

Positive Politeness Dominates: Examining The Politeness Strategies in an Indonesian EFL Textbook

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Abstract

Understanding politeness strategy helps speakers understand which expressions are appropriate to use depending on the situation. This study aims to provide an overview of politeness strategies found in the EFL textbook Bahasa Inggris: Think Globally, Act Locally in the selected chapter. This study employs qualitative content analysis and the data were taken from the dialogues contained in the first chapter that has the theme of congratulating others. A total of 13 dialogues which comprise 35 data of politeness-related expressions were analyzed. The data were examined using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. The results revealed 29 data of positive politeness and six data of bald on record strategies. Negative politeness and off-record strategies were not identified in the dialogues of the first chapter of the textbook. The results of this study suggest that positive politeness and bald on record strategies are predominantly used in situations where speakers share familiarity or closeness, particularly when expressing congratulations.

Keywords: Positive Politeness; Bald on Record; EFL Textbook

INTRODUCTION

Politeness is a crucial aspect for everyone to understand in order to communicate (‘Azzah & Mujiyanto, 2023; Dalimunte & Wen, 2022; Sihite et al., 2021). By understanding politeness, speakers will understand how to communicate (Batubara et al., 2022), avoiding conflicts with the interlocutors (Aspitari et al., 2022; Doohee, 2023; Dwijayanti et al., 2021; Muhtadi et al., 2022; Nursanti et al., 2023). Moreover, understanding politeness strategies is crucial to making the message understandable and acceptable to the interlocutors (Daar et al., 2023).

In an interaction, politeness means that when the speaker talks to the person he is talking to, he carefully pays attention to the "face" of the interlocutor (Yule, 1996). "Face" in the concept of politeness means the social image or how the interlocutor is known by other people (Yule, 1996). Leech (2014) states that one of the characteristics of politeness is that it depends on the situation. Therefore, speakers need to know what is going on between themselves and the interlocutors. Brown and Levinson (1987) define four types of politeness strategies, they are bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. Bald on record is used when people already know each other, and speakers do not need to maintain the other person's "face" (Daar et al., 2023). The second strategy is positive politeness. According to Yule (1996), the use of positive politeness which occurs when the speakers emphasize closeness with the hearers can be seen as a solidarity strategy. When talking about positive politeness strategy, it is used to meet the hearer's positive face (Abbas, 2013). The third strategy is negative politeness. The use of this type of politeness which occurs when the speakers emphasize the freedom of the hearers can be seen as a deference strategy (Yule, 1996). The last strategy is off-record. This strategy is also commonly referred to as hinting (Yule, 1996), where speakers communicate implicitly.

There are many previous studies on politeness strategies used in EFL textbooks. Textbooks have a very important role in teaching and learning English (Ahmadi & Derakhshan, 2016). Textbooks can provide explanations in the form of theory, as well as exercises that students can do to sharpen their English language skills. A study on politeness strategy used in EFL textbooks was conducted by Meiratnasari et al. (2019). Their study used two textbooks, namely *Talk Active 1* and *Talk Active 2: Language and Culture Programme*. Their study used Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies to analyze the data. The study reveals that bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record were reflected in the Indonesian English textbooks. Another study on politeness strategy used in EFL textbooks was conducted by Zelika et al. (2025). The data used by them are the dialogues in the *English for Nusantara* textbook for the seventh grade of junior high school. Their study also used Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies to analyze the data and the results of their study present that there are three types of politeness strategies in the textbook, eight data on bald on record, 65 data on positive politeness, and six data on negative politeness. Moreover, Erlinda et al. (2023) conducted a study on politeness strategy in the EFL textbook *English for Nusantara*. This study only focuses on the positive politeness contained in the textbook by analyzing the dialogues. By using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, the results of their study reveals that there are eight types of positive politeness in the textbook. This study focuses on the broad overview of politeness strategies in the EFL textbook *Bahasa Inggris: Think Globally Act Locally* which was published by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2018. This study focuses on the first chapter of the textbook because the dialogues in this chapter are varied and describe several characters such as teachers and students, parents and children, and between students. It allows the researcher to analyze the politeness strategies used by each character. This study answers the question: What types of politeness strategies are identified in the dialogues in the first chapter of the textbook *Bahasa Inggris: Think Globally Act Locally*?

METHOD

This study employed qualitative content analysis (Flick, 2014) to identify politeness strategies, based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, found in the first chapter of an EFL textbook. Content analysis is a procedure to analyze textual material (Flick, 2014). This method was chosen because it helps to identify politeness strategies in the dialogues of the first chapter of the textbook. The data were taken from the EFL textbook *Bahasa Inggris: Think Globally, Act Locally*, which consists of 13 dialogues found in Chapter 1 of the textbook. The textbook is for ninth-grade students and was published by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2018. The first chapter of the textbook was selected because its varied dialogues allow the researcher to analyze the politeness strategies used by each character in the dialogues. In analyzing data from the dialogues selected, the researcher used data analysis stages proposed by Miles et al. (2014). First, the researcher conducted data condensation by reading repeatedly, until the researcher was absolutely sure that not a single word was missed. Subsequently, each data in the dialogues was classified according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. In the data display stage, the results were organized into tables showing each data, the type of strategy, and explanation. The final step is the conclusion and the researcher reported in the results and discussion section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

There are 13 dialogues analyzed in chapter one of the EFL textbook *Bahasa Inggris: Think Globally, Act Locally*. A total of 35 utterances were examined to determine the type of politeness strategy each one employs.

Table 1. Dialogue 1 in page 2

| Data | Utterance | Politeness Strategy |
|------|--|---------------------|
| 1 | The winner of the story-telling competition in this class is Lina. Congratulations, Lina! | Positive politeness |
| 2 | Congratulations, Lina! | Positive politeness |
| 3 | Thank you, Ma'am. Thank you, everybody. | Positive politeness |
| 4 | Lina, because you are the winner of the story-telling competition in this class, you will represent this class for the story-telling competition of our school next month. | Bald on record |
| 5 | Prepare your best for the competition, will you? I hope you win the first prize, too. Good luck! | Positive politeness |
| 6 | I hope so too, Ma'am. Yes, I'll do my best. | Positive politeness |

According to table 1 above, there are six data. Five data are positive politeness strategies and one data is bald on record strategy.

Table 2. Dialogue 2 in page 3

| Data | Utterance | Politeness Strategy |
|------|--|---------------------|
| 1 | Lina, you are a very good story teller. I'm sure you will win the school's story-telling competition. Good luck! | Positive politeness |
| 2 | Thank you, Edo. | Positive politeness |

According to table 2 above, there are two data of positive politeness strategies.

Table 3. Dialogue 3 in page 3

| Data | Utterance | Politeness Strategy |
|------|---|---------------------|
| 1 | Congratulations on being the champion of the class, Lina! I hope you will be the winner of the school's competition, too. | Positive politeness |

| | | |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 2 | Thanks. I hope so, too. | Positive politeness |
|---|-------------------------|---------------------|

From the third dialogue above, there are two data of positive politeness strategies.

Table 4. Dialogue 4 in page 3

| Data | Utterance | Politeness Strategy |
|------|---|---------------------|
| 1 | Lina, I'm happy for you. Congratulations! I hope you win the first prize in the school's competition. | Positive politeness |
| 2 | Thank you. Wish me luck! | Positive politeness |
| 3 | Of course. Good luck! | Positive politeness |
| 4 | Thanks. | Positive politeness |

According to table 4 above, there are four data of positive politeness strategies.

Table 5. Dialogue 5 in page 4

| Data | Utterance | Politeness Strategy |
|------|--|---------------------|
| 1 | Congratulations, Lina! It's your dream to be the winner of the school's story telling competition, isn't it? | Positive politeness |
| 2 | Yes, it's my dream. And I have practiced every day for the last two months with my dad. | Positive politeness |
| 3 | Sure, you have to work hard for your dreams. Good luck! | Positive politeness |
| 4 | Thank you, Siti, Udin, for your support. | Positive politeness |

The table 5 above shows that the fifth dialogue has four data of positive politeness strategies.

Table 6. Dialogue 6 in page 8

| Data | Utterance | Politeness Strategy |
|------|--|---------------------|
| 1 | Lina: "Thank God, I've got an A for my Math test. But, I don't know the result of my English test, yet." | Bald on record |
| 2 | Dayu: "Congratulations on the result of your Math test! I hope you get an A for the English test, too." | Positive Politeness |

The sixth dialogue above has two data that contain one positive politeness and one bald on record strategies.

Table 7. Dialogue 7 in page 11

| Data | Utterance | Politeness Strategy |
|-------------|--|----------------------------|
| 1 | Happy birthday, Udin! You are a big boy now. I'm proud of you. | Positive Politeness |
| 2 | Thank you, Dad. I'm proud of you, too. | Positive Politeness |

From the seventh dialogue above, there are two data of positive politeness strategies.

Table 8. Dialogue 8 in page 11

| Data | Utterance | Politeness Strategy |
|-------------|--|----------------------------|
| 1 | Amazing! You run like a panther. I'm sure you will win the race. | Positive Politeness |
| 2 | I hope so. Thanks. | Positive Politeness |

According to table eighth above, there are two data of positive politeness strategies.

Table 9. Dialogue 9 in page 12

| Data | Utterance | Politeness Strategy |
|-------------|--|----------------------------|
| 1 | Thank God, the tent is done. | Bald on record |
| 2 | Good work, boys! You are super. I'm very proud of you. | Positive Politeness |

The ninth dialogue above has two data that contain one positive politeness and one bald on record strategy.

Table 10. Dialogue 10 in page 12

| Data | Utterance | Politeness Strategy |
|-------------|--|----------------------------|
| 1 | Mom, I have cleaned up my room. | Bald on record |
| 2 | Good girl! It looks tidy now, doesn't it? I love it. | Positive Politeness |

According to table 10 above, there are two data that contain one positive politeness and one bald on record strategy.

Table 11. Dialogue 11 in page 12

| Data | Utterance | Politeness Strategy |
|-------------|--|----------------------------|
| 1 | Many people have come to our table. They like my cookies. They are sold out. | Bald on record |
| 2 | Great! Your cookies are very popular now. | Positive Politeness |

The eleventh dialogue above has two data that contain one positive politeness and one bald on record strategy.

Table 12. Dialogue 12 in page 12

| Data | Utterance | Politeness Strategy |
|------|---|---------------------|
| 1 | Udin, I got a scholarship. | Bald on record |
| 2 | Congratulations, Siti. You deserve it. Your mom and dad must be proud of you. | Positive Politeness |
| 3 | Yes, thanks. It will help my parents a lot. | Positive Politeness |

From the twelfth dialogue above, there are three data that contain two positive politeness and one bald on record strategies.

Table 13. Dialogue 13 in page 14

| Data | Utterance | Politeness Strategy |
|------|--|---------------------|
| 1 | Beni: "That's a very beautiful handycraft. I'm sure you will win the national crafts competition." | Positive Politeness |
| 2 | Edo: "Thank you. I hope so, too." | Positive Politeness |

According to table thirteenth above, there are two data of positive politeness strategies

Discussion

By using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, this study found that there are only two types of politeness strategies present in the first chapter of the EFL textbook titled *Bahasa Inggris: Think Globally, Act Locally*. The thirteen tables in the finding section above indicate that the positive politeness strategy is the most dominant strategy in the first chapter of the textbook. The most dominant are the words 'congratulations' and 'thank you' to express appreciation and gratitude. All examples of dialogues in the first chapter demonstrate that speakers who are already familiar and close commonly use positive politeness strategy when expressing congratulations. In this study, it has been shown that there are a total of 35 data in dialogues contained in the first chapter of the textbook. There are 29 data of positive politeness and seven data of bald on record strategy. Dialogue 2, 3, 7, 8, and 13 each have two data and all are positive politeness strategies. Furthermore, dialogue 4 and 5 have four data and all are positive politeness. Most positive politeness strategies in the first chapter of this textbook are identified when speakers congratulate their speaking partners. It is crucial for students to learn how to congratulate others, and the first chapter of this textbook includes many examples of short dialogues on how to congratulate others. Using this textbook can help students learn to say congratulations, since textbooks are important resources to achieve course objectives based on the learners' needs (Ahmadi & Derakhshan, 2016). Furthermore, dialogue 6, 9, 10, 11 each have two data which each consist of one positive politeness and one bald on record strategy. Moreover, dialogue 1 has six data which consist of five positive politeness strategies and one bald on record strategy. Another dialogue that consists of two politeness strategies is dialogue 12 which consists of one bald on record and two positive politeness strategies. The findings

support that bald on record is also a type of politeness that is usually used by speakers who know each other well (Daar et al., 2023; Sihite et al., 2021). Overall, there are positive politeness and bald on record strategies as demonstrated in examples of short dialogues in the first chapter of the textbook. Chapter 1 of this textbook discusses congratulations so that it is possible that neither negative politeness nor off-record strategies were identified because all dialogues are portrayed that all speakers are already familiar, close, and they communicate without hinting. The dialogues are between students and teachers, parents and children, and friends. The findings have shown that the use of positive politeness and bald on record strategies helps speakers to communicate in situations where speakers share familiarity or closeness, particularly when expressing congratulations.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to provide a broad overview of the politeness strategies identified in the first chapter of an EFL textbook titled *Bahasa Inggris: Think Globally Act Locally*. The focus of this study is to explore the distribution of each politeness strategy identified. This study does not analyze the sub-strategies within each politeness strategy, but this study focuses on the general function and broad overview of each politeness strategy. Based on the politeness theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), this study found that there are 13 dialogues comprising 35 data in the first chapter of the textbook. There are 29 data of positive politeness and six data of bald on record strategies. The first chapter of this textbook discusses the topic of congratulating others, and the short dialogue examples shown in the textbook demonstrate that the dialogues are conducted by people who are already familiar with each other.

The discussion regarding the politeness strategy in the first chapter of the textbook has also implications and benefits that can be taken by students. First, students can learn to express congratulations to people they already know. Second, understanding various types of politeness strategies can prevent learners from making errors when they are talking with the interlocutors. By understanding politeness, speakers can avoid conflicts with the interlocutors (Aspitasari et al., 2022; Doohee, 2023; Dwijayanti et al., 2021; Muhtadi et al., 2022; Nursanti et al., 2023). However, this study comes with limitations. First, this study only explores the politeness strategy in the first chapter of the textbook, so it cannot describe the overall politeness strategy in all chapters of the textbook. Second, this study only provides a broad overview of politeness strategy. This study does not explain the specific types of each politeness strategy. Future research could explore the specific types of politeness strategy and examine the politeness strategy in all chapters of the textbook so that the findings can be more varied.

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