
Commanding with Politeness: English Lecturers' Directives at Institut Prima Bangsa

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ABSTRACT: In the context of communication, the role of politeness in fostering positive interaction between interlocutors and their conversation partners cannot be overstated. This research addresses the existing gap in understanding of politeness strategies across different regions in Indonesia, with a particular focus on the strategies employed by an English lecturer at Institut Prima Bangsa Cirebon. This study aims to identify the positive politeness strategies employed by the lecturer through a qualitative, phenomenological approach with data collected through observation. The findings indicate that the lecturer predominantly utilises directive speech acts, including commands, requests, and suggestions, during classroom interactions. The results identify seven key positive politeness strategies in the lecturer's directive speech acts, as follows: (1) Using Affectionate Greetings, (2) Involving Interlocutors and Hearers in activities, (3) Employing Subtle Request Markers, (4) Incorporating Humor, (5) Including Elements of Praise, (6) Considering the Wishes of the Speech Partner, and (7) Seeking Agreement. These strategies are not only essential for the maintenance of a respectful and inclusive learning environment but also for enhanced student engagement. By employing these politeness techniques, the lecturer ensures that students feel valued and motivated to participate without feeling pressured or uncomfortable. This study contributes to the broader understanding of the function of politeness in the context of language learning and teaching, with particular reference to the diverse cultural landscape of Indonesia.

Keywords: Politeness Strategy, Directive Speech Acts, Classroom Interaction, Positive Politeness, Lecturer's Speech Acts



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INTRODUCTION

In education, directive speech acts are pivotal, encompassing the instructions and commands issued by lecturers to facilitate student learning (Basra & Thoyyibah, 2017). In this context, deploying positive politeness strategies is crucial for maintaining a respectful and supportive learning environment. Deploying positive politeness strategies, including inclusive language, praise and supportive phrases, enables lecturers to convey their directives in a manner that fosters

engagement and reduces the potential for face threats to students (Trinity et al., 2024). This study explores how English lecturers at Institut Prima Bangsa utilise these strategies to enhance clarity and respect in classroom communication. By examining the dynamics of directive speech acts, we can better understand their impact on student motivation and learning outcomes.

The challenge of striking a balance between directness and politeness in classroom directives is a common one faced by English lecturers (Pavel & Maria, 2022). At Institut Prima Bangsa, it is incumbent upon lecturers to provide clear instructions to students while maintaining a tone that is polite and respectful (Sudarmawan et al., 2022). Nevertheless, achieving this equilibrium can prove challenging, particularly when directives may be perceived as excessively harsh or unduly ambiguous. This issue has been observed occasionally, whereby students have perceived directives as either excessively authoritative or too indirect, leading to confusion. As observed by (Fathi, 2024), politeness strategies assist in mitigating the impact of face-threatening acts. However, their overuse or underuse can result in unintended interpretations. Despite the crucial role of effective classroom communication in higher education, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, English lecturers face a significant challenge in balancing clarity and politeness in their directives (Sung et al., 2022). It is crucial to achieve this delicate balance to ensure that students not only comprehend the instructions but also feel respected and motivated to engage in the learning process (Hoidn & Reusser, 2020). However, misinterpretations of politeness strategies or excessive directness may result in student disengagement or confusion, underscoring the need for a more profound comprehension of how English lecturers can command with politeness without compromising instructional clarity.

Furthermore, the difficulties associated with providing instruction in an educational setting frequently stem from the inherent diversity of students' cultural backgrounds (Milner, 2021). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environments, students hail from many social and cultural backgrounds, which exhibit disparate understandings and expectations regarding polite forms of communication. As posited by (Gotzner & Mazzarella, 2021) cultural dimensions such as power distance can influence the way instructions are perceived. In cultures with a high power distance, directives from educators are perceived as normal, whereas in cultures with a low power distance, the same instructions may be regarded as overly authoritarian (Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021). Given the fairly heterogeneous student population at Institut Prima Bangsa, lecturers must consider politeness strategies and the cultural nuances that may influence students' perceptions of classroom direction.

The politeness strategies employed by lecturers should also consider the students' proficiency level in the target language (Economidou-Kogetsidis, 2016). In EFL classes, where students often encounter difficulties due to limitations in vocabulary and grammar, overly implied or indirect instructions can impede comprehension. For instance, the use of indirect language, such as "Can you do this now?" instead of direct instruction "Do this now," although more polite, can engender confusion in students who have language limitations (Prayitno et al., 2022). (Pomerantz et al., 2020) research demonstrates that lecturers must balance politeness and clarity when interacting with students at varying levels of English proficiency to prevent further misunderstandings in the classroom. Furthermore, the advent of technology and the rise of online learning have introduced a novel dimension to the challenge of providing polite directions (Mishra et al., 2022). In online or hybrid classes, written instructions frequently supersede direct verbal communication, and the subtleties of politeness may be diminished in written text. As demonstrated by (Bolton & Emery, 2021), those engaged in online teaching encounter obstacles in conveying unambiguous directions without appearing excessively formal or rigid. This is particularly the case given the inability of written communication to convey tone and intonation (Kochem et al., 2020). This challenge assumes heightened relevance at Institut Prima Bangsa, where online learning is already a curriculum component. Lecturers must recognize the necessity of adapting their communication

strategies online to ensure clarity and politeness are maintained (Mujiyanto & Yuliasri, 2022; Pratama, 2019).

Politeness is a communicative strategy employed by speakers to prevent their speech partners from feeling pressured or offended (Pratama, 2019). As proposed by (Brown, 1987), the concept of language politeness can be understood as an endeavor by speakers to safeguard their self-esteem or face both their interlocutors and listeners. The principle of politeness in communication is a universal phenomenon. However, the specific forms of politeness and expressions observed in any given culture or group of people will vary. (Leech, 2016) Note that politeness is not a concept exclusive to Western or Eastern cultures; nevertheless, there are notable differences between the two. Consequently, politeness plays a crucial role in facilitating communication.

Politeness can be categorized into two types: positive and negative. Both forms of politeness emerge in conversations as strategies to reduce or eliminate face-threatening acts. (Brown, 1987) Propose five key strategies to mitigate face threats: 1) performing speech acts directly, 2) using positive politeness, 3) employing negative politeness, 4) using off-record strategies, and 5) refraining from speech acts. Politeness, crucial for successful social interaction, relies on strategies that take into account the social status of both the speaker and hearer (Hosni, 2020). These strategies foster an atmosphere that maintains politeness and prevents embarrassment. In the classroom, lecturers need strategies that protect students' "face" to demonstrate care and respect. However, impoliteness may occasionally occur when speakers neglect these strategies (Culpeper & Hardaker, 2017). Since directive speech involves instructing hearers to take action, lecturers must use politeness strategies to avoid coercion and encourage students to act willingly and positively.

Several studies have examined politeness strategies in Indonesia (Mahmud, 2019; Rahayuningsih et al., 2020; (Gunaningtyas & Fitriati, 2021); Saputra et al., 2021; Krisdiah et al., 2022; Wasanadiputra et al., 2022). (Mahmud & Sahril, 2019) investigated politeness techniques used by English students at a Makassar university, finding that students employed various expressions to demonstrate politeness in the classroom. Similarly, (Saputra et al., 2021) conducted research on politeness in Pidie. (Rahayuningsih et al., 2020) explored politeness strategies in a junior high school in Semarang, while (Gunaningtyas & Fitriati, 2021) focused on Surakarta. (Wasanadiputra et al., 2022) identified seven directive politeness speech acts and eight directive speech acts that demonstrate leadership skills. These acts encompass teaching honesty, fostering self-confidence, persuading others, providing motivation, promoting justice, managing time effectively, instilling humility, and cultivating strategic thinking. Building on this existing research, the current study aims to address the research gap by examining the positive politeness strategies employed by an English lecturer at Institut Prima Bangsa Cirebon.

METHOD

This qualitative study examines the politeness strategies utilized by English lecturers at Institut Prima Bangsa in conveying classroom directives and students' perceptions of these strategies. In this qualitative study, data analysis involved a structured approach to explore the politeness strategies employed by English lecturers at Institut Prima Bangsa. The researcher began by transcribing all collected information after gathering data through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Coding procedures followed, combining inductive and deductive methods to categorize and identify recurring themes, especially around directive speech acts and politeness strategies. A case study approach was employed in the research, which involved thirty participants, including ten English lecturers and twenty students. According to (Maxwell, 2008) the students were selected through purposive sampling to ensure a diverse range of perspectives.

To ensure validity, strategies such as triangulation, member checking, and peer review will be employed, aligning with (Creswell & Poth, 2016) recommendations for qualitative research. The research aims to enhance communication strategies in English Language Teaching and contribute to a better understanding of classroom dynamics. By integrating the researcher's presence and the informants' perspectives, the study seeks to provide a rich narrative of politeness in educational settings, ultimately improving the learning experience for students.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis reveals that the communication function of lecturers' directive speech acts comprises ordering, asking, and suggesting. These functions are realized through positive politeness strategies, which include (1) Using Affectionate Greetings, (2) Involving Interlocutors and Hearers in activities, (3) Employing Subtle Request Markers, (4) Incorporating Humor, (5) Including Elements of Praise, (6) Considering the Wishes of the Speech Partner, and (7) Seeking Agreement.

a. Using Affectionate Greetings

Greetings are words or phrases exchanged in conversations that reflect the relationship between participants (Bonvillain, 2019) The type of greeting employed varies based on the context and the individuals involved in the interaction. According to (Jucker et al., 2017) there are nine greetings in English, including pronouns, kinship terms, and proper names. In a classroom setting, lecturers often use affectionate greetings when addressing students to foster a warm and engaging atmosphere. For example, the lecturer said greeting "everyone," and "you." Using "everyone," the lecturer creates a sense of inclusivity, addressing all students collectively. This pronoun fosters a feeling of belonging, signaling that the lecturer values the presence of each individual in the classroom. In addition to the word "everyone," the lecturer also says the word "you." Using "you" in a pedagogical context facilitates establishing a personal connection between the lecturer and the students. This implies that the lecturer is not merely disseminating information but is also interested in the students' experiences and perspectives. The following are examples of this speech.

(1) L: Good morning, everyone. I trust you had a good weekend and are ready for today's discussion on cultural differences.

S: Good morning. I had a great weekend. I'm eager to discuss today's topic, which I've long wanted to know more about.

In this instance, the lecturer initiates the class with a greeting of "Good morning, everyone!" fostering a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere. The lecturer demonstrates a genuine interest in the student's well-being by inquiring about their weekend activities and fostering personal connections. By introducing the topic as a "fascinating exploration of cultural differences," the lecturer establishes an engaging tone for the lesson. In response, the students acknowledge the greeting and share their positive experiences, indicating personal relevance and a willingness to engage in learning. This interaction showcases effective communication that enhances student motivation and creates a positive learning environment.

(2) L: Thanks to the students for their great effort today. I'm looking forward to "our" next class.

S: Of Course, Sir.

The word "our" above implies a sense of togetherness and community while there are no direct kinship terms like "mother" or "brother. While there are no direct kinship terms like "mother" or "Brother is a similar kinship. The student's response, "Of course, Sir," indicates respect for the lecturer and their willingness to continue engaging in the learning process. "Sir" reflects the formal and respectful relationship between students and the lecturer. This interaction generally emphasizes mutual respect and collaboration, which can enhance student motivation and encourage active participation in future classes.

b. Involving Interlocutors and Speech Partners in Activities

Involving interlocutors and speech partners in activities is a pedagogical strategy that actively engages students in collaborative tasks during the learning process. This approach emphasizes interaction between students and the lecturer and among peers to foster a sense of community and shared responsibility in the classroom. The example is below.

(3) L: Let's do a quick activity! I'd like you to pair up with someone next to you and share a tradition from your culture. After a few minutes, we'll come back together, and each pair will present one tradition to the class.

S: "My family has a unique way of celebrating birthdays. Instead of cake, we prepare a special dish that's traditional to our culture."

The lecturer initiates an engaging learning experience in a dynamic classroom by proposing a brief, interactive activity. "I'd like each of you to pair up with someone next to you and share a tradition from your culture." This directive encourages students to engage collaboratively, thereby fostering a sense of involvement as they become interlocutors and speech partners. The responses given by the students signify that the lecturer invites students to present their findings, which cultivates public speaking skills and builds confidence while building a supportive classroom community.

c. employing subtle request markers

In Indonesian, the lingual forms of polite requests like "please," "can you," and "can you please" affect speaker status differently: "please" suggests a lower status for the speaker, "can you" indicates a higher status, and "can you please" denotes equality (Yoon & Frank, 2019). Despite these distinctions, all three forms elicit positive student responses to the lecturer's directive speech acts.

(4) L: Please help me by passing out these handouts. I would appreciate it.

S: Sure! I can do that.

In this utterance, the lecturer employs "Can you please help me" as a subtle request marker, softening the directive tone. Instead of issuing a straightforward command, this phrasing invites collaboration and encourages students to engage willingly. By presenting the request in this way, the lecturer establishes a partnership in the learning process, which can enhance student motivation and participation. This leads to a positive classroom environment and encourages students to feel valued and respected, resulting in more active involvement in discussions and activities.

d. incorporating humor

Jokes play a significant role in the lecturer's directive speech act strategy, eliciting positive emotional responses from students. By incorporating humor, the lecturer fosters a relaxed and

intimate atmosphere, helping to alleviate tension and encouraging students to feel comfortable engaging with them.

- (5) L: Today, we will explore various communication styles. If I start speaking like a robot, it's just my way of demonstrating how not to communicate

S: We'll let you know if you start beeping and booping!

The lecturer starts the lesson by reminding students of the importance of good communication. The lecturer uses humor to engage them while introducing the day's topic. The lecturer joke, "If I speak like a robot, it's just my way of showing you how not to communicate," is an example. Student response shows active participation in interaction and humor comprehension. Humor fosters a friendly, collaborative atmosphere, which helps students engage with the lesson. The author needs to report the results in sufficient detail so that the reader can see which statistical analysis was conducted and why, and later justify the conclusions.

e. Including Elements of Praise

Providing students with compliments can benefit their motivation and engagement in learning. Conversely, if a lecturer is seeking constructive criticism or guidance, it is recommended that they first provide positive reinforcement in the form of praise for the student's achievements. This approach can foster a positive learning environment where students are encouraged to strive for even higher performance levels. The following example illustrates this concept.

- (6) L : "Well done, Biempy! Your presentation was clear and well-organized. I can see the effort you put into explaining the concepts. Keep up the great work!"

S : "Thank you, Sir! I appreciate your feedback. I'll keep working hard to improve even more."

In this exchange (6) , the lecturer's use of politeness is evident through positive reinforcement and encouragement. The lecturer demonstrates positive politeness by offering praise and recognition for her efforts. This strategy conveys appreciation and solidarity with the student, rendering the feedback more supportive than critical. Furthermore, the lecturer personalizes the praise by highlighting the clarity and organization of Biempy's presentation, strengthening the connection between the two.

Biempy's response, "Thank you, sir! I appreciate your feedback," reflects a reciprocal expression of politeness. She conveys gratitude and acknowledges the lecturer's positive comments while indicating an openness to continued improvement. This fosters a polite and respectful exchange, establishing a collaborative and supportive classroom environment.

Both participants utilize language that maintains a respectful and positive tone, reinforcing their communication's polite and constructive dynamic.

f. Considering the Wishes of the Speech Partner

One positive politeness strategy is to show consideration for a speech partner's wishes. This can be seen in lectures, where students' express happiness and gratitude when they feel acknowledged and valued.

- (7) L: "If it's alright with all of you, I'd like to move on to the next topic. Does anyone need more time with this material, or shall we proceed?"

S: "Thank you for asking, Sir. We're ready to move on, but maybe we could revisit this in the next session for clarification?"

In these utterances (7), the lecturer demonstrates negative politeness by considering the students' needs and allowing them to express their preferences. By phrasing the directive as a question, the lecturer demonstrates respect for the students' autonomy and sensitivity to their wishes. The student's response reflects appreciation for the lecturer's consideration and offers a respectful suggestion for further discussion to ensure everyone's understanding, thus maintaining polite and cooperative communication.

g. Seeking Agreement

To mitigate the impact of the ordering function in directive speech acts, the phatic "ok" category is employed after the assertion as an indication of an intention to concur or a solicitation of approval from the interlocutor. This enables the students, in their capacity as speech partners, to exercise discretion in complying or not, while the lecturer, in their role as speaker, has demonstrated the requisite degree of wisdom. The following offers an illustration of this speech pattern.

(8) L: "We've covered quite a bit today, and I'm considering assigning a short reflective essay for next week. Does that sound reasonable to everyone?"

S: "Yes, that sounds good! A reflective essay would help us process everything we've learned."

In this utterance (8), the lecturer uses a seeking agreement strategy by assigning a task and asking for the students' input "Does that sound reasonable?" This approach allows students to express their opinions and ensures they feel part of the decision-making process.

The student responds positively, affirming the suggestion while providing a reason highlighting the task's benefits. This exchange promotes collaboration and maintains a respectful, participatory classroom environment.

CONCLUSION

The research on polite command strategies by English lecturers at Institut Prima Bangsa provides a foundation for further study and practical application. Further research could investigate the impact of these strategies in different cultural and educational settings, examining whether variations in polite directive approaches influence student engagement across diverse contexts. Longitudinal studies might also assess the effects of sustained politeness on student motivation, while student-focused research could clarify their perceptions of polite directives and their overall classroom experience.

From a practical standpoint, these findings encourage the integration of politeness strategies into professional development programs, particularly for educators seeking to foster a supportive and engaging learning environment. Training that emphasizes polite classroom management could assist lecturers in developing stronger rapport with students, thereby promoting a respectful and collaborative educational experience that enhances participation and academic performance.

The positive politeness strategies of directive lecturer speech acts used in the classroom context can be broadly categorized as follows: include (1) Using Affectionate Greetings, (2) Involving Interlocutors and Hearers in activities, (3) Employing Subtle Request Markers, (4) Incorporating

Humor, (5) Including Elements of Praise, (6) Considering the Wishes of the Speech Partner, and (7) Seeking Agreement. In light of the research findings, the authors propose that educators employ directive speech acts to elicit positive affective responses from students, facilitating conducive and effective learning.

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