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Positive Politeness Strategies during Online Learning: A Cyberpragmatic Study

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Abstract

Language politeness and character education are crucial in the era of education disruption, particularly in terms of learning communication. Problems with language politeness happen when communication is mediated by electronic media, such as WhatsApp in particular, because it allows undergraduates to be more open in conveying their intentions, including to the lecturers regarding the learning goals. This study aims to describe the forms of language politeness during online learning in higher education. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach. The data of this study were utterances consisting of language politeness, and the data sources were undergraduates' utterances to their lecturer. The data collection techniques were documenting, reading, and note-taking. The data were analyzed through referential identity, extra lingual interactive model, and politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Maricic (2000). Cyberpragmatic perspective perceives the positive politeness strategies with the help of external context, in this case, the virtual learning context, to find out whether there were positive politeness strategies in the utterances. The findings indicate that positive politeness strategies during online learning using cyberpragmatic approach are represented in six forms: paying attention, using identity markers, looking for agreement, avoiding conflict, creating humor, and showing an optimistic attitude. This study recommends that positive politeness strategies can be used as a pillar of developing and strengthening character education in learning, especially in universities.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The recent problems related to language politeness should be considered by undergraduates, teachers, lecturers, and societies because language politeness is successfully managed in a concrete context when undergraduates politely communicate with their lecturers. Studies in language politeness in the academic discourse between undergraduates and their lecturers should be encouraged. This is based on findings by [Suntoro \(2018\)](#) related to the presence of language impoliteness between undergraduates and their lecturer through WhatsApp text messages. The language impoliteness which occurred covers violation of wisdom, generosity, respect, modesty, congeniality, and sympathy principle. The skill in using language, the ability to understand context, and the intimacy are the factors causing the impoliteness.

Language politeness during online learning is crucial to achieving learning goals. Language politeness during online learning has got much attention from many researchers. [Savić \(2018\)](#) studied lecturers' perceptions on the impoliteness and politeness of undergraduates in the context of online learning. Other studies related to language politeness in online learning include politeness effects in math learning ([Mikheeva et al., 2019](#)), positive politeness in the academic course ([Kusmanto et al., 2020](#)), academic communication strategy through email ([Balman et al., 2020](#)), politeness in online learning ([Basri et al., 2021](#)) and directive politeness in online learning ([Alfiansyah et al., 2021](#)). Previous studies have resulted in interesting findings related to online learning language politeness. However, the perspective used in those studies was a pragmatic approach. Meanwhile, communication act analysis during online learning can be solid with cyberpragmatic approach because virtual communication analysis is different from communication analysis in general. Cyberpragmatic approach can give more comprehensive and relevant results for data involving online interaction because it considers virtual media used in communication.

On the other hand, understanding an utterance mediated by virtual media considers virtual context. The context involved in analyzing politeness acts during online learning differs from that in a pragmatics study because the context shift is considered by cyberpragmatic approach. Hence, the study aims to describe the forms of language politeness during online learning in higher education, and the cyberpragmatic approach will likely take aspects of language politeness mediated by virtual media into account. The research question to be answered in this research is: "What are the forms of the undergraduates' positive politeness during higher education online learning?"

The findings are beneficial to nurturing undergraduates' awareness and skills in communicating politely with their lecturers. Furthermore, the result of this research contributes to the development of pragmatics study, particularly cyberpragmatics, which has not been widely developed in linguistics and pragmatics study in Indonesia.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Cyberpragmatics

Communication act analysis performed virtually is different from the pragmatic analysis in a face-to-face context. Communication act analysis is virtually carried out by analyzing the context in more detail (Locher, 2013). The intended context is external, i.e. the virtual context (Rahardi, 2020). Context becomes a key in understanding an utterance that includes politeness or impoliteness category. In addition, a cyber speech study is referred to the cyberpragmatic study which the primary interest is in producing and interpreting information over the internet (Yus, 2011). Furthermore, cyberpragmatics is a study of internet-mediated communication (Yus, 2016). In short, cyberpragmatics is a study of language that pays attention to the internet-mediated context.

Furthermore, there are some fundamental implications of cyberpragmatic study:

- (1) internet is a media used to achieve a communication goal,
- (2) language messages can be interpreted through the internet,
- (3) interpretation of internet-mediated communication requires contextual information for the message to be accepted, and
- (4) different cyber media influence the quality of user's access to contextual information, the amount of information obtained, interpretation, the cognitive effect inherited, and the mental effort involved in obtaining those effects.

Speech analysis conducted through the internet aims to understand the intentions expressed by the speakers. In other words, the main aim of cyberpragmatic analysis is to determine the extent to which the quality of these cyber media affects relevant stimuli, how the quality which influences cognitive effect assessment is perhaps inherited, and how the mental effort is requested in return (Yus, 2011). In our study, utterances were analyzed in higher education online learning to know the quality of politeness utterances.

2.2 Cyberpragmatic Context

The context of a pragmatics study in the cyber era has undergone many changes. The changes happen because of communication situations that occur in virtual media. Situational context can be categorized into four details: (1) participant or speech participant, (2) participant's or speech participant's action, (3) another relevant speech situation, and (4) speech act effects (Halliday, 1975; Rahardi, 2016). The situational context that Halliday means is a context in face-to-face communication. Thus, a speaker's expression implicates the speech quality. It is different from the situational context in virtual communication in that the context, beyond the language, does not immediately represent communication quality.

Furthermore, Leech (2014) develops a theory on the context of the situation, the context of utterance or speech situation. According to Leech (2014), the context of the utterance situation can be categorized into five: (1) speaker and speech partner, (2) speech context, (3) speech objective, (4) speech as utterance act, and (5) utterance as verbal act product. Therefore, the situational context in the cyber era has been changed, which is dominated by one's goal of communicating through virtual media.

In addition, the context in the virtual era has shifted. [Rahardi \(2019\)](#) states that the context in the cyber era has undergone shifts, where the contexts included in the cyberpragmatic approach are social, societal, cultural, and situational contexts. In other words, [Yus \(2011\)](#) states that communication context covers cross-cultural differences, individual relationships with society, communication-specific contexts, social power, social distance, and coercion rating.

2.3 Language Politeness of Cyberpragmatics

Politeness utterance needs to be applied in every communication act, be it conventional or virtual communication. According to [Yus \(2011\)](#), politeness utterance is an obligation in both face-to-face and virtual communication act. However, some rules in conventional politeness do not become a convention in virtual communication.

[Brown and Levinson \(1987\)](#) and [Maricic \(2000\)](#) divide politeness into five strategies, i.e. direct, indirect, positive, negative, and silent strategies. [Leech \(2014\)](#) categorizes politeness into some principles, which include wisdom, mercy, acceptance, humility, compatibility, and sympathy; meanwhile, [Pranowo \(2012\)](#) divides politeness into humility, adjustment, face-saving, willingness to sacrifice, and reflection principle.

Based on the various forms of politeness which has been described, politeness utterance theories in online learning relevant to cyberpragmatics approach are Brown and Levinson's politeness model. Those various contexts should be adapted because not all politeness models proposed by Brown and Levinson are relevant to the study of language politeness in the cyber era.

Language politeness act in a cyber communication context has undergone some shifts. Not all politeness utterance models stated by Brown and Levinson are relevant to the study of virtually-mediated politeness utterance. At least two strategies can be applied in the study of politeness utterances in the cyber era, i.e. positive and negative politeness strategies. Positive politeness strategies in a virtual communication context cover: (1) considering speech partner's presence, (2) using an identity marker, (3) looking for agreement, (4) avoiding conflict, (5) communicating exaggeratedly, (6) involving humor, and (7) behaving positively. Meanwhile, negative politeness in a virtual communication context can be realized through: (1) fostering freedom of act, (2) minimizing threats, and (3) minimizing introduction ([Maricic, 2000](#)). Those politeness strategies depend on the virtual external context in online communication. Based on those language politeness strategies, positive politeness strategies are more relevant to be analyzed since the context deals with face-saving acts in communication. Moreover, the context of this study is related to the communication between the undergraduates and the lecturer, then there is a tendency for the undergraduates to save the lecturer's face.

3. METHODS

3.1 The Study

The study approach was descriptive qualitative ([Banegas, 2020](#); [Moodie, 2020](#)). The qualitative approach in this study was used to describe language politeness forms

during online learning. The data were utterances consisting of language politeness, and the data sources were utterances spoken by undergraduates to the lecturer. The data were collected from one of the Islamic higher education institutions in Surakarta. Javanese culture became the cultural background as the focus of the learning communication context because the undergraduates lived in Java. The number of undergraduates as the research subject was 121 students. WhatsApp was chosen because it was used as the main media to communicate during online learning, and thus the data of language politeness were easily collected. In collecting the data, all WhatsApp chats during the online learning were exported. The study on online learning language politeness is vital as the shift from offline to online learning tends to decrease communication skills, especially in terms of language impoliteness. Besides, [Suntoro \(2018\)](#) found out that language impoliteness happened between undergraduates and their lecturer through WhatsApp. Therefore, this study is the antithesis of the previous study.

3.2 Data Collection

The data were collected through documenting, reading, and note-taking techniques. The documents which were analyzed were communication acts through WhatsApp. The communication acts in WhatsApp were further extracted to form a document containing undergraduates' speech during the learning process. Furthermore, the documented communication acts were read to identify their politeness. Furthermore, polite and impolite data recordings were identified. The recording technique was done by recording the language data containing language guidance on the data card that had been prepared. Impolite language data was also done on data cards which had been prepared.

3.3 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by using referential identity ([Sudaryanto, 2015](#)), an extra lingual interactive model ([Sudaryanto, 2015](#)), and politeness strategies ([Brown and Levinson, 1987](#)). The referential identity method was used to analyze the language used by undergraduates in the virtual communication, consisting of speech with polite or impolite meaning. The pragmatics method in this study was used to strengthen the analysis of the context of the language chosen by the undergraduates, both polite and impolite languages. The analysis of language acts in social media with a cyberpragmatic approach was performed by considering two aspects, namely the language use and context in communication, to determine whether a speech is considered polite or impolite.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that there are six positive politeness strategies during online learning based on cyberpragmatic perspective. The six language politeness strategies show differences with internet-mediated positive politeness strategies proposed by [Brown and Levinson \(1987\)](#), [Maricic \(2000\)](#), and [Yus \(2011\)](#). They are:



(1) paying attention to the speech partner,

- (2) using identity markers,
- (3) looking for agreements to avoid arguments,
- (4) avoiding communication conflicts,
- (5) involving humor to break the ice, and
- (6) showing positive attitude in completing the task and the learning.

Meanwhile, the strategy that was not found in this study was exaggerating the speech. The six strategies are further discussed in the next sub-sections.

4.1 Paying Attention

Paying attention to speech partners in virtual communication during the online learning group is one of the language politeness forms. Attention is shown by the speech partner by greeting informally. Both formal and informal greetings are communication politeness markers (Prayitno et al., 2019). The following data show how attention was shown to the speech partner.

Data	Utterance	Context	Intention
1	<p><i>Assalamualaikum wr.wb.</i> <i>Selamat datang di kelas 7B, Pak</i> . <i>Mohon bimbingannya untuk satu semester kedepan</i>  (H, 25-8-2021) [Peace be upon you. Welcome to class 7B, Sir. Please supervise us for the semester ahead]</p>	<p>The lecturer was added to the course WhatsApp group by the chairman of the class.</p>	<p>Paying attention</p>

The excerpt in (1) linguistically shows language politeness through the greeting in the expression “Peace be upon you”, which in communication indicates a polite utterance (Prayitno et al., 2019). On the other hand, the undergraduate also friendly welcomed the lecturer to the group through the utterance “Welcome to class 7B, sir.” Welcoming a speech partner in that situation is considered polite (Lee & Lee, 2022). It is a strategy used by the speaker to build communication with the speech partner (Flores-Salgado & Castineira-Benitez, 2018). Besides, the speaker also used a polite expression such as “Please supervise us in the semester ahead.” It is essential to consider a linguistic expression when the undergraduate asks for help from the lecturer (Balman et al., 2020). The use of the linguistic term in the data shows politeness. Fedriani (2019) refers to the use of words ‘sorry’ and ‘please’ as signs of politeness. However, using the word ‘sorry’ in a specific context, such as insinuation, is considered impolite (Sumarti et al., 2020).

Paying attention in a virtually-mediated communication act in the cyberpragmatic perspective embodies language politeness. In an online learning context, the expressions of greetings and thanks are used to show language politeness in cyberpragmatic perspective (Yus, 2011). Thanking is considered as an expression that shows language politeness used by undergraduates to the lecturer (Lee & Lee, 2022). It shows that undergraduates adhered to the cultural aspect of virtual communication, as Javanese culture is attached to speaking manners (Mirmanto et al., 2021; Widiarti & Pulungan, 2020).

Paying attention in a virtually-mediated communication act in a cyberpragmatic perspective is the representation of language politeness. It is shown by the greeting

expressed by undergraduates to the lecturer in the online learning context. In the beginning of the semester, the undergraduate contacted the lecturer and added him/her to the new online learning group in WhatsApp. At first, the undergraduate greeted, asked for supervision and thanked the lecturer. The communication performed by the undergraduate in a cyberpragmatic context shows the undergraduate's politeness to the lecturer.

4.2 Using Identity Marker

An identity marker in communication is a form of language politeness. This identity marker shows the speaker's self-image to reflect the speaker's culture (Ulfa et al., 2018). Therefore, an identity marker is used as a politeness marker in speaking. The following is an example of an utterance in which a self-identity marker is included.

Data	Utterance	Context	Intention
2	<i>Semangat Mbak Q</i> (L, 28-05-2021) [Keep it up, Ms Q]	The lecturer motivated an undergraduate to complete a task. The undergraduate was older than the lecturer.	Motivating by using an identity marker.

Excerpt in (2) is an utterance that shows language politeness by using an identity marker. The identity marker in that utterance is seen from the use of 'Q', which shows the intimacy between the speaker and the speech partner to express politeness. This is in line with what was found by Kim et al. (2021), i.e. showing communication politeness strategy by the use of an identity marker to show respect and intimacy. The identity marker 'Q' was intended to refer to the undergraduate's name.

Using an identity marker in virtual group communication shows intimacy and minimizes social distance (Yus, 2011). The lecturer can express it by calling the speech partner's profession. The realization of identity used in this study is referring the name, which shows the speaker's intimacy. It was strengthened by the utterance context which is the relationship between the undergraduate and the lecturer in the same undergraduate program.

The use of identity marker 'Q' becomes the convention for the undergraduate who was already acquainted with the lecturer so that it can be concluded that the presence of an identity marker is the representation of positive politeness in communication (Onn et al., 2018). Moreover, an identity marker emphasizes intimacy and agreement (Maros & Rosli, 2017). Without intimacy and agreement, conflict can potentially happen. In the case of a new undergraduate who is not acquainted with the lecturer, calling the lecturer's initial is surely considered impolite. Hence, the utterance, as shown in excerpt (2), is polite as it shows the effort of the speaker to make up solidarity with the speech partner.

4.3 Looking for Agreement

Looking for agreement and avoiding disagreement are language politeness forms. Following Jia and Yang (2021), the speaker should always compliment to achieve agreement and avoid disagreement. The following is an excerpt that shows an agreement.

Data	Utterance	Context	Intention
3	<i>Wah, bagus sekali Prof, puisinya.</i> (E, 19-10-2021) [Wow, the poem is so beautiful, Prof.]	The lecturer posted a self-written poem in the virtual group.	Looking for an agreement with the speech partner.

The excerpt in (3) is an utterance that presents language politeness in the form of a speech partner's agreement. It can be seen from the utterance that the speaker showed an agreement to the speech partner by saying that the poem that the speech partner sent was beautiful. This was done to avoid disagreement to the lecturer's poem. This is in line with Yus (2011), stating that the politeness strategy can be implemented by minimalizing disagreement towards the speech partner.

What the undergraduate uttered during the online learning shows language politeness. The representation of politeness is the agreement with the speech partner by uttering "Wow, the poem is beautiful, Prof". It happened when the lecturer sent a self-written poem to the undergraduates. Through the compliment that the undergraduate uttered, agreement as one of the politeness strategies was achieved. Therefore, for the communication to run well and the learning goal to be achieved during online learning, agreement with the speech partner should be achieved.

4.4 Avoiding Conflict

Avoiding conflict is the right choice to achieve the goal of communication. The speakers in their utterances should avoid disputes because it is close to impolite communication (Kurniasih et al., 2019). The following is the sample data that shows politeness in preventing conflict.

Data	Utterance	Context	Intention
4	<i>Nama saya kok ganti lagi buu.</i> <i>Kemarin istiqomah lho buu.</i> (LH, 10-10-2021) [Why do you change my name again, maam? Yesterday, you called me Istiqomah, maam.] <i>Oh Iya, Latifah.</i> (L, 10-10-2021) [I see, Latifah.]	The lecturer said the undergraduate's name incorrectly during online learning.	Avoiding disputes



The excerpt in (4) is an utterance that shows how the speaker avoided conflict. It is evident from the undergraduate's utterance, which says "Why do you change my name again, maam? Yesterday, you called me Istiqomah, maam". That utterance shows that the speaker tried to avoid conflict with the speech partner. The utterance "Why do you change my name again, maam?" is considered polite because the speaker did not directly blame the lecturer. In other words, the speaker avoided conflict as a politeness strategy. This positively impacted the learning process conducted online because the undergraduate saved the lecturer's face.

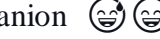
The context of the utterance is when the lecturer incorrectly called the undergraduate's name twice. However, the undergraduate showed politeness instead of disappointment to the lecturer. This means that the undergraduate applied politeness

strategy by avoiding conflict. This is in line with the findings of the research conducted by Kurniasih et al. (2019), showing that Indonesian tend to avoid conflict in social media by applying politeness strategies. In the context of online learning, language politeness indicates a positive image of the undergraduates so that a better relationship with the lecturer is achieved. Thus, online learning communication that prioritizes politeness to avoid conflict helps both undergraduates and their lecturer achieve the expected learning goal.

4.5 Creating Humor

Humor involved in communication is one of the language politeness strategies that please the speech partner. Delighting the speech partner is helpful in achieving communication goals. Polite humor is not humor that is checking, but humor that tempts speech partners to laugh (Murphy, 2021). The following is an example of an excerpt that shows good manners in learning through creating humor.

Data	Utterance	Context	Intention
5	<p><i>Pak A ngunjuk lan dhahar rumiyin njih... kejenge fokus.</i> (Q, 17-10-2021)</p> <p>[Mr. A is about to eat and drink first. To be attentive.]</p> <p><i>Oh ya dah waktunya makasih. Tapi, ga ada yang menemani</i>  (A, 17-10-2021)</p> <p>[I see, it is the right time, thank you. But there is no companion.]</p> <p> (L, 17-10-2021)</p>	<p>The lecturer started the online class. However, one of the undergraduates did not realize that the class had started.</p>	<p>Creating humor.</p>

The example shown in (5) is a form of language politeness performed by creating humor - the focus expressed by the undergraduate who is Mr. A's wife states "Mr. A is about to eat and drink first. To be attentive." Furthermore, Mr. A replied "Oh yes, it is the right time, thank you. But there is no companion ". Polite communication was achieved by creating humor. This is further reinforced by the context of the communication when the online lecture was conducted. The lecturer also appreciated the humor by sending laughing emoticons because the communication took place between the undergraduates who were husband and wife. Emoticons have relevance to the speech (Yus, 2019).

Creating humor during online learning can break the ice so that the speech partner is delighted. In addition, the humor is positive because it does not physically mock the speech partner. This is in line with Murphy (2021) stating that humor can be a language strategy that makes speech partners laugh. However, humor can also be negatively perceived if it is intended as a joke that insults speech partners (Terkourafi & Bezuidenhout, 2021). In this case, the humor was not intended to offend the speech partners, so the humor involved can be categorized as a language politeness strategy. Generally, humor can be used to save one's face. Humor is also required to make the speech partner happy (Kusmanto et al., 2019). In the context of online learning, humor

boosts intimacy between the undergraduates and the lecturer so that the quality of learning is improved, and an awkward situation can be avoided. Therefore, the learning is more engaging.

4.6 Showing Optimistic Attitude

Language politeness during online learning makes speech partners cooperative, confident, and motivated. Motivation during online learning is a key for a learner to complete the study. The following is an example of a speech that shows an optimistic response to the speech partner.

Data	Utterance	Context	Intention
6	<i>Bismillah semangat untuk kita semua teman teman.</i> (A, 28-10-2021) [In the name of Allah, keep it up for all of us, friends]	The lecturer knows that there is an article published in a journal.	Showing an optimistic attitude.

The excerpt in (6) is the representation of language politeness strategy produced by showing an optimistic attitude. The evidence is shown by the utterance “Bismillah, keep it up for all of us, friends”. The expression is polite because it shows an optimistic attitude that influences speech partners to be confident and passionate in pursuing their studies. Optimistic expression in studying online is essential, which is in line with Kusmanto et al. (2020), i.e. language politeness provides a motivation to speech partners during online learning. Expressions that indicate an optimistic attitude will have a positive influence, both on the speaker and the speech partner.

Showing an optimistic attitude motivates the undergraduates and the lecturer during the learning process. Motivating the speech partners shows that communication is successful. The optimistic attitude as the representation of communication politeness shows an excellent communication (Hendrastuti, 2017). Therefore, both the undergraduate and lecturer optimistic attitude is crucially required in an internet-mediated online learning as it improves the quality of the learning process.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the problems discussed in the introduction, positive politeness strategies during online learning were analyzed from cyberpragmatic perspective. Cyberpragmatic perspective perceives the positive politeness strategies with the help of external context, in this case, the virtual learning context, to find out whether there were positive politeness strategies in the utterances. The analysis results show that undergraduates applied six positive politeness strategies in an online class, listed in order as follows: (1) paying attention to the speech partner, (2) using an identity marker to show solidarity, (3) looking for an agreement to avoid a disagreement, (4) avoiding a conflict, (5) creating humor to break the ice, and (6) showing an optimistic attitude in completing tasks and studies.

Nonetheless, the data in this study are limited to an online learning context in higher education. In another more comprehensive study, the limitation can be anticipated, so that positive politeness strategies are widely found. The positive

politeness strategies found in the process of online learning communication can be a communication alternative for undergraduates and lecturers.

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