

IMPOLITENESS IN INTERLANGUAGE PRAGMATICS OF INVITING BY INDONESIAN EFL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at describing impoliteness in making inviting strategy in the target language (English) by Indonesian EFL learners regarding social status, power, and rank of imposition. The data of research was elicited by administering written Discourse Completion Tasks (DCT) with nine scenarios adopted from Blum-Kulka (2000). The participants of this study were 66 students of Senior High School in Central Java. The findings show that the proficiency of mastering English grammar does not guarantee the successful communication in terms of inviting others based on social status and familiarity. Impoliteness was found in the use of impolite (neutral) inviting strategies in terms of imperative forms and asking for willingness using neutral (impolite) strategies toward higher invitees as they only employ words grammatically ordered without considering context of situation. Brown-Levinson super strategies of politeness in the form of Bald on record was found in the interaction to higher invitees as well.

Keywords: *impoliteness, interlanguage pragmatic, inviting*

INTRODUCTION

Learning a language means learning the culture. However teachers or instructors sometimes only pay attention to the constructing linguistic patterns rather than introducing culture beyond the language we learn. Culture differs one and another. What we act and speak reflect the culture of our language. Talking about culture means talking about sociopragmatics. It is about language in context situation where we adjust our linguistic behavior in where we make interaction and communicate. The area of pragmatic competence is studied in terms of sociolinguistic competence and discourse competence. Whereas pragmatic competence in foreign language contexts is defined as the knowledge of communicative action or speech acts, how to perform it, and the ability to utilize the language in proper ways based on the context or contextual factors (Kasper, 1997).

As pragmatics differs from one culture to other second or foreign language, learners should acquire the sociopragmatics and pragmalinguistic rules of the foreign or second language to enable them to make communication effectively with native speakers. Miscommunication often occurs due to incident that people make use of the rules of their native pragmatics to express intention in other culture without realizing the difference between these two cultures (Baron, 2003; Takahashi, 1996; Thomas, 1983; Wolfson, 1989). Error in grammar could be tolerable but inappropriateness will affect the communication outcomes. The conversation may lead to an awkward situation which is not realized by the learners of the language. “the appropriate usage and selection of language in accordance with context and the ability to understand the social conventions that govern communication” (Xiaole, 2009).

However, the learning English tends to exclude its sociopragmatic context. For example, Indonesian students in Semarang regency are not accustomed to use English politeness expression in situational contexts. They even are not aware the norms of politeness of the target language they learn for daily basis communication.

Sociopragmatic competence shall refer to the way a speaker generates utterances to maintain communication by using linguistic units in an appropriate way based on the social context and value of politeness related to the degree of power, rank, and imposition. It can be said that this competence is the core of communication, how to maintain feasible and accepted communication especially involving interactants from different cultural background, in terms of using appropriate linguistic units, strategies and real context of situation base where the language is used and developed. Therefore, identifying and understanding the way people from other culture speak or perform the language should be paid more attention in the language classroom program. Pragmalinguistics is also crucial. According to Brown and Levinson (1987) it deals with face. They mention pragmalinguistics as a part of linguistics, which means of conveying illocutionary force and politeness value.

In second language learning, interlanguage pragmatics is a relatively new field that is “the study of the development and use of strategies for linguistic action by nonnative speakers” (Kasper and Schmidt, 1996). In other words, interlanguage pragmatics is about the acquisition and performance of speech acts in the target language by learners. Kasper and Dahl (1991: 216) view interlanguage pragmatics as “non native speakers’ comprehension and production of speech acts and how that the target language related knowledge is acquired”.

To indicate someone being polite would mean when this person shows good manners and consideration to others. To be polite associates with how to say things with which one does not really feel or believe in. However, it is an important part of social conventions since in all cultures, however different they are, politeness in addressing others is a kind of observed code of behavior that one has to hold on.

English is one of a compulsory subject in Indonesia. Although it is taught as a foreign language, Indonesian EFL learners should have the capability to convey the meaning of the language through oral or written text. It is indicated in the way teachers evaluate and measure the learners’ ability in speaking and writing as native like. This is in line with the objectives of learning language that is having language skill in listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

One of conversation gambits taught in Senior High School is invitation. The objectives of learning invitation are to enable students to produce invitation based on such situations, and to have the capability to respond to the invitation. It is stated in the curriculum that students are required to understand how an invitation is carried out and how they should respond to such invitations. In line with these learning goals, the writer investigates the way the students make an invitation from the perspective of pragmalinguistics and politeness strategies.

Invitation is a part of speech acts, which reflects the actualization of an illocutionary intention of a speaker through utterances, either spoken or written. The speech act of invitation emerges when someone asks somebody else to attend to a kind of occasion, usually the one that is hosted by the inviter. It is quite challenging to do the research on speech act of invitation as it is rarely found any research in speech act of invitation. No study to my knowledge has so far examined the

interlanguage production of inviting strategies of Indonesian EFL learners. The present study aims at contributing to this understudied area.

RESEARCH METHOD

Subjects

The subjects consisted of sixty six students, thirty three were males and the other thirty three were females of Senior High School. They are students at the age of 16 to 17 years old with different background of family and economical status. All of them have learned English for nearly four years since they were in Junior High School. They have never been abroad previously.

Data collection

The data were collected through written Discourse Completion Tasks with nine scenarios. The students were asked to give responses to the scenarios. The data then were analyzed by using Brown-Levinson politeness system. The social situations were as follows:

- Inviting a close friend for a birthday party with specific theme and time
- Inviting lower grade student to see a show
- Inviting a teacher for a class excursion
- Inviting a friend to go to a prominent university to get an information about registration
- Inviting a friend to watch a football match in a stadium
- Inviting a sport teacher for a meal
- Inviting a sport teacher for a meal
- Inviting some to see a photography exhibition
- Inviting someone for a swimming competition

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis was divided into two main parts (1) the realization of inviting strategy types in terms of pragmalinguistics of inviting strategies based on gender (male and female) and social status: power (P), and distance (D), (2) politeness strategies used in the invitation based on Brown and Levinson. The responses in written form by the participants were then analyzed and categorized according to the super strategies of politeness by Brown and Levinson.

Pragmalinguistic Strategies

The data showed that the participants had different pragmalinguistic strategies in making invitation. The discrepancies were due to different gender, so as to male-male interaction, male-female interaction, female-female interaction. However, most participants tended to use indirect strategies followed by some explanations according to given situation. The data employed by Indonesian EFL learners were analyzed based on discourse strategies. Belows are invitation strategies used by the participants:

- Asking for willingness (AW)
- Performative (P)
- Imperative (I)
- Hoping (H)
- Want Strategy (W)

Among five strategies, it seemed that the participants employed AW and I strategies which were considered as impolite to the higher-close invitees. It was found the participants used ... ‘can you come’, ‘will you ..’ or ‘come and join us in the party’. This kind of strategy was also employed to the invitees of familiar and higher status. It seemed that the participants only incorporated linguistics forms by translating their native language into the target language without considering sociopragmatic context to maintain successful communication. To communicate with higher status people means employing politeness involving certain pragmalinguistic forms. That is why understanding pragmalinguistics of the target language is more important than just having grammar knowledge.

Politeness Strategies

Politeness is used to avoid clash or conflict between the persons involved in a situation, i.e. speaker or hearer, or speaker or hearer. The study of speech acts helped us to have better understanding toward the interactional styles and differences in speech act behavior within and across cultures. Linguistic politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) is the seminal work on politeness including some super strategies, i.e. bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness and off record.

Bald on record (BR) is used for the reason when the speaker wants to do the FTA with maximum efficiency more than he wants to satisfy hearer’s face. This can be identified by the verbal realization of the use of imperative sentences. Positive politeness (PP) is redress directed to the addressee’s positive face that should be thought of as desirable. The linguistic realizations of positive politeness are in many respects simply representative of the normal linguistic behavior between intimates, where interest and approval of each other’s personality, presuppositions indicating shared wants and shared knowledge, including approval, sympathy, solidarity markers, slang, using inclusive ‘we’ form. Negative politeness (NP) is redressive action addressed to the addressee’s negative face: his want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded, the linguistic behavior is indicated by the insertion of please, the use of deference, preparatory condition, and any indirectness. Off Record (OR) is the one which includes indirectness.

Politeness strategies were used to smoothen communication between people from different cultural backgrounds. Nevertheless it has also been acknowledged that politeness strategies may be different in different cultures (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Some culture may tend to use positive politeness strategies (those which show closeness and intimacy between speaker and hearer) and other use negative politeness strategies (those which stress non-imposition upon the hearer and express deference). Among all super strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson; Bald on record strategies were considered direct and were found in the interaction between the inveter to the higher invitees in this present research.

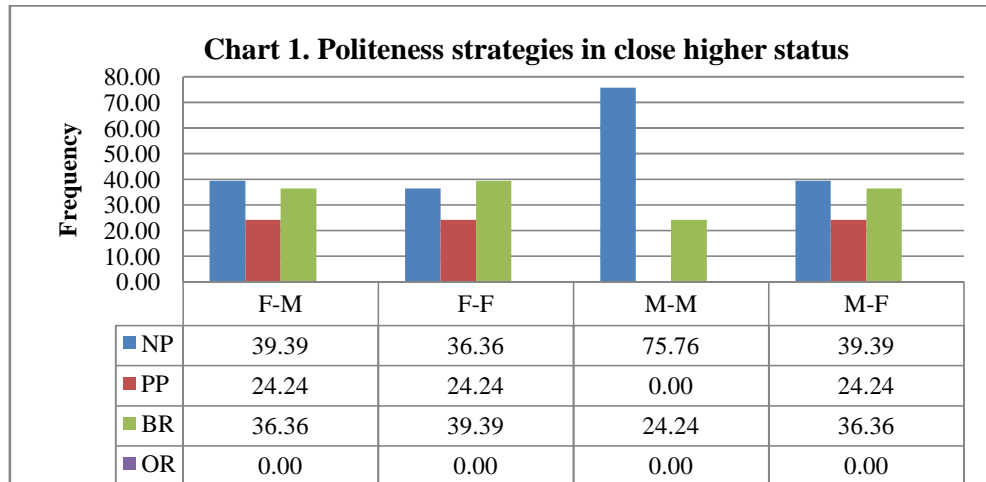


Chart 1. shows that the participants only adopted three super strategies of politeness, NP, PP, and BR. Female participants adopted NP with high frequency especially addressed to male invitees, while for female invitees, the female participants employed BR strategies. Unlike female participants, male participants employed two prevalent strategies when addressing male invitees, NP and BR; however the most frequent was the use of NP. Nevertheless when addressing female invitees, male participants involved three strategies, NP, PP, and BR. The most frequent strategies used by male addressed to female were NP.

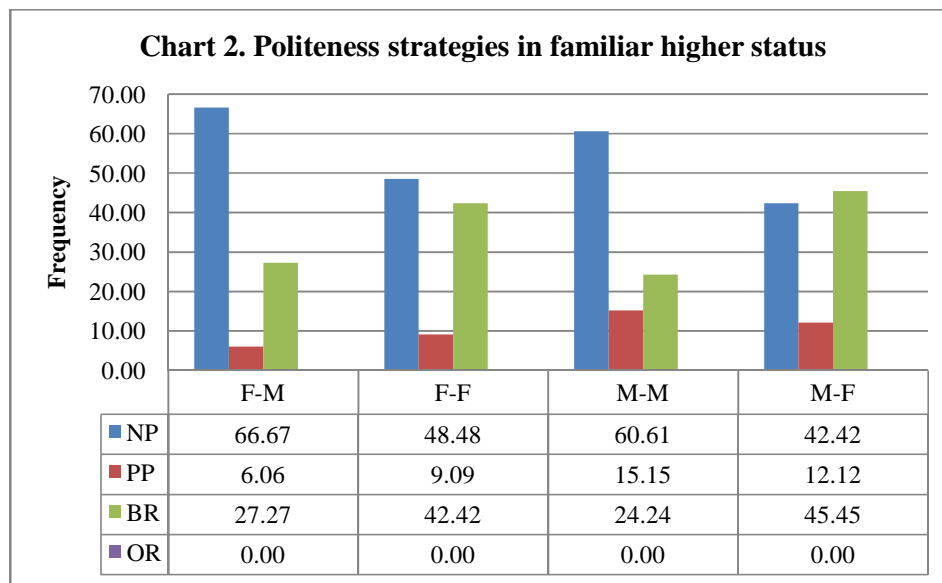


Chart 2 shows that participants included three super strategies, NP, PP, and BR. The highest frequency in all interactions either female to male, female to female, male to male was NP, however in the interaction between male to female, the highest frequency was BR, and the least was PP.

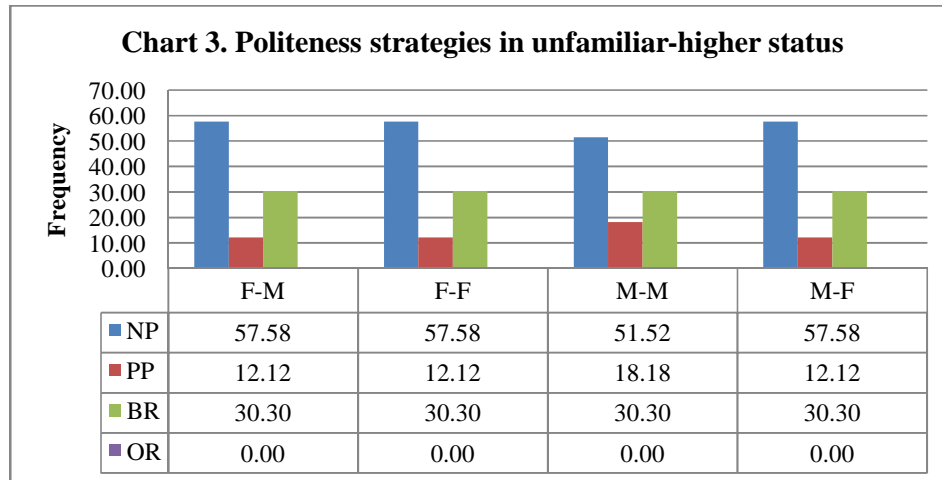


Chart 3 shows that participants used three super strategies of politeness, NP, PP, and BR. However the most frequent in all interactions was NP. This was due to the fact that the invitees were higher and distant. Nonetheless BR strategies were also employed by the participants.

Based on the findings, there was impoliteness employed by the participants in making inviting strategies. Female who are considered as polite as Lakoff (1973) described the politeness as “talking like a lady” are not always polite. However, the failure to maintain politeness was due to pragmatic competence which was not incorporated in opting strategies in terms of linguistic behavior. As proposed by Bardovi-Harlig (1996) that is to say, a learner whose grammar competence was good did not necessarily show equivalent pragmatic development. Consequently, learners who mastered grammar often reveal different pragmatic competence. Seemingly, that high level of grammatical competence is not enough for the learners to acknowledge and generate target language appropriately in social context.

CONCLUSION

In the realm of pragmalinguistics, the participants cannot differentiate the use of neutral (impolite) and polite strategies while addressing the invitation to higher level of the invitees. It is revealed in the use of willingness neutral and imperative strategies by the participants to invitees who are of higher status. Based on the findings teacher should teach pragmatic knowledge of the target language (English) to the students, so that they are able to use the language appropriately to social contexts or situations.

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