

# AN ANALYSIS ON POLITENESS IN SMS OF THE STUDENTS TO THE LECTURERS OF ENGLISH DEPARTMENT UNIROW TUBAN

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## **ABSTRACT:**

*The purposes of this study are to find out politeness strategies and the dominant politeness strategies in Short Message Service (SMS) text of the students of English period 2008 sent to the lecturers of English from March to May 2012. This study applies qualitative research. Using documentation method, the data are collected from the lecturers' mobile phone by making permission from the lecturers to send the students' SMS that they received to the writer' mobile phone. The data are analyzed using Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987). The results reveal that there are four politeness strategies in students' SMS- Bald on Record (BOR), Positive Politeness (PP), Negative Politeness (NP), and Off Record (OR). Negative politeness strategy is dominantly used by the students. But the students' SMS cannot reflect appropriateness in their interpersonal communication to lecturers since the SMS of the students of English period 2008 sent to the lecturers are not consistent with Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, that lower status members tend to be relatively indirect (polite) in their communication to higher-status superior.*

**Key Words:** *Politeness, SMS, Text Messages, Mobile Phones*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Learning a language, especially a foreign language, involves not only knowing how to speak and write, but also how to behave linguistically. In our daily talk, there are ways to get things we want. When we are with friends, we can be informal with them as to say 'shut up', 'open the door', 'close the window', 'hand me your book'. However, when we are talking to adults and strange people we do not know well, we must be more formal and more polite as to say 'could you open the window, please?' Or 'I am sorry, I don't mean to interrupt you but it is too hot.'

The rapid growth of attention given to linguistic politeness seems to be more the result of real world necessity than purely linguistic interest. As the world becomes smaller and smaller owing

to rapid progress in transportation and communication systems, people who previously engaged in face to face interaction among acquaintances are now confronted by the need to communicate with people from different backgrounds and with unfamiliar communicative styles.

Concerning electronic communications, there are a lot of kinds of ones that can bridge our communication with others. One of the most famous communications is a mobile phone. Mobile phones are particularly useful mini-computers that fit in students' pocket, are always with them, and are nearly always on (Prensky, 2005). It can be used to make a call or send short messages to inform or to get information from others. The writer thinks that in sending SMS of course we should keep concerning with whom,

where, how and in what situations or context (formal or informal) in order to avoid friction and achieve smooth communication regardless of its characters.

In this paper, the writer investigates politeness strategies in text messages (SMS) of the students of English period 2008 sent to the lecturers of English at the University of PGRI Ronggolawe Tuban. It is primarily analyzed within the framework of Brown and Levinson's work (1987) in the universal aspects of politeness and specifically with the respect to face threatening acts (FTA).

People use language to transmit information, but to do it effectively, language must be used in a manner that will not cause friction between the participants because not all of the languages can make our interpersonal communication (writers and readers, speakers and listeners) run smoothly. The speakers or writers should consider many things before they speak or write, such as their words, to whom, how, what, when and where they are speaking or writing. In the other words, humans should use some strategies. It is using politeness.

Brown and Levinson (1987; cited in Watts, 2005: xv) defines politeness as rational behavior aimed at the strategic softening (or mitigation) of face-threatening act, while Yule (1996: 60) argues that politeness, in interaction, can be defined as the means employed to show awareness of another's face. Lakoff (1975; cited in Watts, 2003: 50) '... politeness is developed by societies in order to reduce friction in personal interaction.' From those definitions the writer deduces that politeness is the means how to achieve smooth

communication verbally at any different societies and cultures.

Thus, this study is based on some reasons: Firstly, it is based on the view that "The way in which we use language can tell people a good deal about our personal qualities- our way of thinking, our alertness, our concern for useful communication with other people" (Batko, 2004:17). Secondly the writer personally feels difficulty in having smooth interpersonal communication either oral or written ones which often cause friction between friends, parents, teachers, lecturers, and strangers. Thirdly, the writer often hears complaints of lecturers of English that a lot of students often send short text messages inappropriately like they sent ones to their own friends by using contractions (Gd = good), shortenings (bro = brother), G clipping (goin = going), or letter/number homophones (B = be, 4 = for) (Thurlow & Brown, 2003: 29) which cannot be understood easily by the lecturers.

The same study was also done by Panggabean (2010). She analyzed on the students' short-messages services/SMS sent to the lecturer by using critical discourse analysis in investigating the purposes of the students in sending SMS, the language forms and word choices and the politeness strategies applied by the students. In politeness strategies, the result reveals the students use different politeness strategies, some of which are impolite and cause the lecturer not to respond.

Based on the background of the study, this paper attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. What are politeness strategies in text messages (SMS) of the students of English period 2008 sent to the lecturers of English at the University of PGRI Ronggolawe Tuban?
2. What are the dominant politeness strategies in text messages (SMS) of the students of English period 2008 sent to the lecturers of English at the University of PGRI Ronggolawe Tuban?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Brown and Levinson's Politeness theory

In this study the writer focuses on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory as a theoretical basis because 'it represents a framework for linking the major dimensions of social interaction with the ways in which people talk with one other (Holtgraves, 2002: 38). Their politeness theory rests on three basic notions: face, face threatening act (FTA), and politeness strategies. The three basic notions will be discussed below.

### Face

Central to interpersonal politeness, Brown & Levinson's politeness theory is rooted in the notion of face. They claim that face is the motivation behind politeness. In particular, their politeness is influenced by Goffman's study of 'face.' Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) define face as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself," and state that "face is something that is emotionally invested and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction." In a technical term, face means the public self-image of a person. It refers to that emotional and

social sense of self that everyone has and expects everyone else to recognize (Yule, 1996: 60).

They propose two kinds of face: positive and negative face. Positive face is defined as "the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others" and Negative face is defined as "the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others" (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 61-64). In the simple terms, positive face is the need to be connected and negative face is the need to be independent (Yule, 1996: 62).

### FTAs

Brown and Levinson's key concept regarding face is Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs), which means that "certain kinds of acts intrinsically threaten face, namely those acts that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or the speaker" (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 65). More clearly FTA is "If a person says something that represents a threat to another individual's expectation regarding self-image" (Yule, 1996: 61). According to Grundy (2000: 156), in most encounters, our face is put at risk. Asking someone for a sheet of paper, or telling them they have to wait to see the doctor, or complaining about the quality of their work on one's car, or asking them the time, these all threaten the face of the person to whom they are directed.

### Politeness Strategies

Politeness strategies are the strategies that are used to minimize or avoid the FTA that speaker makes. In order to either avoid or minimise such face-threatening activities, participants in interaction usually select from a set of strategies.

Brown and Levinson suggest possible strategies for doing FTAs. (See figure 1)

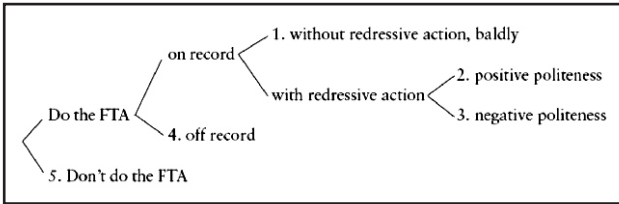


Figure 1. Possible Strategies for Doing FTAs (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 69).

**Bald on Record Strategy (BOR)**

Doing an act baldly, without redress, involves doing it in the most direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way possible (for example, for a request, saying 'Do X!') (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 69). To speak on record without redressive action is to speak with strict Gricean rationality. They argue that normally, a FTA will be done in this way only if the speaker does not fear retribution from the addressee. Bald-on-record strategies are used in circumstances where: (1) S

and H both tacitly agree that the relevance of face demands may be suspended in the interests of urgency or efficiency; (2) where the danger to H's face is very small, as in offers, requests, suggestions that are clearly in H's interest and do not require great sacrifices of S (e.g., 'Come in' or 'Do sit down'); and (3) where S is vastly superior in power to H, or can enlist audience support to destroy H's face without losing his own. (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 69)

**Positive Politeness strategies (PP)**

Positive politeness is oriented toward the positive face of H, the positive self-image that he claims for himself. Positive politeness is “approach-based” (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 70). The positive politeness strategy is usually seen in groups of friends, or where people in the given social situation know each other fairly well. It usually tries to minimize the distance between them. There are fifteen sub-strategies that are used in positive politeness strategies:

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Notice, attend to H (his interests, wants, needs, goods).</li> <li>2. Exaggerate (interest approval, sympathy with H)</li> <li>3. Intensify interest to H</li> <li>4. Use in-group identity markers</li> <li>5. Seek agreement</li> <li>6. Avoid disagreement</li> <li>7. Presuppose/raise/assert common ground</li> <li>8. Jokes</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants.</li> <li>10. Offer, promise.</li> <li>11. Be optimistic</li> <li>12. Include both S and H in the activity</li> <li>13. Give (or ask for) reasons</li> <li>14. Assume or assert reciprocity</li> <li>15. Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)</li> </ol>
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**Negative Politeness Strategy (NP)**

Negative politeness, on the other hand, is oriented mainly toward partially satisfying (redressing) H's negative face, his basic want to maintain claims of territory and self-

determination. Negative politeness is “avoidance-based” (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 70). Brown and Levinson claim that negative politeness is most similar to what people mean by being polite. Some of the sub-strategies of negative politeness are:

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Be conventionally indirect.</li> <li>2. Question, hedge.</li> <li>3. Be pessimistic.</li> <li>4. Minimize imposition</li> <li>5. Give difference</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Apologize</li> <li>7. Impersonalize S and H</li> <li>8. State the FTA as general rule</li> <li>9. Nominalize</li> <li>10. Go on record as incurring debt, or as not indebting H.</li> </ol>
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**Off Record Strategy (OR)**

According to B&L (1987: 211-227), a communicative act is done off-record if it is done in such a way that it is not possible to attribute only one clear communicative intention to the

act. Thus, if a speaker wants to do an FTA, but wants to avoid the responsibility for doing it, he can do it off-record and leave it up the addressee to decide how to interpret it. Some sub-strategies of off-record:

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Give hints</li> <li>2. Give association clues</li> <li>3. Presuppose</li> <li>4. Understate</li> <li>5. Overstate</li> <li>6. Tautologies</li> <li>7. Contradictions</li> <li>8. Be ironic</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Use metaphors</li> <li>10. Use rhetorical questions</li> <li>11. Be ambiguous</li> <li>12. Be vague</li> <li>13. Over-generalize</li> <li>14. Displace H</li> <li>15. Be incomplete, use ellipsis</li> </ol>
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**Variables Determining Politeness Strategies**

Brown and Levinson (1987: 74) argue that in choosing the type of politeness strategies can be determined by the three factors (sociological variables) they are (D) the social distance of S and H, (P) the relative power of S and H, and (R)

the absolute ranking of imposition in the particular culture.

The greater the social distance between the interlocutors (e.g. if they know each other very little), the more politeness is generally expected. The greater the relative power of hearer over speaker, the more politeness is recommended.

The heavier the imposition made on the hearer (more of their time or the greater the favour requested), the more politeness will generally have to be used.

### SMS

SMS stands for Short Message Service. SMS is also often referred to as texting, sending text messages, text messaging or mobile text messaging. The service allows for short text messages to be sent from one cell phone to another cell phone or from the Web to another cell phone (Wardhono, 2007: 80).

While Hard af Segerstad, (2005: 34) argues SMS is an asynchronous mode of communication, i.e. it does not require the communicators to be online simultaneously. As it employs writing as means of expression, it is monomodal and thus can only take advantage of what can be conveyed through the single channel of the visible writing system. On the other hand, the asynchronicity allows the writers to compose and edit messages before sending them, and the communication does not require immediate response like spoken interaction. Most commonly, messages are produced on the tiny keypad of the phone and are limited to 160 characters in length. From this view the writer argues that students, in sending short messages to the teachers or lecturers, are supposed to be polite.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### Method and Participants

This study uses qualitative research. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994; cited in Cresswell, 1998: 14), qualitative research focuses on interpretation of phenomena in their natural

settings to make sense in terms of the meanings people bring to these settings. Qualitative research involves collecting information about personal experiences, introspection, life story, interviews, observations, historical, interactions and visual text which are significant moments and meaningful in peoples' lives.

Since this research is qualitative research, the main instrument of this research is the researchers themselves. An additional instrument used was cell phone, modem and notebook for collecting the data. The setting of the research is at University of PGRI Ronggolawe Tuban, participants of the study are the students of English period 2008 and data source the students' SMS sent to the lecturers from March to May 2012

### **Data Collection**

In collecting data the writer used document method since this study aimed to understand politeness strategies in text messages (SMS) of the students of English are sent to the lecturers of English. Before collecting the data, the writer made permission to the pertinent institution. Then, he made permission to the lecturers of English to gather the students' SMS by voluntarily sending the text messages to the writer's mobile phone. The SMS which had been collected from lecturers' mobile phones, then those were copied from writer's mobile phone to computer by using a modem and saved to Microsoft word and printed out for analysis. 122 SMS were collected from March to May 2012.

### Data Analysis

To obtain the answer of the research questions. The writer used the following data analysis

procedure; Read and reduced to the data that do not contribute to complete understanding of context. Selected, categorized and fragmented the data into topic based on the purposes of the students' SMS. Focused on request strategies since requesting purposes were the most dominant ones in students' SMS. Identified and coded the data in accordance with Brown and Levinson's (1987) category politeness strategies (Appendix b). B1-B3 were for bald on record strategies (BOR). P1-P15 were for positive politeness strategies (PP). N1-N10 were for negative politeness strategies (NP) and O1-O10 were for off record strategies (OR). Grouped and displayed the data into a table and numbered the codes to indicate the frequency of politeness strategies in text had been used. From 122 the students' SMS, the writer analyzed 101 SMS which divided into six fragments.

**RESULT DISCUSSION**

1. Politeness strategies in text messages (SMS) of the students of English period 2008 sent to the lecturers of English.

The communicative events were in academic institutional context between students and

lecturers in SMS communication. Most of the students' SMS were making requests about their research proposals. Making request is FTA to the hearer's negative face (the need to be independent and freedom from action) since the hearer has to do what speaker's wants. In academic context, the lecturers had power over the students. And also the lecturers had difference social distance from the students. It means that the students needed to use more formal, respectful language when writing SMS to the lecturers and the students had to show respect to them and made good impression on them too.

The findings revealed that there were four politeness strategies in the students' SMS those were bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness and off record. In bald on record (BOR), they generally used strategies B3 (want statement) and B2 (direct question), in positive politeness (PP) they generally used strategy P4 (use in group identity marker), and in negative politeness (NP) they commonly used strategies (N5) give deference and (N6) apologize, and in off record (OR) they used (O1) give hints.

Fragments	Politeness Strategies			
	BOR	PP	NP	OR
Fragment I	23	5	56	
Fragment II	7	16	28	
Fragment III	11	15	45	1
Fragment IV	23	22	51	
Fragment V	17	19	37	
Fragment VI	1	6	7	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>3</b>

The table showed the negative politeness strategy was the most dominant politeness strategies used by the students in SMS communication to their lecturer. The strategy was employed two hundred and twenty four times, while bald on record was employed eighty two times and positive politeness strategy was used eighty three times. And off record strategy was applied three times.

## DISCUSSION

Based on the findings above the writer would discuss the four politeness strategies in students' SMS sent to the lecturers. As it was known from the findings above that the students used four politeness strategies. Those were negative politeness, positive politeness, bald on record and off record strategies:

### o Negative politeness strategies

Negative politeness, according to Brown and Levinson (1987: 129), is “redressive action addressed to the addressee's negative face (the need to be independent and freedom from imposition).” Negative politeness is “avoidance-based” (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 70). As a result, it is realized by the speaker's showing recognition and respect toward the addressee's negative faces.

Based on the finding above negative politeness strategies were the most dominant strategies in students' SMS. The most salient negative politeness strategies used by the students was [N5] “giving deference” e.g., using honorific terms (pak, bapak, ibu, bu), greeting (assalamualiakum, selamat pagi, selamat siang), thanking (terima kasih). But the honorific terms

were commonly used in their SMS. Only a few of the students used strategy [N6] “apologize” (maaf, mohon maaf) to show reluctance for the imposition.

### o Positive politeness strategies

Brown and Levinson (1987: 101) define positive politeness as “redress directed to the addressee's positive face (the need to be connected)” Positive politeness is “approach-based” (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 70). Therefore, it is realized mainly by claiming the common ground or sameness with the addressee. It was known that most of the student used positive politeness strategies [P4] by using informal writing styles or “use-in group identity markers in their SMS e.g., contractions and ellipsis (n for dan, dah for sudah, sy for saya, ntar for nanti, ass for Assalamualikum), informal address term (miz for miss, p for pak ), using of in-group language or dialect- using of jargon or slang (ciang for siang, core for sore).

### o Bald on records strategies

Brown and Levinson (1987: 95) treat bald on record strategy as speaking in conformity with Grice's maxims. These maxims are intuitively the characterization of conversational principles that will constitute guidelines for achieving maximally efficient communication. Bald on record strategy [B3] “Want Statements” (saya ingin/mau...) generally used by the students to convey their request. Want Statements indicated the students overestimated their student right and did not



demonstrate sufficient status-appropriateness deference to lecturers. “Want Statements” indicated directness and maximally efficiency communication which had little or no desire to maintain lecturers' face.

o Offrecord strategies

Brown and Levinson adopted the Gricean framework for categorizing off-record strategies; hence, strategies can be grouped according to the specific maxim that is violated. But according to Holtgraves (2008: 44), their intent was not so much to explain how people comprehend off-record remarks as to show how off-record remarks can convey politeness. It is also not clear whether these strategies are truly off-record.

Off record strategies are indirect utterances. If speaker wants to do an FTA, but wants to avoid the responsibility for doing it, he can do it off record and leave it up to the addressee to decide how to interpret it. It means that one says something which is different from what he means. There was one type of the off record strategy used by the students the strategy [O1] “give hints” ([P4]Ass.wr.wb. [N6]maaf [N5]bu mengganggu... bab 2 dan bab 3 saya sudah selesai di koreksi belum ya bu? Kalau sudah, [O1]saya mau ke tuban sekarang soalnya rumah s a y a rembang.[5/5/20127:59:23AM/087882XXx/99/17). Off record strategy was the least used by students.

Interestingly, even though the negative politeness strategies dominantly were used in the students' SMS but those strategies could not

indicate that the students had sent SMS appropriately to the lecturers. Since most of the negative politeness strategies they had used e.g., honorifics, formal greetings and apologize used as mitigating moves but they conveyed their request act by using both bald on record strategy “Want Statement” and also positive politeness strategy “use in group identity markers” e.g., contractions and ellipsis, using of group language and dialect, jargons or slangs which indicated directness- could not demonstrate sufficient status-appropriate deference to the lecturers, and closeness- emphasized that both students and lecturers belonged to some set of persons who share some wants.

**CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of the research, the writer concludes that there are four politeness strategies in text messages (SMS) of the students of English period 2008 sent to the lecturers; those are bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness and off record strategy. And negative politeness strategy dominantly used by the students.

But the students' SMS cannot reflect appropriateness in interpersonal communication between students and the lecturers since the SMS of the students of English period 2008 sent the lecturers are not consistent with the politeness theory, that lower status members tend to be relatively indirect (polite), in their communication to higher-status superior. These problems can be triggered by the students' lack of pragmatics and sociolinguistic competence.

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