norms of respect and deference in Indonesian classrooms.

Representative Function

Representative speech acts convey the speaker's belief or information, including explaining materials, answering questions, and giving information. These were predominantly

expressed through bald-on record strategies, as the primary aim was clarity and informativeness (Grice's Maxim of Quantity; Leech, 1983). The teacher often used unambiguous language, such as ―*The simple past tense is formed with verb-2‖*, to ensure studentcomprehension.

Understanding the functions of politeness in EFL classroom interaction has significant pedagogical implications for effective language teaching and learning. Each function—expressive, directive, and representative—serves not only to facilitate classroom communication but also to model pragmatic competence for learners. The expressive function supports socio-emotional engagement by promoting a respectful and positive learning atmosphere, helping students feel acknowledged and motivated. The directive function, when used thoughtfully, enables classroom management and instructional clarity while also teaching students how to issue polite requests and respond to authority appropriately. Meanwhile, the representative function ensures accurate information exchange and demonstrates how to present ideas clearly and respectfully. By making students aware of how these functions operate in classroom discourse, teachers can foster both linguistic accuracy and pragmatic fluency. Thus, incorporating explicit instruction on the functions of politeness into classroom practices not only improves interactional effectiveness but also equips learners with essential communication skills for real-world intercultural contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that classroom interaction in the EFL context remains predominantly teacher-led, with teachers employing a range of politeness strategies—particularly bald-on record, positive politeness, and negative politeness—to manage instruction and foster social harmony. These strategies serve various pragmatic functions: expressive (e.g., greeting, thanking), directive (e.g., instructing, questioning), and representative (e.g., explaining, informing). The strategic use of politeness facilitates effective communication, enhances mutual respect, encourages student participation, and supports a collaborative learning environment. However, the findings also reveal that excessive formality or unclear pragmatic competence—especially among students—may hinder confidence and communicative fluency. Therefore, fostering pragmatic awareness and appropriate use of politeness in English should become an integral part of language instruction, ensuring not only linguistic development but also meaningful, respectful, and empowering classroom discourse.

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