Exploring Students' Politeness Perspectives at the State University of Makassar

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	This paper's main focus is to explore the students' perspectives of politeness practices at the State University of Makassar. The main problems to be explored are the roles of politeness in the class and the ways to show politeness. The subject of this research is the students of English Literature Department, Faculty of Languages and Literature, the State University of Makassar. To collect data, an open-ended questionnaire was distributed to one class of English Literature department, consisting of 20 students. This questionnaire was analyzed descriptively in relation to politeness theories. Findings shows that the students perceived that politeness has important roles in the classroom interaction. Politeness is a need in education, a strategy to create good characters, and a learning motivation. There are also some ways to show politeness according to the students such as being on time and not getting angry in the class. These students' perspectives should be given a priority in order to create effective learning and teaching process. Findings from this study become valuable inputs for teachers and students in their efforts to create effective classroom interaction.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Politeness functions as one of the effective strategies to interact in human's communication. This function had been observed in many different areas of human life [1]-[12]. Findings from these studies had proved that through politeness, humans are able to communicate and transfer their ideas clearly and in comfortable ways. Communication problems can be solved by applying politeness strategies.

There had been many perspectives of politeness. Fraser [13] reveals four major perspectives of politeness. The first is "the social norm view". As is defined by Fraser [13], this perspective emphasizes that each society has certain cultural and social norms containing rules to prescribe "certain behaviour, a state of affairs, or a way of thinking in a context". Politeness is directed to maintain those cultural and social norms. Breaking these norms is considered impolite.

The second perspective is "the conversational-maxim view". This is based on Grice's work. According to this perspective, conversationalists are rational individuals who are primarily interested in the efficient conveying of messages [13]. Politeness in this way aims to maintain the corporation or the relationship among the interlocutors.

The third perspective is "the conversational-contract view" where politeness means "operating within the terms and conditions of the existing conversational contract". In this perspective, if one violates this contract, then one is seen as being impolite or rude [13]. When entering into a conversation, each person should understand a set of rights and regulations which should also be understood by other persons.

The fourth perspective is "the Brown Levinson face-saving view" which has become the most popular approach in terms of politeness [13]. Brown and Levinson [14], whose theory of politeness is based on the concept of "face" [15], in the sense of "reputation" or "good name", defines politeness essentially as "means of satisfying communicative and face-oriented ends, in a strictly formal system of rational practical reasoning". According to Brown and Levinson [14], "face" is "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself". It is "something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained, or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction" [14]. Every person wants to maintain each others' face, otherwise Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) such as being offended, or annoyed may result.

Brown and Levinson's [14] politeness theory classifies five strategies, they are: (1) to follow what it says, which is commonly known as "bald on record", (2) perform speech acts using "positive politeness", which are directed to "the addressee's positive face, his perennial desire that his wants (or the actions, acquisitions/values resulting from them) should be thought of as desirable" (3) perform speech acts using "negative politeness", which are directed to "the addressee's negative face: his wants to have freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded", (4) indirect speech act (off the record), and (5) do not do speech act or say anything (do not do the FTA).

In Indonesia, studies on politeness had been given attention. Geertz [16] with the "linguistic etiquette" had studied politeness in Javanese society. Other studies of politeness in Java had also been conducted by Kartomiharjo [17], Errington [18]-[21], and Berman [22]. In addition, Mahyuni [23] studied politeness in Sasak language whereas Mahmud [8] studied politeness in Bugis society. Mahmud's study [8], for example, found several politeness strategies used by Bugis people to communicate such as pronoun systems, address terms, small talk, humor/jokes, switching the topics of conversation, code-switching, and non-verbal communication.

In the field of education and language teaching, politeness issues had also been observed [24]-[26]. Yuka's [24] research revealed that positive politeness plays important roles when performing good interpersonal relationship. Jiang's [25] study had proved that being polite in the class can function as a way to "promote the mutual understanding and harmonious relationship between teachers and students". Senowarsito's [26] study on politeness in teacher-student interaction in Indonesia also asserted that politeness serves as "a character building". Findings of all of these studies confirmed that politeness has important roles in the communication and interaction between teachers and students in the class.

Most of those politeness studies above investigated the use of languages to express or to show politeness. It is also important to look more thoroughly on how politeness behaviours and strategies are perceived. In other words, studies on how people think about politeness are also important. Zhan [27] argues that "politeness strategies vary from language to language, from culture to culture". Graham [7] also states that "perception of (im)politeness vary from one individual to one another and there are multiple gradations of more- or less-(im)polite behaviour". This means that politeness will be perceived differently in different situations. In this study, students could reveal different perspectives about politeness practices in the class.

Referring to these phenomena, the researcher considered that studies on how politeness is perceived are important. For this purpose, this paper is directed to find out how politeness is perceived in a particular setting of communication, that is in classroom setting. The focus of this paper is on the exploration of how students as one of the important parts of the class perceive politeness practices in the class. The main questions are what are the roles of politeness in the class and how to express politeness based on students' perspectives. Findings from this study contribute significantly on the politeness studies, especially in Indonesian context and also became valuable input for teachers and students on how to create effective communication and interaction in the class.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This paper is a descriptive-qualitative study, which was intended to collect, analyze, and interpret several data which were related to one particular phenomenon, that is the students' perspectives on politeness in the classroom. Gay, Mills, & Airasian [28] confirmed that qualitative research is "the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data in order to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest".

The study was conducted at the State University of Makassar in 2015. The university is located in Makassar, the capital city of South Sulawesi, the Eastern part of Indonesia. This university was selected since it is one of the leading universities in Makassar, which conduct many types study programs in undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate level. Participants of this research are the undergraduate students of English Literature Program of the State University of Makassar, Academic Year of 2014/2015. There were two classes in the Academic year. Each class consists of 20-25 students. This study chose one class

randomly. The students were in the fourth semester. Twenty students from one of the classes participated in this study.

To collect data on the students' perspectives on politeness in the class, a questionnaire was employed. The type of the questionnaire was an open-ended questionnaire. Questions were open ended in which students were given the chance to express their ideas about politeness. There were two main questions. The first question was asking about the important roles of practicing politeness in the class. The second one was asking about the ways to show or express politeness.

3.   RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This part displays the results from the open-ended questionnaire which was distributed to explore the students' perspectives on politeness. The first finding from this study was about the roles of politeness behaviors in the class according to students. Their comments can be seen in the following extracts:

Extract 1:
"How could teaching and learning process run well if all people in the class do not respect one another, keep on talking, then the class will be messy"

Extract 2:
"Being polite can create a good dynamic in teaching and learning processes"

Extract 3:
"Politeness is an indicator for their success, and expected that their teachers paid attention to the students' behaviour when determining the passing grade of the students"

The above three extracts show the students' views on the important roles of practicing politeness in the class. In extract 1, the student viewed that being polite in the class was one of the determining factors of being successful in the class. He stated that some students ruined the class by talking to each other, instead of paying attention to the class. As stated in extract 2, indeed, if all students in the class maintained their politeness, the class would run well, leading to the success of the learning and teaching process. Being polite in the class for teachers and students were considered as a way to create "a dynamic process in language learning and teaching". In extract 3, the students expected that teachers not only paying attention to the knowledge and the skills in determining the passing grade of the students, but also paying attention to the degree of politeness of the students. If the students were rude and tended to be impolite in the class, then teachers should think it as the ways to decide whether they would pass the subjects or not.

Other perspectives on the important roles of politeness in the class can be seen in the following three extracts:

Extract 4:
"Being polite becomes the character of the students and a person can be said polite if there is an education"

Extract 5:
"Politeness is a symbol of good attitude"

Extract 6:
"Politeness is Eastern culture, have a conducive and comfortable situation, we are supposed to be polite"

Extract 4, 5, and 6 above are other perspectives of students in relation to the roles of politeness in the class. In extract 4, the students said that politeness was one of the indicators of good characters of the students and in fact, it all created good education. In extract 5, it was believed that having politeness was an indicator of good attitude. In fact "it is a symbol of good attitude". Another perspective can be seen in extract 6, in which the students maintained that politeness was a unique culture, especially for people in Eastern culture. The students said that it was their culture or habit to be polite because they were all from Eastern culture. Therefore, as a part of Indonesian society, being polite is highly recommended as a part of Indonesian and Eastern culture.

More opinions about the important roles of politeness in the class can be seen in the following three extracts:

Extract 7:
>*"A student is not only demanded to have a good knowledge but also attitudes"*

Extract 8:
>*"One of the three objectives in education is "affective". Behavioural values and politeness have to be considered"*

Extract 9:
>*"A study is also to change behaviour"*

Based on the three extracts above (extract 7, 8, and 9), it can be seen that the students perceived politeness as a need in education. Being a good student does not only mean to have a good knowledge but also to have a good attitude, which can be seen by the application of politeness (extract 7). Education is not only for cognitive sides such as knowledge and skills, but also for affective sides, which rely on behaviour and moral values. According to the students, these affective sides could be obtained through the practice of being polite (extract 8). One of the comments confirmed that changing behaviour was one of the purposes in education (extract 9). From these three extracts, it can be seen that the students confirmed the important functions of being polite in the classroom. They viewed politeness as indicator of the success of education and the teaching process in the class. Politeness was also viewed as a signal for their good character as students.

The following two extracts are also perspectives of students regarding the important roles of politeness in the class, especially for the teachers.

Extract 10:
>*"They need to display politeness so that their students will get motivation and they can be inspired by their teachers"*

Extract 11:
>*"Teachers should be polite in order to feel comfortable in the class"*

In the above two extracts (extract 10 and 11), the students stated their expectation in relation to politeness, especially to their teachers. In extract 10, they expected their teachers to display politeness in the class. Politeness practices were not only recommended for students but also for their teachers. According to them, teachers were expected to show their politeness in the class since the students need comfortable situation as well as good motivation in the class. In extract 11, the students stated that what they required was the good condition in the class which could be created by the teachers' politeness. They sometimes feel disturbed caused by disruptive behaviours in the class, either by their teachers or by their fellow students.

These extracts show that the students need motivation, inspiration, and comfort in the class that can be gained from their teachers' practices of politeness. If their teachers are rude or impolite, they, as students, may not feel comfortable, not being inspired, and not being motivated. Such conditions could ruin the process of classroom interaction. They all expected to create effective classroom interaction, which could be gained by practicing politeness, especially for teachers. Other expectations could also be seen in the following extracts:

Extract 12:
>*"The teacher must have personality competence"*

Extract 13:
>*"It is important for teachers to be polite as a model"*

Extract 12 shows that one of the expectations for the teachers was the possession of personality competence. Besides having knowledge and skills in teaching, teachers also need to show their affective side or their good personality. In fact, teachers were expected as a model of good behaviour in the class as asserted in extract 13. Students usually imitate the attitude of the teachers. Therefore, teachers as a whole are expected to show good behavior.

The second important finding is about the ways of being polite in the class perceived by the students. According to the students, teachers seemed not display politeness in the class. Accordingly, there were some kinds of behaviors in the class which were considered impolite by students. This shows some situations in which their teachers tended to act impolitely in the class such as seen in the following extracts:

Extract 14:
   "My teachers got angry and impolite if we did not do our homework"

Extract 15:
   "My teachers sometimes got angry with me if I could not understand the materials and I could not answer their questions"

Extract 16:
   "My teachers got angry and acted impolite if I made mistakes in the class"

Extract 17:
   "My teachers sometimes said bad words to express their anger"

According to the students, some of their teachers in the class did not display politeness as expected. Mostly they said that teachers would get angry if they made mistakes in the class, did not do their homework, or if they could not understand the material and answer the questions well (extract 14, 15, 16). What they expected was that their teachers would try to minimize the situation in the class although there were a lot of problems. They wanted their teachers to be rather understanding if such situations, not by being angry in the class. In fact, as stated in extract 17, the teachers sometimes used bad words or expressions to express their anger which was really impolite manner.

Extract 18:
   "My teachers sometimes do not apply politeness. There are some of them who open the class without greeting and corrupted the time by being late"

Extract 19:
   "My teachers acted impolitely by coming late to the class and sometimes they said something impolite in their humour"

Extract 20:
   "My teachers sometimes stated impolite words to us"

The above extracts (extract 18, 19, and 20) show the students' opinion about the politeness practices of teachers in the class. They confirmed that their teachers did not display politeness in the class. Their teachers sometimes showed bad manner such as opening the class without greeting and being late to the class. Due to the busy time of the teachers, they sometime could not come on time, which was considered as a disturbing situation for students. Some of them were rushed to teach so that they sometime ignored the practice of good teaching such as greeting the students. According to the students, greeting to the students especially in the beginning of the class is one of the ways to show intimacy and solidarity. When teachers did not apply that, the students considered that teachers were being very formal and no intimacy at all to the students. In addition, when teachers used humour in the class, teachers sometimes used bad words (extract 20). In the students' opinion, bad words should be avoided as they can be imitated by the students. Teachers as models need to use good words.

3.1. Discussion

The first important finding from this study is about the roles of politeness in the class (extract 1-13). Students considered that politeness is important in the classroom. Politeness is needed in education as a strategy to create good attitude as well as a motivation to create good atmosphere of learning and teaching process. Politeness is absolutely needed in the class, not only to acquire knowledge but also to create good attitude. This finding is in line with the findings of other studies conducted by Yuka [24], Jiang [25], and Senowarsito [26]. All of these studies had found that politeness serves as an important strategy in classroom interaction. It functions as a practical tool to "perform good interpersonal relationship" [24], to "promote mutual understanding and harmonious relations" [25], and to "build character" [26]. Findings of all of these studies confirmed that politeness has important roles in the communication and interaction between teachers and students in the class. Finding from this study stressed that education is not only placed on knowledge and skill but also on attitude, behaviour, or moral values of the students.

This study also shows that classroom as the setting of communication especially between teachers and students demand polite expressions. Teachers and students are expected each other to apply politeness in the class. This is prompted by the role they exercise in the class. Teachers with their power in the class are

potential to hold a dominant power, which may influence the learners. This idea supported Milal [29] who had pointed that teacher is inherently endowed with power over learners because he or she has the authority and right to plan, to manage, and to control activities. However, teachers need to take into account learners' personal dignity and their needs of being cared, respected, and loved.

The second important finding from this study is about the students' perspectives of how to show politeness in the class (extract 14-20). The students stated that one of the ways to express politeness is by avoiding disruptive behaviours in the class. It was found that teachers and students sometimes did some disruptive behaviours in the class which disturbed the teaching and learning process. One of the examples is being angry in the class. According to the students, teachers sometimes got angry in the class caused by the students' mistakes (not doing the homework, coming late to the class, etc.). These situations need to be minimized since these can cause impolite behaviours by teachers to students, which then disturb the flow of the class interaction.

Another example of disruptive behaviors was related to time commitment. It was found that teachers and students sometimes came late to the class. This condition also caused disturbance in the teaching and learning process and could lead to the impolite situation in the class. Students considered that being on time both for teachers and students is a way to show politeness in the class. This case implied that when both teachers and students had committed to the time, no face threatening acts occurred and no violation on the rules of classroom management and interaction. Politeness in the class can be created in this way.

These findings are in line with Sun and Shek's [30] study about students' misbehaviors in the class. Sun and Shek [30] had explored the types of unacceptable misbehaviors of students in the classroom and found that those misbehaviors disturbed teaching and learning, and violated the values of respect, conformity, and obedience in the teacher-student relationship within the classroom. Therefore, in order to create polite situation in the class, disruptive behaviours such as those found in this study either by teachers or by students should be minimized or avoided.

These findings are also connected with Mahmud's [12] study on teachers' rituals to be polite in the class. Mahmud found that in order to maintain politeness in the class, teachers need to apply some kinds of rituals of expressions such as greetings, apologies, thanks, and address terms. The use of those expressions had proved to build good relations between teachers and students and helped to build good flow of the conversation for the sake of solidarity between teachers and students. Therefore, in order to minimize the disturbance in the class and to avoid disruptive behaviours in the class as revealed in this study, it is important for teachers and students to apply some polite expressions, such as greetings, thanks, apology, address terms. This study found that the use of those expressions (e.g. greetings and thanks) in the class could minimize the impolite situation in the class caused by teachers and students.

Findings from this study also show that different individuals have various perceptions of how to be polite in a particular context of situation. Previous studies had confirmed that different society will have different perceptions on politeness [7]-[27]. Different perspectives of politeness by the students revealed in this study show that in different society or in a different group of people, politeness could be perceived differently. The different perspectives of politeness stated by the students in this study should be considered by practitioners of learning and teaching process in order to create effective classroom interaction.

These findings also supported the four perspectives on politeness revealed in the literature of politeness [13]. Classroom as one setting of communication has particular "social norms" which regulate the actions. Therefore, to be polite in the class is to maintain those norms whereas breaking the rules of the norms may create impoliteness. Classroom is also a place to maintain the corporation or the relationship among the interlocutors suggested by the "conversational-maxim view". In addition, classroom is a place where each person should understand a set of rights and regulations which should be also understood by other persons, suggested by the "the conversational-contract view".

This finding is also related to "the Brown-Levinson face-saving view", in which politeness is to preserve face to avoid face threatening acts in the class. Teachers and students are subject to disruptive behaviours in the class which may disturb to each other. These disruptive behaviours can then lead to face threatening acts. Avoiding face threatening acts to save "face" of the interlocutors (teachers and students) are indicators of "face-saving view" of [14]. Maintaining politeness by preserving "face" as suggested by Brown and Levinson [14] is a good strategy to be used by teachers to communicate with students in the class. This finding is also in line with Payne-Woolridge's [31] study on the application of "facework" in the classroom. Payne-Woolridge [31] asserted that the concept of "facework" of Brown and Levinson [14] hold important functions "to introduce a fresh way of considering the way teachers speak to pupils about behaviour". This confirmed that avoiding face threatening acts to save "face" of the interlocutors (teachers and students) through "facework" could minimize the impolite situation in the class and therefore, could lead to good atmosphere of classroom interaction.

4.   CONCLUSION

This paper had explored the perspectives of politeness by the students in the class and pointed out the important roles of politeness in the classroom settings. Classroom setting is potential to provide various perspectives on this case. Teachers and students in the class might have different perceptions on politeness in the class. Teachers and students need to maintain good interaction such as their politeness in order that the teaching process to learn the language may run smoothly and properly. Findings also show that students had various views on how to behave politely in the class. Students confirmed that one way to be polite in the class both for teachers and students was by avoiding disruptive behaviours both by teachers and students. Findings of this study are beneficial input for teachers and students in order to create effective classroom interaction. Findings of this study also contribute to the study of politeness, especially in Indonesia. However, further studies need to be conducted in terms politeness strategies of teachers and students in the class, especially the types of languages they used to express their politeness.

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