POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN MODEL CONVERSATIONS IN ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

Sugeng Purwanto
Stikubank University, Semarang
drpsugeng@yahoo.com
Liliek Soepriatmadji
Stikubank University, Semarang
liek59@gmail.com

Abstract

The study investigated to what extent politeness strategies had been integrated in the conversation models in five English textbooks for Grade- 6 Elementary School Students. In the study, each 'move' in the conversations was matched against the criteria for politeness strategies (Leech 1983). The results show that politeness strategies have been adopted in the five books under study with the most significant use of non FTA. However, there were also uses of varying degrees of FTA. Thus, the teachers should be selective in using the textbooks and there should be a cooperation among those involved in supplying school textbooks.

Penelitian ini mengkaji seberapa jauh 'strategi kesantuan' diintegrasikan dalam model konversasi yang disajikan di tiga buah buku teks bahasa Inggris bagi Siswa Sekolah Dasar, Kelas 6. Dalam penelitian ini, masing-masing langkah (move) di konversasi dicocokkan dengan criteria strategi kesopanan (Leech 1983). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi kesopanan telah diadopsi ke dalam kelima buku yang diteliti dengan penggunaan non FTA yang sangat signifikan, dan hanya sedikit yang menggunakan FTA dengan tingkat yang berbeda. Dengan demikian, para guru harus selektif dalam menggunakan buku-buku teks dan harus ada kerjasama bagi yang terlibat dalam menyediakan buku-buku sekolah.

INTRODUCTION

A 'Face Threatening Act' (FTA), as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), should, as far as possible, be avoided in lingual communication. In recognition of the fact that language is power, the undemocratic use of language – i.e. language

that marginalizes people – should be avoided. In other words, when a language is used whether by native or non-native, it should never devalue any parties. In Javanese, there is a vivid saying that the 'self' is valued on the basis of the language use (*Ajining diri ana lathi*). In the light of this statement, one will be judged through his or her use of language.

Thus, the role of language education becomes central to the development of the target language studies, whether they are native, second, or foreign languages. This study is aimed at investigating whether textbook writers and publishers have been aware of integrating the nature of politeness in language use when presenting the model conversations in their products (textbooks) which will be used by the teacher teaching, and the students learning in and outside the language class. It has been argued Krashen (1987); Ellis (1985); and Ellis (1994) that politeness is an important element in interactional activities and should therefore be taught in early education during the critical period of four to ten years of age. Meanwhile, it has been a common view that model conversations are used in the initial stage of learning because the textbooks have been written adopting thematic syllabus model where a textbook is always accompanied by a workbook (Muflikah, 2010). More interestingly, however, at least to educational practitioners in support of decentralized education, textbook publications are entirely left to the local government (Listia and Kamal, 2008; Muflikah, 2010), and thus the idea of politeness is subject to multiple interpretations.

Halliday (1985), supported in Eggins (1997) argued that a conversation in conversational exchanges is an exchange of commodities (things, services or information), whether to demand or give something. This implies in the use of spoken language as ruled out in turn-taking mechanism, context dependence, dynamic structure, spontaneity phenomena, everyday lexis, non standard grammar, and lexical sparseness (Eggins 1994) as opposed to written language. Therefore, it is recommended from early education that students start to recognize both spoken and written versions of language.

With respect to politeness in language use, it is argued (Leech, 1983) that there are six maxims that should be considered, namely:
(1) tact maxim, minimizing the burden of others by maximizing the benefits for others,
(2) generosity maxim, minimizing the self-benefits by maximizing the burden of one's self,
(3) approbation maxim, minimizing the mocking of others by maximizing the mocking of one's self,
(4) modesty maxim, minimizing the praise for one's self by maximizing the praise for others,
(5) agreement maxim, minimizing self-disagreement with others by maximizing by maximizing agreement with others
(6) sympathy maxim, minimizing antipathy with others by maximizing sympathy with others

Politeness may be influenced by several variables or factors (Leech, 1983; Brown and Levinson, 1987), such as social distance, social status, and gender, all of which determine the types of politeness strategies which are aimed at 'respecting' and 'face-saving'. In other words, the main point of solidarity and

politeness is to avoid Face Threatening Acts (FTA) which may cause disgrace on others. Brown and Levinson (1987) noted that there are four politeness strategies, namely Bald on Record, Negative Politeness, Positive Politeness, and Off Record. It, however, is important to note that all politeness strategies have to be used both contextually and culturally with respect to choices whether to use direct or indirect statements (or questions). One polite strategy may be suitable in one situation but not in others.

The current study was guided to answer the research questions, namely (1) What politeness strategies are implied in the conversations in English textbooks for Elementary School Students, Grade 6? (2) To what extent are the direct and indirect expressions contained in the conversations in English textbooks for Elementary School Students, Grade 6? (3) Do expressions in the conversations in English textbooks for Elementary School Students, Grade 6 possibly contain face threatening acts?

RESEARCH METHODS

The study is descriptive qualitative in nature, attempting to answer the formulated research questions with 'moves' in each conversation found in the textbooks under study as the units of analysis (total sampling out of five books recommended for use by the government).

The research procedures adopted include (a) identifying, (b) segmenting the model conversation into 'moves', (c) determining the types of politeness strategies, (d) determining the degree of directness, (e) determining FTA potentials in each move, (f) quantifying the degree of directness and the types of politeness, and (g) describing the phenomena with respect to the use of politeness strategies employed in the textbooks.

The study, has assumed that the textbooks which fall under 'Recommended for Use' must have put politeness strategies as one of the teaching contents in support of the communication, information and globalization era, where the use of language has become a central issue. Such an assumption, however, needs validating and or justifying through research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Politeness Strategy

With respect to the politeness strategies implied in the conversations in English textbooks for Elementary School Students, Grade 6, the five books under study are in good positioning in that each of which presents some politeness strategies, namely doing no FTA, FTA off Record, Positive FTA Bald on Record and Negative FTA Bald on Record with doing no FTA as being the most frequently used strategy (See Table 1).

Tabel 1 Politeness Strategies

Book	No FTA Pleasing				FTA BoR (eksplisit) + (no efforts)				- (with efforts)				FTA off R (implicit)			
	s	q	r	o	s	Q	r	o	s	q	r	o	s	q	R	o
1	53	2	1	2	2	22	7	1	2	0	9	0	1	0	1	0
2	72	26	0	1	0	0	8	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	17	1
3	17	9	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	1	0	0
4	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	1	0
5	27	1	0	0	2	7	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	1	0

Table 1 above reveals that model conversations in English textbooks, Grade 6 of Elementary School (ES) put a considerable stress on internalization process of expression which does not easily create face threatening risks on the part of the interlocutors. Statements (s), questions (q), requests (r) and offer (o) are present in a strategy of doing no FTA rather than other strategies. Below are examples of participants in the model conversations performing a strategy of doing no FTA due to the absence of risk factors resulted from such utterances.

(1) Male guard – a student   : *It's a cheetah*. (Book one: s)
(2) M std B – another student : *Is he*? (Book two: q)
(3) Mom – a daughter   : *Yes, bring me a plate, please*. (Book three: r)
(4) M std A –another student : *What do you like to drink*? (Book three: o)

Such expressions are good to improve the interpersonal skills of the students and thus, such models need increasing in numbers. By so doing, the students will get used to expressing things with doing no FTA in nature and finally resulting in favorable expressions in communication among students.

The problem is of course that not all expressions in the model conversations employ a doing no FTA strategy. In some parts of the model conversations, FTA potentials are still available, ranging from the least (FTA off Record), moderate (Neg FTA Bald on Record) to the most (Pos FTA Bald on Record). If at all possible, such expressions causing FTA potentials should be avoided as models in conversation. If such face threatening expressions have to appear (to be used) the students should be made to understand that they should be used in appropriate contexts of time pressure, gender, social distances, status, situation, etc. Consider the following examples:

(5) Seller – a girl   : *May I help you*? (Book three: q/o)
(6) Pen friends   : *I'd like to have two slices of bread and a glass of orange juice*. (Book four: s/r)
(7) Student – staff   : *My teacher needs some paper. Do you have any*? (Book one: s/r)

The above three expressions (utterances) in (5) to (7) have implicit intention to minimally lower the risks of FTA. In the utterance *May I help you?* A seller offers something, using a question. Meanwhile, in *I'd like to have two slices of bread*

and a glass of orange juice, a pen friend wants something, using a statement. Finally in *My teacher needs some paper. Do you have any?,* a student asks for a few pieces of paper implicitly. It is hoped that the implicit intention can be understood and does not cause any FTA on the individuals involved in the exchanges, especially when the offer (by the seller) is turned down (rejected), the pen friend's wish and the student's request not fulfilled. However, when in fact such expressions may still cause FTA, they have been put to a minimal level of risks by employing implicit and indirect intentions.

Contrary to the strategies of doing no FTA and FTA off Record, the Neg FTA Bald on Record and Post FTA Bald on Record are explicit in nature when expressing intentions in utterances, even often ignoring the feeling of other individuals. Therefore, such strategies may be much riskier. Consider the following examples:

(8) Between friends : *He's much taller than you*. (Book five: s)
(9) Between friends : *Tell me how to play the sack race, please*? (Book two: r)
(10) Between friends : *What do you have*? (Book one: q)

The utterance *He's much taller than you* explicitly states that there is something wrong with the other individual which is being ignored by the speaker in a model conversation as this may cause 'shyness' on the counterpart speaker. The request utterance *Tell me how to play the sack race, please?* is explicitly and directly expressed, ignoring whether or not the counterpart speaker is busy and thus cannot fulfill the illocutionary force. This may create 'uneasiness' in one or both parts, especially when the counterpart speaker refuses to comply with the intention. Meanwhile the sudden question *What do you have?,* clearly surprises the one being asked as this would cause 'uneasiness' because he or she cannot provide the answer to the question. The three types of strategies have been adopted in the model conversation but not as many as the first strategy.

Degree of Directness
Dealing with the degree of directness, utterances vary. Some are extremely direct and some others are extremely indirect. Normally, the degree of directness is influenced by variables, such as social relation, status, gender, time pressure (constraint), situation and many more. Therefore it is advisable, in terms of directness, that model English conversation for Grade 6 of Elementary School be made in such as a way that the students undergo assimilation processes in such language uses.

The phenomena in the data show that the model English conversations for ES Grade 6 have adopted a variety of the degrees of directness which tend to direct utterance, as shown in Table 2.

Tabel 2: Directness Level

Book	Direct				Indirect				
	s	q	r	o	s	q	r	o	
1	57	24	10	1	1	0	8	2	103
2	72	25	14	0	0	1	13	2	127
3	17	10	0	0	0	4	1	2	34
4	9	0	1	0	1	0	4	0	15
5	29	8	1	0	0	0	4	0	42
									321

Indirect expressions are not easily understood since they are usually culturally-bound and a broader spectrum of life. How can a student understand that the sentence *Well, you've left the door open, and it's noisy here*, as a request targeted to someone who just left the door open in order for him or her to close the door. That is an example of an indirect expression in the form of a statement. Only by experience in the spectrum of life can someone understand such an expression and act accordingly. However, it does not mean that indirect expressions should not be taught to Grade 6 of Elementary School. The data show similar indirect types of expressions as follows:

(11) Seller – a girl   : *May I help you*? (Book three: q/o)
(12) Pen friends   : *I'd like to have two slices of bread and a glass of orange juice*. (Book four: (s/r)
(13) Student – staff   : *My teacher needs some paper. Do you have any*? (Book one: s/r)

The offer given by a seller is not in a statement but in a question *May I help you?* and is a good example to stimulate similar expressions so that students learn how to use interpersonal and transactional expressions correctly. A request *I'd like to have two slices of bread and a glass of orange juice* is an example of polite and indirect expression, which also needs to be included as a model in the conversation. Similarly, an expression *My teacher needs some paper. Do you have any?* Here, students are exposed in indirect expressions which hopefully can be further developed and expanded in daily communication.

FTA Potentials in Model Conversation in English
Despite low frequency counts, the data actually show that model English conversations for Grade 6 of ES still demonstrate, possibly unintentionally, some expressions with FTA potentials, as shown in Table 3.

Tabel 3: FTA Potential

Book	s	q	r	o
1	3	3	5	0
2	0	0	27	2
3	0	4	0	0
4	0	0	0	0
5	2	5	1	0

Examples of expressions with FTA potentials

(14) Between friends   : *What do you think about my new dress*?
                                             (Book three: q)
(15) Between friends   : *He's much taller than you*. (Book five: s)
(16) Between friends   : *May I use your marker, Nurul*? (Book one: r)
(17) Between friends   : *Sorry I'm using it*. (Book one: s)

The question *What do you think about my new dress?* may potentially cause 'sort of uneasiness' because the response may not be as expected. This may be caused by the ignorance of feeling. Similarly, the statement *He's much taller than you,* may create an assumption that the counterpart speaker may feel 'being said to be short even though he or she is, and in this context he or she may feel being ignored.

In the expressions *May I use your marker, Nurul?* and *Sorry I'm using it,* which happen to form an adjacent pair in the model conversation actually create a kind of broken hope on the part of the speaker who wants to borrow something. This kind of circumstance may cause uneasiness because of FTA potentials. When such an exchange is well contextualized, the risk of FTA potentials can be eliminated. Therefore model conversation must be well organized in terms of statement, question, request or offer, which should be in accordance with the degree of directness, social relation, status, gender, time pressure, atmosphere between participants established in a model conversation. Expressions with FTA potentials within wrong context should be avoided. Otherwise, they will be thought of as being true to be imitated by the students in daily communication, with the negative impact of FTA on the part of the counterpart speaker.

Pedagogical Implication

A textbook is one of the most important components in the learning process. English textbooks for Grade 6 of Elementary School are classroom textbooks widely on sales in Semarang and also widely used by ES teachers in their English classes. Unfortunately, however, not all books contain appropriate teaching materials for Grade 6. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers be selective in the use of such books. It is necessary to justify the quality of the books prior to using them.

One of the ways to justify the appropriateness of a textbook for Grade 6, ES, is to check the politeness strategies used in the textbook with respect to the model conversation. Secondly, it is also necessary to check the index of readability. If at all possible, comprehensive investigation on the textbook is required to give justification on the appropriateness.

The five textbooks under study vary in terms of the number of conversations, contents, organization, and participants. Book 1, for example, has 23 model conversations with different themes, and organized in 6 units. Book 2 has 32 model conversations with different themes, and organized in 8 units. Book 3 has 14 model conversations with different themes, and organized in 14 units. Book 4 has 7 units but only 2 units which have model conversation with different themes (unit 1 and unit 3). Book 5 has 10 model conversations with different themes, and organized in 10 units.

Participants in the model conversations were introduced with significant difference among the five books. Book 1 introduced the participants with the background of school friends (classmates) and a small portion of family relation, administrative staff, and security guards. Book 2 indicates complete participants: classmates, teachers, security guards, library staff, book writers, sellers, restaurant waiters, and all family members. Book 3 focused on classmates as the participants, but also involving other participants, such as sellers, teachers, police, and mothers. Book 4 only involved pen-friends, customers, and hotel staff. Book 5 focused on classmates, teachers, family, and sellers. In fact, the themes in conversations have been much influenced by the participants involved.

Unfortunately, most model conversations under study were not organized minimally with opening stage, body and closing stage, except Book 4 which tried to organize the model conversations, adopting the minimal stages.

The researchers assume that the condition in terms of model conversations in the books under current study indicates that the government policy to delegate the local governments with respect to the English syllabus for ES has a significant impact on the irregularity of supply and production of the textbooks, especially regarding with the model conversations.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion on the study of politeness strategies in the model conversations in English textbooks for Grade 6, ES, and its discussion can be outlined as follows:

1. In general, politeness strategies have been adopted in the model conversations in English textbooks for Grade 6, ES with the most significant occurrences of doing no FTA. However, other strategies (FTA off Record, Neg FTA Bald on Record and Pos FTA Bald on Record) should accompanied with the appropriate contexts in relation to the social status, gender, time constraints and many more, so that wrong expressions which may cause FTA can be avoided.

2. The degree of directness was also found in the model conversations for Grade 6 of ES with the tendency toward direct expressions. It might be better to adopt indirect expressions but of course under appropriate contexts especially in relation to how participants are socially related. By so doing, the students

would find it easier to internalize the appropriate use of indirect expressions within the correct participants.

3. Another phenomenon is that there are still model conversations with FTA expressions. Such expressions must be well-controlled in terms of their occurrences in any model conversation in order for the students not to be misled—toward improper behaviors. This can be done by providing model conversations by paying particular attention to the appropriate contexts I relation to the social status, gender, time constraints, and other situations

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion, the researchers recommend the following issues with respect to the betterment of the future English education, especially at the early ages of the students.

1. Teachers and other users of textbooks should be selective and critical with respect to the textbooks on market. If at all possible, teachers can investigate the appropriateness of the textbooks with the needs of the students. This is in relation to whether or not the politeness strategies have been correctly adopted.

2. In relation to the supply of textbooks through publishing business, the publishers should cooperate with related educational institutions to comply with the real needs in the teaching and learning processes in Elementary School.

3. Other cooperation should be established, involving experts in English language education, Elementary School English teachers, and publishers in order to be able to design the model conversations as closely as possible to the real world, where English is actually used, especially with respect to Elementary School contexts.

REFERENCES

Brown, Penelop and Levinson, Stephen C. 1987. *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Eggins, Suzanne and Slade, Diana. 1997. *Analyzing Casual Conversation*. London: Cassell.

Eggins, Suzanne. 1994. *An Introduction to Systemic Functional Linguistics*. UK: Pinter Publisher Ltd.

Ellis, Rod. 1985. *Understanding SLA*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ellis, Rod. 1994. *The Study of SLA*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Halliday, MAK. 1985. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar.* UK: St Edmundsbury Press Ltd.

Krashen, Stephen D. 1987. *Principle and Practice in SLA*. UK: Prentice-Hall International.

Leech, G. 1983. *Principles of Pragmatics* . London: Longman.

Listia, Rina dan Kamal, Sirajuddin. 2008. "Kendala Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris di Sekolah Dasar." *Hasil Penelitian* (tidak diterbitkan).

Muflikah, Binti. 2010. Abstract: "Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris Sekolah Dasar di Kota Salatiga (Studi Kajian Etnografi)." *Hasil Penelitian* (tidak diterbitkan) (diunduh pada 26 Januari 2011).