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## WAYS TO DETERMINE AND HOW TO APPLY POLITENESS VALUES IN ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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### *Abstract*

Every culture has its own ways in applying its norms and politeness values. Some things that are considered polite in one culture could be considered impolite in another. This greatly affects the utilization of politeness value that is used by students in English textbooks that they use compared to their own culture that would create some questions about politeness like which politeness value that they are supposed to use. Besides, politeness values in Eastern country like Indonesia are very prominent. The culture in Indonesia usually uses negative politeness values in conversations. This paper explains about the importance of norms and politeness values in interaction within English class. The purpose of this paper is to describe the English learning that is not only taken from textbooks but also inserts the politeness values of that very culture in order to enable the students in comparing and determining the forms and differences between those two politeness values. This paper is expected to give valuable contribution to English teachers in junior and senior high school about how to see the difference between politeness values of textbooks and their own culture and how to apply the politeness values shown on the English textbooks.

**Keywords:** politeness values, English classroom

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Politeness is a part of pragmatics that is interesting subject to study. Politeness is studying about the way how we express what in our feeling or thought about something. As a human, we should know the way of our speaking and how we choose a word in order to get a good communication with others. Logically, we will get nice thing if we do something or say it with polite, it means that we respect and interest to other speaker. Politeness phenomenon is a basic foundation in social order of human social life that also reflected in language use. The study of politeness phenomena has traditionally been primarily concerned with individual choices in spoken face to face. Politeness will influence how one person interact out of their society even in their society itself. Someone can directly say, "Hey, what's up, friend?" to a friend, but he or she cannot say the same thing to a stranger because he or she can be considered as being polite or rude. This is happen because there are so many cultures in this world. And every culture has a different custom.

Every culture has its own ways in applying its norms and politeness values. Some things that are considered polite in one culture could be considered impolite in another. The greatest examples are from English and Indonesian language in which English culture tend to use direct politeness in their daily conversation while Indonesian people tend to use indirect politeness in their daily conversation especially in learning process. Mostly the process of learning English in the classroom are adapted from American or British culture. Therefore the process of learning English as a second or third language in Indoensian has obstacles on the aspects of both cultres and politeness. This greatly affects the utilization of politeness value that is used by students in English textbooks that they use compared to their own culture that would create some questions about politeness like which politeness value that they are supposed to use. Besides, politeness values in Eastern country like Indonesia are very prominent. It is convenient that the learner knows about different strategies and different degrees of directness. But these scales should not be left without a suitable explanation. Otherwise the student may misinterpret them thinking for example that the more indirect the form is the more polite he is.

In this paper, some examples of utterance or sentence are taken from the junior and senior high English textbooks in order to determine and to apply the politeness values in English and Indonesian culture.

## 2. POLITENESS THEORY

Politeness is related with feeling of someone, Holmes [1992:297] states that ‘a polite person makes others feel comfortable’ In this case, the speaker has to consider whether the situation is formal or informal. In formal situation, the appropriate way of talking to one who is known well, such as brother, it is depends to the context. Politeness and the way of speaking are influenced by the cultural background. In this paper, politeness strategy by Brown and Levinson (1987) is used in identifying kinds of politeness values that appear in students English textbooks. They divide politeness into five types, they are; bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. *Bald on-record* strategies usually do not attempt to minimize the threat to the hearer’s face, although there are ways that bald on-record politeness can be used in trying to minimize FTAs implicitly, for example: Pass me the water. *Positive Politeness* addresses the recipient’s positive face, his/ her wants and need. It acknowledges common ground between the interlocutors, for example: Hey, dude, can you lend me money? Or Let’s get an ice cream (Brown & Levinson, 1987:102). *Negative politeness* addresses the recipient’s need for self determination, to have her/his actions unimpeded, for example: Would you close the window? (Brown & Levinson 1987:129). *Off-record* attempts to minimize the imposition of the listener, for example: It’s getting cold in here. Speaker has the opportunity to evade responsibility by claiming that H’s interpretation of the utterance as a FTA is wrong .This type of politeness strategy is indirect strategy.

Furthermore, certain aspect are also influenced the degree of politeness, such us power, distance, and impositions (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 74). Power is crucial in politeness matter. Holmes (1995: 17) states that the power dimension refers to the ability of the participants to influence one another’s circumstances. So, when one speaker has power over another means that he/she is able to lead the conversation. Power is also influenced by age differences. Mizutani and Mizutani (1987: 4) state that age differences will affect the formality of the speaker and hence the degree of politeness.

## 3. DISCUSSIONS

In this part, the examples politeness values that appear in English textbook are analyzed whether it is influenced by English culture or mix of both cultures.

Dialog 1 (English textbook of Class X)

The first dialog is between two friends. It is appeared in English textbook for senior high students class X.

Rama : You look so pale. I bring you some soup, fix you some tea and bake you some treats. Hope you recover soon.

Imran : **Thanks a lot.** What a lovely friend you are! I really appreciate that.

Rama : I’d also water your plants and tidy your room.

Imran : **Thank you very much.** I’m glad you do it for me.

Rama : to help you feel better, I’d fluff up your pillow and straighten your sheets.

Imran : **I am so grateful to you.** You’re the bestfriends I have ever had.

In the conversation above, it can be seen that the second speaker uses positive politeness which can be seen from the utterance “**Thanks a lot**” which suggests that they are close friends and he tries to minimize the distance between them. In the English classroom, teacher needs to tell his/her students that it is okay to say “**thanks or thanks a lot**” if the conversation happens between two or more friends. Moreover, it is not appropriate to say to someone older than those students, for example: teacher, parents, elder, etc. The appropriate one is “**Thank you or thank you very much**”.

The second dialog is between teacher Mr. Sultoni and his students Rani and Anisa. (Class X of senior high English textbook)

Mr. Sultoni : Hi, how are you?  
Rani : We're good. Thanks.  
Anisa : Excellent.  
Rani : You have a nice hair cut, Pak Sultoni.  
Anisa : Yes, you're looking good with your hair style.  
Mr. Sultoni : Thanks a lot. Rani, I heard you won the Math Olympiad. Is it true?  
Rani : Yes, I won the second prize lastweek.  
Mr. Sultoni : I'm glad to hear that.  
Rani : Thank you very much for saying so.

The case of politeness is also appeared in the dialog above. Rani's utterance "**We're good. Thanks**" indicates that she uses positive politeness strategy which is a part of English culture. It is also the same with the previous dialog, that it is not appropriate to use the short term "**thanks**" in answering older speaker utterance. It is considered okay if the dialog happens between friends but not with the teacher. The best response which aligns with Indonesian culture is "**Thank you or thank you for asking, Sir**".

The next dialog is between a teacher and her students in the classroom. (English textbook of Class VIII)

Teacher : Attention, please! Attention, please!  
Students : Yes, Ma'am.  
Teacher : Dayu, please look at me! Would you stop doing that please? Are you ready to learn?  
Dayu : I'm so sorry, Ma'am. Yes, I am.  
Teacher : Attention, please. Are we all ready to learn English?  
Students : Yes, Ma'am.

The dialog above suggests that the teacher uses negative politeness in her utterance which can be seen from the word "**please**". It is suggested that teacher does not need to use "**please**" in conversing with their students because teacher has a power over his or her students. Teacher, in the classroom, need to realize that they do not need to use this word to show the students that he/she is needed to be heard. By saying please, teacher makes it sound like he/she begs for the students to stop talking or being annoying in the class while she/he should just say "**Attention, students!**" or "**Dayu, look at me**" without the word "please" in it.

The next dialog is a conversation between two students. (English textbook of Class VIII)

Lina : Can I use your pen?  
Dayu : Sure. Take the green one.

The dialog above indicates the use of positive politeness which is represented from the utterance "**Can I use your pen**". Here, it shows that the students are close to each other. Therefore, she minimizes the distance by using "**Can**". However, teacher must aware and tell them that that utterance is not appropriate to be addressed to someone older like a teacher, principal, or parents. To make it more like Indonesian culture, student should use "**May I**" or add "**please**" to make it more polite as the representation of Indonesian culture.

The next dialog is a conversation between two strangers. (English textbook of Class XII)

Edo : Hello, I am Edo. May I know your name please?  
Slamet : Sure, I am Slamet. I am from Jepara. What about you?

Edo : I am from raja Ampat. I work in a tourism airport.

The utterances in the dialog above suggest that the first speaker Edo uses negative politeness in his utterance. It can be seen by the indication of “**please**” in his sentence. It shows that they are two strangers who has just met for the first time. It is the right choice to use this kind of politeness in the first meeting and it represent the culture of Indonesian people who likes to be indirect and maintain distance with someone else in order to respect them. This is mostly happen in Indonesian culture. Moreover, teacher need to explains to the students that this is the right choice of introduction to other people that they do not know.

The next dialog is between a teacher and a student. (English textbook of Class VIII)

Teacher: Beni, will you close the window, please?

Student : I’ll do it.

The dialog above shows that the teacher the form of negative politeness in asking heer student to close the window by adding the word “**please**”. This represent the culture of Indonesian who likes to use the word “**please**” in asking a request. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that the dialog happens between teacher and student in which teacher has a power over her student. So, teacher need to be aware of this kind of politeness and can get rid of the use “**please**” in conversing with her students because it is not appropriate for the teacher to ask a student by saying “please”. It should be “**Bill, close the window!**”.

The next dialog is between a student and his classmate. (English textbook of Class VIII)

Student : Hey. Let’s go to the canteen.

Classmates : Sure. Let’s go.

The utterances above indicate that the students use the positive politeness which is shown by the word “**Let’s**”. It is normal to use it between students but teacher need to tell the students that they cannot use those kind of utterances in talking with people who are older than them. Those utterances above are simply typical of English culture. In conversing with older people, students need to use name marker to the addresse, such us “Sir/Madam/Miss”

The dialog below is a conversation between a guy in a company who got promoted as the director of a national company and his colleagues are warming him with congratulations.

Samuel : Alif, congratulations. You deserved it, Man.

Alif : Thank you very much. This is because you always help me.

It is clear that the first speaker congratulated him for his achievement but his utterance is a not a representation of Indonesian culture. It can be seen from his utterance “**You deserved it, Man**”. It is a typical of English culture. It is probably okay between friends but it should be better without “Man or Dude” in the sentence. Sometimes people get offended if they hear it simply because it is less polite and mostly Indonesian people do not use that kind of expression. So, teacher needs to explain to the students that mostly people in Indonesian culture use “**Congratulations, I am so happy for you**”.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The culture in Indonesia usually uses negative politeness values in conversations. This paper explains about the importance of norms and politeness values in interaction within English class. The purpose of this paper is to describe the English learning that is not only taken from textbooks but also inserts the politeness values of that very culture in order to enable the students in comparing and determining the forms and differences between those two politeness values.

It is found that there are some aspects of politeness values of English cultures and Indonesian culture in students English textbooks. It appears that mostly English textbook contain of English culture which should be understood deeper by the students in order to avoid misunderstanding in their conversations. Moreover, students will face difficulty in understanding those kinds of politeness in English textbooks without any guidance from their teachers. Teachers are expected to fully aware of this matter because it is somehow will affect their ways in being polite in the future. Based on the investigation, it is found that there are lack of conversations between students and teacher which should be added more in English textbooks. So that students can differentiate how to act polite to the teachers or other students based on the degree of politeness.

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