

**PERCEPTION OF POLITENESS IN REQUESTS
BY INDONESIAN LEARNERS OF ENGLISH
AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**



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ABSTRACT

EKO WALUYANTI, 320100244. "PERCEPTION OF POLITENESS IN REQUESTS BY INDONESIAN LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE." Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta. Research Paper. 2014.

This study focuses on analyzing the perception of politeness in requests by EFL learners. This study aims at 1) describing the perception of the learners for the politeness in requests in some different social situations produced by Indonesian EFL learners, 2) describing the different perception of politeness used in requests between males and females, 3) classifying the reasons provided by Indonesian EFL students to judge politeness used in requests. This research applies a descriptive qualitative method in which the research participants were forty Indonesian EFL learners in Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta. The data were the perception of politeness used in requests which provided in three scales: polite, impolite, and I don't know. The way to collect data is using documentation and questionnaire forms of DCT (Discourse Completion Task) scenarios. The subjects of this research were taken through a random sampling technique consisting of 40 students comprising 20 males and 20 females participants who were in seventh semester. The writer analyzed the data by using politeness theory by Brown and Levinson (1987), impoliteness theory by Culpeper (2010), and the last request theory by Trosborg (1995).

The results show that there were perceptions to judge politeness used in requests which provided by Indonesian EFL learners, the students regarded that indirect requests included polite and direct requests were considered impolite. The difference in perception also happened between males and females to make judgments. Females had a better perception about politeness on requests than males because in mostly DCT, females have more confidence to judge whether the utterance of a request is polite or impolite. But, males prefer to not make judgments in politeness requests. The writer found several reasons to judge politeness, there were fourteen kinds of reasons which provided by Indonesian EFL learners. It could be seen from the total of the reasons: Word choice as 35,86%, modal verb as 16,53%, habitual action as 7,78%, distance as 10,97%, strategy of request as 4,72%, type of sentence as 5,69%, emotion as 2,5%, right as 0,83%, intonation as 4,86%, exclamatory mark as 2,08%, expression of face as 0,14%, culture as 0,55%, attention getter as 0,14%, and condition as 0,42%. In fact, there were some students who didn't give reasons because the participants were not sure whether the request was polite or impolite.

Keyword: Perception, Politeness, Request, Reason.

A. Introduction

People use language to send or convey their purposes, message or information. Message and information can be shown from the structure of language, or by understanding intrinsic meaning of its word formation. (Leech, 1983: 1) stated that someone can not understand rightly about the feature of language itself, if he/she does not know how the language is used in communication. So, context is important in using language. One of them of the context is pragmatics. The focus of pragmatic analysis is on the meaning of speaker's utterance rather than on the meaning of word or sentences. Pragmatics concentrates on aspects of meaning that cannot be predicted by linguistic knowledge itself but it takes to account for the knowledge about the physical and social world, e.g the use of politeness.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), politeness can be defined as a desire to protect face. According to Fauziati (2005: 193), in English, polite language may be characterized by the use of indirect speech, the use of form of address system like, *Sir, Madam*, or the use of formulaic utterances like, *please, excuse me, sorry, thank you*, ect. In Indonesia this politeness is usually called *tatakrama* (manners). In Indonesia EFL learning context, it is very rare. This study is intended to fill the gap, thus this study is to extend on interlanguage pragmatic research in Indonesian context, particularly on politeness strategies used in speech act of request produced by EFL learners.

Speech act is action performed via utterance which are generally called 'speech' and in English are commonly given more specific labels, such as apology, complaint, promise, or request (Yule, 1998:47). Utterances that are more indirect are more polite. In that situation the higher indirectness influences the decrease of the benefit to the hearer.

Basically, the sociolinguistic component refers to rules of speaking which depend on social, pragmatic and cultural elements. For

example, when we utter a polite utterance in any language depend on the social status of the speaker or hearer's and on age, sex or any other social factor. Based on the DCTs and survey of the data, perception of the students to the politeness used in request are different, caused the feel between first language and second language also different.

This present study is to explore the perception in politeness of request produced by Indonesian EFL learners which has not been investigated previously. The data of this research come from Indonesian EFL students of Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta. They were forty Indonesian EFL learners in the seventh semester of English department. This research is to develop interlanguage pragmatics research focusing on the Indonesian EFL learners, especially analyzes the perception of polite request produced by Indonesian EFL learners. The researcher interested to analyzes this topic because the society regarded that context, level, and gender was influenced the students to judge politeness in requests and the research is going to prove that the politeness strategies contribute to the determining the degree of politeness used in politeness of request by Indonesian English Foreign Language learners.

B. Research Methode

This research is a descriptive qualitative research, which uses methods of seeking, collecting, classifying, and analyzing the data, then drawing conclusion. By using a descriptive method, the researcher analyzes the perception of politeness in requests by Indonesian English Foreign Language learners of Departement English Education in Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta.

The subjects of study are English Foreign Language learners at Department English Education of Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta. They were selected through a random sampling technique. Participants taking part in this research consisted of 40 students

comprising 20 males and 20 females who were in the third-year course of the degree (seventh semester) of English Education in UMS.

The object of the research is politeness used in request by students of English Department of Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta.

The source of data in this research is taken from the perceptions of politeness requests which produced by EFL learners in the seventh semester of English Education in UMS which are represented in the form of three scale there were polite, impolite and I don't know. The data source of the research are the answer of questionare contain complaint utterances. To collect data for this study, the researcher has used a "Discourse Completion Test" instrument which consisting nine scripted situations.

There are nine scenarios in DCT, each of which includes two questions to be responded orally by the students (see appendixs). The DCT scenarios were based on relative power, social distance and gender. The scenarios of the DCT were written in English language. Besides that, as the use of English in the DCT scenarios might provide the subjects with some English pragmalinguistic resources which could be irritated or copied into their responses, Indonesian Language was used. The following Wijayanto (2012) are the procedure of aministrating the DCT is as follows: (1) Asking for an agreement or consent from the participants whether they were willing to partake in the study and explaining that the data they provided were used solely for the purpose of a pragmatic study and were made anonymously. (2) After the participants gave their agreements or consents, the participants were provided with some explanation concerning the DCT scenarios, their social roles in the scenario, and the procedures of answering the DCTs. The were encouraged to ask question when they had some problems of understanding the DCT scenarios. (3) When they were ready, they

answered the scenario. (4) After completing the scenario, they are asked to judge the level of politeness and the reason of it.

The writer conducted the data analysis with the following procedures: (1) Calculating the perception of the participants to judge politeness in request utterances. How many were polite, impolite, and I don't know. (2) Compare the data of the perception of politeness in request between male and female of Indonesian EFL learners in Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta. (3) Describing the reason provided by Indonesian EFL students to judge politeness used in requests.

C. Research Finding and Discussion

Based on the nine scenarios of DCT in data analysis, the researcher sum up that there were perception of politeness on request which given by participants. They were 16 tables from 18 tables which had different perception of nine DCTs. In addition, the researcher found that the participants had similar perceptions. From the nine DCTs above divided into two parts, there are indirect request and direct request. In the most DCTs, the participants regarded that indirect request usually as polite and direct request as impolite request. Although, some of indirect request included impolite request. It could be seen table 1.2, 1.3, 1.5, 1.13. The researcher assumed that gender was influenced to their perception of politeness on request. It could be seen in the each tables. In this research have interest part, for example the participants assumed that the statements add word "please" included polite, but there are some direct utterance which used word "please". Infact it is a bland request, maybe the student were destructed by use of please.

According to the eighteen charts of nine scenarios DCTs, it could be seen that there were different perception of politeness in request between males and females. The participants gave perception with real reason. From the eighteen charts of nine DCTs there are 16 chart has different perception and two charts was similar. Based on the three

provided, there were some participants who judge I don't know answer. From the all charts male has highest percentage in the I don't know answer. It means that female has better understanding and confident than male to judge whether the request above polite or impolite.

There were calculation of the reasons, the total of the reasons. Word choice as 35,86%, modal verb as 16,53%, habitual action as 7,78%, distance as 10,97%, strategy of request as 4,72%, type of sentence as 5,69%, emotion as 2,5%, right as 0,83%, intonation as 4,86%, exclamatory mark as 2,08%, expression of face as 0,14%, culture as 0,55%, attention getter as 0,14%, and condition as 0,42%. In fact, there were some students doesn't give reason because the participants not sure whether the request polite or impolite.

In this section, the researcher discuss research finding based on the some theory and previous study. Based on the previous study, perception to judge politeness provided by Indonesian English Foreign Language learners. Gender was influenced to the perception of politeness. Beside that, status level (power) also mentioned in this research likes previous research conducted some researcher as Pratiwi (2013), Wijayanto (2013) and Umar (2004). The researcher assumed that status level was reflected to the request strategies and politeness strategies that used by them.

Based on the situation of DCT the researcher gave two kinds of request in each DCT. There were indirect request and direct request. Indirect request included polite and direct request was considered as the impolite. First request was indirect request. It related to the Leech theory in Culpeper (2003) said that indirect utterance tend to more polite. Beside that this research has interest part which does not have other research. Second request was direct request which regarded as the impolite, but many students assumed that direct request as polite. The students gave polite answer caused the utterance as bland request, maybe the student were destructed by the use of "please". (Trosborg: 1995) said that a

requester who wants to make explicit the illocutionary point of his/her utterance may use a performative statement or an imperative, thereby issuing an order. Different perception of the participants can found in DCT 4.1, DCT 4.6, DCT 4.7, DCT 4.8 and DCT 4.9. They had mostly difference perception to judge impoliteness, but in other DCTs had slightly different perception.

Based on the previous chapter, the researcher found that there were several reasons to judge politeness request used by the Indonesian EFL learners. Mostly participants judged whether the utterance of request polite or impolite based on the strategy of request and degree of indirectness which used by the requester. The previous statement initiated by Trosbog (1995) and Leech (1983). The researcher divided into two parts in this subchapter. They were polite and impolite.

In polite, the researcher found kinds of reasons provided by students to judge the sentence was polite. The first reason which mostly appear in the each DCT is word choice. The request utterances which has appropriate word choice and uses refined words, did not use any rude words like swearing. For example of the polite request, *Because it did not used rude words.* **(04/2B/FE/M)**

The next reason which used to judge politeness was modal verb. The using modal verb (can/could, will/would) made the sentence very polite. The following are the examples. *The statement above is polite because we using "can". So it's politely to ask with our close friend.* **(01/1A/CE/FM)**

Habitual action as the next reason. Habitual action which suitable to communicated in society, so it was common to used. Request sentence which used becomes habit in the each place considered as the polite

request. The reason still appear in each DCT, the examples of data: *Thus utterance is usually used by student to student to communicate, so I think it is polite enough.* **(04/1A/CE/FM)**

Social distance or Relation of Interlocutor was drawn to the politeness. If the relation between requester and requestee has close relation it means did not need more polite request. For examples, *Because the hearer is our close friend, it's OK if we ask like that.* **(05/1B/CE/M)**. The examples above reflected the close-equal relationship. The social distance also found in DCT 9, for example, *It's no problem if we ask like that with new classmate.* **(06/9B/UL/M)**. The relation of interlocutor of the second example was unfamiliar-distance.

Strategy of request still appear to judgment in nine DCT. There are four major categories of requests strategies, in involving eight sub-strategies that presented at levels of increasing directness according to Trosborg (1995: 192). It was as the reason which given by students to judge the politeness requests. There were two categories of request called indirect requests and direct requests. Indirect requests considered as the polite answer and direct requests considered as the impolite answer. For example of thi reason, *This utterance asking the willingness of the hearer to do or not to do the work.* **(08/3B/UE/FM)**.

Type of sentence also as the reason provided by students to judge politeness. Introgrative sentence considered as the polite requests. For examples, *I think there is no problem with this statement. The sentence is correct.* **(19/6A/UH/FM)**.

Then right also found as the reasons. That reason only found in DCT 2, DCT 6 and DCT 8. The reason of right here was the right of requester to do request because of the requestee act. The requester had right to request. For examples, *I think this statement is polite because if we*

don't borrow it, we will hungry. (01/2A/FE/M), It was polite because it was students right. (08/6B/UH/M).

The next reason which given by participants was intonation. the using low intonations to pronounced the utterances made the sentence polite. It was initiated the theory of (Culpeper: 2003) stated that pitch operates as part of a conventionalized linguistic system (intonational phonology), and also paralinguistically to express, for examples of speaker emotion. For examples, *Because the speaker pronounced slowly. (08/8B/FL/M).* Shouted usually used high intonation so, the example above used low intonation because did not shouted.

The other reason which used students to judge politeness was expression of face. Expression of face of the way to asking when needs something, used good expression made the sentence polite. For examples, *Because , From the statement above the speaker use soft expression for make aware one who blocking up our view at the watching a film. (20/4A/CH/M)*

The last reason to make judgements was condition. The condition or context influenced to make judgements. It intiated by (Brown and Levinson: 1987) context is crucial to politeness. For examples, *Based on the situation, the sent looks polite (13/9A/UL/FM).* It was polite request because suitable if used in that context.

Impolite reason found in nine DCTs had more or less similar to the polite one. There are word choice, strategy of request, type of sentence, modal verb, emotion, intonation, habitual action, social distance, culture, condition and attention getter. The reasons which used to judge impoliteness was opposite with the reasons to judge politeness. First reason was word choice, the using rude as the reason to make judgements

in impoliteness. Example of data, *Because it used polite words (13/1A/CE/M)* . The other reason was type of sentence, imperative sentence considered as the impolite. For examples, For example, *It is an imperative sentence. So, it's impolite. (06/4B/CH/FM)*

High intonations or used high tone become impolite. This reason often appearing in some DCT which provided by students to make judgements. For examples, *Because the speaker ask like shouted. (08/3A/UE/M)*. Shouted usually used rough intonation so, the example above used high intonation.

Emotion of requester reflected of the sentence. Emotion as the next reason provided by the students. It found in some DCT, for examples, *Because the spaker ask like threathening. (11/2A/FE/M)*, *Because the hearer will be angry if we ask like that. (12/2A/FE/FM)*.

Exclamatory mark as the reason to judge impoliteness. That reason not found in polite factors. The using exclamatory mark influence the degree of politeness. It indicated the speaker way to requests. Exclamatory mark showed the imperative sentence and seems insist the hearer so it was impolite. The example of data, *The sentence is rude, it is proven by the mark of “!” and get out which orders rudely. It seems insists the hearer (20/4B/CH/M)*.

Culture mentioned in DCT 4 and DCT 5 as the reason to make judgements. Culture of a society as identity a place should be protected. The participants were Javanese (one of ethnic in Javanese island of Indonesia), every ethnic usually has culture as identity. So, a person who did not keep culture in a society would be reminding by the society. For examples, *It seemed rude, In Javanese it was too rude if uses asking for teacher (05/5A/FH/M)*. If the student communication with teacher in

Javanese should be used refined word, so it was impolite if the requester did not keep the culture.

Attention getter as the last reason. The using attention getter such sir, miss or mom ect indicated it was polite. The word “you” better replaced with sir, mom, miss ect, because word “you” indicated impoliteness. It was conveyed by Pratiwi (2013) that attention getter used to open conversation and to soften conversation. The examples, *Because I directly blame her, and I also called her with word “you” I might say sir, miss, or mom (07/5A/FH/FM).*

Every people has different perception to judge politeness. Leech in Culpeper (1996: 350) argue, “some illocutions (e.g. orders) are inherently impolite, and others (e.g. offers) are inherently polite”. This research is perception of politeness in request by Indonesiaian learners of EFL. It was not analysis about politeness strategy or requests strategy that used by participants. It just to explained are there different perception or not between male and female (different gender). Furthermore, beside explained it the researcher also analyses the reason which given by participants to judge politeness requests. It must correct the research before stated that there were different perception between male and female. The researcher analyses how the participants judge the scale of politeness but also thay must had different perception and reason to judge politeness. The important part of this research are focus with the reason to judge politeness and emphasis the knowledge about request.

D. Conclusion

After analyzing the data and discussion the research finding, the researcher concluded this research. Based on the research finding the researcher found the main findings according to research problems. The writer discuss the perception of the Indonesian EFL learners to judge politeness on requests. The writer used DCTs scenario to collect the data,

she uses DCTs scenario because it can to measure pragmatics language frequency and politeness competence of the learners. So, the researcher found that there were perception which produced by EFL learners to judge politeness of requests, the students assumed that indirect requests were polite while direct requests were impolite.

The writer also discuss the different perception between males and females to judge politeness of requests. The researcher found that the different gender have different perception to makes the judgements, and hence was different perception of politeness on requests between males and females. According to the above discussion, female students had better understanding about politeness than male.

The reasons provided by the Indonesian EFL learners also discussed by the writer. Based on the above discussion she found fourteen reasons to judge politeness requests which produced by Indonesian English Foreign Language learners. There were word choice as 35,86%, modal verb as 16,53%, habitual action as 7,78%, distance as 10,97%, strategy of request as 4,72%, type of sentence as 5,69%, emotion as 2,5%, right as 0,83%, intonation as 4,86%, exclamatory mark as 2,08%, expression of face as 0,14%, culture as 0,55%, attention getter as 0,14%, and condition as 0,42%. In fact, there were some students doesn't give reason because the participants not sure whether the request polite or impolite.

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