

Speech Act of Suggestions in EFL Classroom Interactions: Teacher's Politeness Strategies and Students' Perceptions

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Abstract

In a classroom context, teachers are unavoidable to correct something that a student has said, done or written. Sometimes, the corrections are in the form of suggestions. However, giving suggestion can be challenging, as it can threaten the student's negative face. To reduce this threat, politeness strategies are necessary. This study was conducted to (1) identify the types of politeness strategies employed by an EFL teacher in delivering suggestions, (2) examine students' perception of their teacher's politeness strategies. This research is a qualitative case study involving an English teacher and 34 eleventh-grade Senior High School students. Data were collected through observations and interviews, and then analyzed using Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. The result revealed that the teacher employs a balanced combination of politeness strategies, with positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies each used 26% of the time, and bald on record used 22%. These strategies are employed for various reasons, including ensuring clear communication, maintaining a supportive classroom environment, and fostering closer teacher-student relationships. Additionally, students' perceptions revealed that the teacher's use of polite and indirect language contributes to a positive learning atmosphere, enhancing student comfort and engagement. However, this study is limited by its focus on a single teacher and a specific group of students, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader contexts.

Keywords: EFL classroom interactions, politeness strategies, speech act

1. Introduction

In a foreign language classroom, students mainly learn the grammar and vocabulary of the language. They are taught how the language works in terms of its different forms and functions. They learn the words of the language, then memorize them. However, knowing the linguistic forms and functions of the language only is not enough. It is equally important to learn how to use them correctly in real-life situations. In fact, one of the primary goals of learning English as a foreign language is to communicate proficiently in English (Senowarsito, 2013; Fitriyah et al., 2019; Fitriyani & Andriyani, 2020). As Hasan (2018) emphasizes, English teachers should not only focus on familiarizing students with sounds, vocabulary, and grammar but also guide them in using the language effectively by teaching them the pragmatic rules that govern proper communication.

In a school setting, teachers and students use language to communicate. To communicate effectively, they need to focus not only on the message they want to convey but also on how they deliver it. Effective communication is not just about sharing information but also creating a comfortable environment for everyone involved. Fitriyah et al. (2019) argue that to communicate well in a language, learners must understand both the rules of grammar and the social rules of how to use the language. These rules help learners consider who they are talking to, the situation they are in, how to act appropriately, and how to express their message in a way that does not harm the other person's self-image.

One important way to achieve effective communication is by using politeness strategies (Mahmud, 2019). These strategies help maintain a positive and respectful atmosphere during interactions. The speakers must consider whether the language they use is appropriate for the person they are communicating with. By doing so, effective communication can be achieved.

Effective communication between teachers and students creates a comfortable environment for both. This helps students feel safe and at ease, which in turn makes the teaching and learning process run more smoothly. When students feel comfortable, they are more likely to participate actively, ask questions, and engage with the lesson. Moreover, positive classroom interactions play a key role in supporting students' language development (Consolo, 2006).

In a classroom context, teachers are unavoidable to correct something that a student has said, done or written. Sometimes, the corrections are in the form of suggestions. Banerjee and Carrell (1988) define suggestion as an utterance that the speaker intends the hearer to perceive as a directive to do something that will be to the hearer's benefit. Suggestions occur more frequently when the students seek a help from their teacher. However, giving suggestions can be difficult since according to Brown & Levinson (1987) suggestion is considered as face threatening act because it will threaten the hearers' negative face. For this, politeness strategies need to be applied to soften or mitigate the face threat.

Several studies have explored the use of politeness strategies in teacher-student interactions in EFL classrooms (e.g., Jiang, 2010; Senowarsito, 2013; Purandina et al., 2014; Peng et al., 2014; Sulu, 2015; Erlinda & Rahmi, 2015; Zaenul, 2016; Fitriyah et al., 2019; Mahmud, 2019; Wijayanti et al., 2020; Fitriyani & Andriyanti, 2020; Rahayuningsih, 2020; Soviana & Mukminatien, 2020; Febriansyah et al., 2021; Unaina et al., 2021; Jayanti et al., 2024). These studies examined the use of politeness strategies across various educational levels, from junior high schools to universities. The findings consistently show that both teachers and students use politeness strategies in their interactions, which positively influences the teaching and learning process. Specifically, these strategies helped maintain good relationships between teachers and students, created a comfortable

learning environment, and ensured that lessons were conducted smoothly, contributing to the achievement of learning goals.

In addition, research on suggestions as speech acts has also been conducted (e.g., Pisghadam & Sharafadini, 2011; Shofwan & Mujiyanto, 2018; Maldin, 2019; Sentana et al., 2020; Yildis, 2020; Alfghe & Mohammadzadeh, 2021). These studies primarily focus on identifying the types of suggestion strategies used by participants, often based on Martinez-Flor's (2005) taxonomy. These studies indicate that conventional forms of suggestions are most commonly employed. Some studies also compared the suggestion strategies of native and non-native English speakers, revealing that non-native speakers tend to be more direct in making suggestions compared to native speakers.

The previous researches related to politeness strategies in EFL classroom interactions mostly discussed about the politeness strategies in general. Most of the researches did not specifically discuss the politeness strategies used in delivering certain speech act of suggestions. While the previous researches related suggestions speech acts in EFL Classroom context have not explored the politeness aspect. Therefore, this study aims to fill these gaps by examining the types of politeness strategies used by EFL teachers in delivering suggestions and how students perceive these strategies in the context of an Indonesian senior high school classroom.

Based on the background above, the research questions are proposed as follows:

1. What are the types of politeness strategies employed by the EFL teacher in delivering suggestions?
2. How do students perceive the politeness strategies employed by their teacher?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Politeness Strategies

Politeness theory, as proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987), provides a framework for understanding how individuals manage social interactions to preserve their social identity, or "face". They define face as something that is managed in an interaction through the use of politeness features. Furthermore, they divided face into two aspects. They are positive face (the need to be appreciated) and negative face (the need to be free or not to be bothered by others). In any communication, especially in a classroom setting, speakers must be aware of these face needs and adjust their language accordingly to avoid threatening the listener's face.

In an EFL classroom, teachers often engage in face-threatening acts (FTAs) when they correct a student's mistakes or offer suggestions. To mitigate these threats, teachers must employ politeness strategies. Brown & Levinson (1987) identify several strategies that can be used to manage face-threatening situations: positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on record, and off-record strategies.

Bald on Record is a direct approach with no attempt to mitigate the threat to the hearer's face. This strategy is typically used when the speaker has high social power over the hearer or when the relationship allows for such directness. Positive Politeness involves showing appreciation or solidarity with the listener, for example, through compliments or expressions of empathy. This strategy aims to maintain the hearer's positive face by expressing friendliness and support. Negative Politeness aims to mitigate the imposition on the hearer's autonomy, often through indirect speech or hedging. This strategy seeks to protect the hearer's negative face by minimizing the threat of imposing on their freedom of action. Off-Record involves the use of indirect language to allow the hearer to interpret the message in a way that avoids a direct face threat. This strategy creates ambiguity and gives the hearer the option to reject the suggestion or message without losing face.

2.2 Suggestions

A suggestion, as a type of speech act, involves the speaker directing the hearer toward a specific course of action that is intended to benefit the hearer. According to Yule (1996), suggestion is a part of directive speech acts, where the speaker aims to guide or encourage the hearer to do something. Banerjee & Carrell (1988) further define a suggestion as an utterance that the speaker intends the hearer to perceive as a directive, encouraging the hearer to take an action that will be to his/her benefit. Overall, suggestions aim to advise or recommend actions that are beneficial to the hearers while still allowing them the freedom to choose their response.

3. Research Methods

This section describes in detail how the study was conducted. A complete description of the methods used enables the reader to evaluate the appropriateness of the research methodology.

3.1 Research Design

This research employs a qualitative case study approach, as it aims to explore the use of politeness strategies in teacher-student interactions specifically in the context of delivering suggestions in an EFL classroom. A qualitative approach is suitable for this research because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the participants' behaviors, perceptions, and experiences in their natural classroom setting. Moreover, case study is particularly effective in understanding complex social phenomena within a specific context, making it ideal for examining the specific ways in which politeness strategies are applied. Thus, this research methodology will provide a comprehensive understanding of how politeness strategies are employed in the classroom and their impact on communication dynamics.

3.2 Participants

The participants in this study consisted of one experienced EFL teacher from a senior high school, thirty-four eleventh-grade students who were native speakers of Indonesian learning English as a foreign language. The participants were selected using purposive sampling technique based on some criteria. The criteria for the teacher: (1) teacher who has taught for more than 10 years; (2) teacher who actively interacts with the students; and (3) teacher who has minimum 2 meetings a week in the same class. Then five students participate in the interview sessions with the criteria for the students: (1) Students who have attended more than 80% of the classes; and (2) students who are active or less active in class participation.

3.3 Instruments

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the use of politeness strategies in delivering suggestions, data will be collected through classroom observations and interviews.

3.3.1 Classroom Observation

This research used non-participant observation to collect data. The researcher observed several EFL lessons taught by the teacher, focusing on moments when the teacher gave suggestions to students. The goal was to identify the types of politeness strategies used by the teacher and how these strategies were applied in the classroom. Field notes were taken during the lessons, and audio recordings were made to capture the conversations. This allowed the researcher to gather detailed examples of teacher-student interactions and analyze them in relation to the politeness strategies used. This approach ensured that the data collected was both detailed and comprehensive for further analysis.

3.3.2 Interviews

Following the classroom observations, semi-structured interviews were conducted with both the teachers and students. The interviews focused on understanding students' perceptions of their teacher's politeness and the impact of teacher's politeness strategies usage on their willingness to engage in classroom activities.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data obtained by the researcher during data collection were analyzed using interactive models from Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) that consist three stages of analyzing the data; they are data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusion. The researcher transcribed the conversation between the teacher and the students. The researcher selected the data containing suggestions expression then analyzed the selected data based on the theories of politeness strategies proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987).

4. Results

The first part of the research finding outlines the answer of the first research question; that is what are the politeness strategies used by the English teacher in delivering suggestions. For answering the first research question, the coding process for identifying politeness strategies in this study followed a structured approach based on Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. Initially, data were collected through non-participant classroom observations. The observations focused on instances where the teacher made suggestions to the students. The data were transcribed and organized into meaningful units for analysis.

The identified suggestions were then categorized using Brown & Levinson's four politeness strategies: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. Direct commands without any mitigation devices were classified under bald on record as they were clear and direct without any softening. Indirect suggestions that provide the students the autonomy to make a choice without being forced, and the directives with mitigation which make them less imposing were categorized under negative politeness. The statements containing teacher's reassurance and empathy toward the students were categorized under positive politeness, as they were fostering a supportive environment. Lastly, the statements in which the teacher gave hints without direct correction, allowing the student to interpret the feedback on their own were categorized under off-record strategies. The following table shows the frequency of politeness strategies realized by the English teacher in delivering suggestions to the students:

Table 1: The frequency of politeness strategies in delivering suggestions realized by the English teacher

| Meeting | Politeness strategies used | | | | Total |
|------------|----------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------|-------|
| | Bald on record | Positive politeness | Negative politeness | Off record | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | - | 6 |
| 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 14 |
| 3 | - | - | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| 4 | - | - | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Total | 6 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 27 |
| Percentage | 22% | 26% | 26% | 26% | 100% |

The table above shows that there are totally 27 suggestions performed by the English teacher in the class. Those data were obtained through the direct observation during four meetings in an

English class in a Senior High School. The strategies were found in a fairly balanced way from various classroom situations (7 times Positive Politeness (26%), 7 times Negative Politeness (26%), 7 times Off Record (26%) and 6 times Bald on Record (22%).

4.1 Bald on Record Strategy

According to Brown & Levinson (1987), bald on record is conveyed by the speaker when he wants to do the face threatening acts (FTAs) with maximum efficiency more than he wants to satisfy the hearer's face. It means that the speaker in some situations prefers to deliver his utterances effectively and efficiently rather than please the hearer's face. The realizations of this strategy can be seen in the following data:

1. Imperative

Imperative is a strategy used by the teacher in which she directly and clearly gave the command in order to deliver a direct demand. After checking students' attendance, the teacher asked about the assignment given in the previous session. However, it turned out that some students had not finished it, so the teacher inquired about the difficulties they had encountered. There were several sections of the exercise with the different instructions. Since they would not discuss all the exercises the teacher told the students to focus on the part that they would discuss.

The examples of this strategy usage are in the following excerpt:

- Teacher : *Apakah ada kesulitan?* (Are there any difficulties?)
Student : *Ada yang sulit.* (Yes, there are difficulties)
Other student : *Semua sulit Bu.* (All things are difficult)
Teacher : ***Fokus pada activity 4 nomor yang awal 1, 2, 3, 4.*** (Focus on activity four at the initial questions. Number 1, 2, 3, 4.)

The conversation above shows that the teacher used a bald on-record strategy, which means she gave a direct instruction without softening the message. The phrase "Focus on activity four at the initial questions. Number 1, 2, 3, 4" is a clear command with no hedging. The teacher did not try to make the message less forceful. Instead, she simply told the students what to focus on next. This approach was used to be efficient, making the instruction easy to understand and follow. The teacher had more authority than the students, so there was no need to reduce the face threat. By being direct, she ensured the students understood the task and could proceed without confusion.

2. Task oriented

Task oriented is a strategy used by the teacher when giving the suggestions containing the act for doing a task. The teacher asked the students to take a diagnostic test using an online platform. After sending the link to the students, the teacher instructed them to complete the test. However, some students faced difficulties in joining the test. Then the teacher asked them to try another way.

The example of this strategy usage is in the following excerpt:

- Teacher : *Udah bisa mengakses?* (Can you access it?)
Student : *Belum bisa Bu.* (Not yet, Miss)
Teacher : ***Pakai Google Chrome, harus sabar.*** (Use Google Chrome, you have to be patient.)
Student : *Baik Bu.*(Alright Miss)

The conversation above shows that the teacher used a bald on record strategy, namely case of non-minimization of face threat using task-oriented strategy. Teacher's utterance "Use Google Chrome" is included as task oriented. It is how to do a task properly so that she did not need to minimize the face threat. The teacher gave a direct and clear instruction without attempting to soften the impact. The teacher simply told the students what to do without adding any further explanation or consideration. By saying "Use Google Chrome" the teacher offered a direct, action-based suggestion that was intended to help students overcome a challenge related to the task they were working on, rather than addressing their feelings. She used this strategy to be efficient. She wanted to make a clear instruction so that the students could easily understand the instruction and did it correctly. Moreover, the teacher had more power than the students had so she did not need to make an effort to lessen the face threat.

4.2 Positive Politeness Strategy

1. Positive Politeness Strategy 1 (Notice, attend to the hearer's interest, wants, needs, goods)

Notice, attend to the hearer's interest, wants, needs, goods is a strategy used by the teacher by giving attention toward the students. At the previous meeting, the teacher could not attend the class so she gave a task to her students. Then, before starting the current meeting, she told the students that there were a number of mistakes that students had done in their task. She saw that the students began to worry but she then told them not to worry because she had not given the explanation so that she could tolerate the mistakes.

The examples of this strategy usage are in the following excerpt:

- Teacher : *Tugasnya sudah saya cek. Kebetulan saya menemukan masih banyak yang salah.* I still found many mistakes *ya.* (I have checked your tasks. I have checked your tasks. It happened that I still found many mistakes)
- Students : (looking at the teacher with a worried expression)
- Teacher : *Tidak apa-apa karena memang saya belum mengajarkan. Saya belum menerangkan. It's okay. Ngga apa apa. Nanti bisa diperbaiki ya.* (It's okay because I haven't taught it yet. I haven't explained yet. It's okay. **You can revise it later, okay**)
- Students : (nodding their head) *Baik, Bu.* (Alright, miss)

The conversation above shows that the teacher used a positive politeness strategy namely notice attend to hearer. The teacher took notice of the hearer's condition especially to the hearer's goods. The teacher showed that she cared about the students' feelings, especially their guilt or regret. She reassured them by saying "It's okay. You can revise it later, okay?". This response showed that the teacher understood how the students feel and tried to help them feel better. Instead of focusing only on their mistakes, the teacher focuses on keeping a good relationship, showing care, and encouraging the students.

By saying "It's okay" and reminding them that she had not taught the lesson yet, and they could revise the task, the teacher was not just comforting them. She was also thinking about how the students might feel, maybe nervous, embarrassed, or disappointed.

2. Positive Politeness Strategy 12 (Include both speaker and hearer in the activity)

Include both speaker and hearer in the activity strategy is used when the teacher wants to satisfy the hearer positive face by including herself and her students in the same activity. The teacher was walking around and checking the students answer. She was approaching a student and

asked whether she faced difficulty or not. The student then showed her answers. The teacher then saw the answer and asked her to revise her answers.

The example of this strategy usage is in the following excerpt:

- Teacher : *Bagaimana? Ada kesulitan?* (What is it? Is there any difficulty?)
Student : *Yang bagian ini lho, Bu. Jadi itu maksud terjemahannya apa? tadi kan salah to?* (This part right here, Miss. So, what does the translation mean? It was wrong earlier, wasn't it?)
Teacher : *Iya, salah. Yuk diperbaiki nomor 123.* (Yes, that's incorrect. **Let's correct number 123.**)

The conversation above shows that the teacher used a positive politeness strategy namely including both the speaker and the hearer in the activity. The teacher said “lets” that made a sign as if the teacher would include herself in the same activity as the student did. By saying “lets” the teacher positioned herself as a partner in the process rather than merely a figure of authority. This approach minimizes the threat to the student’s positive face (their desire to be liked and respected) by offering support rather than giving direct criticism.

3. Positive Politeness Strategy 13 (Give reasons)

Give reasons is a strategy that includes the hearer in the activity by providing reason and assuming that the hearer has no good reason for not cooperate. The teacher gave explanation about narrative text while writing key points on the board. She then asked the students to take notes.

The example of this strategy usage is in the following excerpt:

- Teacher : *Oke silakan ditulis ya dicatat biar ingat.* (Okay, please write it down. Make a note so you can remember.)
Students : (Nod their head)

From teacher’s utterance “Make a note so you can remember”, we knew that the teacher did not only give instruction to students, but also provided reasons underlying her instruction. It showed that the teacher used a positive politeness strategy, specifically by giving a reason strategy. Here, the teacher added “so you can remember”, which provided the rationale behind the request to write the notes down. This reasoning showed the students that the teacher’s request was meant to benefit their learning. This use of positive politeness aimed to make the students feel respected while still fulfilling the teacher’s role in directing the students’ actions. The teacher ensured the request was not imposing, otherwise it fostered a supportive and friendly atmosphere.

4.3 Negative Politeness Strategy

Negative politeness is a strategy used to minimize the imposition of a face threatening act on a hearer and to satisfy his/her negative face that is the desire for freedom of action and freedom from imposition. It is characterized by speaker self-effacement, formality and restraint and conventionalized indirectness. The examples of this strategy usage are in the following excerpt:

1. Negative Politeness Strategy 1 (Be conventionally indirect)

Be conventionally indirect is a strategy used by the speaker when he/she prefers to imply his/her request or command. The teacher did a diagnostic test, but some students faced problem in accessing the link given by the teacher. Then the teacher approached one of the students that could not access the link and tried to find out the problem. After that she asked her students to open the link use another browser.

The example of this strategy usage is as follow:

- Teacher : *Bisa atau tidak?* (Does it work?)
Student : *Tidak bisa Bu.* (It doesn't work miss.)
Teacher : *Kamu pakai apa?* (What do you use?)
Student : *Pakai Browser.* (I use Browser.)
Teacher : ***Ngga pakai Google Chrome aja?*** (Why don't you use Google Chrome instead?)
Student : *Tadi pas saya klik linknya langsung otomatis pake browser. Saya coba lagi Bu.* (When i click the link earlier, it is automatically opened with browser miss. I will try to use Google Chrome then.)
Teacher : *Ok.*

In this situation, the teacher applied a negative politeness strategy, specifically being indirect. The phrase "Why don't you use Google Chrome instead?" is an indirect suggestion because the teacher did not give a direct instruction like "Use Google Chrome," but instead posed a question that made it seem like a choice rather than an order. This approach allows the teacher to avoid being forceful and gives the student the freedom to decide whether to follow the suggestion. It guided the student without issuing an explicit command.

By using the negative politeness strategy, the teacher helps maintain a respectful and non-imposing atmosphere. The student does not feel pressured to follow the suggestion, which fosters a more comfortable and supportive environment. This strategy also encourages the student to take responsibility for their actions and make their own decisions. The teacher showed respect for the student's autonomy and freedom to choose, even though she was still implicitly guiding the student toward using a specific browser (Google Chrome). By using an indirect question, the teacher ultimately promoted autonomy and a positive teacher-student relationship.

2. Negative Politeness Strategy 2 (Use Hedges)

This strategy is used by the speaker when he/she uses the language that softens what he/she says by adding uncertainty or reducing directness. The teacher was walking around the classroom checking students' work and stopped at one student. Before the teacher asked about the student's work, the student asked the teacher a question first. After reviewing the student's answer, the teacher felt that the answer needs improvement.

The example of the usage of this strategy is as follow:

- Student : *Kalau saya jawab langsung bolehkan, Bu?* (If I answer directly, is it okay, ma'am?)
Teacher : *Iya. Langsung saja tidak apa-apa. Sudah terlanjur kan?* (Yes. It's fine, just go ahead. It's already done, right?)
Student : *Iya Bu.* (Yes, miss)
Teacher : ***Tapi kalau salah diperbaiki ya jawabannya. Dicek dulu.*** (But if it's wrong, please correct the answer. Check it first)
Student : *Iya, Bu.* (Alright, miss)

In saying "But if it's wrong, please correct the answer. Check it first.", the teacher applied negative politeness strategy namely hedging. Hedging reduced the assertiveness of a statement, avoiding the impression of being too direct or controlling, and gave the listener room to choose their action. In this case, the phrase "But if it's wrong" functioned as hedging, as the teacher did not directly criticize the student's answer but rather provided the possibility that the answer could be

correct or incorrect. This way, the student is given the freedom to check their answer without feeling pressured to act.

3. Negative Politeness Strategy 4 (Minimize the imposition)

Minimize the imposition is strategy used by the speaker when he/she wants to minimize the imposition of his/her instruction. The teacher instructed the students to form groups of four. Some students had not yet been assigned to a group, so the teacher helped them find one.

The example of this strategy usage is as follow:

- Student : *Sini belum Bu.* (We haven't got a group yet, Miss).
Teacher : *Belum. **Kamu gabung sama yang sebelah sana aja.** Kalian kesana apa mereka kesini?* (Not yet. **Just join the ones over there.** Are you going there or are they coming here?)
Student : *Mereka kesini juga ngga apa apa Bu.* (They can also come here, it's fine Miss)

The teacher's statement, "Just join the ones over there." is a direct instruction, however it is softened by the use of the word "just" which makes the directive less forceful and more like a suggestion rather than a strict command. This softening shows an attempt to respect the student's negative face, allowing them some room to act freely without feeling coerced. Here the teacher try to apply negative politeness strategy especially minimize the imposition because the word "just", reduces the level of imposition. By adding "just" the teacher is presenting the directive as a simple and easy action. It conveys that it's not a big deal or an overly demanding task, which makes it feel less like a strict order.

4.4 Off-record strategy

Off-record strategy is usually employed by using indirect speech and also giving hints to the addressee so it will leave it up to the addressee to interpret the meaning by himself. The example of the usage of this strategy is in the following excerpt:

1. Off-Record Strategy 1 (Give Hints)

Give hints strategy is used when the teacher did not directly say what the students should do, letting the students to interpret her intention. The teacher moved around the classroom to observe students' work and stopped at one student. Before the teacher asked any questions, the student initiated to ask question first. After reviewing the student's work, the teacher subtly indicated that the student's answer needed improvement.

Here is an example of how this strategy is used:

- Student : *Soalnya tidak perlu ditulis, ya kan Bu?* (Miss the question doesn't need to be written, right?)
Teacher : *Tidak usah. Tidak apa-apa.* (No need. It's okay.)
Student : (show her work) *Seperti ini, apakah tidak apa-apa, Bu?* (Like this, is it okay, miss?)
Teacher : ***Tapi sepertinya jawaban kamu perlu diperbaiki.** Pilihan mana yang paling tepat untuk menjawab pertanyaannya. (But it seems like your answer needs to be revised. Which option is the most appropriate to answer the question.)*
Student : *Baik bu, nanti saya perbaiki.* (Okay miss, I'll fix it later)

The conversation above shows that the teacher used an off-record strategy by using hint. Giving hints as an off-record strategy where the speaker suggests something indirectly, letting the hearer infer the intended meaning without stating it explicitly. By saying “But it seems like your answer needs to be revised”, the teacher did not directly state that the student's answer was wrong or inadequate. Instead, the teacher provided a hint or a suggestion that pointed to the need for correction without explicitly criticizing the answer. The use of “But” at the beginning of the sentence signaled that there was something in the student's answer that needed attention, but the teacher did not directly criticize.

Furthermore, the word “seems” added a sense of uncertainty, which softened the impact and reduces the potential threat to the student’s positive face. In other words, the student was given room to interpret that their answer might not be entirely correct, but there was still an opportunity to improve it without feeling embarrassed or cornered. This sentence was also indirect because it did not firmly state that the answer was wrong. It gave the student the freedom to make adjustments based on the hint provided by the teacher.

The second part of the finding discusses how the EFL students perceived their teacher’s politeness in delivering suggestions. The data were elicited from the interview with five EFL students in class who voluntarily joined the interview session. Those five students were asked to answer questions related to their perceptions on their teacher’s politeness and the effect on teaching learning process.

Based on the interview, the students informed that even when addressing mistakes or giving feedback, Miss S maintained a respectful and encouraging tone. One example of this occurred when Miss S was absent and had assigned a task to the class. Unfortunately, most students misinterpreted the task due to a lack of attention to the instructions. Rather than reacting harshly, Miss S gave them suggestion to read carefully. The students revealed that Miss S delivered the suggestion in polite and clear ways. Student 1 said:

Yesterday, Miss S gave me suggestion. In the previous meeting, she was absent, but Miss S still gave us assignment. Most of the students were not careful in reading the instruction. So almost all student got wrong. In the next meeting, she suggested us to read the instruction carefully before doing the assignment. She told us politely and explained clearly, also easy to understand.

This response demonstrates that Miss S provided constructive feedback using polite and clear language, which helped students receive her suggestions positively. Her use of polite language allowed the message to be well-received without creating embarrassment or fear.

Student 4 supported student 1’s statements by explaining that Miss S typically delivers suggestions in a general, inclusive manner rather than singling out individuals. This approach reduces anxiety among students when they wanted to say and asked something and promotes a safe classroom environment. As Student 4 said:

She never suggested me personally but for general, I mean she gave suggestions for all students in this class. For example, she just reminds us that it would be better if we read the instruction carefully before doing the assignment. She also conveyed the suggestion in clear and good ways so it did not make us afraid or something. She never offended us with her words. Sometimes we still found that in other teachers, but it is not for Miss S, she is always polite.

This response shows that Miss S speaks respectfully, avoids blaming individuals, and uses indirect language to reduce the imposition. These strategies help maintain students' self-esteem and foster trust, making them more receptive to advice and more comfortable participating in class.

The findings clearly suggest that Miss S employs polite utterances not only in everyday classroom communication but also when delivering suggestions or corrections. Her respectful, inclusive, and non-threatening language supports a positive emotional climate, encouraging students to accept feedback without fear or discomfort. This approach enhances student motivation, participation, and overall classroom harmony, demonstrating the powerful role of politeness in effective pedagogy.

5. Discussion

This section of the research discusses the findings of the study regarding the politeness strategies used by the English teacher when giving suggestions, with comparison to existing theories and previous studies. The findings showed a relatively balanced use of politeness strategies, with positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies each being employed 26% of the time, while bald on record was used 22% of the time. This balanced application of strategies highlights the teacher's adaptability in adjusting their communication based on classroom dynamics and students' needs.

The teacher's use of Bald on Record strategy, characterized by directness, was evident in situations requiring clear and urgent instructions. For example, when giving technical suggestions like "Use Google Chrome," the teacher avoided hedging, which enabled swift action without ambiguity. This aligns with Brown & Levinson's (1987) concept of using bald on record strategies when the speaker has authority and needs to convey a direct message, ensuring clarity in situations where immediate action was necessary. Unaina et al. (2021) reported that Bald on Record strategies were the most frequently used in their observed classrooms, particularly when clarity and efficiency were prioritized. Additionally, the use of this strategy in the classroom was supported by previous studies (Rahayuningsih, 2020), which found that such directness is often employed by teachers to manage classroom efficiency.

Positive politeness strategies were frequently utilized by the teacher to express empathy and solidarity with the students. The teacher reassured students when mistakes were made and emphasized the possibility for improvement, such as telling them, "It's okay. You can revise it later." This strategy is crucial for reducing student anxiety and fostering a supportive learning environment. It supports the findings of Peng et al. (2014), who noted that positive politeness strategies enhance teacher-student relationships and create an atmosphere conducive to learning. Soviana & Mukminatien (2020) similarly found that positive politeness was the most commonly employed strategy among university academic staff. The research also discovered that students expressed strong agreement on the significance of polite language in classroom interaction. Moreover, Febriansyah et al. (2021) revealed that female teachers tended to favor positive politeness compared to their male colleagues. This application fostered more lively and interactive classroom communication. These findings collectively reinforce the idea that positive politeness strategies are essential for maintaining supportive and engaging classroom environments.

Negative politeness strategies, used to respect students' autonomy and minimize imposition, were also prominent in the classroom interactions. The teacher's use of indirect suggestions, like "Why don't you use Google Chrome instead?" provided students with a sense of choice, empowering them to make decisions without feeling coerced. This approach reinforces the concept of negative face, where students are given the freedom to act without the pressure of direct

commands. As Brown & Levinson (1987) suggest, respecting negative face is essential for preserving relationships in contexts where power dynamics might otherwise make directness uncomfortable.

The Off-Record strategy, which allows students to interpret the message indirectly, was employed when the teacher gave hints or suggestions, leaving room for interpretation. For example, when the teacher remarked, "It seems like your answer needs to be revised," the suggestion was made without direct criticism, allowing the student to take responsibility for their correction. This strategy aligns with the work of Brown & Levinson (1987), who suggest that off-record communication offers the hearer the freedom to act based on their interpretation of the message, reducing the risk of confrontation or embarrassment. Jayanti et al. (2024) also emphasized that Off-Record strategies, such as rhetorical questions or indirect hints, helped minimize imposition while maintaining respect in teacher-student interaction.

From the students' perspective, the teacher's use of politeness strategies contributed to a positive and comfortable classroom environment. Students appreciated the teacher's respectful tone and clear, non-threatening delivery of suggestions. Interviews with students revealed that they felt more at ease and less anxious about making mistakes, as the teacher's polite and indirect suggestions created a non-judgmental atmosphere. Student 4 noted that the teacher's inclusive approach, offering suggestions to the entire class rather than singling out individuals, helped maintain a harmonious environment where students could learn without fear of being criticized. This perception resonates with Soviana & Mukminatien (2020) findings that students generally prefer and positively respond to teachers' use of politeness strategies, as they promote comfort, respect, and motivation to participate.

6. Conclusion

The teacher's effective use of politeness strategies, adjusting the level of directness and empathy according to the context, played a crucial role in creating a classroom environment that encourages student participation, reduces anxiety, and improves learning outcomes. By maintaining clear communication, fostering positive relationships, and respecting students' autonomy, these strategies helped create a space where students felt guided, respected, and motivated. This research highlights the importance of politeness strategies in supporting both the emotional and cognitive aspects of learning, ensuring students feel supported and engaged throughout their learning process. However, the study's sample size, which focused on one teacher and a small group of students, limits its ability to fully represent classroom dynamics in other educational settings. Additionally, this research only examined suggestions as a type of speech act. Future studies could explore other speech acts, such as requests, apologies, or compliments, to gain a broader understanding of how different speech acts influence teacher-student interactions. Additionally, future research could expand the sample size to assess whether these findings hold true across diverse classrooms and investigate how various educational contexts impact the application of politeness strategies in teacher-student interactions.

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