

Linguistic politeness strategies in teacher-student interactions at cendekia assalam islamic elementary school, bangilan, tuban: a sociopragmatic study

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Abstract

This study examines linguistic politeness strategies in teacher-student interactions at Cendekia Assalam Islamic Elementary School, employing a descriptive qualitative approach with a sociopragmatic perspective. The theoretical framework is based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and Leech's (1993) politeness principles. Data were collected through observation, recording, transcription, and in-depth interviews, yielding 352 utterances that were subsequently analyzed using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014). The results reveal four politeness strategies employed by teachers: positive politeness (36%), bald-on-record (32%), negative politeness (22%), and off-record (10%). Positive politeness strategies predominate as teachers consciously build emotional rapport through praise, friendly forms of address, and expressions of empathy to foster student motivation and self-confidence. The choice of strategy is influenced by three primary factors: situational context, student characteristics, and pedagogical goals. This study reinforces the relevance of Brown and Levinson's theory and Leech's principles within the Indonesian primary education context and demonstrates that politeness strategies are dynamic and contextual. These findings have practical implications for enhancing teacher communication competence—through Teacher Professional Education (PPG) programs or in-service training—aimed at creating humanistic and inclusive learning interactions.

Keywords: *linguistic politeness, speech strategies, teacher-student interaction, sociopragmatics, primary education*

INTRODUCTION

Language is a primary instrument in the educational process; within the classroom, it serves not merely as a tool for delivering subject matter but also as a medium for fostering relationships, shaping student character, and cultivating learning motivation. As stated by (Haqiqiyah, 2025), in an educational context, language is not merely a tool for communication but also a means for constructing meaning, understanding, and knowledge. Verbal interaction between teachers and students occurs daily and yields impacts far broader than the simple transfer of knowledge; through linguistic communication, a process of meaning negotiation takes place between teacher and student, enabling "meaningful learning" (Vygotsky, cited in Amin, Haqiqiyah, 2025).

Consequently, a teacher's manner of speaking, word choice (diction), and the way they deliver instructions or corrections directly influence students' psychological state, self-confidence, and participation in the learning process.

Linguistic politeness is a crucial aspect of educational communication that determines the quality of classroom interaction. According to Zulkarnain and Hilalludin (2024), linguistic politeness is a vital element in communicating with others. It goes beyond conventional notions of courtesy, encompassing pragmatic strategies employed by speakers to preserve the interlocutor's "face," build solidarity and cohesion, and minimize the potential for conflict or discomfort during interaction. Teachers possessing high pragmatic competence are able to adapt their speech strategies to the situational context, student characteristics, and the pedagogical goals they aim to achieve.

At the primary school level, teacher linguistic politeness plays a crucial role, as students are in a sensitive phase of cognitive and emotional development. Teacher utterances that belittle students, involve blunt reprimands, or disregard politeness can leave psychological imprints that hinder the learning process. Conversely, the use of appropriate politeness strategies fosters a comfortable and conducive learning atmosphere, encourages students to participate actively, and strengthens the bond between teacher and student.

Observations in the field reveal a significant gap between the ideal of pedagogical communication and the reality of teacher-student interactions in schools. Many teachers predominantly use direct, instructional language without regard for politeness, causing students to become passive, afraid to express their opinions, or prone to academic stress. This situation highlights the need for a deep understanding of linguistic politeness strategies as an integral component of a teacher's professional competence.

Cendekia Assalam Islamic Elementary School serves as the context for this study; the institution is characterized by a religious atmosphere that upholds values of **adab** (etiquette) and **akhlaq** (moral character) in daily communication. Consequently, teacher-student interactions at the school exhibit a rich variety of politeness strategies that are compelling to examine from a sociopragmatic perspective. By analyzing 352 speech samples from teacher-student interactions, this study aims to uncover how linguistic politeness strategies are implemented within the context of formal learning at the primary education level.

The study of linguistic politeness within an educational context holds significant importance, both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this research contributes substantially to the development of sociopragmatic studies in Indonesia, particularly regarding institutional communication in primary education settings. Politeness theories—which have predominantly been tested within Western cultural contexts—require verification and contextualization within the Indonesian cultural landscape, given its unique patterns of social interaction.

Practically, a teacher's awareness of linguistic politeness strategies represents a crucial pedagogical competence that is often overlooked in teacher education and training programs. Inappropriate choices regarding speech

strategies can diminish student motivation, instill fear during the learning process, and even cause emotional hurt in front of peers. Conversely, the use of appropriate politeness strategies has been shown to foster a classroom atmosphere that is comfortable, enjoyable, inclusive, participatory, and humanistic.

This research serves as a valuable foundation for developing teacher communication training modules—whether for the Teacher Professional Education (PPG) program or for in-service training for active teachers. Thus, the study offers not only academic value but also tangible policy implications for enhancing the quality of pedagogical interactions in primary education institutions.

Research on linguistic politeness in education has been widely conducted at both international and national levels. Brown and Levinson (1987) established a robust theoretical foundation through their politeness theory based on the concept of "face," distinguishing between positive and negative politeness. This theory serves as a primary reference for the vast majority of studies in linguistic pragmatics, including those focused on classroom discourse.

In Indonesia, research on linguistic politeness within the school context has also expanded rapidly. Djumingin (2016) analyzed the linguistic politeness strategies of Indonesian language teachers in junior high schools, finding a predominance of positive politeness strategies—specifically praise and familiar forms of address. Yolandini et al. (2024) analyzed conversational implicatures between teachers and students during Indonesian language lessons, revealing that breaches of linguistic politeness frequently occur in classroom interactions, involving both teachers and students.

A number of studies have also linked teachers' linguistic politeness to students' psychological variables. Roatin et al. (2026) found that the use of politeness strategies by teachers and students during classroom interactions contributes to the establishment of respectful communication between them. Meanwhile, Suryani and Marlina (2026) concluded that teachers who consistently apply linguistic politeness principles are effective in enhancing students' linguistic politeness and fostering a more participatory classroom climate compared to teachers who prioritize instructional efficiency alone.

Although considerable research has been conducted on teachers' linguistic politeness, there remain research gaps that need to be addressed. First, most previous studies have focused on the junior or senior high school levels, whereas in-depth studies regarding teachers' politeness strategies in elementary schools—particularly within the context of character-based Islamic schools—remain very limited.

Secondly, previous studies generally examine linguistic politeness from a single perspective—relying solely on Brown and Levinson's theory or Leech's principles—with few integrating both synergistically within a single analytical framework. An integrative sociopragmatic approach combining these two theories remains rare in the literature on primary education in Indonesia.

Thirdly, most prior research has been purely descriptive, failing to explicitly link findings to practical implications for teacher training development. There is a lack of research that systematically identifies the distribution of politeness strategies and the factors influencing them, or that recommends training models based on empirical data from actual classroom interactions. This study is designed to address these three gaps.

Based on the background, urgency, and research gaps outlined above, this study aims to: identify and describe the types of linguistic politeness strategies employed by teachers during teacher-student interactions at Cendekia Assalam Islamic Elementary School, drawing on (Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory and Leech's (1983) politeness principles; analyze the distribution and prevalence of these strategies across various classroom interaction contexts—namely instructional, evaluative, corrective, and motivational situations; uncover the factors influencing the choice of politeness strategies, including situational context, student characteristics, and pedagogical goals; and formulate practical implications based on the findings to provide evidence-based recommendations for developing teacher communication competence training, particularly within Teacher Professional Education (PPG) and in-service training programs.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a sociopragmatic perspective, as the study of linguistic politeness cannot be separated from the social context and situational background of the speech exchanged between teachers and students in an elementary school setting. The researcher selected this approach because the study aims to describe, identify, and interpret linguistic phenomena in a natural setting, without the manipulation of variables.

The theoretical framework is based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, encompassing positive politeness, negative politeness, *off-record* acts, and *on-record* acts. This analytical framework is further supported by Leech's (1993) politeness principles, which include the maxims of tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy.

Data sources for this study comprise both primary and secondary data, collected through observation, recording and transcription, and in-depth interviews.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which involves four stages: first, systematic data collection (recordings, transcripts, field notes, and interview results); second, data presentation—organized into politeness strategy classification tables, speech excerpts, and analytical-descriptive narratives—to facilitate drawing conclusions; and third, drawing conclusions based on the strategy patterns that appear most dominantly in the interactions between teachers and students. Data validity was ensured through source and method triangulation—comparing data from various sources and utilizing different collection techniques—to confirm consistent findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of 352 speech utterances obtained from interactions at Cendekia Assalam Islamic Elementary School, four linguistic politeness strategies were identified in teacher-student interactions, with the following distribution:

Table 1. Distribution of teachers' linguistic politeness strategies

Politeness Strategy	Number of Utterances	Percentage
Positive Politeness	128	36%
Direct (Bald-on-record)	112	32%
Negative Politeness	78	22%
Off-record (Indirect)	34	10%
Total	352	100%

Positive politeness

The positive politeness strategy (36%) predominates in teacher-student interactions because teachers recognize the importance of fostering emotional closeness and creating an enjoyable learning atmosphere. This strategy is implemented through the use of praise, friendly greetings, and expressions of empathy. This is evident in the following utterance:

“That’s a wonderful drawing. I am so proud that you had the courage to explore and create such an excellent narrative drawing. The color gradation is vivid and truly beautiful.”

The utterance above employs a positive politeness strategy in the form of praise, aimed at boosting the student's self-confidence while simultaneously strengthening the affective bond between teacher and student. This aligns with Brown and Levinson (1987), who state that positive politeness aims to satisfy the interlocutor's need for "positive face"—specifically, the desire to be acknowledged and appreciated.

Direct (bald-on-record) strategy

The direct, no-nonsense strategy (32%) appears in contexts involving the delivery of instructions, class rankings, and situations requiring a quick response from students. This is evident in the following utterance:

“Now, let’s move on to the next set of practice questions. Open page 88, exercise section B.”

Using such a strategy is not necessarily impolite; rather, it represents a form of communicative efficiency in situations requiring assertiveness. Nanda and Rizaldi (2024) state that in institutional settings like schools, direct speech used by teachers is acceptable—provided it is not accompanied by a demeaning tone or facial expressions that might offend the student.

Negative politeness

The negative politeness strategy (22%) is employed by teachers when making requests or corrections that could potentially threaten a student's "negative face"—specifically by offering choices or using softer modal expressions. This is evident in the following utterance:

“I’m sorry, but if you don’t mind, could you please revise your answer for question number 5?”

The use of phrases like "I’m sorry" and "if you don’t mind" demonstrates the teacher's effort to respect the student's autonomy and reduce interactional pressure. Such strategies are effective in encouraging participation from students who tend to be shy or lack confidence.

Off-record strategy

The indirect or "off-record" strategy (10%) is observed in situations where the teacher wishes to deliver a reprimand or criticism without directly putting the student on the spot. This is evident in the following utterance:

“Wow, it looks like you were too engrossed in your phone last night, weren’t you? You stayed up too late, so you arrived late today and didn’t do your homework.”

This indirect utterance serves as an implicit reprimand that preserves the student's feelings and dignity in front of their peers; employing such a strategy reflects the teacher's pragmatic intelligence in managing classroom dynamics in a humanistic manner.

Factors influencing the choice of politeness strategy

Based on interview and observation findings, three factors influence the choice of teacher politeness strategies: situational context (where teachers tend to use direct strategies in urgent situations—such as when maintaining order—but shift to positive or negative politeness strategies during discussions or interactive Q&A sessions); student characteristics (where these strategies are applied to students who are quiet, lack confidence, are shy, or have special needs, as direct strategies are more frequently used with active and expressive students); and pedagogical goals (where teachers employ positive politeness to motivate, build student confidence, and encourage participation, whereas direct strategies are predominantly used when delivering procedural instructions).

CONCLUSION

Based on an analysis of 352 speech samples from Cendekia Assalam Islamic Elementary School, four linguistic politeness strategies employed by teachers were identified: positive politeness (36%), bald on-record (32%), negative politeness (22%), and off-record (10%). Positive politeness was the dominant strategy, as teachers consciously fostered emotional closeness through praise, friendly forms of address, and expressions of empathy. The choice of strategy was influenced by three factors: situational context, student characteristics, and pedagogical objectives.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the theories of Brown and Levinson (1987) and the principles of Leech (1983) within the context of primary education in Indonesia, demonstrating that politeness strategies are dynamic and contextual. Practically, teachers need to enhance their pragmatic awareness in communication, as the choice of speech strategy directly impacts students' motivation, self-confidence, and participation. These findings also serve as relevant material for developing teacher communication competency training within Teacher Professional Education (PPG) programs and in-service training.

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