

Interlanguage Pragmatic Study of Politeness in Requesting among English Education Students

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Abstract

This study aims to uncover the politeness strategies which are used by English Education Students/Non Native Speakers of English (NNS) in requesting and compared it to the Native Speakers of English (NS). The main data was obtained from Discourse Completion Test (DCT) with six situations shared to 84 NNS and 6 NS of English as parameter. All six situations in the DCT are based on the sociolinguistics variables such as distance and imposition. The data from DCT are also supported by the data from interview and observation. All the data are classified and analysed by using the theory of politeness strategies from Brown and Levinson (1987), Yule (2000) and Cutting (2002). It revealed that both Native Speakers (NS) of English and Non Native Speaker (NNS) participants use interrogative form in expressing request, except in expressing bald on record strategy. In addition both NS and NNS participants in this study frequently use negative politeness strategy with more than 50% in each situation. Moreover in the situations which have far social distance, all of the NS participants use negative politeness strategy. In doing negative politeness strategy both NS and NNS participants tend to use modal such as "May I..." or "Would you ..." It is also strengthened by the NNS' statements in interview that they were taught to use modal and interrogative forms in expressing request since Junior and Senior High School. In addition they also stated that they frequently watch western movies to improve their skills in using English for daily communication, such as requesting. Therefore, it also helps them to decrease any possibility to do pragmatic failure. However, NS participants tend to be more brief and straighter to the point in expressing request than the NNS participants especially in the situations which have low imposition level.

Keywords: *interlanguage pragmatics, politeness strategies, request*

Introduction

Requesting is considered as one of the most common form of communication used in the human's daily life. In addition, requesting is also known as one of the most frequent communication forms which are examined by using pragmatics. Ohyama, Morikawa and Johnson (n.d) examined the politeness strategies in requesting used by Japanese students. In this study, they observed 22 Japanese students who have intermediate level of English proficiency and compared them to seven American Native Speakers of English. The NS and NNS participants are asked to participate in role plays requesting to a friend and also to a professor. The result of this research showed that the NS of English tend to use interrogative forms and also tend to use more complex linguistics forms, especially when they use if clause to indicate politeness.

However, the NNS participants (Japanese students) are generally not be able to use flexible appropriate forms for different situations and different participants although they have followed the intermediate English class (Ohyama, Morikawa & Johnson, n.d., p. 98).

Moreover, Khorshidi (2013) examined the effect of study abroad in general and also the impact of the length of someone who stay abroad to his linguistic development. He tested a group of 72 Iranian English language learners who enrolled to study English in two Indian language institutes as a study abroad program. These 72 language learners were already administered a placement test and an interview and placed in intermediate level. The researcher used a DCT questionnaire comprised of 16 request scenarios developed by Schauer and 10 apology situations originally developed by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain in Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project (CCSARP) to measure the amount of gains regarding politeness in the three phases of the learners' stay in L2 context. The result of this research showed that someone's length of residency in abroad influences the improvement of learners' pragmatics development especially in the perception and production of linguistic politeness in request and apology speech acts (Khorshidi, 2013, p. 331). Susilo (2015) examined the Indonesian EFL students in requesting. This study examined forty students of junior high school.

This study uses DCT with nine different situations to gather the students' expressions in requesting. This study found that the EFL learners use both direct and indirect strategies in requesting. In addition to the previous studies above, the writers also noted several studies which examined requesting such as Abuarrah (2013), Blum Kulka (1982), Kim (1995), Fukushima (1996), Umar (2004), Al-Marrani and Sazalie (2010) and Sofwan Rusmi (2011). Besides requesting, Wijayanto, Laila, Prasetyarini and Susiati (2013) discussed the politeness strategies in complaining by Indonesian students. They examined 50 students who have upper-intermediate level in learning English. They used DCT and ODCCT (Oral Discourse Completion Test) to take the data. The result of this research showed that the level of status and social distance stimulate more to the use of politeness strategies rather than the politeness types. The participants tend to use bald on record and positive politeness in complaining rather than negative politeness or off record, however both of the politeness strategies are used differently when the interlocutors have familiar or unfamiliar relationship and they have different level of status (Wijayanto, Laila, Prasetyarini & Susiati, 2013, p. 196).

Related to this study, the writers examined the politeness strategies used by English Education Students in Suryakancana University as the Non-Native English Speakers in doing request in English. These NNS of English are chosen in this study since this study focuses on finding how do the Non Native Speakers of English who have studied English as their major do request in English. In addition, the writers also examined seven Native Speakers of English as parameters. This study uses the theory of Politeness from Brown and Levinson (1987), Yule (2000) and Cutting (2002). Brown and Levinson (1987) explained that requesting is an FTA (Face Threatening Act) which usually use negative politeness as long as the speaker treats the listener's territory and freedom of action (as cited in Reiter, p.2). Brown and Levinson (1987) explained that in many cultures, FTA can be examined by considering the 'social distance' (D) between the interlocutors, the 'power' (P) and the ranking (R) of 'imposition' (p.74). Therefore, Brown and Levinson (1987) stated that the weightiness of an FTA can be calculated as:

$$W_x = D(S,H) + P(S,H) + R_x$$

where W_x is the seriousness (weightiness) of an FTA, $D(S,H)$ is the distance between the speaker and the hearer, $P(S,H)$ refers to the power power that the hearer has over the speaker, R_x is the rating of imposition in that culture.

The first aspect that influence the weightiness of FTA is distance. In some cases, distance can be assessed by looking the interaction frequency which is done by the

speaker and hearer. The second aspect is power. Power is degree which speaker can 'force' the hearer to impose the hearer's (face). In addition Brown and Levinson (1987) stated, "Power is a value attached not to individuals at all, but to roles or role-sets" (p.77). For example the role set between the teacher and students, father and son, CEO and employee and so on. The last aspect is rank of imposition. Rank of Imposition covers the degrees of imposing in the interaction. Brown and Levinson (1987) explained that R (rank of imposition) is influenced by culture and situation (p.77).

Brown and Levinson (1987), Cutting (2002) and Yule (2000) mentioned the politeness strategies such as bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness and off record. Cutting (2002) explained that bald on record is the speaker's attempts request, suggestion, offer, etc. directly. Moreover Brown and Levinson (1987) described that in general, bald on record can be done by the speaker to achieve the maximum efficiency (p.95). In addition bald on record has different usage in different circumstances, because of the different motives of the speaker to do the FTA. Direct imperative is the clear examples of bald on record usage; the example of direct imperative utterance is *"Give me the book!"*. The second politeness strategy is positive politeness. Positive politeness strategy has a purpose to save hearer's positive face by showing solidarity and closeness. This strategy can be realized by Notice, Attend to Hearer's Interest, Wants, Needs or Goods which suggests the speaker to pay attention on the hearer's condition such as the noticeable changes, which the hearer want to be approved (p.103) e.g. *"Oh my goodness, you cut hair! By the way, I am here to borrow your notebook"*. This strategy can also be realized by joking since joke can also soften an FTA in requesting. The third strategy is negative politeness.

Wardhaugh (2006) explained, "Negative politeness leads to deference, apologizing, indirectness and formality in language use" (p. 277). This strategy can be realized by being conventionally indirect e.g. *"Can you please pass the pepper?"* One of the realizations is using hedge e.g. *"Won't you open the door?"* (Which could be glossed as 'I hedgedly request that you open the door') etc. The forth strategy is Off Record Strategy (Indirectness). Indirectness enables the speaker to show his or her needs to others, but on the other hand the speaker also gives option to the hearer to respond his or her complains by offering help or ignore the complaint. Meanwhile Cutting (2002) explained that the hearers tend to know the implicit meaning of the FTA, but they have opportunity to respond or ignore it safely (p. 46). Therefore, the speaker tries to lessen the imposition and show his or her awareness. There are several off record strategies, such as giving hints e.g. *"It's cold in here"* (c.i. Shut the window) and presupposing e.g. *"I do the dishes again today"* which means that the speaker presupposes that he has done it before and therefore it is one of the criticism expressions etc.

Moreover, this study is considered as interlanguage pragmatic study since this study examined the NNS in using a particular language (i.e. English). Schauer (2009) defined interlanguage pragmatics as the second and foreign language learners' acquisition, production etc. of particular language. Moreover Kasper and Rose (2002) described interlanguage as the implementation of the second or foreign language so that interlanguage pragmatic examines the NNS in understanding and producing action in target language (as cited in Elsayed, 2014, p. 21). Interlanguage pragmatics also investigates how the L2 learners learn to develop their competence in understanding and producing it in target language (as cited in Elsayed, 2014, p. 21).

The above definition from Kasper and Rose (2002) highlights two important aspects in interlanguage pragmatic study. The first, it emphasizes that the production and understanding is part of the L2 learners' pragmatics competence. Second, ESL or EFL does

not only have to produce the utterance which is appropriate with the context but they also have to be aware to the linguistic behaviour which is appropriate with several L2 situations. This can show that there is any relationship between the culture and the pragmatic competence in second/foreign language.

Method

A mixed-methods design is used in this study, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. A particular population's attitudes, behaviors, and experiences can be better understood by analyzing and interpreting data using the qualitative component (Dawson, 2007). Here, the emphasis is on NNS of English and how they employ English request strategies. The quantitative method is used in analyzing the frequency and percentage distribution of request strategies that were elicited by a Discourse Completion Task (DCT). This study examines 84 students of English Education Department of Suryakencana University. The students are NNS of English which is Sundanese or Indonesian native speakers, but the students are studying English comprehensively for more than three years. In addition English is their main major, so that it can be ensured that the students are demanded to be able to use English especially in doing the communication.

The main instrument in this study is DCT which is a collecting data instrument in a research to gain the responses from the object of the research contextually about a language phenomenon specifically. In this study, the DCT is conducted in English. All situations in the DCT are based on the sociolinguistics variables such as distance and imposition, but in this study the writer does not use power as the main consideration in conducting the DCT since this study is focused on the subjects who are in the same level. Beebe & Cummings (1996) stated that DCT is an appropriate instrument in doing the speech act performance research since it can gather a large amount of data quickly, DCT also can make initial classification from the formulas and semantics strategy which likely occur in natural speech, it can also increase the insight into the social and psychological factors which likely affect the speech act performance, and ensure the genuine shape of the speech act in the speaker's mind in that language (as cited in Elsayed, 2014, p. 38). In addition Blum-Kulka et al., (1989) explained that DCT provides clear evidences about the speaker's utterances in facing various situations (as cited in Elsayed, 2014, p. 38). The following is the outline of the instrument (DCT) used in this study.

No	Distance	Ranking of Imposition	Situation
1	Near	Low	Borrowing pen to close friends
2		Medium	Asking a close friend to buy a drink for the speaker.
3		High	Borrowing money (IDR. 1.000.000)
4	Far	Medium	Borrowing a laptop from a classmate
5		High	Asking for accompanying the hearer for a quite long trip
6		Low	borrow one of the classmate's notes.

Table 1. Outline of DCT in this study

Besides DCT, the writer also use interview and observation to complete the data and to cross-check the data.

The writers use several steps in analyzing the data: 1) distributing DCT to 84 NNS of English and 7 NS of English; 2) Doing Interview to NNS to get deeper data; 3) Identifying the politeness strategies for 91 DCT by using the theory of Politeness from Brown and Levinson (1982) and Cutting (2002) and Yule (2000); 4) Analyzing and Comparing how NS and NNS of English do requesting in English in certain situations.

Results and Discussion

The data from DCT of NNS participants showed that the participants tend to use negative politeness, which is indicated by the use of modal, such as can, could, and would as realized in, *"May I borrow your pen?"* (First situation), *"Please, could you buy a bottle of cold water for me?"* (Second situation) or *"Have you paid the school fee for this semester? Hmm.. I haven't. You know that my parents are in another country. I've tried to call them but it's hard. So, by the way, may I borrow your money? I need RP. 1.000.000 for paying it. I'll return it after my parents back home"* (Third situation). The element which is used by the speakers in the third situation is more complicated, because it can help the speakers to lessen the imposition, so that the speakers do not only use modal but they also use other elements in requesting such as hesitation and the reason to impose the listener. The following are the percentages of the use of politeness strategy by NNS participants.

Imposition Level	Distance	Pre-sequence	Bald on Record	Off Record	Positive Politeness	Negative Politeness
Low (S1)	Near	30.8%	10.3%	2.6%	5.1%	82%
Medium (S2)		38.5%	35.9%	7.7%	-	51.3%
High (S3)		69%	-	5.1%	28.2%	69.5%
Low (S6)	Far	28%	7.7%	2.6%	-	79.5%
Medium (S4)		56.4%	2.6%	2.6%	-	87.2%
High (S5)		56.4%	-	-	7.7%	84.6%

Table 2. The Use of Politeness Strategies by NNS Participants

In using negative politeness strategy, the participants mostly use modal such as can, could, would and may. Based on the participants' statements in the interview, they said that they tend to use modal in doing request at least to lessen the imposition. Moreover, some of the participants thought that modal is very essential in doing request especially when they want to do a request to someone who does not have a quite close relation with them, even they will also use modal to their close friends if the imposition level of the situation is weight. The use of modal by the participants can be influenced by several factors, such as by their teachers' guidance in junior and senior high school. As Indonesian students who learn English as their foreign language, most of the NNS participants are taught explicitly that in expressing request they have to use modal such as can and could.

After negative politeness strategy, the NNS tend to use pre-sequence in doing request. Pre-sequence also an essential element which can be used by the speaker to lessen the imposition in requesting. In using pre-sequence, the NNS participants tend to use it in far social distance rather than in near social distance, as stated in the data from interview, the speakers stated that when they do request to someone who do not have near relation with them, they tend to use pre-sequence as opening and as one of the ways

which can be used to lessen the imposition. Most of the NNS participants in the interview stated that at least they need to say *"Excuse me"*, *"Sorry"*, *"Sorry to disturb your time"* or *"Can I take your time for a minute?"* when they want to make a request to someone who do not have close relation with them, and of course it is different if it is compared with the way they do request to their near friends, most of them stated that they go straight to the point especially if the imposition is not really weight.

The next politeness strategy which is frequently used by the NNS participants is bald on record. Most of the NNS participants tend to use bald on record in the situations which have near social distance.

The next politeness strategy which is used by the NNS participants is off record. The use of off record by NNS participants in the first situation which has near social distance situation can reach 2.6% and then there are 7.7% of NNS participants who use it in the second situation, in addition there are 5.1% NNS participants who use off record strategy in the third situation.

The last is strategy is positive politeness. There are 5.1% of NNS participants who use positive politeness strategy in the first situation which has low imposition level. Moreover there are 28.2% of NNS participants who use positive politeness in the third situation which has weight imposition level. However, there is no participant who uses positive politeness strategy in the second situation which has medium imposition level. In the situations which have far social distance such as in the fifth situation, there are only 7.7% of NNS participants who use it, moreover in the fourth and sixth situations there is no NNS participant who uses positive politeness strategy.

In this study, there are six native speakers (NS) of English who participated in this study. All of their utterances in requesting are used as the parameter for the use of politeness strategies in requesting by NNS. In detail there are the following percentages of the use of politeness strategies in requesting by NS and NNS participants.

Table 3. The Comparison of the Use of Politeness Strategies between NS and NNS Participants

Imposition level	Pre-sequence		Bald on Record		Off record		Positive politeness		Negative politeness	
	NS	NNS	NS	NNS	NS	NNS	NS	NNS	NS	NNS
Low (S1)	33.3 %	30.8 %	-	10.3%	-	2.6%	-	5.1 %	66.7%	82%
Medium (S2)	-	38.5 %	16.7 %	35.9%	-	7.7%	-	-	83.3%	51.3%
High (S3)	-	69%	-	-	-	5.1%	16.7 %	28.2 %	83.7%	69.5%
Low (S6)	-	28%	-	7.7%	-	2.6%	-	-	100%	79.5%
Medium (S4)	-	56.4 %	-	2.6%	-	2.6%	-	-	100%	87.2%
High (S5)	16.7 %	56.4 %	-	-	-	-	-	7.7 %	100%	84.6%

As stated by Yule (2000) that negative politeness is the most frequent politeness strategy which is used in requesting in English (p.64). Not only NNS, but the NS also tend to use negative politeness strategy, moreover in the situations which have far social distance, all of English NS use negative politeness strategies. Based on the data from DCT, NS participants tend to use interrogative form in expressing negative politeness strategy in requesting, such as by saying, *"Can I have a pen"* or *"May I borrow your pen, please?"* In the first situation which has low imposition and near social distance, similarly NNS also tend to use interrogative form such as by saying, *"I'm sorry, do you have any pen? May I borrow your pen?"*, *"Do you have two pens? May I borrow one of your pens?"* or by saying, *"I'm sorry, may I borrow your pen? I must write something."* There are several differences between NS and NNS of English in expressing request in English for example NNS participants tend to use additional element in using negative politeness strategy such as by inserting the apology for the imposition such as by saying, *"I'm sorry"* meanwhile NS do not use it in the first situation.

Likewise in the second situation which has near social distance with medium imposition level, NS participants still use interrogative form in expressing request with negative politeness strategy such as by saying, *"Hey could you please get me water? I'm super thirsty"*, or by saying, *"Hey mate, I'm really thirsty, can you get me some water please? Sorry I don't have any money on me and I'm desperate."* However the NNS tend to say, *"I'm sorry mate, are you busy now? Can you help me? I want you buy me cold water because I'm very thirsty. Please"* or by saying, *"What are you doing now? If you want to go to canteen can I ask you to buy me cold water? Please"* In the second situation, NS participants tend to express their request directly, i.e. straight to the point by expressing their request, meanwhile the data shows that the percentage of pre-sequence of NNS is a quite high and it is one of the most frequent strategies which is done by the NNS participants in expressing request, such as by saying, *"I'm sorry mate, are you busy now?"*. In the third situation which has weight imposition level and near social distance, the NS participants tend to use negative politeness strategy in expressing request such as by saying, *"So I was wondering if you could help me out with my school fee, because I cannot reach my parents and I will pay you back as soon as possible."*, Meanwhile the NNS tend to say, *"I'm so sorry for saying this, but I need 1.000.000 rupiah for paying my school fee because my parents are hard to call, can you help me?"*. Therefore, the NNS and NS of English respondents tend to do request by using interrogative in the form of modals as the part of negative politeness strategies.

Bald on record strategy is also used by the NS in requesting, but the NS participants prefer using negative politeness and positive politeness than bald on record. There are 16.7% NS participants who use bald on record strategy in the second situation, such as by saying, *"Water, please!"* As explained by Yule (2000) that imperative form is categorized as bald on record since it is considered as one of the most direct utterances (p.63).

Paltridge (2006) stated that, "Politeness strategies are not the same across language and culture and might mean different things in different linguistic and cultural contexts" (p.78). Because what we think as FTA sometimes can be realized as common phenomenon for others. For example, the result of this study said that NNS participants in this study tend to use pre-sequence before expressing request especially in the situations which have far social distance and weight imposition level, meanwhile NS participants tend to directly express their request without doing any pre-sequence even in the situations which have weight imposition level, but it does not mean that NS participants do not polite. So that, the lack of knowledge in the differences of language and culture in cross-cultural communication can cause pragmatics failure. Tanaka (1997)

and others stated that most NS of a language are less tolerant in facing pragmatics failure in a cross-cultural communication (As cited in Paltridge, 2006, p 78). So that, Paltridge (2006) assumed that, "Different views of pragmatic appropriateness, then, can be easily lead to misunderstandings and inhibit effective cross-cultural communication" (p.78). So that the education students who are going to be the teacher and also the English teacher should understand this cross-cultural understanding, in order they can teach and educate their students very well. Moreover, Indonesia has faced the ASEAN Economic Associations which means that there will be so many foreigner who come to Indonesia, so that the students are not only demanded to know how to communicate in English as their international language, but they also have to know the language and cultural differences in doing cross-cultural communication, so that they can avoid the misunderstanding in doing cross-cultural communication.

Therefore, to avoid the pragmatic failure in doing cross-cultural communication, there are several things which should be done by the English teacher in teaching English, such as, rising the students' socio-cultural awareness which means that the teachers do not only teach the students the grammar or the form (syntax) but the teachers also should teach the semantic meaning so that it can improve the students' communicative competence, and then the teachers also have to emphasize and explain that language and culture cannot be separated, so that the teachers should teach the language and cultural knowledge to the students, in addition the teacher also have to vary their teaching strategy so that it can be suitable for cross-cultural class. Finally, the teacher also should motivate their students to interact and communicate by using English in and out of the classroom, especially doing cross-cultural communication. So that, the teachers do not only become someone who teach the students but they also become the facilitator who give their students access to do cross-cultural communication. Therefore, when the students are accustomed to communicate with English NS, it is expected that the students also will have initiative to do cross-cultural communication with others by using social media, such as Instagram, Twitter, etc. So that the students can get more knowledge and experience in facing the pragmatics differences in cross-cultural communication, and finally they will know how to avoid pragmatics failure in cross-cultural communication.

Conclusion

In doing request, the speaker will impose the listener, so that the participants in this study (NS and NNS) do a strategy to lessen the imposition level. Negative politeness is the most frequent politeness strategies which are used by the NS and NNS participants with more than 50% in each situation. Moreover in the situations which have far social distance such as in the fourth, fifth and sixth situations all of the NS participants use negative politeness strategy.

Both of NS and NNS participants use interrogative form in expressing request, except in expressing bald on record. In addition, in doing negative politeness strategy both NS and NNS participants use modal such as "*May I...*" or "*Would you ..*". However, NS participants tend to be more brief and straight to the point in expressing request than the NNS participants especially in the situations which have low imposition level.

Another difference is in the use of pre-sequence. NNS participants frequently use pre-sequence with more than 25% in each situation, such as in the first situation which can reach 30.8% NNS participants, and then the second situation with 38.5% and third situation can reach 69%. Meanwhile in the situations which have far social distance such as sixth situation, it can reach 28%, and then there are 56.4% of NNS participants who use

pre-sequence in the fifth and sixth situations. So that it shows that the weightier imposition level of situation the more frequent NNS participants use pre-sequence, meanwhile NS participants just use pre-sequence in the first and fifth situations with 33.3% and 16.7%, but it does not mean that the NS participants who tend to be more straight forward is not polite, but there is just a different culture.

Therefore, to have a good ability in communicating in other languages, the learners do not only need knowledge of the language itself, but they also need the knowledge of the culture, because language and culture are inseparable. So that, it is expected that the learner can avoid the pragmatics failure in doing cross-cultural communication when they learn the language and culture inseparably.

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