
POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN INDONESIAN ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS

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Abstract

This study investigates the use of politeness strategies in the Bahasa Inggris textbook for Indonesian twelfth-grade students. It aims to identify statements explicitly expressing politeness within the textbook's conversation exercises. Considering the cultural significance of politeness in Indonesian society, particularly within educational settings, the study highlights the importance of integrating culturally appropriate communication practices into English language teaching (ELT) materials. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, six chapters (Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, and 14) were analyzed, resulting in 128 instances of politeness strategies. Among these, positive politeness emerged as the most dominant (50%), followed by negative politeness (25%), off-record strategies (11.7%), bald-on-record strategies (7.8%), and "Don't do the FTA" (5.5%). The findings reveal that the conversational texts reflect Indonesian cultural norms by emphasizing respect, indirectness, and sensitivity to social hierarchy. This research evaluates ELT materials by promoting the integration of linguistically and culturally appropriate politeness strategies. It also encourages educators and textbook developers to prioritize politeness in instructional materials, enhancing students' pragmatic competence in English communication.

Keywords

Politeness Strategies; English Textbook; Indonesian Culture.



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INTRODUCTION

Politeness is one way of showing respect that every human should do; moreover, in Indonesia, or the “eastern country”, decency should be applied by children, adults, parents, and all elements of society. According to Trask, politeness is the linguistic expression of courtesy and social position. It means that politeness is an essential rule for people to follow when engaging in conversation, and speakers should be aware of their social position when interacting with others. Brown and Levinson assert that the core idea of politeness theory, that some acts are intrinsically threatening to face and thus require ‘softening’-finds ratification in microcosm in the domain of honorifics. The notion that politeness strategies and, therefore, honorifics might be used differently in the high and low levels of stratified societies.

This research employed Leech's theory, which posits that politeness encompasses both what is done politely and what is done intentionally or unintentionally. Politeness includes culture and society. Culture in anthropology and society in sociology. Studying politeness involves examining the language people use in specific communicative situations. Leech developed the ten maxims of politeness. The maxims show the imperative mood. It is about the context relevant to what people say; moreover, it is an interface between linguistics and social psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Therefore, Leech's framework provides a comprehensive lens for analyzing how polite behavior is linguistically encoded across different cultural settings.

In Indonesia, the social position is used to benchmark how languages are spoken. For example, communication between students and teachers, as well as among teachers, should be based on politeness rules. When everyone is saying something, he should think about the language they use, whether it is spoken politely or not, to their interlocutors. Then, to avoid embarrassing or offending others, the interlocutor should also employ politeness strategies. Using politeness strategies in conversation is pleasant to the ears of listeners. This highlights the crucial role of politeness as a social norm that maintains harmony in educational interactions.

In Indonesia, the English language is essential. Indonesia's Rule Number 20 Year 2003 on National Education, Article 37, paragraph 1, explains that it requires local content in the primary and secondary education curriculum. English is one of the local content lessons given in primary school. Suyanto claims that English language teaching materials for elementary school are pretty much available to the public, but not many are eligible to be used as a student textbook in the classroom. Therefore, teachers should be careful and selective when adapting books by considering

their objectives, content, language, and difficulty levels for students. This careful selection is necessary to ensure that the materials truly support students' linguistic and cognitive development.

In Indonesia, there are often mistakes in the education system. The mistake sometimes goes unnoticed because of the school's provisions, so students need to follow them. Mistakes are frequently encountered in the textbook material. These mistakes are sometimes caused by textbook printing, language, or content. In Indonesia's 2013 curriculum, educators aim to correct errors for the benefit of students. Textbook material serves as a valuable learning tool for students. Teachers often use textbooks as a primary teaching resource in the classroom. The mistakes are not spared in the English lesson. Thus, evaluating textbooks is an essential step in ensuring the quality and accuracy of instructional materials.

This research aims to provide a detailed justification of the explicitly expressed politeness in the conversation textbook. The recent politeness strategies studies (Liu, Fang, *et al.*, 2014; Mu Yuting, 2015; Wen, 2015; Sari, 2016; and Tan, *et al.*, 2017) discussed English textbook learning about English in class, but there is no analysis of how conversational texts are used in class, moreover, using politeness strategies. Additionally, there is a lack of research on politeness strategies in English textbooks (conversation-focused), particularly in Indonesia, as a local language. This gap underscores the need for studies that examine how politeness is modeled and taught through textbook dialogues.

Most English textbooks utilize conversations to facilitate students' learning. Due to the limitations of the English language, students sometimes struggle to understand the meaning of words and phrases, and are unfamiliar with sentences that convey politeness from textbooks. When students read the conversation in the textbook, they do so to expand their knowledge of the English language. It enables students to follow what they read automatically. In application, during conversation, they speak what they learn from the textbook. They will ask and answer based on what they got and learned. In English lessons, the politeness level differs from the Indonesian level, since Indonesia has many languages.

In Indonesia, most students can understand their native language in sentences because it is their primary language and they use it every day. However, for the English language, it is a foreign language, so they are not familiar with the politeness level in speaking. That's why the conversation in the English textbook should be noticed and evaluated for the politeness strategies that the students should learn. With these situations, the researcher decided to extract data on politeness

strategies from the ELT textbook. To ensure that the analysis is grounded in the real needs of learners, it is important to clarify the specific reasons underlying this selection. This step is crucial to ensure that the identified politeness features truly reflect the communicative demands faced by Indonesian learners in real interactions.

This decision was based on several considerations: (1) politeness strategies are essential not only for children but for all members of society; (2) the ELT textbook is a crucial tool for supporting students in learning the English language in Indonesia; (3) the ELT textbook functions as a guide for enriching students' linguistic knowledge and serves as a benchmark for daily language practice; and (4) the ELT textbook provides direction for students in using language appropriately according to social position and age level. The study aims to help Indonesian students develop English competence while maintaining their local language and cultural values. Therefore, this study was designed to identify the statements in the textbook's conversation exercises that explicitly express politeness.

METHOD

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a content analysis design to examine politeness strategies in an English textbook. The study aims to describe how politeness strategies are manifested in dialogues and how these reflect pragmatic aspects of communication. The theoretical foundation draws upon Leech's (1983) Politeness Maxims. The data source of this study is the English textbook *Bahasa Inggris for Twelfth Grade Students*, authored by Rd. Safrina Noorman, Helena Indyah Ratna Agustien, and Wawan Gunawan, published by the Ministry of Education and Culture (2015). The research focuses on the conversation texts within the textbook because they represent authentic communicative situations in which politeness strategies are likely to occur.

The data collection procedure involved a comprehensive reading of the textbook, identification and extraction of conversational excerpts, and systematic coding of each utterance according to Leech's maxims. The data analysis followed the stages of qualitative content analysis, namely data reduction, data categorization, interpretation, and conclusion. Supporting literature, including books, journal articles, and previous studies on pragmatics and politeness, was also consulted to strengthen the understanding of the findings. To ensure the validity and reliability of the analysis, this study employed triangulation of sources by comparing the

researcher's interpretations with established theoretical references and relevant prior research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

There are 128 politeness strategy statements in the conversation in the Bahasa Inggris textbook, ten (10) statements of bald-on-record, fifteen (15) statements on off records, sixty-four (64) statements of positive politeness, thirty-two (32) statements of negative politeness, and seven (7) statements of don't do the FTA. These figures suggest that positive politeness is the predominant communicative pattern presented in the textbook. This distribution also reflects the authors' emphasis on fostering friendly, cooperative, and socially harmonious interactions among learners. This pattern indicates that the textbook promotes communicative behaviors consistent with Indonesian cultural norms of warmth and respect.

Discussion

Statements that Explicitly Express Politeness in the *Bahasa Inggris* Textbook

Tabel 1. Summary of the Analysis of Statements on Politeness in "Bahasa Inggris" Textbook

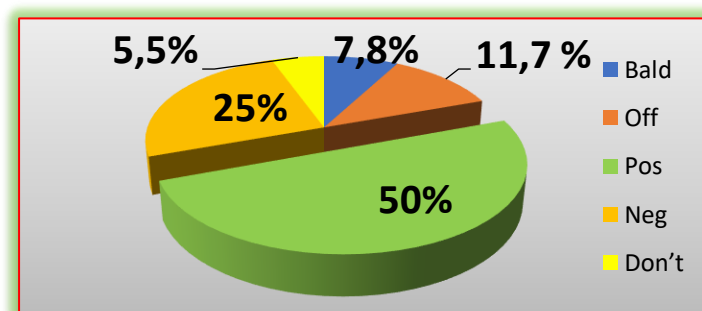
No	Statements	Kinds of Politeness Strategies					Σ
		Bald	Off	Pos	Neg	Don't	
1.	Chapter 1	4	2	11	5	2	24
2.	Chapter 2	0	0	1	5	0	6
3.	Chapter 3	5	1	15	0	1	22
4.	Chapter 4	0	6	23	9	3	41
5.	Chapter 9	0	4	11	8	0	23
6.	Chapter 14	1	2	3	5	1	12
Total		10	15	64	32	7	128

From the data above, it is revealed that the Bahasa Inggris textbook contains six chapters, which include conversation exercises, namely chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 9, and 14. These chapters have a total of 128 (one hundred twenty-eight) politeness strategies that are explicit in the conversation exercise. The data consist of ten statements on record, fifty statements off record, sixty-four statements of positive politeness, thirty-two statements of negative politeness, and eight statements of 'don't do the FTA'. The data on politeness strategies show that the most frequently used politeness strategies in the Bahasa Inggris textbook are those of positive politeness. The second is negative politeness. The third is off record, the fourth is bald-on, and the least is don't do the FTA. There is no similar data in the Bahasa Inggris textbook.

The *Bahasa Inggris* textbook lacks conversation exercises in the 10 chapters, specifically chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, and 16. These chapters should include a conversation or dialogue exercise to help students apply politeness in their daily interactions. Using politeness can help students understand the importance of politeness in society and for others, especially older individuals. In the ELT textbook, the teacher can choose politeness material in the English textbook with supporting pictures and the language appropriate for the other culture, mentioning the cultures in Indonesia, like the Javanese, Sundanese, and so on. Adding more conversation-based tasks across all chapters would strengthen students' exposure to authentic communicative situations that foster polite and culturally aware language use.

Based on the kinds of politeness strategies in the *Bahasa Inggris* textbook, the positive approach is represented in statements that show sympathy, avoid disagreement, attend to the hearer's desire, and assume agreement. The language of the *Bahasa Inggris* textbook generally serves the English language, which includes politeness categories based on various kinds of politeness strategies. In the conversations or dialogues, the authors show local terms in the Indonesian language, such as OSIS "students' organization," Arjosari, Malang, and Gandang Terminal "the name of a place in Indonesia." These provide readers with information about Indonesian national geography. When the students read it, they will get information from what they have never heard before.

Diagram 1. The Percentages of Kinds of Politeness Strategies in the "*Bahasa Inggris*" Textbook



Based on Diagram 1, the most dominant politeness strategies evident in the conversation in the "*Bahasa Inggris*" textbook, along with four categories, are positive politeness (50%), negative politeness (25%), off-record (11.7%), and bald-on-record (7.8%). On the other hand, please don't do the FTA, it is 5.5%. The same category is not found in those conversations. This pattern suggests that the textbook prioritizes strategies that promote harmony and social connection among speakers. This tendency reflects the cultural orientation of Indonesian learners, who generally value

friendliness and solidarity in their communication. Moreover, it indicates that the textbook aims to model interactional styles that align with both linguistic and cultural expectations.

As mentioned in the diagram, positive politeness is the most frequent category, accounting for 50% of the whole data, while the category 'don't do the FTA' occurred at 5.5%. It means that the positive politeness is dominant in this conversation or dialogue. The following diagram shows the percentages of each category of positive politeness used in the total dialogues (128). From the diagram, the category of positive politeness dominates the whole data. Negative politeness, off-record, and bald-on-record are also categories of politeness strategies. The FTA is the least dominant in the "*Bahasa Inggris*" textbook. His finding reinforces the overall distribution pattern.

It means that positive politeness is a valuable concept in the English textbook from Indonesia. Good values can influence the politeness of students. In the politeness strategies, there are examples of showing sympathy or how to give respect to older adults. This is why politeness is essential for academic success. Such exposure helps students internalize socially appropriate behaviors that support effective communication inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, integrating politeness strategies into learning materials encourages learners to develop both linguistic competence and cultural awareness. In turn, these skills equip students to interact confidently in diverse social and academic settings.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that politeness strategies in the *Bahasa Inggris for Twelfth Grade Students* textbook are generally represented through various forms of Leech's (1983) Politeness Maxims, including the tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy maxims. The analysis revealed that the tact and approbation maxims were the most dominant, indicating that the textbook emphasizes respect, consideration, and positive expressions toward others in communicative contexts. These strategies contribute to learners' understanding of pragmatic competence, particularly in promoting courteous and culturally appropriate English communication. Overall, the findings show that the dialogues in the textbook not only teach linguistic structure but also implicitly embed social and moral values aligned with politeness principles. However, some conversations demonstrate limited variety in pragmatic contexts, suggesting that the pragmatic richness could be further improved to expose students to broader real-life communication situations. Enhancing the diversity of communicative scenarios would enable

learners to encounter a wider range of politeness demands and sociolinguistic choices. Such improvements could strengthen students' ability to adapt their language use across different social settings and interactional goals

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