

# Cross Cultural Politeness Strategies in Arabic and English A Case Study of Secondary Schools, Hasaheisa Locality. Gezira State, Sudan

Mawaddah Ibrahim Min Alseed

## ABSTRACT:

Politeness strategies are differ cross-culturally. This study aims at showing the performance of politeness interaction cross-culturally and introducing some politeness strategies that used EFL classes. The study adopted the descriptive analytical method. The data were collected by means of a questionnaire from twenty five (25) teachers of secondary schools. Then the collected data were analyzed by the SPSS program. The study came out with the following results: EFL learners need to perform polite interaction in the classroom, being polite helps in showing respect in an interactional act, it is important for learners to keep a positive face when addressing people, positive politeness is to show solidarity and it is directed to the positive face of the addressee, negative face leads to apology and indirectness. Socio-cultural context influences learners' interaction. Showing politeness is differ cross-culturally. The study recommended: EFL learners should learn how to keep a positive face when addressing people.

**Key Words: Politeness strategies, cross-culturally, positive face, negative face, indirectness.**

## مستخلص:

إستراتيجيات التآدب اللغوي في العرض الكلامي يختلف باختلاف الثقافات. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد أداء التواصل حسب التآدب الثقافي في صفوف تدريس اللغة الانجليزية كما تهدف الي توضيح استراتيجيات التآدب. إستخذت الدراسة المنهج التحليلي الوصفي كما إستخدمت نظام الاستبانة لجمع البيانات من خمسة وعشرين (25) معلماً ومعلمة للغة إنجليزية محلية الحصاصيما ولاية الجزيرة السودان. تم تحليل البيانات إحصائيا بنظام (SPSS). وبعد تحليل الاستبانة توصلت الدراسة للآتي: يحتاج الطلاب الى تطوير اداء التآدب في التفاعل الصفي ، من المهم

ان تخاطب الناس باحترام ، الخطاب الايجابي المؤدب يعكس تضامن المجتمع وادب المتحدث بينما المخاطبة السلبية تقود للإعتزاز والمراوغة، ثقافة المجتمع تؤثر علي المخاطبة وكيفية ادائها بين الطلاب والمعلمين في الصف الدراسي،أوصت الدراسة بتعلم ثقافة وادب المخاطبة و ان يودي التواصل الصفّي الدراسي بين طلاب اللغة الانجليزية بطريقة التأدب الموجهة.

## 1.0 Introduction

In general communication, people choose the right strategy to communicate with others, namely in a polite manner. Being polite is one of the ways people conducting speech quality. (Brown and Levinson,1987) illustrate that a politeness theory is based on the concept that people have a social self-image. The face here means the speaker must be aware of the listener's needs about their faces, consider the listener's feelings, and minimize face threatening act (FTA). On the other hand, Yule (1996, p. 130) states that FTA is an action which gives threat to a person's face. Thus, in brief, politeness is an act of showing awareness of the hearers' social self image. Accordingly, politeness as a form of behavior developing in society to reduce frictions in communication. With similar vein, (Leech,1983) states that politeness is a form of behavior aimed to develop and maintain mutual interpersonal relationship. This kind of strategy is indicated by the speaker act in which the utterance indicates a direct speech act which may cover an imperative device, such as suggestion, request, invitation, offer or order.

Searle (1969) asserts that, all speech acts such as requests are meaningful and that they are rule-governed. For that reason, in interactions, participants ought to be aware of their actions and thus consider what named 'face', defined as" the positive social

value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact” and that face can be lost, maintained or enhanced during interactions with others. (Brown,1987) asserts that, face is a set of wants, roughly “they want to be unimpeded” and a person’s desire to act without imposition, and “the want to be approved in certain respect”. In everyday communications, there are considerably a very large number of acts such as requests. Threatening Acts (FTAs) are acts that violate the hearers’ need to maintain his/her self steam, and be respected.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

The notions of politeness and the degree of politeness differ cross-culturally and thus, the different perceptions on politeness may lead to misunderstandings and conflicts for EFL learners. So, EFL learners need to be effective communicators in EFL settings, they are required to perform polite behaviors during their schooling and their future contact. This study tries to explain the polite behavior which helps EFL learners understand culture-specific concepts of politeness in Arabic and English.

### **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to:

- a. Resort different politeness behaviors cross-culturally.
- b. Investigate factors influencing politeness in EFL classes.
- c. Explain cultural differences in politeness behavior between Arabic and English languages.

### **1.3 Questions of the Study**

The study will answer the following questions:

- a. To what extent does showing politeness vary cross-culturally?
- b. How do social factors influence EFL students’ performance of

polite interaction?

c. What are the differences in politeness behaviors in general?

### **1.4 Hypotheses of the Study**

The study suggests the following hypotheses

a. Showing politeness cross-culturally.

b. Cross cultural factors influence EFL learners' performance of polite interaction .

c. There are cultural differences in politeness behavior between cross-culturally.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

This study explains the polite behavior which helps EFL learners understand culture-specific concepts of politeness in Arabic and English. It helps EFL learners understand culture-specific concepts of politeness; it sheds light on the semantic meanings of the word politeness in Arabic as compared to English.

### **1.6 Research Methodology**

The study will use the descriptive analytical method. The questionnaire will be used as a tool to collect the data from the EFL teachers at secondary level. Then, the collected data will be analyzed statistically by the SPSS Program.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

Politeness is a behavior that occurs in society to make them respect each other and reduce the possibility of getting conflict or dispute between members of the society (Holmes, 1995). Therefore, politeness strategy can contribute to the success of effective communication in the classroom.

## 2.1 Politeness and Social Communication

Politeness occurs in the communication in the society however, the use of politeness strategy differs in societies which have different language and culture (Ardi et al., 2018) For instance, positive politeness sometimes is preferred to negative politeness in some countries. (Kingwell,1993) emphasizes that to communicate means that the speakers do not only transfer their content of information but also the way they transfer it should not hurt the hearers. It means that teachers and students should pay attention to the way they transfer the message in their communication. However, the development of social media which grows very rapidly can influence the use of language by students to interact with their teachers. The language that they use in the cyber world has a chance to be used by the students when they communicate with their teachers. Moreover, in the field teachers tend to create a friendly teaching and learning atmosphere since it is one of the character values that need to be integrated into the classroom activity. As a result, some students will feel spoiled by teachers.

The friendly environment that is built by teachers to create a more pleasant teaching and learning atmosphere might be misinterpreted by the students. Therefore, teachers have to put boundaries in order to avoid misinterpretation. Students also should pay attention to the way they communicate with their teachers. Thus, the occurrence of politeness strategy in the classroom interactions is important.

## 2.2 Politeness in EFL Learners' Interaction

The aim of learning a language is to be communicative, thus the theory proposed by (Celce-Murcia, 2007) about communicative competence is needed by language learners to communicate the language in a proper way. Providing polite classroom interaction for the students can contribute to the students' language development (Consolo, 2006). The politeness strategy can be shown from the interactions that occur in the classroom activity when teachers and students transfer their ideas in communication. However, to achieve the same understanding between the speakers is quite challenging because in speaking language learners such as the EFL students tend to be insufficiently equipped which causes psychological factors such as afraid of making mistakes and fear of criticism ( Shen and Chiu, 2019). As a result their self-confidence to communicate in English is low and they often face some difficulties in transferring their ideas to be well understood by the hearers (Sayuri, 2016). Moreover, both teachers and students have different communication style. Thus, a strategy to communicate in the classroom setting is needed to create effective classroom interactions between teachers and students (Tan et al., 2016).As such politeness strategy is needed in EFL classes.

## 2.3 Politeness Strategies in the Social Media

Politeness strategies also occur in the social media platform, (Jeanyfer and Tanto, 2018) had investigated the politeness phenomena in the text messages between people from different ranking power status. While (Ambarwati et al., 2019) investigated the

politeness strategies used in the Facebook interactions posted by women. Both of the findings showed that in the written form politeness strategies also occurred. Ambarwati et al. (2019) argued that politeness strategies occurred as ‘a reflection of humanistic learning’. They elaborated politeness strategies in the social media platform as a process to show how people choose appropriate speech, maintain the power in doing communication and maintain the attitude to save interlocutor’s face. In addition, (Widiadnya et al., 2018) investigated the implication of politeness strategies used in the classroom interactions. The result showed that the use of politeness strategies in the classroom interactions imply positive results, for instance, it could create effective communication between teacher and students which contain respect value, improve their interactions, and lessen the interference in their communication. Encouraging the students related to the importance of having politeness strategy in communication will develop their awareness not only in communicative competence but also cultural awareness, and build their character values. Especially for students from the senior high school level which tend to get easily influenced by their environment either in the real or cyber world in a positive or negative way. Referring to the phenomenon above, the purpose of this study is to investigate the teacher and students’ politeness strategies in the EFL classroom interactions

A person’s positive public image that is established in his or her social interactions is defined as face. It can be praise, honor, or self-esteem. Meanwhile, (Brown and Levinson, 1987) concep-

tualize face as the people's impression that they need to be free and appreciated in a certain respect. Thus, it indicates that every person tends to keep each other's self-image in the public to avoid getting offended or annoyed by others. There are four strategies, namely bald-on-record strategy, positive politeness strategy, negative politeness strategy, and off-record strategy. Through those strategies, the speaker can choose the appropriate strategy which can be used when he or she wants to prevent threatening acts to the hearer's face or at least minimize or soften it. The first strategy is called bald-on-record. It is used to convey information or message directly to the hearer (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Moreover, they elaborate that this strategy is used to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation between interlocutors since the speaker speaks effectively and directly. Thus, the utterances have to be spoken directly, vividly, unambiguously, and succinctly. (Brown and Levinson, 1987) declare that direct imperative or direct command is one form of bald-on-record strategy.

Further, they explain that there are two cases when the speaker uses this strategy. The first case is the non-minimization of the face threat. There are four conditions when the speaker uses the strategy to not soften the face threat. The conditions are when they are in an urgent situation, the speaker has more power than the hearer, the speaker has the desire to show sympathy, and when the speaker does not want to maintain the face. In addition, they state that the second case occurs when this strategy is 'actually oriented to face'. It occurs in three situations such as welcoming or invit-

ing, farewells and offers. The second strategy is positive politeness. It is addressed to enhance the hearers' positive face. (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 101) elaborate that it can be expressed by satisfying the hearers' face to make them feel that they are appreciated by others. Further, (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 102) propose three broad strategies of positive politeness: claim common ground, convey that the speaker and the hearer are cooperators, and fulfill the hearer's wants for some. In claiming common ground, they state that both of the speaker and the hearer share the same specific wants, goals, or values. Thus, the speaker may perform the claim by stating that he or she also feels interested in the hearer's wants. The second main strategy of positive politeness is conveying that the speaker and the hearer are co-operators. It implies that they are involved in the same interest, so they share the same goals. As a result, this strategy can improve the hearer's positive face. The last strategy on positive politeness is complying with the hearer's wants for some. Satisfying the hearer's positive face is the form of this strategy. It can be performed by fulfilling the hearer's wants directly such as by showing encouragement or giving items.

### **2.3.1 Positive Politeness Strategy**

According to (Cutting, 2002, p. 48) the positive politeness strategy shows the speakers recognize that the hearer has a face to be respected. Positive Politeness Strategy is used when the speaker attempts to minimize the threat to the hearer's positive face by finding an agreement or giving compliments to the listener so that

he/she feels good about himself/herself. This strategy is mostly used in situations where they both know each other fairly well. The friendliness in the relationship and the desire to be respected is recognized.

### 2.3.2 Negative Politeness

The third strategy is negative politeness. Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 129) define this strategy as ‘redressive action’ which is oriented to hearer’s negative face. This strategy aims to reduce the interference with the hearer’s freedom of action. The speaker can perform this strategy by being indirect, using hedges, conveying pessimism in the utterance to express doubt, reducing the imposition, or giving respect to the hearer, (Culpeper, 2011). The speaker usually uses this strategy when he or she has social distant or feels awkward towards the hearer. Furthermore, the last strategy is called off-record. It enables the speaker to perform FTA indirectly. Thus, the speaker’s utterance consists of more than one possible interpretation. Since there are many interpretations that can be drawn from the speaker’s utterances, so it is up to the hearer’s choice to decide how to interpret it. Negative Politeness Strategy is used when the speaker wants to protect the hearer’s negative face by performing indirect acts to minimize the imposition of the request on the hearer (Krisnoni, 2013). This strategy is similar to Positive Politeness in that it is mostly used in situations where the speaker recognizes the friendliness and the desire to be respected by the hearer. However, the speaker assumes that he/she is in some way imposing on the other.

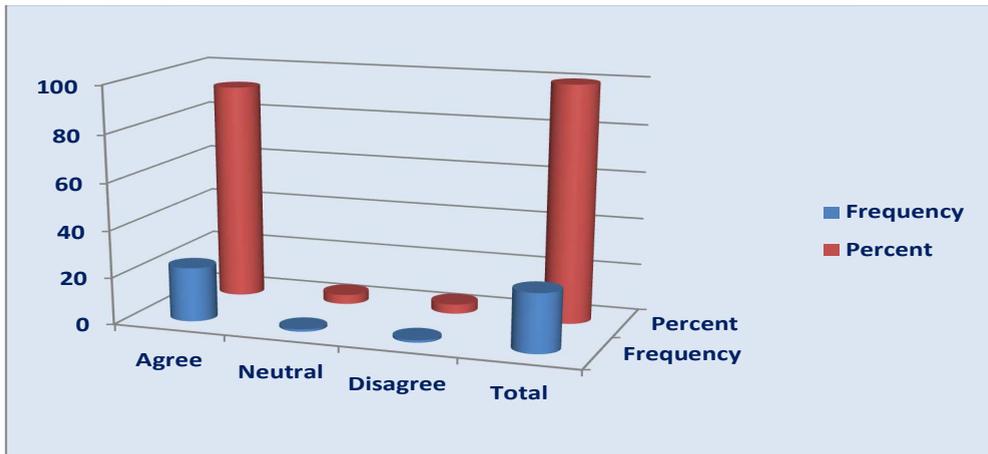
### 3.0 Material and Method:

The participants of this study were the EFL secondary school teachers in El-hasahisa Locality, Gezira State, Sudan (2021). To collect the required data, a questionnaire was designed, revised and distributed to the sample who were twenty five (25) EFL teachers. Then the collected data was statistically analyzed by SPSS program. The analyses of the questionnaire were shown in the following tables.

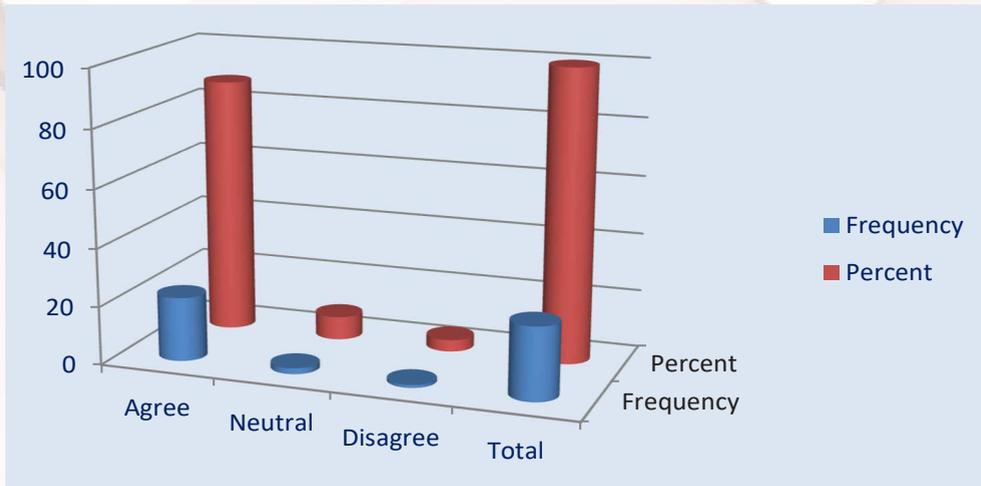
#### 3.1 Data Analysis

Statement (1) EFL learners need to interact politely and develop awareness about cultural aspect of the target language.

Fig (1) EFL learners need to develop the performance of polite interaction.



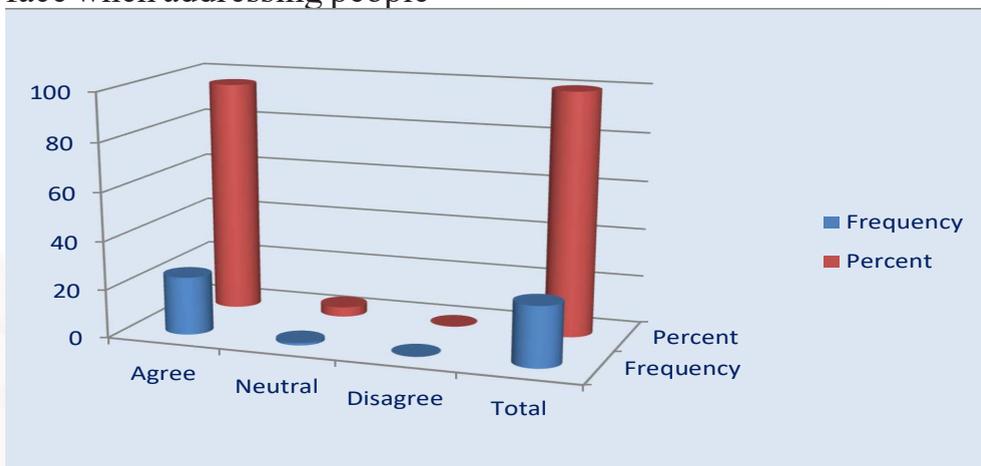
According to the statistical analysis in fig (1), (92%) of the sample agree that EFL learners need to interact politely and develop awareness about cultural aspect of the target language. Only (4) of the sample are neutral and (4%) of the sample disagree with the statement. Statement (2) Being polite helps in showing respect in an interactional act.. Fig (2) Being polite helps in showing respect in an interactional act..



According to the statistical analysis of fig (2), (88%) of the sample agree that being polite helps in showing respect in an interactional act.. However, (8) of are neutral and (4%) of the sample disagree with the statement. Therefore, the statement is justified.

Statement (3) It is important for EFL learners to keep a positive face when addressing people

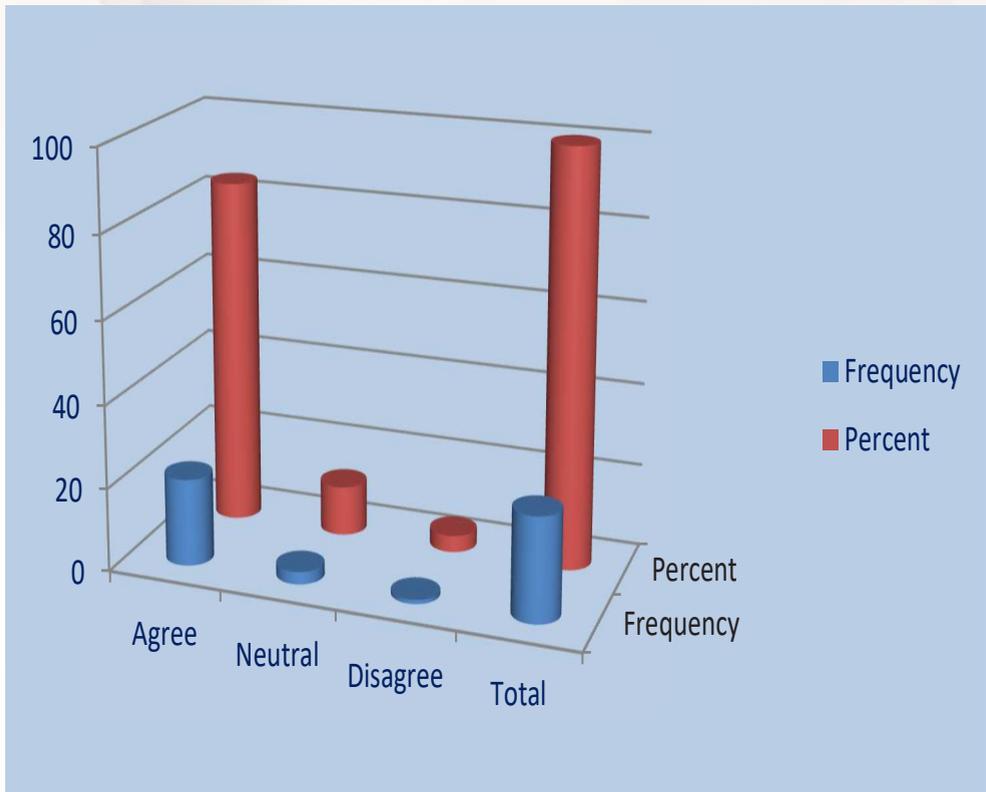
Fig (3) It is important for EFL learners to keep a positive face when addressing people



According to the statistical analysis of table (3), most of the

sample (96%) agree that it is important for EFL learners to keep a positive face when addressing people. Only (4%) of the sample are neutral. Therefore, the statement is justified.

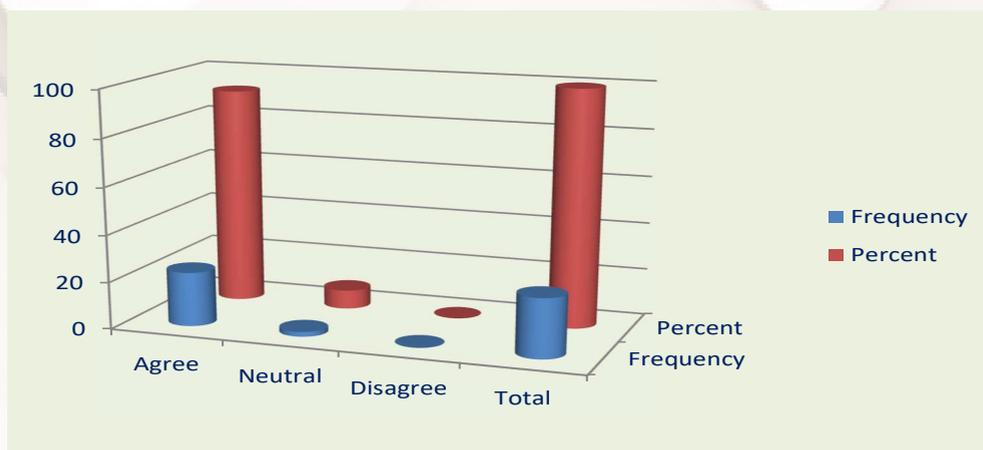
Statement (4) Teacher talk should promote a polite interaction in the classroom.



According to the statistical analysis of fig (4), a most of the sample (84%) agree that teacher talk should promote a polite interaction in the classroom. Moreover, only (12%) of the sample are neutral and (4%) disagree with the statement. Accordingly, the statement is proved.

Statement (5) Showing politeness is differ cross-culturally..

Fig (5) Showing politeness is differ cross-culturally..



According to the statistical analysis of fig (5), most of the sample (92%) agree that showing politeness is differ cross-culturally. Only (8%) of the sample are neutral. In accordance with this, the statement is justified.

### Findings

After analyzing the data, the study came out with the following results:

1. EFL learners need to develop awareness about cultural aspect of the target language.
2. Being polite helps in showing respect in an interactional act.
3. It is important to keep a positive face when addressing people.
4. Positive politeness is to show solidarity and it is directed to the positive face of the addressee.
5. Negative face leads to apology and indirectness.
6. Socio-cultural context influences what people say and how they say it.
7. Showing politeness is differ cross-culturally.

### Recommendations

The study recommended:

1. EFL learners should learn how to keep a positive face when addressing people.
2. Learners should develop awareness about cultural aspect of the target language.
3. EFL Learners should be enabled to perform polite interaction in the classroom.

## References

- (1) Ambarwati, R., Nurkamto, J., & Santosa, R. (2019). Phatic and politeness on women's communication in facebook: Humanistic teaching perspective of being polite on social media. *Indonesian Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 4(1), 95–108.
- (2) Ardi, H., Nababan, M. R., Djatmika., & Santosa, R. (2018). Characters' politeness strategies in giving command: Should translators keep them? *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature*, 24(2), 181–193. <https://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2018-2402-14>
- (3) Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (4) Celce-Murcia, M. (2007). Rethinking the role of communicative competence in language teaching. *Intercultural Language Use and Language Learning*, 41–57. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-5639-0\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-5639-0_3)
- (5) Consolo, D. A. (2006). Classroom oral interaction in foreign language lessons and implications for teacher development. *Linguagem & Ensino*, 9(2), 33–55.
- (6) Culpeper, J (2011) Politeness and Impoliteness. A final draft of: Culpeper, Jonathan (2011) Politeness and impoliteness. In: Karin Aijmer and Gisle Andersen (eds.) Sociopragmatics, Volume 5 of Handbooks of Pragmatics edited by Wolfram Bublitz, Andreas H. Jucker and Klaus P. Schneider. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 391-436.
- (7) Cutting, J. (2002), *Pragmatics and Discourse*. London: Routledge.
- (8) Holmes, J. (1995). *Women, men and politeness*. London: Longman.

- (9) Jeanyfer., & Tanto, T. (2018). Request strategies in Indonesian: An analysis of politeness phenomena in text messages. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 18(2), 132–137. <https://doi.org/10.24071/joll.2018.180204>
- (10) Kingwell, M. (1993). Is it rational to be polite? *The Journal of Philosophy*, 90(8), 387–404.
- (11) Krisnoni 2013. politeness strategy used in requests. University Muhammadiyah Surakarta, 2013 chris.noni@yahoo.com
- (12) Leech, G. (1983). Principles of pragmatics. London: Longman.
- (13) Sayuri. (2016). English speaking problems of EFL learners of Mulawarman University. *Indonesian Journal of EFL and Linguistics*, 1(1), 47–61
- (14) Searle, J. (1969). Speech Acts: An essay in the philosophy of language. London: Cambridge University Press.
- (15) Shen, M., & Chiu, T. (2019). EFL learners' English speaking difficulties and strategy use. *Education and Linguistics Research*, 5(2), 88–102. <https://doi.org/10.5296/elr.v5i2.15333>
- (16) Tan, H. K., Teoh, M. L., & Tan, S. K. (2016). Beyond “greeting” and “thanking”: Politeness in job interviews. *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature*, 22(3), 171–184. <https://doi.org/10.17576/3l-2016-2203-12>
- (17) Widiadnya, I. G. N. B. Y., & Seken, K., & Santosa, M. D. (2018). The implications of politeness strategies among teachers and students in the classroom. *SHS Web of Conferences*, 42, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20184200067>
- (18) Yule, G. (1996) Pragmatics. Oxford: Oxford University Press.