

## Analysis Modality And Politeness Strategy On Lecturer-students' Short Text Message Interaction

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### Abstract

*This study aims to investigate the interpersonal meaning on lecturer-students' short text message interaction in Indonesian education context. In addition, politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson are also reflected in the text interaction. For its framework for analysis, the study draws on systemic functional linguistics, pragmatics, critical discourse analysis, and discussion of the politeness strategies used in Indonesian custom. A case study methodology was used in this study and data were collected by documented short text messages composed by two students to their lecturers in their most naturalistic and authentic way. Later, a coding procedure applied to the data using systemic functional grammar methodology to examine the interpersonal meaning contained in the short text messages. The study reveals that students always use both negative and positive strategies in communicating to their lecturers. It seems that students' background knowledge about their lecturers and students' life background have effects on their linguistic feature choices. The result of analysis modality shows that students' short text messages contain more residue than their lecturers'. It is because of the lecturers' power, distance and imposition which triggers the students' use strategies. To conclude, in Indonesian society, a good lecturer-student relationship can be preserved by employing expected politeness strategies. It is essential to introduce politeness approach to the students in order to shape their communication skill in dealing with different kinds of people.*

**Keywords:** English, Language, Modality and Politeness, Linguistic

### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### • Background of the Study

Communication is when people use language to interact on purpose. In that moment, people are establishing relationships to exchange goods and service or information. To establish this relationship, people take turns as speaking and they take turn, they take on different speech roles in the exchange. When interacting, dialogues are created. The dialogues contain expressed interpersonal meanings about roles and attitudes. Being able to take part in dialogue means being able to negotiate the exchange of interpersonal

meanings, being able to realize social relationships with other language users. This study reports the finding of a qualitative research on two students and their lectures of a post-graduate school in one university in Bandung. The investigation was intended to investigate how students can keep up the social relationship to their lecturers seen from interpersonal meaning of text messages interaction by employing politeness strategies. The intention of short text messages is as a powerful mobile communication tool that allows the participants to interact with their peers, family, teachers, and

lecturers in a cost-effective, timely manner. Text messaging becomes an important communication medium in this mobile age. By using short text messages, students are allowed to send text messages to their lecturers to arrange time for consultation. However, to keep up the relationship between students and their lecturers, students need to compose the text politely in context of Indonesian culture. Thus, this study attempts to look at the use of modality and its significance in politeness strategies used in text messages sent by the students to their lecturers in order to preserve good relationships between them.

- **Literary Review (Relevance Theory)**

This study has been covered by the theory of politeness (Brown and Levinson, 1994) and systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1994; Eggins, 2004).

#### Politeness Theory

Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson proposed the theory of politeness in 1987. They state that politeness theory elucidates for the redressing the affronts to face posed by face threatening acts to addressess (Grundy, 2008 : 187). It is a social skill whose goal is to ensure everyone feels affirmed in a social interaction.

Politeness strategies are used to formulate messages in order to save the hearer's face when face threatening acts are inevitable or desired (Grundy, 2008: 195). Brown and Levinson claims that there are four main types of politeness strategies. First, bald on-record strategies which is most utilized in situations where the speaker has a close relationship with the audience. Second, positive politeness strategies that seek to minimize the threat. They are most employed in situations where the audience knows each other fairly well. Positive politeness can be classified in fifteen categories including noticing or attending to hearer's wants, exaggerating interest or approval, intensifying interest, using in-group identity markers, seeking agreement, presupposing or assert common ground, joking, asserting knowledge of hearer's wants, offering or promising, being optimistic, including speaker and hearer in the activity, giving or asking for reasons, assuming or asserting reciprocity, and giving gifts to hearer as in goods or sympathy. Third, negative

politeness strategies that are oriented towards the hearer's negative face and emphasize avoidance of imposition on the hearer. The negative politeness is classified into ten categories including being conventionally indirect, using question or hedge, being pessimistic, minimizing imposition, giving deference, apologizing, impersonalizing, stating the imposition as a general rule, nominalizing, and going on record as incurring a debt. They will be exploited when the speaker will be imposing on the listener and there is a higher potential for awkwardness or embarrassment. Finally, the off-record (indirect) strategies that use indirect language.

However, politeness strategies in different cultures could be not in line with the Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies. For example, Japanese politeness is at direct odds to Brown and Levinson's assertion of universal politeness strategies (Gilks, *Leading Undergraduate Work in English Studies, Volume 2 (2009-2010)* : 94-102). Brown and Levinson argue that although culturally specific usages will vary, the underlying principles are universal (1987: 57). It suggests that while the strategy realisations may differ across societies, the concept of face in interaction is applicable to all cultures to maintain the social or desired relationship.

#### Analysis of Modality

According to Eggins (1994) modality refers to a complex area of English grammar which concerns the different ways in which a language user can intrude on his or her message, expressing attitudes and judgements of various kinds (1994 : 179). There are two types of modality, modalisation (epistemic modality) and modulation (deontic modality). Deontic modality which is the kind of modality that concerns obligation and permission plays an important role in the expression of politeness. Halliday (2002) introduces three functional modes of meanings of language from the point of the semantic system: (1) ideational (experiential and logical); (2) interpersonal; and (3) textual. Halliday claims that they are 'different kinds of meaning potential that relate to the most general function that language has evolved to serve' (Halliday, 2002: 198).

Ideational meanings deal with the ways the language represents the interlocutor's

experience: 'how we talk about actions, happenings, feelings, beliefs, situations, states, and so on, the people and things involved in them, and the relevant circumstances of time, place, and manner (Lock, 1996 : 9). It focuses on how text represents the external/internal reality. The text subject is influenced by the situation where an interlocutor and a listener/reader are, the social context.

Interpersonal meanings focus on the interactivity of the language, and concern the ways in which we act upon one another through language. In either spoken texts or written texts, an interlocutor expects to tell listeners or readers via text. Each text has a relationship between providers of information and recipients of information. The use of words in texts is strongly connected with the interlocutor's internal reality, it is important to pay attention to words found in texts. The interpersonal function plays the role of setting up and maintaining social relations, and indicates the roles of the participants in communication (Halliday, 2002). In studying the grammar of clause as exchange we are actually studying how interpersonal meanings get made. The system of modality are the keys to understanding the interpersonal relationships between the interactants. By looking at the grammatical choices speakers made, the role they play in discourse, we have a way of uncovering and studying the social creation and maintenance of hierarchic, socio-cultural roles (Egins, 2004).

Textual meaning deal with 'the way in which a stretch of language is organized to its context' (Lock, 1996: 10). It is possible when the core of messages are the same, the interlocutor of each message can express a different nuance to the listener/reader by using different form.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a case study research design, especially text analysis (Travers, 2001). The texts, were collected by documented short text messages composed by two students to their lecturers in their most naturalistic and authentic way. Later, a coding procedure applied to the data using systemic functional grammar methodology to examine the interpersonal meaning contained in the short text messages.

The texts were analysed into clauses to identify how each clause contains mood and modality. From this modality analysis, how students build the interpersonal meanings through text messages to their lecturers can be seen. To see how lecturers' power, distance and imposition affect students in composing text messages, each text was analysed to see the politeness strategies used.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section will discuss two examples of text message interactions between two students (WL and ID) to their lecturers (AM and IW).

Table 1. Text Messages Interaction between WL and AM.

N	Time	WL	Time	AM
1	2nd of Nove m-ber 2012 08:09	Assalamualai kum. Wr. Wb. Bapak, untuk awal November ini, apakah tersedia waktu bagi kami untuk menemui Bapak perihal proposal thesis? Terimakasih, Pak.	7th of Novem -ber 2012 05:48	Maaf baru saya balas. Mungkin minggu depan aja kita rancang, karena minggu ini saya sibuk sekali. Nuhun.
2	11th of Nove m-ber 2012 11:04	Assalamualai kum Wr. Wb. Bapak, maaf mengganggu di hari libur begini. Mengingat adanya libur nasional sejak Kamis, 15 November 2012 dan dengan mempertimban ngkan waktu Bapak yang sepertinya akan sangat sibuk pada hari-hari sebelum libur tersebut, apakah	11th of Novem ber 2012 11:32	Walaikums alam. Mengang besok teh saya ada visitasi dari BAN-PT ke Prodi Bahasa Inggris S2 dan Monev Program PHKI di Universitas. Kalaupun ada waktu, saya paling bisa siang, selepas Dhuhur. Tapi saya belum bias janji. Lalu,

sebaiknya kami merencanakan pertemuan dengan Bapak pada minggu selanjutnya? Mohon saran dari Bapak. Terimakasih, Pak. Wassalamualaikum. Wr. Wb.	rabu saya ke Australia, kembali lagi 20 November. Tanggal 24 November s/d awal Desember ke Eropa. Itu sementara mah jadwal saya. Nuhun.
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Table 2. Text Messages Interaction between ID and IW

No	Time	WL	Time	IW
	19 July 2012, 13:17	Selamat siang Pak IW. Saya ID mhs bimbingan bapak. Maaf mengganggu, kira-kira bapak ada waktu sebentar untuk saya bimbingan akademik hari ini?	19 July 2012, 14:42	aya. Syh di fpbs
	20 August 2012, 08:54	Pa IW, saya harus FKKB jadi harus meminta ttd bapa. Kira-kira saya bs menemui bapa dimana dan jam berapa hr ini? Terima kasih..	20 August 2012, 10:39	Di kantor lab, lantai 3 depan toilet

The results of the modality analysis is that, the use of more residues by the students reflects the more power held by the lecturers. While politeness strategy analysis reveals that students use mainly negative and positive strategies in the text messages to keep the turn taking going until the goal, in this case is the meeting appointment, is set. There are at least two factors found in this analysis that

influence student-lecturer interpersonal meaning and their language choice. The factors are the students' background knowledge about who is the lecturer and students' life background. AM is a professor in a university in Bandung while IW is not. This academic title makes WL texts more polite than ID to IW. In addition, WL comes from a traditional Indonesian family where she is expected to be polite when talking or dealing with older people while ID comes from a more modern and egaliter Indonesian family. Both politeness and modality depend on protocol, procedure, and context. In Indonesian culture, both traditional dan modern family, politeness strategy is considered crucial in maintaining social interaction since the atmosphere of feudalism is still rooted and embraced in almost every system.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study has presented an outcome of study concerned with investigating the use of modality in exposing the interpersonal meaning. Also, this study shows its relation to politeness strategy used by the students in composing text messages to their lecturers. In socializing culture, particularly in academic area in Indonesia, politeness strategies is essential in purpose to stabilize and maintaining good social relationships between students and their lecturers. The analysis result shows that students use politeness strategies in almost every text indicating that this way of communication universally lies not only in traditional or modern Indonesian but on every culture. For pedagogical contribution, teachers should nourish their students with this culture-communication-strategies to support their character in the future.

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