



An Analysis of Students' Language Politeness toward Lecturers in Communication via WhatsApp: A Pragmatic Study

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ABSTRACT

This study was motivated by the researcher's findings regarding students' violations of linguistic politeness when communicating face-to-face with lecturers. These violations involved the use of overly casual language and excessive joking, resulting in a decline in linguistic politeness. The study aims to describe the principles of linguistic politeness observed by students in their interactions with lecturers, as well as the factors influencing such politeness during communication via WhatsApp. This study employs a qualitative descriptive method using the pragmatic approach of Leech and Brown. The research data consist of words, phrases, sentences, and clauses derived from screenshots of chat exchanges between students and lecturers. Data were collected through observation, documentation, and note-taking, and subsequently analyzed using data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The research results indicate that no violations of linguistic politeness principles were found; all student utterances adhered to these principles. However, based on the volume of words and sentences employed, the most dominant principles observed were the principles of tact, generosity, and approbation. Furthermore, it was identified that three factors influence student politeness toward lecturers: social distance, social status, and the type of speech act. Politeness in students' WhatsApp communication with lecturers goes beyond mere formality; it demonstrates their ability to uphold ethical standards and courtesy toward lecturers, even in a digital messaging environment. This practice fosters harmonious relationships and facilitates the academic communication process.

Keywords: language politeness, lecturers in communication, WhatsApp, pragmatics

INTRODUCTION

Technological advancements in the modern era have been rapid, particularly regarding mobile phones, which facilitate communication across distances without the need for face-to-face interaction. This is made possible through applications such as Facebook, SMS, email, Instagram, Telegram, and WhatsApp. Technological progress has influenced various aspects of human life, including communication (Yuliyawati, 2020). Indonesia was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated that schools and universities conduct online learning

to curb the spread of the virus. Consequently, communication between educators and students took place via online platforms such as WhatsApp groups and Facebook groups as well as through private chats for academic purposes.

WhatsApp is one of the most popular applications, boasting millions of users. Rahartri (2019:148) notes that in 2018, there were 1.5 billion WhatsApp users, with 65 billion messages sent daily via the mobile app and WhatsApp Web. The application is used by people from diverse backgrounds, including the higher education

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community (Sukrillah et al., 2017). The use of WhatsApp in higher education particularly among students can serve as a benchmark for assessing linguistic politeness. This is evident in how students communicate via WhatsApp messages sent to lecturers or peers during their interactions.

Politeness also known as etiquette is a norm or rule of conduct that has been collectively established and accepted within a society (Muslich, in Yuliyawati, 2020). One form of politeness involves communication ethics when using mobile phones. The use of polite language fosters harmonious interpersonal relationships free from conflict. Conflicts arise when words are spoken that should not have been said or when linguistic politeness is violated for instance, through the use of sarcasm, mockery, or words likely to offend others (Kamalia, 2021:1).

Politeness is a norm that plays a crucial role in human life. Whether a communication whether spoken or written is considered polite or not depends heavily on the standards of politeness established by the speech community. Regarding the language used, Kamalia (2021) asserts that the study of linguistic politeness is crucial for uncovering whether there are still frequent violations or errors in politeness during human communication particularly within the realm of education, given that students (at both school and university levels) will eventually carry forward the nation's cause (Saputro & Hikmat, 2020:150).

Good and polite communication fosters harmony among people. In this context, it is important for students to practice linguistic politeness when communicating with lecturers, particularly when using WhatsApp in their daily lives. Students must be truly mindful of their messages when contacting lecturers via the app. Universitas Indonesia offers a good example that students can emulate in such situations. According to the university's website, there are seven ethical principles for contacting lecturers: being mindful of the timing of the message; starting the chat with a greeting or salutation; offering an apology as a gesture of courtesy; stating one's identity; using

proper punctuation and generally understandable language; using clear and concise language; and concluding the conversation by thanking the lecturer.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method. Sugiyono (2013), Razak (2017:176), This methods using the pragmatic approach of Leech and Brown. This approach is used to analyze the politeness principles demonstrated by students toward lecturers and the factors influencing students' linguistic politeness in their interactions with lecturers.

The research data consist of words, phrases, sentences, and clauses. The data were obtained from an official source specifically, the digital platform WhatsApp.

Data collection was carried out using observation, documentation, reading, and note-taking techniques. Chat excerpts were read repeatedly to understand the context.

Data analysis was conducted in several stages. First, data reduction was performed to focus on and select raw data from the field, ensuring it was organized and verifiable. Second, data presentation was carried out to identify the data resulting from the reduction process. Third, drawing conclusions constituted the final outcome of the analysis.

RESULT

1. Principles of Students' Linguistic Politeness toward Lecturers

1.1 Tact maxim

"Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh, Ma'am. I apologize for the intrusion; I am Witriana Harun, a student under your supervision for my thesis. May I ask if you plan to be on campus tomorrow? If possible, I would like to have a supervision session with you. Thank you, Ma'am. Wassalamu'alaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh (DP1M2)."

The student's utterance above adheres to the tact maxim because it minimizes cost and maximizes benefit for the lecturer. It is considered

compliant with the tact maxim because the student begins the conversation with a greeting—an essential element of student etiquette when messaging a lecturer. This is followed by an apology, an introduction of their name, and an explanation of their purpose. Messages employing these expressions clearly adhere to the tact maxim; firstly, a greeting makes the lecturer feel respected, thereby minimizing any potential annoyance toward the contacting student—effectively minimizing “cost” by preventing the lecturer from becoming upset. Imagine if a student were to abruptly state their purpose without a greeting or introduction; the lecturer would inevitably have questions and might feel annoyed or irritated, which would violate the tact maxim. Thus, the functions of greeting, introducing oneself, apologizing for the intrusion, and stating one’s purpose are to allow the lecturer to identify the sender and understand the reason for the contact without needing to ask follow-up questions. Consequently, the benefit to the lecturer is maximized. In addition to the message above, several other student messages specifically DP2M2, DP3M2, DP4M2, and DP5M2 also demonstrate adherence to this principle.

1.2 Generosity maxim

“Alright, Sir, thank you; I will adjust to your schedule” (DP2M1),

“Peace be upon you; I apologize for taking up your time, Sir. May I ask—if you are willing—whether my fellow Academic Advisors (PA) and I could come to your activity location to meet you? We are also scheduled to meet the Head of the Department at 2:00 PM at the same venue. I would appreciate your guidance; thank you very much” (DP3M1).

Both utterances above adhere to the generosity maxim, as they minimize benefit to the self while maximizing benefit to others. The first utterance represents adherence to the generosity maxim because it contains no coercive or demanding language; instead, it demonstrates self-sacrifice by expressing a willingness to adjust to the lecturer’s

schedule. This approach ensures the lecturer feels comfortable determining the time and place, thereby minimizing personal gain and maximizing benefit to the lecturer—thus satisfying the generosity maxim. The second data point also exemplifies adherence to the generosity maxim. In this utterance, the student asks for permission to meet the lecturer at an activity site using polite language devoid of coercion, despite having a pressing need to meet the lecturer. Furthermore, the phrase “I would appreciate your guidance, Sir” indicates that the student fully defers the decision to the lecturer. This demonstrates adherence to the generosity maxim by minimizing personal gain and prioritizing the lecturer’s convenience.

1.3 Approbation Maxim

“Assalamualaikum wr. wb. First, I apologize for disturbing your activities, Sir. Let me introduce myself; I am Siti Nurhalisa Pobela. I would like to confirm that I have registered for the MBKM journalism internship, and I have actually started the internship today. I apologize if my choice of words was inappropriate, and thank you very much, Sir” (DP1M1). “Alright, Sir, thank you very much” (DP1M1).

These two utterances adhere to the approbation maxim because they contain no words or sentences that disparage the lecturer; the approbation maxim requires avoiding negative remarks about others while maximizing praise for them. The second utterance represents the student’s response to the lecturer after the lecturer replied to the message in the first utterance mentioned above. The utterance “Alright, Sir, thank you very much” serves as the student’s response; although it does not express explicit praise—conveying instead a positive assessment, appreciation, and gratitude for the information provided by the lecturer—it still complies with the approbation maxim because it contains no disparaging remarks directed at the lecturer. Similar utterances are found in other data entries, specifically DP2M1, DP3M1, DP4M1, and DP5M1.

1.4 Modesty maxim

“Assalamualaikum wr. wb. First of all, I apologize for disturbing your activities. Let me introduce myself; I am Siti Nurhalisa Pobela. I would like to confirm that I have registered for the MBKM journalism internship, and I have actually started the internship today. I apologize if there were any errors in my choice of words, and thank you very much” (DP1M1).

There are several speech segments that adhere to the modesty maxim, as the student minimized self-praise and, conversely, maximized self-deprecation. The segments that maximize self-deprecation include “I apologize for disturbing your activities” and “I apologize if there were any errors in my choice of words.” In these utterances, the student humbles herself by repeatedly offering apologies—demonstrating a self-effacing attitude, caution in speech, and respect for the interlocutor—thereby aligning with the modesty maxim. Similar utterances are also found in other data entries: DP2M1, DP3M1, DP4M1, and DP5M1.

1.5 Agreement maxim

“Alright, Sir, thank you; I will adjust to your schedule.” (DP2M1).

This utterance adheres to the agreement maxim by minimizing disagreement and maximizing agreement between the speaker and the interlocutor. In the analysis of this student’s utterance, the statement represents an expression of agreement with and acceptance of the lecturer’s decision; there is no expression of objection or refusal. The statement clearly demonstrates acceptance, agreement, and a willingness to accommodate the lecturer’s circumstances.

1.6 Sympathy maxim

“Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh. First of all, I apologize for taking up your time and interrupting your activities, Sir. I hope your activities are proceeding smoothly. Allow me to introduce myself: I am

Siti Nurhalisa Pobela, a 7th-semester student of Indonesian Language and Literature Education and one of your academic advisees. I would like to confirm that I have registered for the proposal defense via the SIDAPRO link, and my registration status is currently still ‘pending.’ I would appreciate your guidance on this matter, Sir. Thank you very much.” (DP5M1).

This message from the student to the lecturer adheres to the sympathy maxim because the student minimizes antipathy and maximizes sympathy—as seen in the phrase “I hope your activities are proceeding smoothly” within the excerpt above. This expression demonstrates the student’s sympathy through attentiveness, well-wishes, and concern for the lecturer; it also serves to minimize antipathy, as there are no words indicating any dislike on the part of the student toward the lecturer.

2. Factors Influencing Student Politeness When Communicating with Lecturers

2.1 Social distance

Regarding the aspect of social distance, the findings indicate that the degree of relational closeness influences the choice of language used. This aligns with the view expressed by Ertinawati et al. (2025:1745) that students adjust their language according to the context; for instance, when conveying a message to a lecturer, they use more standard language—even if imperfect—whereas interactions with fellow students tend to be more informal, relaxed, and interspersed with slang. Anugrawati & Syam (2024:4312) further state that the closer the relationship between a student and a lecturer, the more relaxed their communication style becomes, although students still maintain a polite tone. Consequently, the closer the relationship between individuals, the lower the level of linguistic formality employed. This is also consistent with the concept that the need for formal politeness strategies diminishes as social relationships become more intimate.

2.2 Social status

In terms of social status, research results show that students consistently use polite language when communicating with lecturers. This is attributed to the clear disparity in status or power (power distance)



between students and lecturers (Anugrawati & Syam 2024:4308). Dewi (2023:453) notes that speakers typically employ a higher level of politeness when addressing someone of higher status. Students strive to maintain politeness to respect the lecturer's authority and avoid threatening the lecturer's "face," as explained in politeness theory.

2.3 Type of speech act

Certain speech acts—such as issuing orders or offering criticism—carry a greater potential for threatening "face," thereby necessitating more cautious politeness strategies (Dewi 2023:453). Speech acts that potentially inconvenience or impose a burden on lecturers—such as requests or appeals—tend to employ higher levels of politeness strategies; this is evident in the use of respectful forms of address, more complete sentence structures, and more formal word choices. These findings also align with the view of Pranowo (cited in Dyah et al., 2018), who states that politeness is influenced by various factors that determine whether language use is polite or not.

DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that all utterances made by students to lecturers adhered to politeness principles, with no violations observed. The results demonstrate that the theory employed by the researcher Leech's theory (cited in Kamalia, 2021), which outlines six principles of linguistic politeness was indeed applied by students within the Faculty of Letters and Culture (FSB). The study found that all messages sent via WhatsApp by the 20 FSB students to their lecturers satisfied Leech's six politeness principles; the discussion follows below.

Tact Maxim

The first point of discussion concerns the presence of the tact maxim in messages sent by 20 students to their lecturers via WhatsApp. The students' utterances adhered to the tact maxim by minimizing cost and maximizing benefit for the

addressee—in this case, the lecturer. Adherence to the tact maxim is evident because, in every utterance, the students minimized cost and maximized benefit for the lecturer; examples include initiating the conversation with a greeting, offering an apology, stating their name, and immediately explaining the purpose of the message (Kamalia 2021:33). Through such utterances, the lecturer received complete information without needing to ask follow-up questions, thereby maximizing the benefit to the lecturer.

Maxim of Generosity

The next topic is the maxim of generosity. Based on the preceding data analysis, the researcher found that the messages sent by the 20 students to their lecturers fully complied with the maxim of generosity. In every utterance, the students minimized benefit to themselves and maximized benefit to others; an example of a student utterance is: "If possible, I would like to have a guidance session with you, Ma'am." These messages contained no coercive language or statements that prioritized the student's own interests; instead, the students demonstrated generosity by using language that benefited the lecturer. This aligns with Samosir's (2019:108) view that this maxim relates to cost and benefit—specifically, reducing benefit to oneself while increasing personal sacrifice.

Approbation Maxim

The key aspect of this principle is to avoid disparaging others while maximizing praise for them (Samosir 2019:108). Analysis reveals that all utterances from the 20 students adhered to this principle. Examples include: "Thank you very much, Sir," "Thank you for the information, Sir," and "I would appreciate your guidance, Sir." These utterances contain no criticism disparaging the lecturer; instead, they constitute implicit praise conveyed through expressions of gratitude and appreciation. Furthermore, by requesting guidance, the students demonstrate an awareness that they cannot succeed without the lecturer's mentorship.

Modesty Maxim

The fourth principle discussed is the modesty maxim, which entails minimizing self-praise while maximizing self-deprecation (Setyawan et al. 2025; Delima et al., 2019:321). The researcher found that data from all 20 students adhered to the modesty maxim. Examples include: “I apologize for any slip of the tongue,” “I apologize for taking up your time,” and “May I, Sir/Madam?” These utterances demonstrate that students exercise caution, employing apologies and requests for permission—expressions of humility not necessarily prompted by an actual error, but rather intended to preemptively address any potential inappropriateness in the text messages read by the lecturer (Rahim, 2023:4214). Students express these apologies without highlighting their own merits or achievements during the conversation.

Agreement Maxim

The agreement maxim entails minimizing disagreement between oneself and the interlocutor while maximizing agreement between the two (Samosir, 2019). Examples of such utterances include “Very well, Ma’am,” “Yes, Ma’am,” and “Very well, Ma’am; thank you for the confirmation.” Data analyzed from 20 students consistently adhered to the agreement maxim; student responses invariably expressed agreement with the lecturer’s decisions, with no instances of objection. These responses serve as expressions of the students’ concurrence with the lecturer’s decisions.

Sympathy Maxim

The sympathy maxim is a principle requiring behavior that minimizes antipathy and maximizes sympathy (Leech, cited in Mardiyah 2016:53; Delima et al. 2019:321). An analysis of 20 data samples revealed that all messages sent by students to their lecturers adhered to the sympathy maxim. None of the messages conveyed disappointment, complaints, or a negative emotional tone, even when class schedules were changed or postponed. Students also consistently demonstrated sympathy

toward their lecturers, as seen in the phrase “Yes, Ma’am, take care.”

Regarding the factors influencing students’ linguistic politeness when communicating with lecturers via WhatsApp, the research findings indicate that this politeness is shaped by factors consistent with Brown’s politeness theory (1987, cited in Dewi, 2023), namely below.

Social distance

Regarding the aspect of social distance, the findings indicate that the degree of relational closeness influences the choice of language used. This aligns with the view expressed by Ertinawati et al. (2025:1745) that students adjust their language according to the context; for instance, when conveying a message to a lecturer, they use more standard language even if imperfect whereas interactions with fellow students tend to be more informal, relaxed, and interspersed with slang. Anugrawati & Syam (2024:4312) further state that the closer the relationship between a student and a lecturer, the more relaxed their communication style becomes, although students still maintain a polite tone. Consequently, the closer the relationship between individuals, the lower the level of linguistic formality employed. This is also consistent with the concept that the need for formal politeness strategies diminishes as social relationships become more intimate.

Social status

Regarding the aspect of social status, research results show that students consistently use polite language when communicating with lecturers. This is attributed to the clear disparity in status or power (power distance) between students and lecturers (Anugrawati & Syam, 2024:4308). Dewi (2023:453) notes that speakers typically employ a higher level of politeness when addressing someone of higher status. Students strive to maintain politeness to respect the lecturer’s authority and avoid threatening the lecturer’s “face,” as explained in politeness theory.



Type of speech act

Certain speech acts—such as issuing orders or offering criticism—carry a greater potential for face-threatening acts, thereby necessitating more cautious politeness strategies (Dewi 2023:453). Speech acts that potentially inconvenience or impose a burden on lecturers, such as requests or appeals, tend to employ higher levels of politeness; this is evident in the use of respectful forms of address, more complete sentence structures, and more formal word choices. These findings align with the views of Pranowo (cited in Dyah et al., 2018), who states that politeness is influenced by various factors that determine whether language use is considered polite or not.

CONCLUSION

First, based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that students generally apply all principles of linguistic politeness effectively. These principles are:

- a. The tact maxim: a principle that minimizes cost to the interlocutor and maximizes benefit to the interlocutor.
- b. The generosity maxim: a principle that minimizes benefit to oneself and maximizes benefit to others.
- c. The approbation maxim: a principle that avoids disparaging others while maximizing praise for them.
- d. The modesty maxim: a principle that aims to minimize self-praise and maximize self deprecation.
- e. The agreement maxim: a principle that minimizes disagreement between oneself and others and maximizes agreement.
- f. The sympathy maxim: a principle that minimizes antipathy and maximizes sympathy.

Among the six principles above, those most frequently employed by students are the tact maxim, the generosity maxim, and the approbation maxim. The tact maxim is applied through efforts to minimize cost and maximize benefit to the lecturer—specifically by using greetings,

apologies, and requests for permission, as well as by conveying intentions clearly and without coercion. The generosity maxim is demonstrated by accommodating the lecturer's schedule and decisions, not prioritizing personal interests, and showing a readiness to assist and follow the lecturer's instructions. The approbation maxim is reflected in an attitude of respect toward the lecturer, the avoidance of criticism or complaints, and the use of expressions of gratitude and implicit displays of respect. Thus, student communication with lecturers via WhatsApp reflects an awareness of linguistic politeness norms and academic hierarchy, ensuring that interactions are conducted in a polite and effective manner that aligns with the ethics of communication within the academic environment.

Second, students' linguistic politeness toward lecturers is influenced by three primary factors: social distance, social status, and the type of speech act. Social distance affects the level of linguistic formality; the closer the relationship between the student and the lecturer, the more casual the language used. Social status prompts students to employ polite language and show respect for the lecturer, who holds a higher position. Meanwhile, the type of speech act determines the form and politeness strategies employed, particularly in situations that potentially threaten the interlocutor. Thus, students' linguistic politeness is shaped by the context of the social relationship, status differences, and the communicative goal.

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