



RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Sociolinguistic Study on the Addressed Positive Politeness Strategies by the English Professors with their Bachelor Students

Mouad M. Al-Natour^{1*}, Alaeddin BaniKlaef², Khaleel B. Al-Bataineh³

¹Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Jerash University, Jerash, Jordan

²English Language, Literature, and Translation Department, Faculty of Arts, Jadara University, Irbid, Jordan

³Department of English Language, Faculty of Arts & Sciences, University of Petra, Amman, Jordan

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ABSTRACT

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This study seeks to examine the positive politeness strategies used by English professors towards their students. Following Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory in analyzing the data helps in presenting the positive politeness strategies used by the professors [9]. Moreover, a qualitative method was adopted to get a deep understanding of the politeness strategies used. Observations and memos were the tools used to collect the data in parallel with the audio recording of the classroom lectures. The results found that the professors preferred to use eight positive politeness strategies with their students. The positive politeness strategy was the most preferred strategy because, generally, it is used to encourage the students to feel comfortable and participate in the class. It minimizes the distance between the professors and their students, making them feel closer to one another. Future researchers can compare the results of this research with other cultures in performing politeness in their academic setting.

***Corresponding Author:**

m.alnatour@jpu.edu.jo

INTRODUCTION

Politeness, or respectful and thoughtful actions towards others, is an important component that all communities use in their daily communications and can be carried out either verbally or non-verbally in a variety of ways. Moreover, it has become one of the most pragmatic topics nowadays, attracting many researchers to study it. Politeness consists of various linguistic structures that characterize the mentality of the performers and the cultural aspects that they imitate (Sapitri et al., 2020[18]; Ardi et al., 2018) [5]. In their research, Fitriyani and Andriyanti (2020) presented the importance of using politeness strategies efficiently to create successful interactions with others [13]. Theoretically, Brown and Levinson (1987) [9], Lakoff (1973) [16], Leech (2016) [17], Bousfield and Locher (2008) [8], and Culpeper (2005) conducted theories to analyze politeness based on their theoretical variables [10]. This study adopts Brown and Levinson's (1987) theoretical framework to analyze the data. Their framework consists of different strategies that could be used to perform acts of politeness in various interactions [9]. The main objective of this research is to investigate the positive politeness strategies used by the professors of English language and translation toward their students in their classes. However, another aim of this study is to examine the reasons that make their strategies appropriate to use with their students. To achieve these two goals, this study seeks to answer the following two questions:

1. What are the positive politeness strategies that are used by the English professors in their classes?
2. Why do they feel that these positive politeness strategies are appropriate to be used with their students?

This research is significant because it covers a gap that has not been investigated widely in previous studies. It helps today's students and professors understand the best strategies for politeness in classroom interactions. This can help both of them understand the contextual meaning of words, phrases, expressions, and clauses of politeness used by the professors. Assisting students in understanding these cues can help them avoid misunderstandings regarding the responses and reactions of professors during their lectures. What is considered polite in Jordanian culture could be considered impolite in other cultures (Carolus et al., 2019) [10]. Therefore, continuing to examine the divergence of politeness performance in different contexts and settings is vital.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been conducted on politeness in general and politeness among Jordanians in particular. Some, such as Mouad (2015) [2], investigated speech act requests, examining the core request strategies among Jordanians in an academic setting. He found that Jordanian students used a variety of strategies ranging from the most direct to the most indirect. The preferred strategy they used was preparatory. Furthermore, apology strategies in Jordanian Arabic were investigated by Banikalef et al. (2015) [6], who found that the selection of apology strategies was influenced more by social status than by the degree of severity of the offense or social distance.

Another aspect of politeness was studied by Thu Ba Hoang (2023) who investigated gender differences in politeness strategies in negotiations on the television programs *Sharktank America* and *Sharktank Vietnam* [15]. The researcher found that Vietnamese negotiators prefer negative politeness strategies, while Americans favor politeness.

Benzdira and Halima (2023) investigated how Algerian doctorate students formulate requests to their supervisors at a UK higher education institution and how their supervisors respond to these requests [7]. They found that Algerian doctorate students are perceived as polite by their supervisors, and there are socio-cultural factors that influence the use of politeness strategies and responses to requests.

Tabarek et al. (2023) found that both Iraqi and Malaysian learners preferred indirect refusal strategies in marriage proposals, as well as hierarchical politeness in the form of independence strategies, regardless of the social status and distance between interlocutors [21].

Diah Supatmiwati et al. (2023) conducted research on the refusal politeness strategies used by the main characters in *It Starts with Us*, a novel by Colleen Hoover [19]. They found that politeness strategies and refusal politeness strategies are regular human interactions, including those of the characters in this novel.

Moreover, Hamza and Nordin (2023) investigated pragmatic deviations from politeness principles in Trump's political speeches [14]. They revealed that Trump utilized maxims to convince people that his opponents are unacceptable and convince them to elect Trump-backed candidates, influence crowds to change their worldviews, ruin his rivals' images, and show his period as the US president as incomparable to and better than any other US president.

Likewise, Fitriana (2023) looked for the politeness strategy in Joe Biden's speech about the Russia-Ukraine war at the 2022 G20 summit in Bali, Indonesia [12]. She concluded that Joe Biden used 16 politeness strategy data, consisting of nine positive politeness strategy data, four negative politeness strategy data, two bald on record data, and one off record data.

Suyono and Andriyanti (2021) examined negative politeness strategies used on the TV show *What Would You Do?* They found seven negative politeness strategies used by the participants in their responses to the

actors: Being Indirect (12), Questions, Hedges (40), Minimizing the Imposition (12), Apologizing (25), Giving Difference (9), Being Pessimistic (6), and Stating the FTA as General Rule (2) [20]. Almahasees, Z, et al. (2024) found that the main impacts of COVID-19 on interpreting were the transition to remote interpreting services, cancellations and postpones of interpreting events, economic impact (a decline in income), security, data privacy, and confidentiality [4]. Al Bataineh, K. B, et al. (2023) revealed that Facebook posts were efficiently used to define the ethnonational identity of the participants and to describe their goals and activities, as well as to provide continual updates on the protests [1].

Chandra (2021) conducted a study on politeness in language usage on social media. She found that the communication patterns are realized in the form of: (1) various forms of language that do not meet the standard language; (2) the use of other non-verbal representations, such as emoticons; and (3) epronunciation, that is, writing the spoken language. The choice of utterances is affected by relative status, social distance, and range of imposition [11].

Depending on the past studies that investigated politeness in different aspects, situations, contexts, and settings, it is clear that competency in using politeness utterances has a vital impact on others, whether it is socially, academically, or politically. The competency of using politeness strategies, as the previous research indicated, is a central reason to exhibit a positive image in front of others. Moreover, it could help the speakers have successful communication with others by saving their faces.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Theoretical Framework

According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, five strategies may be universally used by speakers [9]. First, there is *positive politeness* which involves addressing the positive face of the listener. Second, there is *negative politeness* which involves addressing the negative face of the listener. Third is *bald-one record* which is used to express a message directly to the listener. The fourth one is *off-record* which allows speakers to execute a *face-threatening act* (FTA) indirectly where their utterances can consist of several ways of interpreting the utterances. Finally, the last one is *do not do FTA* which means the speaker just avoids saying anything and continues doing other things that represent his or her full activities. The following diagram explains the circumstances determining the choice of politeness strategies that are proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987, p. 60) [9]:

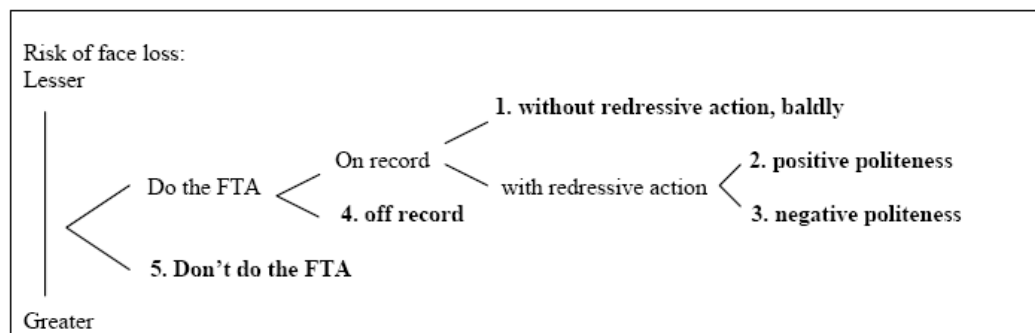


Figure 1. Circumstances Determining Choice of Strategy (from Brown & Levinson, 1987, p.60) [9]

The researchers analyzed the data based on the above framework to determine the preferred positive politeness strategies utilized by the professors with their students. It is noteworthy to mention here that this framework has been used in several studies that aim to find out the occurrence of politeness utterances through the above framework (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 60) [9].

This study was a qualitative one. It concentrated on the utterances that are produced by the professors of English programs with their students in online lectures at Jerash University. The data was recorded and uploaded to the university platform which facilitates collecting it from the professors.

Additionally, a permission letter requesting to gather the data was collected from the university's Department of English and Translation, and a consent form was signed by the professors. The objectives of the research were addressed to the participants who were also informed that they were not forced to participate in the study and that they could cancel their participation while collecting the data. Each participant was coded in order to maintain the privacy of their interactions using codes for the professors such as Prof-1, Prof-2, Prof-3, and so on.

Two lectures were collected from each professor for a total of ten online lectures collected. Each lecture lasted about 40 minutes. The collection of data was gathered from five professors who teach different courses over a period of one month. Observations and memos were used while reviewing the recorded lectures to identify the positive politeness strategies that were performed by the professors with their students. The politeness strategies were listed while listening to the lectures. After that, they were classified based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theoretical framework [9].

IV. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The findings of this study indicate that the professors used different types of positive politeness strategies while interacting with their students in their online lectures. The usage of these positive politeness strategies represents many aspects of Jordanian culture which affects the performance of these strategies by the professors. Arabic societies in general and the Jordanian one in particular are considered indirect societies (Al-Khawaldeh et al., 2023) [3]. This can be observed in the use of the positive politeness strategies that the professors used with their students, which were: Notice; Giving Reasons; Assuming Reciprocity and Giving Sympathy; Intensified Interest; Hedging; Concern for the Hearer's Wants; Promises; and In-Group Identity. To shed light on their usage of these strategies, the researchers distributed each strategy and the number of times the professors used them in the following table and analyzed them in detail. The following table shows that the most frequent positive politeness strategy is the Intensified Interest strategy, which occurred 31 times.

Table 1. The Professors' Positive Politeness Strategies and Frequencies

Professor's Positive Politeness Strategy		
No.	Strategy	Frequency
1	Notice	23
2	Giving Reasons	17
3	Assuming Reciprocity and Giving Sympathy	28
4	Intensified Interest	31
5	Hedging	18
6	Concern for the Hearer's Wants	8
7	Promises	13
8	In-Group Identity	16

As indicated in Table 1, the professors preferred to use the positive politeness strategy with their students to show respect to them and save their faces. The definition of this strategy, as explained previously, refers to every individual's basic desire for their public self-image to be shown through engagement with, ratification by, and appreciation from others. The examples showed that this strategy was the preferred strategy by the professors because they chose to save the students' faces while they were communicating with them. The use of this strategy means that the professors preferred to be polite with their students which could have encouraged them to participate in the lectures. Indeed, it helped the students avoid being shy when answering questions or requesting explanations from their professors. The professors wanted the students to feel that they were generally from the same social group which minimized the distance among them and encouraged the students to be more effective in the lectures.

These strategies were analyzed in detail with examples to represent the various types used by the professors. Eight out of fifteen positive politeness strategies were observed in the data. The strategies used were: Notice; Giving Reasons; Assuming Reciprocity and Giving Sympathy; Intensified Interest; Hedging; Concern for the Hearer's Wants; Promises; and In-Group Identity. The most frequently used was Intensified Interest, which occurred 31 times. Next came Assuming Reciprocity and Giving Sympathy, which occurred 28 times. Each one of the strategies mentioned above is explained in detail below:

A. Notice

This strategy occurred 23 times during the study. The meaning of using this strategy, as Brown & Levinson (1987) claimed, is that the speakers show respect and appreciation for the listener once they know that they have made good things known to others [9]. The use of this strategy by the professors illustrates that they know their students capabilities once they want to participate. Thus, they motivate them by helping them feel that they know their progress in the lectures. The following examples demonstrate the usage of this strategy by the professors with their students:

Prof-1: "You read the text very well, Mohammed."

Prof-4: "I see. Your answer is adequate."

Prof-6: "May you answer, Yousef?"

Prof-9: "I know you can answer the question, but I want other students to do that."

As noted in the above examples, the professors used this strategy to make the listener feel comfortable and at ease in the classroom. This is represented by the use of the Notice strategy to save the students' faces and let them feel at ease. In the third example, Prof-6 threatens Yousef's face once he requests an answer from him. Contextually, the professor's request indicates that he previously noticed Yousef's ability to answer his questions; now Yousef understands that the professor does not intentionally want to embarrass him in front of his classmates.

B. Giving Reasons

Different techniques were used by the professors to employ this strategy. They sometimes apologized for stopping one of the students while he or she read, to make a summation, to avoid wasting time explaining a point, to answer, or to look for topics in the textbook. Sometimes, it is used to announce that they cannot continue explaining some of the points because the lecture is almost over. Thus, once the professors apologize, they are trying to save the students' faces, although they do use a threatening face strategy like stopping the ongoing student's speech or participation in the lectures. They minimize the threat by giving reasons. These reasons prevent students from feeling impinged upon, and they understand it in a positive way. The following examples show the use of this strategy by the professors:

Prof-2: "Sorry, I have to leave after 10 minutes because I have a meeting. I need to explain to you some of the points related to the midterm exam."

Prof-3: "So, this means that Reham wanted to say that..."

Prof-5: "I am sorry, but I have to stop here because we do not have time to continue."

Prof-6: "I would like to apologize to all of you. I want one of the students to summarize the main topics that I have explained in this lecture because I am going to explain another point after that."

The examples demonstrate that the professor used this strategy to avoid face-threatening, and this was understood by the students. They wanted to justify their reasons for stopping the students' speeches in the lecture. Through the use of this strategy, they indicate that they do not want to encroach on the listeners' positive faces. Prof-2 and Prof-5 interrupt the students' speeches because one of them has an appointment for a meeting and the other does not feel there is enough time to finish the point because class will be ending soon. They want to announce to the students that they are going to leave, and they have reasons for that

which are the meeting and the moving to another point related to the lesson. Prof-3 cut short the student's speech because he wanted to move to another point to avoid consuming the lecture time. Prof-6 wanted to sum up the lecture topics to remind the students about them before the lecture finished.

All the examples clearly show that the professors avoid threatening the faces of the students by giving them reasons for using this strategy in their utterances. This indicates that the professors were very polite to the students and wanted to save their faces. Moreover, this result indicates that a positive politeness strategy is preferred by them to justify their usage of this strategy.

C. Assuming Reciprocity and Giving Sympathy

This is one of the positive strategies that were used by the professors to deliver to the students a reciprocal right about an issue discussed in the class. For example, the professors said, "If you answer this question, you will get a bonus mark." Once the professors state the reciprocal right, the students show their cooperation between the two parties which impedes the face-threatening act. The following are some examples related to this strategy:

Prof-3: "If you answer this last question, we will get to finish the lecture."

Prof-7: "Without helping me to complete this chapter, I will not appoint the date of the midterm exam."

This strategy is used by the professors as a sort of encouragement for the students to participate in the lectures or to complete part of the lessons that they plan to finish in the lectures. Thus, the professors avoid threatening their students' faces by giving them a choice that can only be achieved by both of them during the class.

D. Intensified Interest

In this strategy, the professors tried to intensify the interest of the students by telling them about an important issue related to their course, exams, opinions proposed by a student, and so on. They utilize this strategy by saying things like: "Your classmate Ahmad proposed a good opinion about the date of submitting the assignment, which is after the midterm exam. I agree with his opinion." This example explains that the professor saves Ahmad's face and shows his interest in his opinion. Another example was introduced by Prof-1 who said, "I will vote to get your opinion about the next quiz mode. Who prefers to take it in class, and who prefers to take it online on the university platform? I will approve the majority voters' choice." In this example, the professor leaves the choice to the students which is a polite action that shows his interest in the majority of the voters about the exam mode, thus saving their faces.

E. Avoiding Disagreement

This strategy was frequently used when the professors wanted to respect student participation, especially when they gave wrong answers. They minimize their mistakes by telling them that their answers do not cover the exact answers to his questions. An example of this case is demonstrated by Prof-8 who said, "Okay, thank you. You covered part of the answer, but I want someone who can answer this question adequately." As noticed in the example, the professor did not want to threaten the student's face and tried to appreciate her by minimizing her wrong answer. In this case, he was very wise because he motivated the other students to answer even though he knew her answer was not correct. This reaction by the professor improves participation by the students and decreases the distance between the students and their professors. The professor also appeared partially satisfied with the answer, but he wanted to get the complete answer to his question from other students.

F. Concern for the Hearer's Wants

To show that they are concerned about their students' wants, the professors did a good job by cooperating with their students by showing them that they acknowledge their abilities and understand their wants. This strategy was employed in various scenarios, including informing students about the correct answers for

exams, conducting revision sessions before exams, and introducing requested topics for teaching purposes. The following examples explain the use of this strategy by the professors:

Prof-6: "I know you want me to answer the exam question with you today. Let's start doing that."

Prof- 10: "I was going to teach you past perfect tense today, but some of the students want me to make a revision for other tenses. Let us revise present perfect and present perfect continuous before starting with past perfect."

The above examples show that the professors were concerned about the students' faces and providing them with what they wanted. Thus, they saved the students' faces and made them feel happy.

G. Promises

Once the listener feels that the speaker seems to care about him or her, the listener then sees the speaker as polite. Showing his or her intention, the speaker promises the listener that he or she will do something for the listener; thus, the speaker is considered very polite. As a result, one of the positive strategies that was employed by the professors was the promise. Prof-9's reaction to one of the students explains the usage of this strategy. He said, "Your proposed date for the exam will be taken into consideration." Another example was noted by Prof-5 when he said, "I will summarize the points we discussed. Just remind me at the beginning of the next lecture to do that for you." Promising to meet the students' demands represents the professors' interest in following up on their promises. This means that they ease the threat to their students' faces by promising to do as they request. This lessens the potential threat by telling them that they agree to assist them with the problematic issues they face, so the students are satisfied by the use of these positive face acts.

G. In-Group Identity Markers

Either among group members or in different settings, there are different identity markers used by the interlocutors of that group or in those settings. Various identity markers were used by the professors in their classes. This study examined the positive politeness strategies used by the professors with their students in an academic setting which means that they use common identity markers in their interactions. These markers show that they belong to a certain place and group. One of the examples that represent these markers was employed by Prof-4 when he said, "Class, do not interrupt your classmate while he is reading." Another example is manifested through the use of the word "students" by Prof-2: "Students! Do not make noise while I am explaining the lesson to you." Brown & Levinson (1987) stated that using some of the identity markers helps group interlocutors remind others who they are [9]. As a result, these markers prevent threats to the listeners' faces. The use of several identity markers ensures the inclusivity of the professors and the students. Solidarity is exemplified by using these markers which convince the addressees to support the professors' requests and points of view.

V. DISCUSSION

The universality of Brown & Levinson's (1987) theory makes it acceptable to many researchers from different cultures [9]. They claimed that they did not concentrate on the rules of politeness to be implemented. On the contrary, they pay more attention to the face of their listeners and how they could save it by minimizing threats from the speaker. Their contributions attracted many researchers around the world to use their model to analyze politeness practices in their languages through their society's cross-cultures. Although this theory was developed around thirty years ago, it is still being adopted by many researchers today. As explained in the analysis, the professors employed eight positive politeness strategies. All of the examples highlight the utterances that appear in the professors' utterances with their students during their lectures.

The definition of the positive politeness strategy is attending to the listener's positive face; this could be realized by assigning the wants and desires of the listener in a way similar to the speaker's wants and desires. Brown and Levinson (1987) stated that achieving this kind of politeness is accomplished through

emphasizing solidarity and rapport between speaker and listener by expressing sympathy to the listener and using terms that signify in-group membership [9]. The positive politeness strategy is categorized as one of the most polite strategies in Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework. As shown in the analysis, the professors preferred to use this strategy to create the impression that they are close to the student, and the students do not have to be shy once they want to answer the questions, give opinions, and request something or anything else [9]. They wanted the student to avoid reiteration once they participated in the lectures. This strategy is polite in the context of communication because the professors accepted the students' utterances, whether they were right or wrong, by minimizing the threat to their face which encouraged them to speak without feeling hesitant in specific situations.

Institutional position and power were considered by the professors while they were communicating with the students. The distance between them was preserved indirectly as the academic context indirectly required that by both parties of interaction. Fitriyani and Andriyanti (2020) stated that teachers and students in the classroom maintain a sense of distance, power dynamics, and respect for age while communicating with each other, using politeness strategies in their interactions [13].

To summarize, the professors performed positive politeness strategies that exhibited their preference to behave politely toward the students to minimize imposition on them. They intentionally wanted the student to release their inference while they participated in the lectures. Based on the students' reactions, it was clear that the professors employed these strategies successfully to achieve their objectives. The varieties of positive politeness strategies performed by the professors manifested the competences that the professors had to attain their objective of breaking the shyness of the students to either comment on their mistakes while answering their questions or to answer them once the students requested an explanation from them.

The contribution of this study is demonstrated clearly in the impact of using the eight positive politeness strategies by the professors to represent an effective interaction between the professors and their students. Using politeness strategies can preserve the smooth and positive flow of the interaction among the interlocutors. This result guides future researchers to concentrate on the impact of the positive politeness strategies that will be employed by the professors on students interested in attending classes and being aware of the importance of studying their lectures and courses. This study recommends that future researchers conduct a study on students' reactions to their professors' positive politeness strategies within the classroom. Moreover, to find out the best politeness strategy, the professors preferred to use what they thought was best according to their points of view.

VI. CONCLUSION

Politeness is one of the aspects of language that is performed progressively by societies based on their cultures, traditions, norms, and so on. The competency of using politeness utterances adequately in a specific context and setting leads to successful communications between different parties in various situations. In this study, the researchers investigated the positive politeness strategies that were employed by the professors in their English Language and Translation lectures to know the preferred politeness strategy they liked to perform. Moreover, this study sought to explore the reasons for using them in their lectures. This study found that the professors preferred to use the eight positive politeness strategies because it saves the listener's face by avoiding threatening utterances that could increase the impositions. The intensified interest strategy was the most preferred one, and assuming reciprocity and giving sympathy was the second preferred strategy out of the eight strategies that were used by the professors. Hassan et al. (2017) found that the use of politeness strategies could help create a continual preservation of the students' performance [22]. Brown and Levinson (1987) stated that utilizing politeness strategies helps in facilitating communications and performing successful interactions in different situations [9]. The findings of this study can help researchers get to the starting point of conducting research that is related to politeness from other aspects such as the impact of the professors' positive politeness strategies on the students' progress in their courses.

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