



Patterns of Politeness in Teacher-Student Interaction: Investigating an Academic Context

Amin Karimnia *Corresponding Author)

*Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics,
Fasa Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran.
E-mail: aminkarimnia@yahoo.com*

Mohammad Reza Khodashenas

*Ph.D. Candidate of TEFL, Torbat-e-Heydarieh-Branch,
Islamic Azad University, Iran.
E-mail: mkhodashenas@yahoo.com*

Abstract

This study investigated politeness strategies used in instructor-student relationships, in an academic environment. To conduct the study, four university classes with different instructors were randomly selected, observed, and analyzed. Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness was drawn on as the analytic model guiding the study, which focused on face-threatening and face-saving acts. After observing the classes and gathering the data through four classroom observations, it was found that the instructors produced face-threatening utterances less frequently than face-saving utterances. In the case of face-saving acts, they used various strategies to make students feel more comfortable in the classroom. The findings implied that instructors should be aware of using threatening utterances that could negatively affect students' self-esteem. It also suggested that applying politeness strategies in the classroom could lead to a better relationship between students and instructors.

Keywords: Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, Teacher-Student Interaction, Face-Threatening Acts, Face-Saving Acts, Politeness

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: Saturday, April 14, 2018
Accepted: Friday, August 10, 2018
Published: Sunday, October 21, 2018
Available Online: Sunday, October 14, 2018
DOI: 10.22049/jalda.2018.26181.1055

Online ISSN: 2383-2460; Print ISSN:2383-591x; 2018 © Azarbaijan Shahid Madani University Press

Introduction

There are many factors that make foreign language learning/teaching a challenging task. To master a foreign language and to achieve successful interaction and communication, language learners must develop communicative competence, linguistic competence, and pragmatic competence (Krasner, 1999). Because the main purpose of language learning is to communicate and convey meaning, language users/learners have to gain sufficient grammatical and lexical knowledge and to use them effectively in their interactions. Language use, however, is not confined to sentence structure, word formation, pronunciation, spelling, and vocabulary (Hymes, 1986). He asserts that to achieve the communicative goals of language learning, second language learners must learn to speak not only accurately and fluently, but also appropriately. A student who is required to be a proficient language learner may fail to interact with native speakers of the target language.

In a class environment, teachers' can have a specific role in encouraging and motivating students. Many studies (e.g. Bishop & Glynn, 1999; Brown, 2007) have revealed that classroom teachers facilitate, control, direct, manage, and resource students, while helping them to participate in classroom activities and other relevant tasks. Dörnyei and Murphey (2003) similarly emphasize the crucial role of teacher-student interaction in classroom achievement. Teacher-student interaction is regulated by language, which is the crucial factor in class management and in students' process of learning (Bloome et al., 2005). The kind of feedback students receive from teachers constitutes a primary understanding of how students' language productions can communicate meaning successfully.

The purpose of this study is to explore patterns of politeness realized in instructor-student interactions in an academic setting. In doing so, the study focuses on an empirical context in an academic context. Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness and face guides the analysis of the data collected from the empirical context. The study, more specifically, tries to identify and investigate the effects of face-saving and face-threatening acts on the classroom performance of EFL students. Samples of both acts are mentioned and interpreted, while their pragmatic implications are explained. The findings can help instructors adopt appropriate strategies for adapting their language use to their students' needs, thus enhancing the effectiveness of instructor-student interactions.

Review of Literature

Proficient speakers of a language may not be able to produce socially and culturally appropriate utterances because of their limited pragmatic competence (Tanck, 2002; Karimnia & Afghari, 2010; Karimnia & Afghari, 2012). As Celce-Murcia (2007) states, people use language differently when communicating with each other. They use different functions of speech to convey the same meaning. Speakers' pragmatic knowledge and social elements, such as gender, age, solidarity, politeness and power, may affect these socio-communicative differences.

According to Nunan (1991 as cited in Peng et al. 2014), “language determines the success of teaching and learning activities as well as the medium to enhance students’ knowledge acquisition in the classroom” (p. 34). Language classroom can be seen as sociolinguistic environment and discourse communities in which interlocutors use various functions of language to establish a communication system, and the teacher-student interaction is believed to contribute on students’ language development (Consolo, 2006).

The first environment from which an EFL student can receive communicative feedback about the success or failure of his/her attempts is the classroom. This is, in fact, the space in which students can primarily develop pragmatic competence. Fraser (1983) describes pragmatic competence as “the knowledge of how an addressee determines what a speaker is saying and recognizes intended illocutionary force conveyed through subtle attitudes” (p. 30). Without pragmatic knowledge, interlocutors may not be able to understand each other, failing to interact and communicate.

Student-teacher interaction shapes a particular discourse through which both teachers and students are actively participating in constituting communication. Grossi (2009) argues that pragmatic instruction should be practiced in the classroom. In order to achieve successful communication, language learners/users should have knowledge of pragmatic aspects of the language they speak, while developing their understanding of grammar, sentence structure, text organization, cohesion, and coherence (Bachman, 1990).

Politeness is an important aspect of pragmatic competence. Politeness is “the expression of the speakers’ intention to mitigate face threats carried by certain face threatening acts toward another” (Mills, 2003, p.6). As a sub-branch of pragmatic studies, politeness theories are formulated to maintain, develop, and promote harmonious social relations (Culpeper, 1998). Culpeper (1998) argues that when an individual observes the principles of politeness, s/he tries to construct a social image. Watts (2003) contends that politeness is the ability to please others through interpersonal conduct. Foley (1997) similarly recognizes politeness as “a battery of social skills whose goal is to ensure that everyone feels affirmed in a social interaction” (p. 270).

As Ide (1989) states, politeness is a fundamental element in maintaining and improving interactions. He believes that politeness is influenced by social status and social level, education and career, power and structures of kinship, and social role and situation. The spectrum of principles and strategies pertaining to politeness is wide-ranging in pragmatics (Grundy, 2000). Politeness, more specifically, is considered to be one of the main indicators of linguistic behavior. With respect to language, politeness involves making use of indirect speech acts, addressing others with a respectful tone, or utilizing polite words such as “please”, “sorry”, or “thank you” (Watts, 2003).

Some researchers (e.g. Goffman, 1967; Arndt & Janney, 1985; Brown & Levinson, 1987) refer to politeness in language as a face-preserving act. The central idea is that individuals possess self-esteem which has to be credited and recognized

by others. Considering this condition, linguists have categorized politeness in speech into two patterns: face-offending and face-defending. Brown and Levinson's (1987) define "face" as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (p.32). Face is further divided into two subtypes: positive face and negative face. Positive face refers to an individual's desire to be admired and respected, and to be generally considered as a good person. On the other hand, negative face denotes an individual's desire to be free from any burden. It describes the basic personal rights of an individual, including his/ her personal freedom as well as freedom of action.

Considering the concept of face, Yule (2010) defines politeness "as showing awareness and consideration of another person's face" (p. 32). Thus, every individual tends to have positive and negative faces that are expected to be recognized by interlocutors. When an individual tries to do and say things which lead to another individual's loss of face, a face-threatening act takes place (Yule, 2010; Song, 2012). Whenever an individual performs positive or negative face-threatening acts, s/he will be considered to be an impolite person.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), face-threatening acts inherently damage the speaker's face and social image against the wills, wants, and desires of others. Every individual has specific face-related expectations. Face can be easily affected by emotion and can be saved, preserved, enhanced, lost, or threatened. Face is so tender and vulnerable that both the speaker and listener should try to save each other's faces in the process of communication. As a result, interlocutors are expected to use speech acts which are less threatening.

The attempt to minimize face loss is called "face-saving" (Yule, 2010). Face-saving acts, too, cover both positive and negative faces. When an individual tries to minimize the loss of positive face, his/her attempt is called a "positive face-saving act." On the other hand, "negative face-saving acts" occur when an individual tries to minimize the loss of negative face. It should, of course, be noted that the notion of face is a cultural determinant; as a result, different cultures may advocate different pragmatic codes as far as face is concerned. For instance, investigating a Chinese educational context, Gu (1990) observed that face was not perceived as a psychological want but as a social value and norm. Individual behavior, then, must conform to the expectations of the society in terms of respect, modesty, and sincerity.

Face-threatening acts occur when a person does not avoid or intend to avoid the prevention of his/her interlocutor's freedom of action. Either the speaker or the hearer may be affected by this phenomenon and their faces may be negatively damaged. A negative face-threatening act may force the speaker or the listener to submit his/her will to another person. Yule (2010) describes and exemplifies situations in which the negative face of the hearer is threatened: (a) acts which need affirmation or denial of the hearer or those which may oblige or inhibit the hearer (e.g. orders, requests, suggestions, advice, threats, or warnings); (b) acts which express the speaker's feelings of the hearer (e.g. compliments, expressions of envy, expression of admiration, or expressions of strong negative emotion toward the

hearer as in the form of hatred, anger, distrust); and (c) acts which express some positive future acts of the speaker toward the hearer (the hearer may accept or reject the acts as in offers, promises).

Yule (2010) also describes and exemplifies situations in which the speaker's negative face is threatened. Acts which show the power and dominance of the hearer over the speaker and make him/her feel downgraded: expressing appreciation; accepting an apology; accepting appreciation; expressing excuses; accepting offers; a response to the hearer's violation of social etiquette; the speaker commitment to something he/she does not want to do. When a person (either the speaker or hearer) does not care about his/her interlocutor's emotions, feelings, desires, wills, and wants, or does not want what the other wants, positive face is threatened. These acts can also damage both the speaker and the hearer.

Positive face-threatening acts occur when an individual is forced to be separated from the members of a group or community. In such cases, the individual may feel that his/her well-being is treated less importantly. Yule (2010) exemplifies the situations in which the positive face of the hearer is threatened. First, there are acts which express the speaker's negative feeling of the hearer's positive social image/face or an element of the latter's positive face. This disapproval can be displayed by the speaker in two ways: the speaker directly or indirectly shows that s/he hates some aspects of the hearer's belongings, attitudes, wants, desires, wishes, or personal properties.

Second, the speaker expresses his/her disapproval by stating directly or indirectly that the hearer is not right or rational. The speaker, then, tries to indicate that the hearer is misguided (e.g. expressing disapproval as in insults, accusations, complaints, contradictions, disagreements, or challenges). There are also acts which express the speaker's indifference toward the hearer's positive face. These acts may be realized in several ways: (a) the hearer fears the speaker or might feel embarrassed for the speaker (using emotional expressions excessively); (b) the speaker shows that s/he does not have the same values or fears as the hearer does (e.g. showing disrespect, mentioning topics which are not appropriate in the context, or mentioning topics which are not appropriate in general); (c) the speaker shows that s/he is not willing to accept the emotional well-being of the hearer (e.g. belittling the hearer or boasting the hearer); (d) the speaker does things which increase the possibility of the face-threatening acts, as in situations in which a sensitive societal topic is brought up by the speaker (e.g. political, religious, and racial topics); (e) the speaker shows indifference to the positive face desires of the hearer, as usually interpreted through the speaker's obvious non-cooperative behaviors (e.g. interrupting); and (f) the speaker accidentally or intentionally misidentifies the hearer in an offensive way; the situation may involve a misuse of terms of (e.g. Mr., Miss, or Mrs.) in relation to hearer's social status, gender, education, social role, or age.

There are also conditions which threaten the positive face of the speaker (Yule, 2010): (a) acts which show that the speaker is in some sense wrong and s/he is not able to control himself/herself; (b) apologies through which speakers damage their

own faces by accepting that they regret one of their previous acts; (c) accepting a compliment; (d) being unable to control one's physical self; (e) being unable to control one's emotional self; (f) self-humiliation; and (g) confessions.

As another theorist of politeness, Blum-Kulka (1992) focuses on cultural values, norms, and scripts. He states that the concept of want and desire are associated with a specific culture. Politeness is affected by power, distance, relationship, and speech events. Arndt and Janney's (1985) theory of politeness is based on *merit*. They believe that using widespread rules in a community or using appropriate words, phrases, and sentences in proper contexts suggest polite behavior.

Yet, as Watts (2003) states, mere linguistic forms do not necessarily display politeness. In fact, politeness can be seen as a measure decided by language, social conduct, and conventional rules. Thomas (1995) has proposed a principle called *the Pollyanna principle*, which is the tendency for people to remember pleasant items more accurately than unpleasant ones. Brown and Levinson (1987) outline four main politeness strategies (see Table 1 below):

- **Bald on-record:** the speaker shows no act to reduce the threat to the hearer's face and is therefore used in close relationships or when information needs to be shared quickly;
- **Positive politeness:** is used as a way to make the hearer feel a sense of closeness and belonging;
- **Negative politeness:** is used as a way to interact with the hearer in a non-imposing way;
- **Off-record (indirect):** is used to completely remove the speaker from any potential to impose on the hearer and only alludes to the speaker's idea or specific request.

Figure 1 illustrates possible strategies for performing face-threatening acts, based on Brown and Levinson (1987):

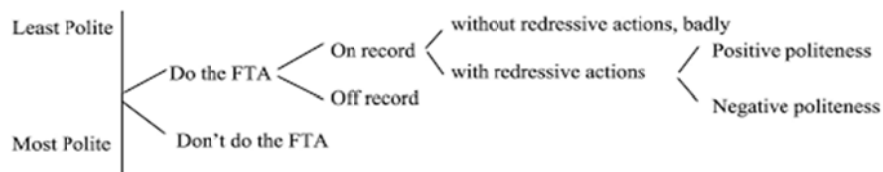


Figure 1. Possible Strategies for Performing Face-Threatening Acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 69)

Table 1 also lists the specifications and examples pertaining to each of the strategies.

Table 1. Summary of Politeness Strategies by Brown and Levinson (1987)

Politeness strategy	Situations
Bald on-record	Urgency or desperation; when efficiency is necessary; task-orientation; little or no desire to maintain someone's face; doing the face-threatening act is in the interest of the hearer; situations where the threat is minimized implicitly; welcomes; offers. Examples: "Be careful!"; "Hear me out..."; "Pass me the salt!"; "Don't close the door!"; "Go out!"; "Eat!"
Positive politeness	Attend to the hearer's interests, needs, desires, and wants; use solidarity in-group identity markers; be optimistic; include both speaker and hearer in activity; offer or promise; exaggerate interest in hearer and his interests; avoid Disagreement; joke. Examples: "You look unhappy. How can I help you?"; "Hey buddy, can you lend me your car?"; "I'll just come along, if you don't mind."; "If we help each other, I guess, we'll both sink or swim in this course."; "If you do your homework, I'll take you to the park."; "That's a beautiful dress you got; where did you buy it?"; "Yes, it's fit."
Negative politeness	Be indirect; use hedges or questions; be pessimistic; minimize the imposition; use obviating structures; statements of general rules; apologetic; use plural pronouns. Examples: "Would you know where the post office is?"; "Perhaps, he might have taken it, maybe."; "Could you please pass the salt?"; "You couldn't find your way to lending me your car, could you?"; "So I suppose some help is out of the question, then?"; "It takes two hours to Boston."; "I hope offense will not be taken."; "Visitors sign the ledger."; "Spitting will not be tolerated."; "I'm sorry; it's a lot to ask, but can you lend me your car?"; "We regret to inform you."
Off-record (indirect)	Relies on implication. Example: "Wow, it's getting warm in here."

The relationship between gender and politeness has also been an interesting topic for investigation. Monsefi and Hadidi (2015) explored the impact of using politeness strategies by male and female EFL teachers on students' learning process and the teacher-student interaction. The study revealed that when students made mistakes, female teachers, contrary to male ones, behaved more patiently and were more supportive. Furthermore, there was a direct relationship between using politeness strategies and the learning process.

Eshghinejad and Moini (2016) conducted a research on politeness strategies used by students and teachers in text messaging. They collected text messages from a sample of 40 EFL B.A. and M.A. university students. In line with Zair and Mohammadi's (2012) observations, Eshghinejad and Moini concluded that Iranian EFL learners preferred negative strategies in texting their teachers, as they conveyed respect and distance, as opposed to friendliness or other variants of positive strategies.

Peng et al. (2014) observed that the application of politeness skills in the class reduced the teacher-student social distance, making the class interesting and helpful while facilitating the teaching/learning process. Kurdghelashivi (2015) found that although students knew specific principles and skills of politeness, they failed to use them in classroom interaction and communication. She suggests that teachers should attempt to enhance students' communicative competence and give them opportunities to practice and use more English speech acts in their interactions with their classmates.

In another study, Senowarsito (2013) showed that, to interact and communicate purposefully, both teachers and students used positive, negative, and bald on-record strategies. Linguistic functions such as addressing, encouraging, thanking, apologizing and leave-taking were used by the students. Behnam and Niroomand (2011) investigated Iranian EFL learners' use of politeness strategies and power relations in disagreement across different proficiency levels. They found some evidence for the relationship between learners' language proficiency level and the frequency of disagreement and choice of politeness strategies associated with social and power status.

To have a successful communication, there are important, practical guidelines for learners. Some of these guidelines emphasize learners' awareness of L2 pragmatic rules, learners' awareness of socio-cultural constraints on speech acts, and learners' awareness of grammatical rules. Moreover, cross-cultural studies by Beebe and Takahashi (1989) and Takahashi and Beebe (1993) about the use of various speech acts among Japanese and American language users revealed that Americans used more positive remarks than their Japanese counterparts. The Americans were also more polite and more indirect, especially when interacting with a higher status person, while the Japanese were not comparatively indirect. On the other hand, when the Japanese disagreed with a person of higher status, they were more direct and explicit. Both Japanese and American users applied various techniques and strategies in English according to the social status of the interlocutor.

The findings of a contrastive study (Guodong & Jing, 2005) concerned with disagreement politeness strategies between American English and Mandarin Chinese students revealed that in the case of expressing disagreement with their superiors, Chinese language users applied more politeness strategies and forms of address, compared to the American students. On the other hand, in the case of showing disagreement with peers, especially considering social distance, both the American and Chinese students used fewer politeness strategies. A negative correlation was found between the rates of disagreement and the degree of social distance for the American students while positive a correlation was observed for the Chinese students.

Knowing the principles and strategies of politeness is important in classroom, especially in the process of teaching a foreign language. Moreover, politeness can be employed as an instrument in social interactions. Politeness strategies which are used by teachers and students in classroom interactions can play an important role in the process of learning and teaching. The present study aims at describing and

investigating Brown and Levinson's (1987) notion of face and politeness theory in instructor-student interactions in the English department of Islamic Azad university of Mashhad, Iran.

Method

Design

This study drew on Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of face-threatening acts and face-saving acts to analyze a sample of classroom interaction between lecturers and students. The study relied on collecting, analyzing, and integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches, considering the nature of the variables under investigation (words, utterances, and frequency of them) (see Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). The aforementioned data was in the form of words and utterances produced by lecturers and students during the classroom interactions. Data analysis involved sentence interpretation and inferential statistics to find out whether the results obtained were significant or just occurred by chance. To this end, chi-square procedure was utilized.

3.2. Participants

Four active male and female instructors (3 males and 1 female) of English Department in the Faculty of Foreign Languages of Mashhad, Iran were selected randomly as the research participants. The instructors who were selected for this study taught different undergraduate TEFL courses, such as curriculum design, language testing, linguistics, and advanced reading. The total number of the students was 168, all of whom were in the second year of their academic career. They were aged 19-25. Because an unequal number of males and females participated in the study, gender was not considered to be moderator.

Procedure

To gather the data for analysis, the researchers attended four classes, observed and recorded instructor-student interactions during the process of teaching and learning, without interfering with the interactions. He utilized a voice recorder to record the interaction. Although classroom interactions were entirely recorded, the study focused on the instructors. Instructors' speeches were recorded during the classroom observations and then transcribed. The transcripts were all in the form of words, and even included non-verbal speech signals such as tone and gesture. In this step, among the total of 50 utterances, the researchers reduced the data to sort out only the utterances containing interpersonal expressions, such as requesting, ordering, asking, or inviting, displayed by the instructors to the students.

Findings and Results

The study relied on Brown and Levinson's patterns of face-threatening acts and face-saving acts in instructors' utterances. Tables 2-3 illustrate some common positive and negative politeness strategies which were uttered by the instructors.

Table 2. Examples of Positive Politeness Strategies in the Instructors' Utterances

Positive politeness strategies	Example
Classroom management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be quiet please - Turn off your cell-phone - Stop talking please
Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Go on to the next page - Today we discuss different properties of a language test - Please outline the characteristics of a good multiple choice question - Is everything clear? Shall I go on? - Please read the text carefully and underline the synonyms and antonyms.
Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Great, good job - Nice presentation - Well done - That's it, keep going on

Table 3. Examples of Negative Politeness Strategies in the Instructors' Utterances

Negative politeness strategies	Example
Classroom management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - You, come and sit here
Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Look at the board and think about the written questions - Thank you
Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maybe you can elaborate more on this topic - Mr. Dadmohammadi, what is your idea?

Face-threatening utterances

Based on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, any utterance that threatens an individual's face is called a face-threatening act. Being direct, clear, or concise about something can suggest a high face threat. In this study, face-threatening utterances displayed how the instructors showed less awareness and consideration toward the students through direct expressions. These utterances revealed threats to the students' positive face.

Positive face represents an individual's appreciation of his/her self-image. When a person (either the speaker or hearer) does not care about his/her

interlocutor's emotions, feelings, desires, wills and wants, or does not want what the other person wants, positive face is threatened. A positive face-threatening act occurs when a person *is forced* to be separated from other members of the group or community, as a result of which the person's well-being is treated less importantly.

Sample 1: *Sorry, are you a newcomer?*

As sample 1 shows, the instructor could not recognize his student and asked for her name. This act could humiliate the student's self-image. Being indiscernible and unknown to someone may be disgraceful and embarrassing (Song, 2012). Thus, in such a case, students may assume they are not important enough to be remembered by the instructor.

Sample 2: *No, you made a mistake. You are not right. The correct answer is....*

Giving feedback and correcting students' mistakes are sorts of interactions which may occur between the instructors and students. There are many possible ways for teachers to correct students' mistakes including asking for clarifications, asking for peer help, pausing and allowing the students to think more about the answer, helping them implicitly, and so on. But in this case (sample 2), the instructor directly corrected the student's mistake (this was the most common way of giving feedback and correcting mistakes in almost all classes). The pragmatics of teacher-student interaction involves both linguistic and psychological consequences.

Sample 3: *If you let me, I will explain it more in detail through the following slides.*

In this case (sample 3), while one of the students was delivering a lecture on a specified topic, the instructor interrupted him and asked him to explain more about the topic and unclear ideas in the lecture. This interruption could adversely affect the students' concentration. Most of the instructors tended to interrupt the students during a presentation. To avoid this unfortunate consequence, instructors should wait until the students finish their sentences or lectures, or interrupt them politely to reduce the effect of losing face.

Sample 4: *I think your presentation is not relevant.*

In sample 4, the student's self-image and self-confidence were evaluated negatively. Thus, the blame for having committed a mistake threatened the student's positive face.

Sample 5: *I feel sorry for you, you got a bad score on your exam.*

In the above utterance (sample 5), the instructor did not care about the social self-image of the student, threatening his face by addressing a topic (score of the exam) which attenuated the student's emotional face.

Sample 6: Imperative utterances (*Stop talking! Turn to page 112! Write it down! Sit down! Turn off your cell phone! Read page 115! Answer these questions! Come to the board!*)

All instances above (in sample 6) were produced in the form of imperative sentences, which indicated negative face-threatening acts. When a person does not avoid or intend to avoid the prevention of his/her interlocutor's freedom of action, negative face is threatened. Either the speaker or the hearer may be affected by this phenomenon and their face is damaged negatively. Negative face-threatening can make one of them (speaker or hearer) submit his/her will to the other. Threatening a person's negative-face could limit his/her freedom of action. The direct use of such utterances could threaten students' rights to non-distraction. Instructors normally produced such types of imperative sentences while speaking to students. Yet, the absence of polite acts gave a face-threatening image to such structures.

Sample 7: *Sorry, I think I make a big mistake.*

In the above utterance (sample 7) the instructor confessed that he had made a mistake in answering one of the student's questions. In fact this utterance was a threat for the instructor's face. He made a statement about his own shortcoming, thus damaging his own positive self-face.

Sample 8: *Thank you so much for your help.*

Sample 8 involved a face-threatening act which threatened the instructor's freedom. This utterance was produced by the instructor in response to one of the student's help in explaining a topic and providing examples. The sentence limited the instructor's freedom of action, because she was obliged to express her appreciation.

Sample 9: *OK, wait a minute please. I am trying to understand you. What do you mean by using metaphor?*

In the above utterance (sample 9) aside from giving feedback, the instructor interrupted the student bluntly while he was delivering a speech on a short story. Interrupting his lecture made him lose his concentration and miss the points. It was better for the instructor to wait until he finished his lecture or interrupt him politely to decrease the effect of losing face.

Sample 10: Feedback utterances (*No that is not right.... It is wrong.... You are wrong.... You make a mistake.... You go the wrong way*)

All the above utterances (sample 10) produced by the instructor in order to give feedback and not to correct the student's mistakes. All these utterances made the student feel unconfident and put him in the wrong. Thus, he lost his face and consequently felt stressed in giving response in next chances.

Face-saving utterances

Unlike the face-threatening acts as explored above, face-saving acts revealed how the instructors showed awareness and consideration of the students through indirect and polite markers. Face-saving utterances towards negative face signaled respect and the importance of another's time or concern. These utterances might include an apology for the imposition or interruption. Meanwhile, face-saving utterances towards positive face signaled affinity, emphasizing that both speakers had a

common goal and wanted the same thing. Face-saving utterances included some alternative expressions marked by polite markers such as “please”, “would you please” and “would you like”.

Sample 11: Polite markers (*good; perfect; OK; all right; nice job; well-done; thank you*)

To justify their students’ responses and give appreciation, the instructors used many similar expressions like the ones in sample 11. Using long utterances, as well as interrogative and declarative structures, instead of direct imperative ones, conveyed a sense of respect toward the students.

Sample 12: *Thank you for your nice presentation, you know when talking about language tests especially vocabulary test, it will be much better to provide some examples for better comprehension of your classmates.*

The long utterance in sample 12 represented a feedback to a student’s lecture on different types of vocabulary tests. This kind of utterance involved the use of a face-saving act because it could mitigate the sense of fault on the part of the student. Generally speaking, such a response could encourage students to actively participate in class discussions and activities and could help them feel more secure in class environment. During the classes under study, the students made a great number of mistakes. Instructors relied on a variety of (discoursal) methods to correct students’ mistakes and errors. Using positive feedback utterances, however, seemed to be more effective than negative ones.

Sample 13:

- *Student: Let’s discuss about the new topic.*
- *Instructor: “Discuss the new topic”, you mean?*

As sample 13 shows, the instructor was trying to politely convey the message that the student was making a mistake, by simply repeating the student’s mistake (emphasized by “you mean?”). This style of politely correcting errors could preserve the student’s desire to be well treated in front of his/her classmates.

Sample 14: Instructors’ questions (“*Can anybody answer my question?*”; “*Any ideas?*”; “*Would you please write your answer on the board?*”)

The formally interrogative utterances in sample 14 were not meant to function as questions at all. Those utterances were expressed to direct the students to do something the instructor wanted in the classroom. Indirectness was normally marked by the use of modals in question forms. As a result, the questions followed regulatory purposes.

Sample 15: Modes of address (“*Ms. Sabouri, would you please read the page 113?*”; “*Mr. Farjad, please, would you paraphrase this paragraph?*”)

As sample 15 shows, the instructor addressed the students by socially appropriate titles and their last names. In teacher-student interactions, using titles could serve as a strategy for teachers to act politely. Remembering and mentioning

students' names may sound trivial and insignificant, but the effect may be favorable for the students. Such a strategy could make students feel respected and appreciated by their instructors. Apart from its function as a polite marker, when a teacher decides to threaten a student's negative face, mentioning his/her last name with a title could also be a positive face-saving act which could satisfy the student's desire to be well-recognized.

Among all the utterances between the instructors and the students, 50 politeness utterances including 23 face threatening utterances and 27 face-saving ones were selected for the purpose of the study. The percentage of politeness utterances for both cases are presented in Table 4:

Table 4. Frequency of the Use of Politeness Strategies in Instructor-Student Interactions

Politeness Strategies	Percentage
Face-threatening Utterances	46
Face-saving Utterances	54
Total	100

As shown in Table 4, face-saving utterances were the most frequently used politeness strategies (54%).

In order to check if there was any significant difference between the frequency of the face-threatening utterances and face-saving ones, chi-square test was used. The result of this test is presented in Table 5:

Table 5. Chi-Square Test for Frequency of Politeness Strategies in Instructor-Student Utterances

	Face-threatening Utterances	Face-saving Utterances
Chi-square	12.26	8.52
Sig.	.00	.00

The result in table 5 suggests that there was a significant difference between the frequency of face-threatening utterances in instructor-student interactions ($X^2(2, N = 50) = 12.26, P = .00$). The result also indicates that there was a significant difference between the frequency of face-saving utterances when instructors were interacting with their students ($X^2(2, N = 50) = 8.52, P = .00$).

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to describe and investigate politeness strategies used in teacher-student interactions in an academic context. To

accomplish this, the study drew on the Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. After observing the classes and gathering data through four classroom observations, it was found that the instructors expressed face-threatening utterances less frequently than face-saving ones. This observation suggested that face-threatening acts were not considerably resorted to in the teacher-student interactions (see table 4).

The findings of the present study are in line with Hariyono (2013) and Senowarsito (2013), which revealed that face-threatening acts are frequently used in classrooms. Despite their unpopular use, face-threatening utterances appeared in the forms of interrogative, imperative, and declarative sentences. However, due to the directness of face-threatening utterances, most of them were produced in the form of imperatives. Peng et al. (2014), observing a teacher's classroom activities, found that he used various politeness strategies, such as using honorifics and encouraging compliments to stimulate students' learning enthusiasm and to build their self-esteem.

The teacher also used many hedges and questions to diminish the imposition and to be successful in maintaining students' face. Peng and et al. (2014) concluded that positive politeness could help teachers satisfy students' positive face and save their negative face by offering help, knowing students' needs, and showing sympathy for students when they experience difficulties or when they feel embarrassed. In a similar study, Monsefi and Hadidi (2015) found a direct relationship between using more polite strategies and the learning process and teacher-student interaction.

The present study also discovered various uses of face-saving strategies. The instructors used both positive and negative politeness strategies to reduce the negative effect of face-threatening acts on the students. Performing positive face-saving acts, the lecturers uttered particular expressions (e.g. *you know, you mean*), modality (e.g. *would you, could you*), and appreciative expression (e.g. *thank you, good*), and they mentioned the students' last names along with respectful forms of address (e.g. Mr. and Ms.) and polite markers (e.g. *please, excuse me*). Among those expressions, most lecturers tended to generate indirect utterances by using modality to save the students' face. The common modals observed were *can* and *would*.

Conclusion

This study investigated the pragmatic dimensions of instructor-student classroom interaction, by relying on a theory of politeness. Some expressions produced by instructors in the classroom could imply threatening acts which might damage students' esteem. EFL instructors and teachers, then, should be aware of using such expressions and should use more polite expressions to deliver instructions, requests, or orders. Students feel more comfortable and appreciated in the class if instructors produce utterances which are polite and enhance their self-esteem. Positively, politeness can lead to a better instructor-student relationship. Further studies can draw on the methodology used in this study but include a larger variety of data to securely generalize their findings. Further studies can also focus on non-verbal

expressions, such as tone, mimics, and gestures, to see how instructors complement their utterances with expressions. Expanding the number of participants from various backgrounds could also help discover how instructors' backgrounds may influence their language use. An important variable to consider is the gender of instructors and the ways it can affect their communication with students

References

- Arndt, H., & Janney, R. W. (1985). Politeness revisited: Cross modal supportive strategies. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 23(4), 281-300.
- Bachman, L. (1990). *Fundamental considerations in language testing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Beebe, L., & Takahashi, T. (1989). Do you have a bag? Social status and patterned variation in second language acquisition', In S. Gass, C. Madden, D. Preston, & L. Selinker (Eds.), *Variation in Second Language Acquisition: Discourse and Pragmatics*, Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, pp. 103-25.
- Behnam, B., & Niroomand, M. (2011). An Investigation of Iranian EFL learners' use of politeness strategies and power relations in disagreement across different proficiency levels. *English Language Teaching*, 4(4), 204-220.
- Bishop, R., & Glynn, T. (1999). *Culture counts: Changing power relations in education*. Palmerston North: Dunmore.
- Bloome, D., Carter, S. P., Christian, B. M., Otto, S. & Shuart-Faris, N. (2005). *Discourse analysis and the study of classroom language and literacy events: A micro ethnographic perspective*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Blum-Kulka, S. (1992). The meta-pragmatics of politeness in Israeli society. In R. Watts, S. Ide, & K. Ehlich (Eds.), *Politeness in language: Studies its history, theory and practice* (pp. 255-280). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Brown, H. D. (2007). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. New York: Pearson Education.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Celce-Murcia, M. (2007). Rethinking the role of communicative competence in language teaching. In E. Alcón Soler, & M.P. Safont Jordà (Eds.), *Intercultural language use and language learning* (pp. 41-57).
- Consolo, D. A. (2006). Classroom oral interaction in foreign language lessons and implications for teacher development. *Linguagem & Ensino*, 9(2), 33- 55.
- Culpeper, J. (1998). (Im)politeness in drama. In J. Culpeper, M. Short, & P. Verdonk (Eds.), *Studying drama: From text to context* (pp. 83-95). London: Routledge.

- Dörnyei, Z., & Murphey, T. (2003). *Group dynamics in the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Eshghinejad, S., & Moini, M. R. (2016). Politeness strategies used in text messaging: Pragmatic competence in an asymmetrical power relation of teacher–student. *SAGE Open*, 6(1), 2158244016632288.
- Foley, W. (1997). *Anthropological linguistics: An introduction*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Fraenkel, J. R. & Wallen, N. E. (2006). *How to design and evaluate research in education*. New York City: McGraw-Hill.
- Fraser, B. (1983). The domain of pragmatics. In: J. Richards and R. Schmidt (Eds.), *Language and Communication*. New York: Longman, 29-59.
- Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual: Essays on face to face behavior*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Grossi, V. (2009). Teaching pragmatic competence: Compliments and compliment responses in the ESL classroom. *Prospect: An Australian Journal of TESOL*, 24(2), 53-62.
- Grundy, P. (2000). *Doing pragmatics*. London: Arnold.
- Gu, Y. (1990). Politeness phenomenon in modern Chinese. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 14, 237-257.
- Guodong, L., & Jing, H. (2005). A contrastive study on disagreement strategies for politeness between American English & Mandarin Chinese. *Asian EFL Journal*, 10(1), 1-12.
- Hariyano. (2013). Strategies of politeness in classroom interaction at English department of STKIP PGRI Sumbar. Unpublished thesis. Padang: STKIP PGRI Sumbar.
- Hymes, D. (1986). Discourse: Scope without depth. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 57, 49-89.
- Ide, S. (1989). Formal forms and discernment: Two neglected aspects of linguistic politeness. *Multilingua*, 8, 223-248.
- Karimnia, A., & Afghari, A. (2012). On apologizing in Persian: A sociocultural inquiry. *Jezikoslovlje*, 13(3), 697-734.
- Karimnia, A., & Afghari, A. (2010). On the applicability of cultural scripts in teaching L2 compliments. *English Language Teaching*, 3, 71-80.
- Krasner, I. (1999). The role of culture in language teaching. *Dialog on Language Instruction*, 13(1), 79-89.

- Kurdghelashvili, T. (2015). Speech acts and politeness strategies in an EFL classroom in Georgia. *International Journal of Social, Behavioral, Educational, Economic, Business and Industrial Engineering*, 9(1), 306-309.
- Mills, S., (2003). *Gender and Politeness*. England, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Monsefi, M., & Hadidi, Y. (2015). Male and Female EFL Teachers' Politeness Strategies in Oral Discourse and their Effects on the Learning Process and Teacher-Student Interaction. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)*, 3(2), 1-13.
- Peng, L., Xie, F. & Cai, L. (2014). A case study of college teacher's politeness strategy in EFL classroom. *Theory and practice in language studies*, 4(1), pp. 110-115, retrieved January 9, 2015 from <http://ojs.academypublisher.com/index.php/tpls/article/view/tpls0401110115>.
- Senowarsito, S. (2013). Politeness strategies in teacher-student interaction in an EFL classroom context. *TEFLIN Journal*, 24(1), 82-96.
- Song, S. (2012). *Politeness and culture in second language acquisition*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Takahashi, T., & Beebe, L. M. (1993). Cross linguistic influence in the speech act of correction. In G. Kasper, & S. Bulm-Kulka (Eds.). (1996). *Interlanguage Pragmatics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tanck, S. (2002). Speech acts sets of refusal and complaints: A comparison of native and non native English speakers' production. <http://www.american.edu/tesol/wptanck.pdf#search>.
- Thomas, J. (1995). *Meaning in interaction: An introduction to pragmatics*. New York: Longman.
- Watts, R. J. (2003). *Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Yule, G. (2010). *The study of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Zaire, G. R., & Mohammadi, M. (2012). E-politeness in Iranian English electronic requests to the faculty. *Journal of Research in Applied Linguistic Studies*, 3, 3-24.

Authors Biography



Amin Karimnia is an associate professor in Applied Linguistics in the Department of English, Fasa Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran. His research interests are in the area of Discourse Analysis, Sociolinguistics, Pragmatics, and Translation Studies.



Mohammad Reza Khodashenas is a PhD candidate of TEFL in the Department of English, Torbat-e-heidarye Branch, Islamic Azad University, and an English instructor. His research interests include Discourse Analysis and Second Language Acquisition.
