

## Politeness Phenomena as a Source of Pragmatic Failure in English as a Second Language

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**Abstract:** Language should be learned in the cultural context of its speakers. This is because the speakers bring an intention in performing a linguistic act. Failure in understanding the intention of the speakers will lead to failure in responding to the intended message and, thus, failure in using the language. The study of how language is used in a particular context or situation is the focus of pragmatics. An important pragmatic issue concerns with politeness, i.e. showing awareness of another person's public self-image. This article highlights the politeness phenomena and the degree of success in learning English. The issues discussed include the definition of politeness, strategies of politeness, politeness in the Oriental cultures, politeness in the context of Indonesian cultures, and the implication of politeness phenomena in the teaching of English.

**Keywords:** politeness, politeness phenomena, pragmatic failure, English as a second language

Learning a language is not just learning collection of rules and applying them in meaningful utterances or sentences. We need to understand how language is used within the cultural context of its speakers. In addition, learning a language is not just learning the meaning of the utterances or sentences literally, but it deals with the speakers' intention in performing a linguistic act. Goody (1978) points out two features in analyzing the meaning of utterances (speech acts). The first one is that the language is rule-governed behavior; it can be analyzed according to the certain rules for the use of linguistic elements. The second one is that the language is performative aspects, so that it can be analyzed according to its performative aspects, i.e., the utterance which is produced with certain kind of intention. Sometimes what the listener



understands from the speaker is different from what the speaker intends to communicate. This kind of meaning may be difficult to analyze grammatically or semantically. Pragmatics is then used, i.e., the study of how language is used in a particular context or situation.

There are many other definitions of pragmatics. Yule (1996), for example, defines pragmatics as the study of speaker meaning which is different from word or sentence meaning. It is the study of language use and its relation to language structure and social context. Thomas (1995) defines pragmatics as meaning in interaction, which reflects that meaning is not independent; "it is not something which is inherent in the word alone, nor is it produced by the speaker alone, nor by the hearer alone." Therefore, interpreting meaning of one utterance is a dynamic process. It includes the negotiation of meaning between the speaker and the hearer. It also involves the social, physical and linguistic contexts of the utterance.

Nowadays pragmatics has become a real issue for some teachers, researchers, and learners. There are a large number of research studies investigating how pragmatics works in a particular language and culture. The investigation covers all aspects of pragmatics such as *speech acts*, *conversational implicature*, *diexis* and *politeness phenomena*. Politeness is one of pragmatic aspects which is widely discussed and which sometimes creates misunderstanding, misinterpretation and miscommunication between the speaker and the hearer, which in turn lead to what is called "pragmatic failure." The failure happens because of the different ways of expressing politeness across culture. Although there are some universals in language usage concerning politeness, there are still some specific politeness phenomena across culture. These phenomena are potential sources of pragmatic failure especially for those who learn English as a foreign language.

#### DEFINITION OF POLITENESS

Politeness is showing awareness of another person's public self-image (Yule, 1996). According to Brown and Levinson (1978) politeness is basic to the production of social order and a precondition of human cooperation; therefore, to understand this phenomenon, the theory underlying it should match with the foundation of human social life. Since politeness deals with human interaction, there must be some universal principles. An example is the fact that there is no one who likes to be

treated impolitely. Furthermore, the way of expressing politeness can be in the forms of linguistic or non-linguistic behaviors. This universality applies to any society in the world, regardless of the degree of its isolation or distance, or the complexity of its social and economic life. However, what considers as polite or impolite might be very much different from culture to culture, from group to group, from situation to situation or even from person to person. One expression, for example, may be considered polite for a certain group of society and impolite for another group. It really depends on the sociocultural elements of the society.

Green (1996) makes a distinction between polite behavior and rude behavior. Polite behavior makes people feel comfortable, whereas rude behavior makes people feel uncomfortable. Therefore, to avoid making other people uncomfortable, or to show good regards to them in order to make them comfortable, politeness is one choice. Politeness covers any kinds of interpersonal behavior, including linguistic and non-linguistic behaviors.

Yule (1996) argues that politeness could be treated as a fixed concept, that is, in an idea of polite social behavior or etiquette within one particular culture. However, possible specification for being polite in social interaction within a particular culture can be occurred. The underlying assumption of this possibility is that people in one interactional situation are generally aware that such norms (politeness and rudeness) and principles do exist in society at large extent. Nevertheless, how to act politely in one situation, such as at work, at dining table is more specific and may be different from one to another society.

In short, politeness and its universal principles are possessed by a particular society. All members of the society they need to be treated politely. The differences lie in the ways of expressing polite linguistic or non-linguistic behaviors. In this case, there are some strategies of politeness that may share universal characteristics across culture.

#### STRATEGIES OF POLITENESS

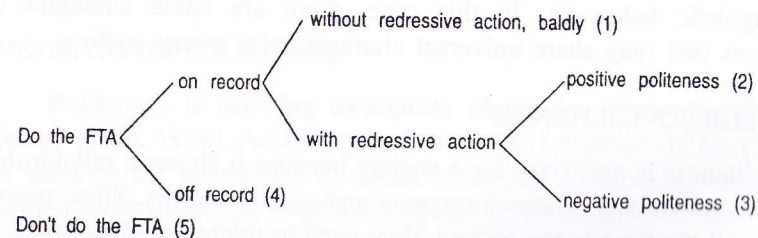
Politeness is necessary for a society because it shows a relationship between individuals; it shows respects and cultural norms. Since people interact all the time in the society, they need to maintain relationship, to maintain face and to be able to communicate to people and to common world of interaction. The famous work concerning strategies of politeness



is that of Brown and Levinson (1978). Brown and Levinson have explored very broadly the universality of the concept of politeness, which come from the cultural notion of "face." Face consists of two specific kinds of "wants" that is, the wants or the needs not to be impeded in one's actions which is called negative face, and the wants or the needs to be approved or to be connected to a group, which is called positive face. Brown and Levinson claim that this notion of face is universal. Their observation reveals that when making a small request one will tend to use language that stress in-group membership and social similarity, and when making a bigger request, one will use the more formal language and more formal politeness strategies, such as using indirect speech, apologies and hedges. This strategy is claimed to be related to participant's face, which is the core element in the notion of politeness.

Given the assumptions of the universality of face, Brown and Levinson claim that certain kinds of acts can threaten face, that is, the acts that go contrary to what the face needs from the speaker. This is called "face threatening act" (FTA). FTA is an utterance or action that threatens a person's public self-image (face). Some acts can threaten the hearer's negative face and some others can threaten positive face of the hearer. Some acts also threaten the hearer's face and some others threaten the speaker's face. These two distinctions of FTA lead to consider whether doing the FTA or not doing the FTA. The strategies of doing FTA depend mainly on the circumstance or situation whether speaker wants to preserve hearer's face to any degree.

The possible sets of strategies that Brown and Levinson propose in relation to doing FTAs can be seen in the following chart:



Possible strategies for doing FTA (Brown and Levinson, 1978)

Based on the chart above, there are five possible strategic choices concerning with FTAs. However, how to choose those five strategies depends on the condition of both speaker and hearer. According to Brown and Levinson there are three sociological factors which are important to determine the choice of strategies of politeness in many cultures. These variables involve: (1) the social distance of speaker and hearer, that is how close the relationship between speaker and hearer; (2) the relative power of speaker and hearer; and (3) the absolute ranking of imposition in the particular culture, that is what is permissible in one culture may not be permissible in another culture.

Brown and Levinson claim that the weight of an FTA is a simple sum of these three factors. On the basis of this calculation, speaker decides whether he likes to perform one of the following strategies:

### 1. Baldly on Record without Redressive Action

In this strategy the speakers do the FTA in the most direct, clear and unambiguous way because they believe that there are occasions when some constraints force people to speak very directly. For example, if there is an emergency or if there is a major time constraint in which the speaker saves time in order to be effective. This strategy will also be done if the speaker does not fear retribution from the hearer, that is where the danger to hearer's face is very small or where speaker has superior power over hearer such as between Commander and one of his soldiers.

### 2. POSITIVE POLITENESS

Positive politeness is an appeal to solidarity towards others, that is how to make hearer feel good or to make him feel that his values are shared. Positive politeness utterances are used to extent intimacy, to imply common ground or to share wants. By using positive politeness strategy, it shows that speaker wants to come closer to hearer. There are three major strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson in this category. First is that speaker claims common ground with hearer by indicating that both speaker and hearer can share specific wants, including goals and values. Second is that both speaker and hearer are cooperatively involved in the relevant activity. Thus they can share goals in some ways. The last is that speaker should fulfill hearer's want in order to indicate that he (speaker) wants hearer's wants in some particular extents such as giving gifts to hearer's, understanding or sympathy.



### 3. Negative Politeness Strategy

Negative politeness strategy refers to an attempt to demonstrate awareness not to be imposed on, that is, to avoid interfering the interlocutor's freedom of action by using hedge, apology, etc. Brown and Levinson consider this strategy as the heart of respect behavior because it performs the function of minimizing the imposition over the hearer. There are five major strategies concerning with this negative politeness according to Brown and Levinson. (a) Be direct; (b) Don't presume/assume; (c) Don't coerce H; (d) Communicate speaker's want to not impinge on hearer; and (f) Redress other wants of hearer's derivative from negative face. In negative politeness strategies, conventional politeness markers and deference markers are used to minimize the imposition.

### 4. Off Record Politeness Strategy

Generally, off record politeness strategy is that the use of utterances that are not directly addressed to another. In this strategy, the speaker performs the FTA by implicative, that is by saying something indirectly. Some of possible strategies Brown and Levinson suggest include "give hints," "use metaphor," and "be vague or ambiguous."

### 5. Do not do FTA

Not doing FTA is the last strategic choice. By not doing FTA, no one would be imposed or threatened. Brown and Levinson are not the only persons who are interested in the issue of politeness strategies. Robin Lakoff in Green (1996), for example, describes three different rules a speaker may follow in order to be polite. The rules range from the most formal to informal rule of politeness. Lakoff and Brown and Levinson's strategies, although they are different in names, are correspondent to each other. The most formal rule of politeness according to Lakoff is "Don't impose." This rule relates to the three sociological variables that Brown and Levinson propose, in that there is an acknowledged difference in power and status between speaker and hearer that allows speaker to act more politely to hearer. According to this rule, a speaker is considered being polite if he avoids or asks permission or apology for making his interlocutor do anything that the interlocutor does not want to do. It seems that this rule might correspondent to Brown and Levinson's strategy 5, that is: Don't do the FTA. Not doing the FTA means that speaker does not impose hearer.

The Lakoff's second rule is: "Offer options." It means that a speaker express himself in such a way that his opinion or request can be ignored without being contradicted or rejected. This situation is appropriate if speaker and hearer have approximately equal status and power, but they are not so close in terms of social relationship. The example of such relationship can be found in the relationship between a businessman and a new client. The use of hedges and indirect acts could be appropriate in this case. An example that Green (1996) presents in this context is that instead of saying "You should get a haircut" it would be appropriate to say: "I wonder if it would help to get a haircut." The latter utterance is offering options. This rule relates to Brown and Levinson's negative politeness strategy, in that both demonstrate awareness of another right whether doing the FTA or not. In other word, both negative politeness and Lakoff's Rule 2 give options by attempting to minimize any imposition that are unavoidable from speaker's point of view.

The last Lakoff's rule relates to friendly or intimate politeness. This rule says: "Encourage Feelings of Camaraderie." In other words speaker makes addressee feel good. This rule applies appropriately to intimate or close friends to show intimacy. In this situation any topic of conversations seems to be appropriate, meaning that one should be able to talk anything with a close friend. However, there might still some propositions that a close friend may have something to hide that he will not tell us. But in general, this strategy suggests that both speaker and hearer be expected not to mince words. They are expected to speak directly without hedges or hints. Speaking indirectly among participants in this context may imply that they risk speaking their mind freely. Direct statements or requests among participants show that the speaker believes that the relationship between speaker and hearer is so strong that truths do not need to be disguised or softened. Both speaker and hearer not only show interest to each other but also show regard and trust by being open to each other.

Lakoff's Rule 3 seems to correspond with Brown and Levinson's baldly on record strategy and positive politeness strategy. This correspondence can be seen in the extent that S and H share so much that what might threaten the outsider's face in a certain occasion may not threaten their face in this context.

There are other perspectives concerning politeness strategies. These perspectives of politeness were proposed by Fraser (1990). Fraser found



that there are four major perspectives on the treatment of politeness. Some of them relate to the strategies discussed previously. The four perspectives of politeness include (1) the social-norm view of politeness; (2) the conversational-maxim view of politeness; (3) the face saving view of politeness; and (4) the conversational-contract view of politeness.

The social-norm view of politeness refers to the historical understanding of politeness, which assumes that there is a particular set of social norms in the society which consist of rules prescribing a certain behavior, a state of affair, or a way of thinking in a context. This perspective also assumes that when an action is congruent with the norms, a positive evaluation arises. On the contrary, when an action is in contradiction with the norm, a negative evaluation arises. One of the rules of politeness in this view requires that people avoid topic which may cause any pains.

The second perspective of politeness according to Frase is the conversational-maxim view. This perspective relies on the Cooperative Principles (CP) proposed by Grice. This principle provides that a speaker say what he has to say, when he has to say it and how he has to say it. In other words, a speaker should say the right thing at the right moment. On the basis of this CP, Grice formulates specific conversational maxims which become guidelines for language use in conversation. The maxims involve: (1) *Quantity*, which suggests that speaker not say more and less, and make the conversation as informative as required; (2) *Quality*, which suggests that speaker not say what he believes to be false and not say something for which he lacks adequate evidence; (3) *Relation*, which suggests to make the contribution relevant; and (4) *Manner*, which suggest to avoid ambiguity and obscurity.

Frase's third perspective is the face saving view. This view relates to the concept of politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson. This perspective emphasizes on the concept of face which constitutes some strategies of politeness.

The last perspective is the conversational contract view. In this perspective Frase claims that his view adopts Grice's notion of Cooperative Principle but it is different from that of Brown and Levinson's in some ways. The assumption underlying this perspective is that each party in a given conversation has some initial sets of right and obligations that will determine what participants expect from the others. During the conversation, it is possible for the two parties to change the context and

renegotiate a conversational contract. It means that the two parties may readjust what rights and obligations they hold towards each other.

Therefore, according to Frase's perspective politeness is not "a sometime thing." Participants in the conversation are aware that they have to act within the negotiated constraints. If they do not, they are considered as being impolite. Thus, being polite does not necessarily mean making hearer feel good as what Lakoff suggests in her rule 3, nor making the hearer not feel bad, as Brown and Levinson (1978) argue. Being Polite simply follows the terms and the conditions of the conversational contract.

The description about the perspectives and the strategies of politeness discussed above provides some universality of politeness. However, it is important to note that cultural values have a great influence of how a particular act will be deemed in a particular culture. Within a certain culture a speaker may employ different means of expressing politeness. These differences are not only due to their beliefs about what kind of situation a certain act is appropriate to, but also due to their personal preference. For example, a culture like Indonesia culture believes that asking personal question, such as age and marital status, is not considered impolite, while other cultures may believe that this kind of question is considered impolite. Further description about oriental and Indonesian culture will be discussed later.

#### POLITENESS PHENOMENA IN SOME ORIENTAL CULTURES

Brown and Levinson (1978), Lakoff (1973) and Fraser (1990) have proposed some universal properties shared in terms of politeness. However, there are some research studies which prove that the universality of politeness, especially one related to the concept of face, may not be applied to some of oriental cultures such as in China and Japan. The following are the description of two oriental cultures which mostly draw attention of some researchers in pragmatic area.

In Matsumoto's study (1988) the concept of face postulated by Brown and Levinson in their Model Person is questioned. Brown and Levinson claim that "all components adult members of society have face: the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself, consisting of two relative aspect: negative face and positive face." According to Matsumoto (1988) the concept of negative face, as the desire



to be unimpeded in one's action, seems most strange. This is because negative face presupposes that the basic unit of society is the individual, while in Japanese culture the dependence on the other individuals is highly maintained. Japanese people must understand their position among others, rather than the preservation of an individual's proper territory. Therefore, what is considered negative politeness strategies by Levinson may not be so in Japanese culture. Matsumoto describes this contradiction by an example. In Japanese culture it is the responsibility for senior to take care of juniors. Japanese society perceives that it's an honor to be asked to take care of someone because this indicates that one is regarded as holding a higher position in the society. According to Brown and Levinson, taking care of someone may be an imposition, which refers to negative politeness. But in Japanese society, this is a kind of deferent imposition that can enhance the good self-image of the addressee which in turn can be perceived as positive politeness strategy.

In short, Japanese culture tends to choose deference strategy of politeness although other strategies may be possible. One of Japanese conventions in terms of deference says: "Leave it to someone higher" in contrast to western type of deference which says: "give option."

Gu (1990) observes politeness phenomena in Modern Chinese. Similar to Matsumoto's observation in Japanese society, Gu's observation of face also contradicts to Brown and Levinson's concept of face. Gu considers that what Brown and Levinson conclude about politeness and face is an embarrassment. This is because Brown and Levinson's understanding of the concept of politeness is that being polite is to be face-caring, meaning that all FTAs are not polite, since they do not care for the face but they threaten the face, thus leading to impolite acts. Gu challenges the assumption that negative face can be threatened by a certain act, such as offering, inviting, and promising. In Chinese culture, such acts, under ordinary conditions, would not be considered as threatening hearer's negative face, that is impeding hearer's freedom.

Gu gives the following illustration to prove that inviting is not a kind of threatening the negative face of the hearer:

"A Chinese S will insist on inviting H to dinner... In this situation, an European will feel that S's act of inviting is intrinsically impeding, and that S's way of performing it is even more so. A Chinese, on the other hand, will think that S's act is intrinsically polite, and that the way S performs

it shows that S is genuinely polite for S's insistence on H's accepting the invitation serve as a good evidence of S's sincerity. The Chinese negative face is not threatened in this case" (Gu, 1988: 242).

According to Gu, a successful inviting-transaction pattern in modern Chinese would be like the following:

A: Inviting

B: Declining (giving reasons for doing so)

A: Inviting again (refusing B's reasons, minimizing linguistically cost to self)

B: Declining again (defending his/her reason).

A: Insisting on B's presence (refuting, persuading, and minimizing linguistically cost to self)

B: Accepting (conditionally or unconditionally)

For a cultural outsider this kind of pattern may appear as an imposition, but for Chinese accepting the invitation directly risks the invitee's face, for he might be seen as being greedy. Therefore, although the invitee desires to accept the invitation, she or he should go through this pattern rather than accepts it directly.

The descriptions of two oriental cultures above show that politeness phenomena and the ways of expressing them are different from one culture to another. Because of those differences, cross-cultural misunderstanding, or what we call "pragmatic failure," could possibly occur.

#### POLITENESS PHENOMENA IN INDONESIA

It has been stated that the unspoken and spoken behaviors that convey politeness are strongly based on culture. One of the easiest ways to inadvertently cause offence is either to violate a cultural norm or to fail to follow one of society's rules of polite behaviors. Many people assume or comment that politeness is universal. It means that if we act politely based on our understanding of what is polite, people in other cultures will understand the attempt. Generally, this assumption may be true if people from different culture take time to learn the specific cultural ideas of politeness that vary between cultures.

In Indonesia there are a number of specific rules or strategies that people should be sure to know about and to follow. One of the most important ways of expressing politeness is reflected in the ways of



addressing people. Linguistic and cultural diversity in Indonesia provides different ways of addressing people that make people have to be careful of using forms of address to a particular person and in a particular situation. Although Indonesia has successfully implemented language planning, in which bahasa Indonesia has been adopted as the national language, this does not mean that people all over the country use the same standard forms in addressing people. What might appear in Indonesian textbooks are the standard forms of address. However, Jenson (1988) has done a study in this area and found that the forms of address in Indonesia sometimes concern with politeness level. She presents some data about the forms of address, which are different from other forms of address in other countries, like America. One example of these differences according to Jenson is that the selection of address forms depends on whether the addressee is adult or child. In American context a form of address is determined by the age of addressee while in Indonesia "it is determined by almost totally on the basis of age relative to the speaker" (Jenson, 1988: 119). For example, in Indonesia it is normal to address a younger pupil in the school as *Nak* (child). However an older man could still possibly address a twenty-five-years-old man as *Nak* because he was much older than the addressee and he remembers the teacher-pupil relationship. The American system does not have forms of address other than first name for children and does not provide forms of address where the name of the child is not known.

In brief, according to Jensen's investigation, there are three elements of address in Indonesia:

- A "Address term" (*Bapak, Ibu, Dik*)
- P "Positional title" (*Rektor, Hakim, Gubernur*)
- N "Name" (*Urip, Pasaribu, Subagio*)

The lexical realization for those elements of address is determined by age, rank, origin, degree of respect, formality and intimacy. However, in the textbooks, standard forms of address seem to be emerging in order to eliminate difficulties of choice either for Indonesia people or for foreigners who learn Indonesian as a foreign language.

Other politeness phenomenon related to Indonesian culture is that of paralinguistic aspects. Paralinguistic aspects involve proxemic, kinesics, and gestures. Those unspoken behaviors are assumed to be some of

pragmatic elements that may cause misunderstanding and miscommunication. Unfortunately, there are no adequate references that discuss paralinguistic aspects in Indonesian context. One of the ways to provide some information about paralinguistic aspects is by observing Indonesian customs and traditions, which might be different from other traditions and custom in other countries.

In Indonesia there are a number of paralinguistic aspects which show politeness to others. Those aspects should be understood by the outsiders in order to prevent pragmatic failure. Perhaps the most important of these paralinguistic aspects in Indonesia is the giving refreshments to the guests. Traditional Indonesian society considers that the giving of refreshments to the guests a very important display of respect and politeness. An Indonesian host should make sure that some refreshment is offered to the guest. If you are the guest you will probably be offered tea or coffee. It is normally advisable to accept even if you are not thirsty. A guest should wait for the host to indicate that it is permissible to drink. What might cause pragmatic failure in this category is that when Indonesian people travel abroad where this kind of tradition does not occur. In Indonesian custom, guests do not need to bring some food or drink when they are invited to have a party, for example.

Another example of paralinguistic aspect is the use of hands when giving or handing something to someone else. Most people already know that the left hand is considered "unclean" in many countries. That is also true in Indonesia. It is considered impolite to hand anything to another person using the left hand. Some people from other country may not have this kind of "rule" that when they hand something to another, they do not care of whether using the left or right hand. For Indonesian people who are not aware of cross-cultural differences may judge that this action is very rude that may cause offence and pain.

There are a few differences in the use of hands and feet for indicating actions or getting attention. For example, the proper way to call someone is to use one of the standard forms of address such as *Pak, Mas, Bu* and *Mbak*, and make a scooping motion toward you with your hand, finger facing down. Crooking the index finger as is common in the West is not polite in Indonesia. Also, we should be observant of where the position our feet. Exposing the sole of our shoe can be impolite as is pointing with our foot to indicate an object.



Finally, outsiders of Indonesia should keep in mind the important of status in Indonesian society. In Indonesia everyone has a status, although the status is sometimes situational. For example, a low-level employee in one office may have very high status in his home community, either through leadership ability or religious training. People have to try to understand the different situations arisen day to day activities and have to modify their personal behaviors to meet those situations appropriately.

#### IMPLICATION OF POLITENESS PHENOMENA IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Politeness phenomena, as a part of pragmatics seem to have some implications in language teaching and learning, especially in the teaching of English as a foreign language. Thomas (1983) said that communicative grammar of English may have spilled over into pragmatics but the judgement of appropriateness can ever be spelt out sufficiently to be incorporated in textbooks. Therefore, Thomas suggests that it would be benefit to the learners if teachers try to make explicit the type of choice which underlie pragmatic decision making to prevent pragmatic failure. She also proposes that teachers should develop a student's metapragmatic ability, that is the ability of student to analyze language use in conscious manner by discussing language use in the light of pragmatic parameters.

However, before the teachers are able to develop the students' metapragmatic ability, they have to know what is actually pragmatics. In this case Bardovi-Harlig (1992) observes the need to introduce teachers to pragmatics. She points out three reasons why the introduction of pragmatics is important. First, language learners frequently lack pragmatic competence, even at advanced level of proficiency. Second, teacher must be prepared to meet the need of students to acquire the pragmatics of the target language. The last reason is that textbooks often inaccurately portray language use. Among these three reasons, the last reason has intrigued me whether English textbooks used in Indonesia has reflected the writer's pragmatic competence, whether those textbooks really inaccurately portray language use, especially the use of language to convey politeness.

For the purpose of this analysis, I include four dialogues as corpus. The analysis will provide information of how non native speakers of English present utterances in the dialogues and how a native speaker reacts to the utterances, whether they are appropriate for a particular

situation or not. For this purpose, I showed the dialogues to a native speaker of English and the following are how he react to the dialogues and the speech act used in each dialogue.

#### Dialogue 1

- Ben : Why don't you ride your bike, Tom?  
 Tom : Its front tire is flat.  
 Ben : Wait here. I'll borrow a pump for you.  
 Tom : Oh thanks.  
 Ben : Here you are. Hold it. Let me pump.  
 Tom : Stop. It's enough.  
 Ben : You seem to be in a hurry, Tom.  
 Tom : Yes, I am going to pick Anik up. I've promised to take her to the film this evening.  
 Ben : Well, well, well. What a nice evening it'll be.  
 Tom : Thanks Ben. Bye.  
 Ben : Bye.

(Komunikasi Aktif Bahasa Inggris, 1994:55)

This dialogue consists of sentences which are grammatically correct. The use of direct speech indicates a close relationship between the two speakers. According to Michel, the native speaker I consulted, this dialogue has used appropriate language in an appropriate situation. However, instead of using a very direct expression (*baldly on record strategy of politeness*), such as "Wait here," "Hold it," the speaker may use conditional sentence in order to give the hearer an option. For example, Ben in this dialogue may say: "If you wait here, I'll borrow a pump for you." I guess the reason for using a very direct expression in this dialog is that the writers want to emphasize the use of direct speech.

#### Dialogue 2

- Shopkeeper : Good evening, Mam. Can I help you?  
 Mrs Yuni : Mmm, yes. I need a shirt for my husband and a dress for myself.  
 Shopkeeper : What kind of shirt, mam?  
 Mrs. Yuni : Silk  
 Shopkeeper : Color?  
 Mrs. Yuni : Plain white.



Shopkeeper : We've just sold out. I am afraid. But we have a checked one. Have a look. It is excellent, isn't it?

(*Komunikasi Aktif Bahasa Inggris, 1994:27*)

In this dialogue there is a distance between the shopkeeper and the customer, in the sense that the relationship between the two speakers are not close and they are supposed to use more indirect expression. For example, rather than saying: "Color?" it would be more appropriate for the shopkeeper to say: "What color would you like?" For the customer, Mrs. Yuni, may say: "I am thinking about silk shirt" rather than say "Silk." There are one error found in this dialogue, that is the word "mam" which should be "ma'am."

### Dialogue 3

Jean : Would you like to come to our house for dinner tonight?

Mary : Oh, it is nice of you to invite me, but I am afraid I can't come. You see, well, you know my sister Cathy, the one who has just got a baby?

Jean : Sure.

Mary : It is her birthday today, and we're having a birthday dinner at my place. Mom's cooking.

Jean : Well, I am sorry you can't come. But I hope your sister has a nice birthday.

Mary : Thanks.

(*English For Senior High School, 1995:99*)

In this dialogue, it is clear that the relationship between Jean and Mary is close but the expressions they use are very formal and indirect. Invitation between two close friends could be simply "Can you come to our house for dinner tonight?" or "I'd like you to come..." The reason that Mary gives to refuse the invitation is also very indirect by stalling for the refusal.

### Dialogue 4

Mrs. Benson : Would you care for another piece of cake?

Mrs. Hedges : No, thank you. I don't want to gain weight, you know.

(*English for Senior High School, 1995:91*)

The native speaker found that this dialogue strange because the expressions the two speakers use do not go together. It is assumed that talking about "weight" is a very personal matter that can be talked to the people considered very close. However, the expression of "offering a cake" is very formal, as if the two people have just met. The appropriate expression for "offering" in this context would be "Do you want another piece of cake?"

This superficial analysis suggests that although the sentences used in the dialogues are grammatically correct, some of them do not fit to the context. Some expressions are not appropriate in terms of the relationship between the speaker and the hearer. However, what the writers try to emphasize is the use of language forms such as "direct speech" as we can see in the dialogue 1 and the use of language functions such as inviting (dialogue 3), and "offering" (dialogue 4). The problem is that the writers fail to create appropriate contexts to meet the requirement of the use of language forms and language functions. This textbook analysis may also show that the authors, who are also teachers, lack pragmatic competence, that is the ability of language users to match utterances with context in which they are appropriate.

### CONCLUSION

As a part of pragmatics, politeness phenomena have drawn attention of many researchers, especially since Brown and Levinson's universality of politeness was published in 1978. Many researchers come up with their reactions against this universality by showing some evidence showing that politeness phenomena are different from one culture to another. These differences can create misunderstanding and miscommunication which is called pragmatic failure. Pragmatic failure occurs not only in the utterance of non-native speakers of English (interlanguage pragmatic failure), but also may occur in the utterance of native speakers who lack pragmatic competence.

In the teaching of English as a foreign language, pragmatic competence of the teachers and learners should become a great concern. Research studies in pragmatic area showed that teachers and learners of English as a second or foreign language lack pragmatic competence. Therefore, opportunities should be provided for them to develop their pragmatic awareness.



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