

## **Investigating Politeness Strategies Used in Teacher – Student(S) Interactions in Iraqi EFL Classrooms with Reference to Gender: A Contrastive Study**

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**Abstract.** *Politeness strategies has been first proposed by Brown and Levinson in 1987, since then, many studies have been dealing with these strategies, primarily in an informal classroom basis since the formal classroom basis is limited within curriculum designed by the government.*

*This study is related to the interactions that are taken place in the governmental school classrooms between teacher and student or students through mixed-method research design, the recoded data were analyzed according to Brown and Levinson's Politeness strategies.*

*The researcher includes all the four types of politeness strategy in her study; two teachers (male and female) were included in this study, they both were teaching the fourth preparatory grade with two groups of student for each teacher.*

*The researcher had found that: gender is an effective factor in choosing different strategies by the teacher, since the same teacher may use a completely different strategy with male than female students. Both teachers used different strategies with both groups of students, but their strategies were different and multiple.*

### **1. Introduction**

Learning to speak English as a foreign language means to know not only to speak but also learning to use language appropriately, and this ability to use the language appropriately is called pragmatic. (Samad, Fitriani, Patak, & Weda, 2018). One of the pragmatic knowledge which influences the interaction between the teacher and the students is politeness. Politeness study has been conducted in various aspects one of which is in the educational aspect. Jiang (2010) stated that politeness enhances teaching and benefits to the students, contributes to the effective interaction and friendly, lively atmosphere in the EFL classroom. There are many factors which influence people to be polite such as social status, age, gender, familiarity, and situation.

Related to this study, it is possible that a female teacher is more polite with male students than female students and vice versa. It is also possible to use a different kind of politeness strategies. Monsefi and Hadidi (2015) have studied about male and female EFL teachers' politeness strategies and the effect on the learning process and found that female teachers are more sensitive about using politeness strategies, but male teachers are more direct in expressing ideas, male teachers usually express their disagreement in a direct way. This study examines about the types of politeness strategies used by male and female teachers in EFL classroom with male and female students and what are the differences between the two groups.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

### **2.1 Politeness Strategies**

Politeness strategy has been first established by Brown and Levinson in 1987. Watts (2003:8) states that politeness is highly determined by the relationship between the behavior and suitability convention, not by the specific linguistic forms. Brown and Levinson (1987:61) adopted the concept of 'face' to propose their idea of politeness strategies. Face here can be considered as the portrait of a self-image that exist in the social attributes. There are five classifications of the politeness strategy proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987)m which are bald on record which refers to what it says and shows (the high degree of directness), performing the speech acts by using the positive politeness which can be referred to the positive face, performing speech acts by using the negative politeness applying to the negative face, and finally the off record which represents the degree of indirectness or the indirect speech act, and do not conduct any speech act or not saying anything (do not do the FTA). Brown and Levinson (1987:60) describes the possible strategies for doing the FTAs, in its relation to the circumstances in determining the choice of strategy.

### **2.2Types of Politeness Strategies**

#### **a. Bald on record**

The first type of politeness strategy is bald on record. According to Brown and Levinson (in Goody, 1978: 68) bald on record strategy can be described as a strategy where the speaker is expected to state directly the message that he/she wants the hearer to hear without having effort to minimize threats to the hearer's face. Thus, in general, bald on record strategy is used when the speaker wants to do face threatening act with more efficiency more than he wants to satisfy the hearer's face wants. In bald on record strategy, a speaker may deliver this strategy by fulfilling the maxim of quantity, maxim of quality, maxim of relevance, and maxim of manner. Thus, by fulfilling those maxims, the speaker may deliver his/her intention towards the hearer directly and efficiently, for instance: "Help!" The example above shows that the speaker asks the hearer to help him/her.

The speaker shows the expression of bald on record strategy since he/she says it to the point and there is no effort to save the hearer's positive face. The speaker only wants to make the hearer knows what he/she wants.

#### **b. Positive Politeness**

Positive politeness is a type of politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson whose orientation is the positive face of the hearer. In the positive politeness strategy, the face threatening act is minimized by implicating that the speaker likes some of the hearer's wants. In so doing this, the positive-face wants of the hearer will be fulfilled and the hearer will believe that the speaker is in the same group with him/her.

According to Brown and Levinson in Goody (1978: 103-130), there are 15 strategies of positive politeness. Those strategies are as follows.

- 1) Noticing and Attending to Hearer**
- 2) Exaggerating**
- 3) Intensifying Interest to Hearer**
- 4) Using In-Group Identity Markers**
- 5) Seeking Agreement**
- 6) Avoiding Disagreement**
- 7) Presupposing/ Raising/ Asserting Common Ground**
- 8) Joking**
- 9) Asserting or Presupposing Speaker's Knowledge of and Concern for Hearer's Wants**

- 10) Offering and Promising**
- 11) Being Optimistic**
- 12) Including Both Speaker and Hearer in the Activity**
- 13) Giving or Asking for Reasons**
- 14) Assuming or Asserting Reciprocity**
- 15) Giving Gifts to Hearer**

**c. Negative Politeness**

Negative politeness is another type of politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson. In negative politeness, the speaker is aimed to fulfill the negative-face wants of the hearer. Thus, negative politeness is characterized by self-effacement, formality and restraint, attention to restricted aspects of the hearer's self-image, and the hearer's want to be unimpeded. Brown and Levinson (in Goody, 1978: 131-209) propose 10 ways to show negative politeness strategy.

Those strategies are as follows:

- 1) Being Conventionally Indirect**
- 2) Questioning and Hedging**
- 3) Being Pessimistic**
- 4) Minimizing the Imposition**
- 5) Giving Deference**
- 6) Apologizing**
- 7) Impersonalizing Speaker and Hearer**
- 8) Stating the Face Threatening Act as a General Rule**
- 9) Nominalizing**
- 10) Going on Record as Incurring a Debt, or as not Indebting Hearer**

**d. Off Record Strategy**

The last strategy of politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson is off record, a strategy which lets the speaker to do indirect face threatening act. This strategy is often used by the speaker who wants to do face threatening act without taking the full responsibility for doing it. In this strategy, the speaker violates maxim of relevance, maxim of quantity, maxim of quality, and maxim of manner. The violation of those maxims leads the speaker to do the face threatening act in a vague manner. As a result, the hearer has to interpret the real intention by himself.

Thus, the result of the face threatening act depends on the knowledge of the hearer and the context surrounding the conversation. According to Brown and Levinson (in Goody, 1978: 213-227), there are 15 strategies to perform bald off record. Those strategies are as follows:

- 1) Giving Hints**
- 2) Giving Association Clues**
- 3) Presupposing**
- 4) Overstating**
- 5) Understating**
- 6) Using Tautologies**
- 7) Using Contradictions**
- 8) Being Ironic**

- 9) Using Metaphors
- 10) Using Rhetorical Questions
- 11) Being Ambiguous
- 12) Being Vague
- 13) Over-Generalizing
- 14) Displacing Hearer
- 15) Being Incomplete and Using Ellipsis

### **3. The Concept of Politeness**

Politeness strategy is a branch of pragmatics and discourse study. Based on Brown and Levinson's theory, there are 4 strategies of politeness; bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness and off-record. The concept discussed in the definition of politeness. stated that politeness is the act to increase good behavior. It includes the way that give honorable to people and the way to talk to people. According to, politeness can determine the social status of someone and can be intellectual reflection of the speaker. Furthermore, politeness is pragmatic rules would have to be grounded in a notion of pragmatic competence. In the same case, said that Politeness is a principled reason for deviation from the cooperative principle when communication is about to threaten face. Politeness will be the tool to integrate the communication. It can be the strategies to make the language soften and minimize negative face. The good speaker will be give consideration to the hearers' feeling. Because the way we talk reflects the way we are.

### **4. The Realization of Positive Politeness Strategies in Language**

Having chosen a strategy that provides an appropriate opportunity for minimization of face risk, S then rationally chooses the linguistic (or extra-linguistic) means that will satisfy his strategic end. Each strategy provides internally a range of degrees of politeness (or face-risk minimization), so S will bear in mind the degree of face threat in choosing appropriate linguistic realizations of positive politeness.

Brown and Levinson (1987: 70) say that positive politeness is oriented toward the positive face of H, the positive self-image that he claims for himself.

They (ibid.: 101) add that: "it is redress directed to the addressee's positive face, his perennial desire that his wants (or the actions/acquisitions/values resulting from them) should be thought of as desirable. Unlike negative politeness, positive politeness is not necessarily redressive of the particular face want infringed by the FTA; that is, whereas in negative politeness the sphere of relevant redress is restricted to the imposition itself, in positive politeness the sphere of redress is widened to the appreciation of alter's wants in general or to the expression of similarity between ego's and alter's wants.

### **5. Gender and Politeness**

The differences between male and female are stated that male and female have their biological characteristic to express language. Male's language is direct, and formal. While, female's language is inferior, and indirect. In addition, female use the language politeness to influence the connection. In the other hand, male use the language politeness to assert their independence. argued that Female has a politeness language than male in the question tag.

### **6. Studies on Politeness:**

Lakoff (1973: 296) was among the first to adopt Grice's construct of Conversational Principles in an effort to account for politeness. She explicitly extends the notion of grammatical rule to the domain of politeness and considers the form of sentences, i.e. specific constructions to be polite or not. She suggests two rules of Pragmatic Competence: (i)

Be clear, and (ii) Be polite.

Leech's (1983: 82) model of politeness is founded on interpersonal rhetoric and views politeness as conflict avoidance. He introduced the Politeness Principle whose function is: To maintain the social equilibrium and the friendly relations which enable us to assume that our interlocutors are being cooperative in the first place.

He (ibid.) distinguishes between what he calls 'Relative Politeness' which refers to politeness in a specific situation and 'Absolute Politeness' which refers to the degree of politeness inherently associated with specific speaker actions. Thus, he takes some illocutions (e.g. orders) to be inherently impolite, and others (e.g. offers) to be inherently polite.

Watts (1989: 19) identifies politeness as linguistic behaviour which is perceived to be beyond what is expectable. Politeness is viewed as: explicitly marked, conventionally interpretable subset of 'politic' responsible for the smooth functioning of socio-communicative interaction and the consequent production of well-formed discourse within open social groups characterized by elaborated speech codes.

Lakoff (1990: 34) defines politeness as "a system of interpersonal relations designed to facilitate interaction by minimizing the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange.

Fraser (1990: 232) presents the notion of politeness as a Conversational Contract. He states that: Upon entering into a given conversation, each party brings an understanding of some initial set of rights and obligations that will determine, at least for the preliminary stages, what the participants can expect from other(s).

Cruse (2000: 362) defines politeness as "a matter of what is said, and not a matter of what is thought or believed." He further specifies the purpose of politeness in saying:

The purpose of politeness is the maintenance of harmonious and smooth social relations in the face of the necessity to convey belittling messages. Of course, the nature of reality, social, psychological, and physical constraints the scope for politeness: if our world is to 'work', we must respect this reality.

## **7. Methodology**

The mixed-methods has been chosen to conduct this study. The descriptive qualitative approach to investigate what types of politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson are employed in the interaction, and the quantitative approach to investigate the distribution of each type of strategy.

The samples of this study is 2 English teachers both male and female and 20 female students of class A and 20 male students of class B for each teacher in Yahiya bin Zaid Secondary school located in Babil. The Tape Audio Recorder (TAR) is used to record all the spoken interactions or utterances during the data collection. To be considered, since there is a high possibility for a code-switching between the local languages and English to occur on the interaction, only utterances spoken in English are taken. The analysis of the data goes through some steps as follows: transcribing, coding, classifying, analyzing, and discussing.

### **7.1 Objectives of the study**

The objectives of this study are:

1. to identify and describe the kinds of politeness strategies used in classrooms, and
2. to identify and describe the effect of both teachers' and students' gender in choosing a certain type of politeness strategy.

### **7.2 Significance of the Study**

The results of this study is expected to give some significance, both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the result of this study is expected to be used as additional information to improve the knowledge about linguistics, especially in the field of pragmatics. Practically, the result of this

research is expected to enrich the knowledge about politeness strategies, especially the factors behind the decision of choosing the strategies.

It's also hoped that the result of this study may help learners understand politeness strategies so it is expected to be able to choose the best strategy applied in real life in order to make the communication goes well. Besides, knowing more about the effect of gender on choosing politeness strategies.

### 7.3 Design of the Study

The mixed method design has been chosen by the researcher which best fit the requirements of the study. The descriptive qualitative approach to investigate what types of politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson are employed in the interaction, and the quantitative approach to investigate the distribution of each type of strategy.

### 7.4 Population and Sampling of the Study

The population of this study is represented by the 4<sup>th</sup> preparatory students in the province of Babylon in both first and second courses of the Academic year (2023-2024) in Yahya bin Zaid Secondary school to represent both samples (male and female), which are divided into groups (A, 20 students) to represent the male group and class(B, 20 students) to represent the female group.

## 8. Results

There are two types of results in this study, since this study is designed to differentiate the types of politeness strategies used by male teacher with male students and the types of politeness strategies used by the same teacher with the female students. On the other hand it is also designed to study the different politeness strategies used by female teacher with female students and the types of politeness strategies used by the same female teacher with male students. In table 1 all the utterances used by teachers with the male students:

**Table 1**

No.	Strategy	Coding	M.Teacher Utterances	F.Teacher Utterances
1	Bald on record	BOR	220	190
2	positive	POS	300	440
3	negative	NEG	115	120
4	Bald off record	OFF	10	14
5	Total		645	764

Table 1 shows that there were 1409 utterances containing politeness strategies produced, 645 utterances belonged to male teacher while 764 utterances belong to female teacher . The female teacher was found more dominant in providing the language . On the other hand, male teacher was proved to put himself in more passive situation. Male teacher was more dominant in using bald off record strategy such as direct commands like :answer, be more active, come to the board and clap. Meanwhile, female teacher was dominant in using the other three strategies, like using: greetings, lets and indirect speech as positive strategy.

In negative strategy: the teacher only showed the distance and the power between them, which caused the students to take the weight. Here, the teacher was trying to correlate what teachers generally do to their students, supposing that he was the real Extract to be considered. The degree of imposition would remain high for the students if he insisted on avoiding using just. In bald off record the teachers were trying to give clues to the students to answer their questions and trying to be funny by telling jokes related to the subject to lessen the tension in the class.

In table 2, all the utterances used by the teachers with the female students are illustrated as follows



**Table 2**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Coding</b>	<b>M.Teacher Utterances</b>	<b>F.Teacher Utterances</b>
<b>1</b>	Bald on record	BOR	290	230
<b>2</b>	positive	POS	243	305
<b>3</b>	negative	NEG	112	100
<b>4</b>	Bald off record	OFF	10	10
<b>5</b>	Total		655	645

As shown above, 700 utterances containing politeness strategies produced, 655 utterances belonged to male teacher while 645 utterances belong to female teacher, the male teacher was dominant in using language with the female students in bald on record while both teachers were equal in the bald off record strategy. On the other hand, female teacher was dominant in positive strategy.

## **9. Discussions**

Based on the previous findings, politeness strategies used by male and female teachers in the EFL classrooms covers all types of politeness strategies of Brown & Levinson. The results reveal that the bald on-record strategy was used by the male teacher in giving commands to the male student and be more serious in the class without giving attention to the students face threatening and at the same time he tends to use comments and be less strict and face threatening with the female students. On the other hand, female teacher is being less face threatening with male students than the female, but at the same time she used commands with male students more than female students.

Both teachers used positive politeness strategy more than other politeness strategies to be less face threatening and they tried to seek agreement. Female teacher was more dominant in this field than the male teacher especially with female students; at the same track the male teacher used positive politeness with female students more than male students.

Male teacher used negative politeness strategy with male students more than female, so as the female teacher. Both teachers were equal in using bald off record strategy with female students while female teacher was more dominant in using this strategy with male students.

### **9.1 Discussions of the contrasts**

Both teachers tend to use positive politeness strategy more than other strategies. Male teacher used 300 utterances with male students and 243 utterances with female students. Meanwhile the female teacher used 440 utterances with male students and 304 utterances with female students, so the dominant here is the female teacher with 140 difference in the utterances with the male students and 52 utterances with female students.

At the same range the female teacher was dominant in other both bald on record and negative strategies but with a slight difference. However both teachers were almost equal in using bald off record strategy especially with female students.

## **10. Conclusion**

The above mentioned results show that:

1. Gender is an affective factor in teaching English as a foreign language.
2. Teacher's gender may affect choosing the type of strategies used by the teacher him/herself.
3. Students' gender may affect choosing the type of strategies used by the same teacher.

## **11. Suggestions for further studies**

1. Researchers may study the factors that affect choosing the suitable strategy other than gender.
2. Researchers may also study the effect of students' ages in choosing the suitable strategy .

3. researchers can study the effect of the teachers' ages in teaching English.

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