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Pragmatics and Politeness: Investigating Politeness Strategies Awareness and Use by First-Year Master's Students at Mohamed Lamine Debaghine Setif 2 University

Pragmatique et Politesse : Enquête sur la Connaissance et l'Usage des Stratégies de Politesse par les Étudiants de Première Année Master à l'Université Mohamed Lamine Debaghine Setif 2

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Abstract:
This study investigates the awareness and use of politeness strategies by first-year Master's students at Mohamed Lamine Debaghine Setif 2 University in English as a Foreign Language classroom. The probe adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collected through a questionnaire and discourse completion tasks. The findings indicate that learners exhibit a considerable understanding of the significance of politeness in communicative exchanges, specifically highlighting the relevance of negative politeness strategies. The study highlights gender-based differences, with females showing a higher tendency to use indirect strategies than males. Students understand politeness concepts, yet their practical application, mainly using more subtle strategies like indirectness and hedging, remains limited. This research highlights the need for refined instructional approaches that focus on the practical use of politeness strategies in EFL classrooms.
Keywords: politeness strategies-pragmatics-EFL classrooms-awareness-pragmatic competence.

Résumé :
Cette étude explore la prise de conscience et l'utilisation des stratégies de politesse par les étudiants de première année de Master à l'Université Mohamed Lamine Debaghine Setif 2, dans le cadre des cours d'anglais langue étrangère. L'enquête combine des données quantitatives et qualitatives recueillies à travers un questionnaire et des tâches de complétion de discours. Les résultats montrent que les étudiants sont globalement conscients de l'importance de la politesse dans la communication, avec une attention particulière portée aux stratégies de politesse négative. L'étude met en lumière des différences selon le genre, les étudiantes ayant une propension plus marquée à recourir à des stratégies indirectes comparativement aux étudiants masculins. Les étudiants témoignent d'une compréhension des concepts de politesse, cependant, leur application pratique, notamment dans l'utilisation de stratégies plus subtiles telles que l'indirectivité et l'atténuation, demeure limitée. Cette recherche souligne la nécessité de développer des stratégies pédagogiques renforcées, axées sur l'application concrète des stratégies de politesse dans les classes d'anglais langue étrangère.
Mots- clés : Les stratégies de politesse - pragmatique - classe d'anglais langue étrangère - prise de conscience - compétence pragmatique

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Introduction

Language is the primary way individuals from different cultures communicate and share ideas. However, language can sometimes fail to convey the intended meaning, leading to misunderstandings that disrupt communication. This highlights that language proficiency is not limited to vocabulary or grammar but also includes a deep understanding of pragmatics. Pragmatics examines how communication works in real-world settings where understanding the meaning of words is not enough. Effective communication also involves recognizing the speaker's intent, the context of the conversation, and the cultural norms governing the interaction. In essence, pragmatics pertains to the understanding of the appropriate use of language within distinct social contexts. (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 2005). Pragmatics occupies a pivotal role in understandingthe mechanisms by which individuals utilize language to articulate their intentions. As Mey (2001) noted, pragmatics concerns the relationship between linguistic forms and their users, focusing on how speakers convey meaning based on context, intentions, and social norms. Pragmatics places the speaker at the heart of the communicative process, focusing on the strategies used to convey meaning and how these strategies vary according to context.

One pivotal area within the field of pragmatics is the study of politeness, which is fundamental for the regulation of social interactions and the facilitation of respectful discourse. As articulated by Meyerhoff (2011), politeness encompasses the behaviors exhibited by competent speakers within a given community, aimed at addressing potential social or interpersonal disruptions. In essence, politeness strategies function to alleviate the impact of face-threatening acts (FTAs) and to maintain the social equilibrium among conversational partners. The notion of face, initially introduced by Goffman (1967), pertains to the positive social worth that an individual effectively asserts for themselves through their self-presentation.

Building on this concept, Brown and Levinson's politeness model (1987) identifies several politeness strategies: bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. These strategies help individuals manage their social identity and avoid conflict, ensuring respectful interactions. While the implementation of politeness strategies is subject to cultural variations, the core principles underlying these strategies are universal. Brown and Levinson's model provides a framework for understanding these shared principles and the role of politeness in fostering effective communication across cultural boundaries.

An informal group discussion with 15 first-year Master's students has shown that while students understand the general importance of politeness, they often do not use politeness strategies consistently in their interactions. Students tend to employ politeness selectively, usually in interactions with individuals of higher status or when requesting favours, rather than integrating it into everyday classroom communication.

This research investigates the politeness strategies employed by first-year Master's students enrolled in the Department of English Language and Literature at Setif 2 University. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- Raise students' awareness of the importance of politeness in communication.
- Investigate how students apply various politeness strategies in their interactions.
- Explore the frequency and context in which these strategies are used.

The ultimate goal is to create a more respectful and communicative classroom environment by enhancing students' understanding and use of politeness strategies. Based on the issues and objectives outlined above, the following research questions have been formulated:

1. What are students' perceptions of using politeness strategies in the EFL classroom?
2. How aware are students of the role of politeness in effective communication?
3. What are the most frequently used politeness strategies by first-year Master's students in the EFL classroom?
4. What factors influence the use of politeness strategies by first-year Master's students in EFL classroom interactions?

1. Literature Review

This section explores existing research on politeness and politeness strategies in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. It will first provide an overview of key concepts such as pragmatics, face, face-threatening acts (FTAs), speech acts, and politeness strategies, and then synthesize relevant studies.

1.1 Pragmatics and Its Role in Communication

As defined by Davis(1998pragmatics entails the examination of language use, emphasizing the interplay between language participants and the contextual framework within which the language is employed. Unlike semantics, which is concerned with the literal meaning of words, pragmatics examines how meaning is conveyed in different social contexts(Blum-Kulka,1997). In the EFL classroom, understanding pragmatics is crucial for students, as it helps them recognize how to use language appropriately, depending on the situation. For instance, students need to comprehend that the meaning of an utterance can vary based on the context, tone, and social relationship between speakers(Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 2005).

In an EFL context, students often face challenges understanding and applying pragmatics effectively. While they may be proficient in grammar and vocabulary, their success in communication largely depends on their ability to navigate pragmatic factors such as politeness, tone, and contextual appropriateness (Taguchi, 2011). For example, students might struggle with understanding when it is appropriate to use direct or indirect language depending on the formality of the situation, which can affect their communication and relationships with peers and instructors.

1.1.1. Face and Face-Threatening Acts in Communication

One critical concept in pragmatics is "face," introduced by sociologist Goffman (1967), who defined it as the positive social value a person claims for themselves during an interaction. This concept is vital for understanding politeness, as it revolves around protecting individuals' self-image and social standing. In the context of EFL, students' face needs are especially relevant when interacting with teachers and peers, as the success of these interactions depends on how well they manage their own and others' face needs.

Brown and Levinson (1987) expanded on Goffman's work, outlining two main types of face: positive face, which refers to the desire to be appreciated and liked, and negative face, which refers to the desire to maintain autonomy and avoid imposition. These concepts help explain why politeness strategies are essential in communication, as they seek to minimize face-threatening acts (FTAs), which occur when an action threatens the speaker's or hearer's face. FTAs can be particularly challenging for students in the EFL classroom, as they may

inadvertently use language that threatens the face of others, leading to misunderstandings or discomfort (Mills, 2003).

1.1.2 Politeness and Politeness Strategies Theoretical Framework

Politeness is a social behaviour aimed at preserving face and ensuring smooth communication. In the EFL classroom, students often rely on politeness strategies to manage their interactions with teachers and peers. Politeness strategies are verbal and non-verbal acts that minimize face threats and maintain social harmony (Brown & Levinson, 1987). While there is no universally accepted definition of politeness, most scholars agree that it involves using socially appropriate language to avoid conflict and maintain positive social relations (Leech, 1983).

Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies offer a framework for understanding how face-threatening acts (FTAs) can be mitigated in communication. Below is a summary of their strategies, which are highly relevant to understanding student behaviour in EFL classrooms:

- Bald-on-Record is a strategy used for direct communication, with no effort to minimize face threats. It is typically used when the speaker strives to undertake a Face Threatening Act (FTA) with optimal effectiveness.
- Positive politeness is a strategy seeks to show solidarity and build rapport by acknowledging the hearer's positive face. It is often used in close relationships or when speakers want to show respect for the hearer's needs and desires.
- Negative politeness is a strategy for addressing the hearer's negative face by avoiding imposition and giving them the freedom to choose. It is used when there is a greater social distance between the interlocutors.
- Off-record is an indirect strategy that avoids direct face-threatening acts by allowing multiple interpretations of a statement. It is often used when speakers want to avoid commitment to a particular interpretation or to lessen the threat of an FTA.
- Do Not Do the FTA The ultimate strategy of avoidance, in contexts where the speaker opts to refrain from executing a face-threatening act, this approach frequently represents the most courteous strategy when the potential for face loss is significantly elevated.

For students in the EFL classroom, understanding and using these strategies is crucial for building rapport with peers and teachers. Students must learn when to use direct language (Bald on Record) and when to employ more indirect strategies (such as Positive or Negative Politeness) based on the social context and power dynamics involved (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 2005). The use of politeness strategies is influenced by various factors, including the student's cultural background, familiarity with the interlocutor, and the perceived power relationship in the interaction.

1.2.Speech Act Theory

Speech acts are utterances that perform actions, often serving a specific communication function. In other words, they are the actions the speaker performs with an utterance. It does not matter if they are true or false, but what matters is the effect they have. They may refer to producing a simple statement, asking questions, making requests, invitations, refusals, giving orders or commands, etc.

Speech Act Theory is a subfield of pragmatics. It was first presented by the Oxford philosopher J. L. Austin in the 1930s and later published in 1962 in a book entitled "How to Do

Things with Words". It was then further developed by the American philosopher J. R. Searle in 1967. This theory emerged as a reaction to those who claimed that words exist solely to describe the world. Instead, it studies communication units that people use to express specific meanings. It concerns how words state information or describe things and carry out actions. In other words, it studies how language is not used only to inform or describe but also to do things and perform actions. Generally, something is done by using these utterances.

1.2.1 Austin's View

Austin describes the above-mentioned utterances as performatives. According to the "hereby" test, these are called performatives, which states that if the word "hereby" is inserted between the subject and the verb in an utterance and still makes sense, the utterance is a performative. He linked speech acts' success to a set of circumstances that should be recognized by both interlocutors because, in many cases, they may decide the nature of the speech act. These circumstances are called felicity conditions. The performance will be infelicitous (inappropriate) if the speaker is not a specific person in a special context. This means that the setting of the utterance should fit the situation; the speaker must have the right to say something, and the listener must be aware of the surrounding circumstances.

Additionally, Austin introduced five conditions that help in the success of a speech act. First, general conditions refer to the interlocutors' understanding of the language and their seriousness about the situation, meaning they are not play-acting. The second type is content conditions, which state that the utterance must be logical and fit the situation, such as in cases that require special consideration of the tense.The third type is preparatory conditions, which refer to the authority that grants the speaker the right to declare something. The fourth type is sincerity conditions, where the speaker must show sincerity in their utterance, as in the case of promises, which cannot be denied or retracted later. The final type is essential conditions, which refer to utterances that obligate the speaker to act, changing their state from non-obligation to obligation.

Austin's exploration of speech acts delves into three fundamental constructs: the locutionary act, the illocutionary act, and the perlocutionary act, each of which plays a pivotal role in the overall execution of communicative intentions. Austin elucidates that the successful execution of any singular speech act necessitates the interplay of all three components, highlighting the complexity and richness of human communication. Oshima (2010) defines the locutionary act as the production of a meaningful linguistic expression, emphasizing its foundation in the clear and precise articulation of statements. This component involves not just the mere utterance of words, but the conveyance of meaning that is recognizable and interpretable by the listener. The locutionary act serves as the groundwork upon which further communicative intentions are built. Building on this, Oshima (2010) describes the illocutionary act as the action intended to be performed by the speaker in uttering a linguistic expression by conventional force associated with it. This concept encapsulates the speaker's intention behind their words, which goes beyond mere expression to encompass the performative nature of language. For instance, when a speaker makes a promise, they are not simply stating something; they are engaging in an act that carries an inherent obligation, thereby illustrating the illocutionary force of their utterance. The third construct, the perlocutionary act, pertains to the impact that the spoken words have on the listener. In summary, Austin's framework

illuminates the intricate layers of meaning and intention that underlie human speech, demonstrating that effective communication is a multifaceted process that requires a harmonious integration of locutionary clarity, illocutionary intent, and perlocutionary impact.

1.2.2 Searle's View

Searle(1967)significantly advanced the foundational theoretical framework of speech acts originally established by J.L. Austin by delineating five distinct categories of illocutionary acts: declarations, representatives, expressives, directives, and commissives. Each category serves a unique purpose within the realm of communication, reflecting the multifaceted ways in which language can be employed to convey meaning and intention.

Declarations represent a compelling category of speech acts characterized by their remarkable capacity to transform a specific situation or context solely through the act of enunciation. For instance, when a judge pronounces a defendant guilty, this declaration transcends mere conveyance of information; it actively alters the legal status of the individual involved. The efficacy of declarations is contingent upon the speaker's institutional authority, which may derive from various roles, such as a supervisor in a corporate environment, an educator within an academic setting, or a clergy member during a ceremonial occasion. The inherent power embedded in declarations underscores the intricate intersection of language and social structures, thereby illuminating how words can enact substantive change.

In contrast, representatives function as speech acts that articulate the speaker's beliefs, perceptions, or factual claims concerning the world. This category encompasses a broad spectrum of utterances, ranging from straightforward statements of fact to nuanced descriptions that reflect the speaker's reasoning and interpretation of truth. For example, when an individual asserts, "It is raining," they are not merely conveying an observation; they are simultaneously providing insight into their assessment of the prevailing weather conditions. Representatives thus play a crucial role in communication by facilitating the sharing of one's understanding of reality. Expressives constitute a deeply personal category of speech acts that enable speakers to convey their emotional states or psychological conditions.

Through expressives, individuals can communicate a variety of feelings, such as joy, sorrow, anger, or relief. For instance, a person might exclaim, "I am so happy for you!" to articulate their genuine delight in another's success. This category emphasizes the emotive power of language, illustrating how words can serve as a conduit for sharing one's internal experiences with others. Directives encompass speech acts that are aimed at influencing the behavior or actions of others, thereby reflecting the speaker's desires or intentions. This category includes a diverse array of utterances, such as commands, requests, suggestions, and orders. For example, when a manager instructs an employee to complete a task, they are employing a directive to guide the employee's actions in a desired direction. The effectiveness of directives often hinges on contextual factors and the relationship between the speaker and the listener, as these elements can significantly impact how the message is received and acted upon.

Commissives represent a forward-looking category of speech acts wherein the speaker commits to a specific course of action in the future. This can manifest in various forms, including promises, refusals, or threats. For instance, when an individual states, "I promise to assist you with your project" they are not merely making a statement; they are binding

themselves to a future action. Commissives underscore the importance of intention in communication, highlighting how speakers can utilize language to navigate commitments and obligations.

In addition to these five categories, Searle further refined the understanding of speech acts by introducing two classifications: direct and indirect speech acts. A speech act is classified as direct when there exists a clear and unambiguous relationship between its structural form and its intended function. Conversely, an indirect speech act occurs when there is a less apparent connection between form and function. Through this nuanced categorization of illocutionary acts, Searle has enriched our understanding of the operational dynamics of language within social contexts, illuminating the intricate ways in which we communicate intentions and meanings.

1.3. Related Research Studies

Research shows that students in the EFL context are aware of the importance of politeness but often struggle with applying the appropriate strategies in different situations. In a study by Haugh (2008), students reported that they were generally aware of politeness but found it challenging to adapt their language use to different social contexts. This finding is supported by Taguchi (2011), who noted that while students often understand the theoretical aspects of politeness, they may not always use politeness strategies consistently or appropriately in their interactions. This inconsistency can be particularly problematic in EFL classrooms, where students must communicate formally and informally.

Furthermore, students' perceptions of politeness often vary based on their cultural backgrounds. For instance, in some cultures, students may be more likely to use indirect language to show respect, while in other cultures, they may adopt a more direct approach (Holmes, 1995). In the EFL classroom, this cultural variability can lead to misunderstandings or conflicts when students fail to recognize the cultural norms of politeness expected by their teachers or peers (Meyerhoff, 2011). As such, students must learn the linguistic aspects of politeness and develop cross-cultural awareness to navigate social interactions effectively in the classroom.

Several studies have investigated politeness in the EFL classroom, shedding light on students' use of politeness strategies and their challenges. A study by Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990) examined the use of politeness strategies by Japanese EFL students and found that students often used indirect language to mitigate face-threatening acts when interacting with authority figures. Similarly, studies by Holmes (1995) and Haugh (2008) have shown that EFL students' understanding of politeness is often influenced by their cultural backgrounds, with some students using strategies that are perceived as too indirect or insufficiently polite in specific contexts.

In the EFL context, students are expected to master the linguistic structures of the language and the social rules that govern how those structures are used in interaction. A study by Matsumoto (1989) found that Japanese EFL learners, for example, struggled with using direct language in requests, as they were concerned about violating social norms related to face and politeness. This highlights the need for explicit instruction in politeness strategies to help students navigate the complexities of social interaction in English. Kurniati (2017) conducted an exploratory, descriptive, and qualitative study about using politeness strategies by teachers and

students in English classes. The study showed that while teachers primarily use the bald-on-record strategy, students predominantly use positive politeness strategies.

Giti Karim Khanlooei and Narges Vaezi (2017) examined the use of politeness strategies in written communications by Iranian EFL learners. The study found significant differences in politeness strategies between upper-intermediate and intermediate students. Monsefi and Hadidi (2015) studied the effect of gender on the use of politeness strategies in Iranian EFL classrooms. Their findings suggest that female teachers' polite strategies positively influenced student-teacher interactions.

Athamna (2016) investigated politeness strategies in Algerian learners' academic emails. The study revealed a correlation between language proficiency and complex politeness strategies, highlighting cultural influences on the learners' perception of politeness.

From the above-mentioned studies, it is clear that while extensive research has been conducted on the use of politeness strategies by teachers and learners in various cultural and linguistic contexts, there is a significant gap in research specifically addressing the use of politeness strategies by students in Algerian EFL classrooms. Very few studies have explored the interplay of politeness strategies and how this can positively influence the learning environment. This research aims to fill this gap by investigating the use of politeness, offering insights into the potential impact of these strategies on the overall learning process.

2. Research Methodology

This section outlines the research methodology used to explore the awareness and use of politeness strategies by first-year Master's students. It details the research design, methods, instruments, data collection procedures, and analysis approaches. Additionally, it addresses ethical considerations.

2.1. Research Design and Methods

An exploratory research design was chosen for this study. This design is beneficial when there is limited prior knowledge about a phenomenon, and the goal is to gain a deeper understanding (Bajpai, 2011). Since the study focuses on understanding how students use politeness strategies in EFL classrooms, an exploratory design allows the researcher to understand students' awareness and practical use comprehensively.

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. A mixed-methods approach is justified by the need to collect numerical data (via the questionnaire) and detailed, context-based insights (via the Discourse Completion Task—DCT). This approach strengthens the validity and reliability of the results, providing a fuller understanding of the students' use of politeness strategies. The quantitative data helps measure trends and patterns, while the qualitative data adds depth and context to the student's responses and behaviours.

2.2.Research Setting, Population and Sample

The current research was conducted at Mohamed Lamine Debaghine Setif2 University, in the Department of English Language and Literature. This setting involves first-year Master's students exposed to pragmatics in their fundamental unit courses. These students are suitable for this research as they are exposed to pragmatics as part of their language sciences courses, and they are actively learning about language use in social contexts, making them familiar with concepts relevant to the study of politeness. This study's population consists of 237 first-year

Master's students in English at Mohamed Lamine Debaghine Setif2 University. A convenience sampling method was employed, and participants who were readily available and willing to participate were selected. Seventy-four students participated in the study, representing a manageable sample size for this research. The choice of convenience sampling was driven by the constraints of time and accessibility to students present during the data collection period suring the academic year 2024.

2.6 Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data for this study was collected using the questionnaire and the Discourse Completion Task (DCT).

2.6.1.Questionnaire:

The questionnaire was distributed to 74 students to gather quantitative data regarding their awareness and use of politeness strategies in different classroom contexts. It includes both closed and open-ended questions to allow for detailed responses. It consists of three sections:

- Demographic questions and background information.
- Students' awareness of politeness and its importance.
- Students' use of politeness strategies.

2.6.2.Discourse Completion Task (DCT)

The DCT consists of 10 written situations that prompt students to choose appropriate politeness strategies based on the context provided. Students are asked to respond as if they were in real-life situations, allowing for an assessment of their pragmatic competence in terms of politeness strategies. The DCT was employed to collect qualitative data on students' pragmatic competence. Each situation requires them to select or produce a response reflecting an appropriate politeness strategy. The DCT is helpful in this context because it allows the researcher to examine how students navigate social relationships and politeness through language in specific situations.

2.6.3. Data Analysis Procedures

Data collected from the questionnaire was analyzed using SPSS software, with table results. The responses to the DCT were analyzed thematically according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies framework.

2.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations necessitate the acquisition of informed consent from all participants, the assurance that their engagement is voluntary, and the preservation of the confidentiality of their responses. Participants were apprised of the study's objectives, and they were guaranteed that their responses would remain anonymous and utilized exclusively for research purposes.

3. Findings and Discussion

In this section, the findings derived from the collected data are presented, followed by a detailed discussion that interprets these results within the context of the research questions and objectives.

3.1 Students' Questionnaire Analysis and Discussion

This section analyzes the responses from the students' questionnaire, which aimed to explore their awareness of politeness, their perceptions of its importance in communication, and their ability to recognize politeness strategies in EFL classroom interactions.

Section One Background Information

Participants' Gender Distribution	Frequency	Percentage
Female	64	86.48%
Male	10	13.51%
Total	74	100%

Table 1Participants Gender Distribution

The gender distribution reveals a clear gender imbalance, with females making up 86.48% of the respondents, while males account for only 13.51%. This skewed gender ratio aligns with the broader trends observed in Algerian educational institutions, where females dominate literary fields, including language studies. This also reflects the broader sociocultural context where males may be underrepresented in specific academic streams, particularly humanities and language-related disciplines.

Section Two Learners' Use of Language

Participants' Use of English in the EFL Environment	Males	Females	Total
Never	0	1.5%	1.35%
Rarely	10%	15.6%	14.86%
Sometimes	40%	37.5%	37.83%
Often	50%	31.2%	33.78%
Always	0	14%	12.16%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Table 2 Participants' Use of English Language in their EFL Classroom

Most male and female respondents report regular use of English in their EFL environments. Most students (37.83%) use English sometimes, 33.78% use it often, and 12.16% use it consistently. The fact that very few students report never using English (1.35%) suggests a high level of engagement with the language, which is essential in an academic EFL setting. The higher percentage of females using English more frequently than males could reflect a cultural tendency for females to be more active participants in classroom settings, particularly in the context of language learning.

Participants' Focus on English Language Production	**Males**	**Females**	**Total**
Politeness	10%	17.1%	16.2%
Fluency	40%	31.2%	32.4%
Pronunciation	30%	31.2%	31.1%
Accuracy	20%	20.3%	20.3%

Table 3 Participants' Focus on English Language Production

The results of this item indicate that the majority of students (32.4%) prioritize fluency when speaking, followed by pronunciation (31.1%) and accuracy (20.3%). Notably, only 16.2% of students emphasize politeness, which suggests that politeness may not be viewed as a central feature of their language production. This could be attributed to the students' more significant focus on communicative efficiency (fluency) and clarity (pronunciation), which are often considered more immediately relevant to language learning, particularly in a foreign language environment.

Speech Acts	Males	Females
Request	10	44
Refusal	1	16
Offer	2	3
Greeting	1	9
Apology	3	41
Invitation	2	8
Disagreement	2	2
Acknowledgment	0	5
Warning	0	1
Compliment	0	5
Complaint	0	5
Regret	0	2
Advice	0	1

Table 4: Speech Acts that Need More Politeness According to Students

The data suggests that requests and apologies are the Speech acts most commonly associated with politeness by students. A substantial portion of both males (10) and females (44) identified requests as requiring politeness, with females also emphasizing apologies (41). This reinforces the idea that politeness is mainly associated with speech acts that involve interaction and personal engagement, such as asking for something or expressing regret. The difference in responses between males and females might reflect social norms, where females are more attuned to social expectations of politeness in communication, particularly in formal or semi-formal contexts.

Section Three Learners' Awareness of Politeness

Politeness' Importance According to Students	Males	Females	Total
Strongly Disagree	0	7.8%	6.8%
Disagree	0	4.6%	4.1%
Undecided	0	3.2%	2.7%
Agree	40%	35.9%	36.5%
Strongly Agree	60%	48.4%	50%

Table 5 Politeness' Importance According to Students

The data reveals that most students (86.5%) acknowledge the importance of politeness in speech acts, with 50% strongly agreeing. This indicates a high awareness of politeness's role in maintaining positive interactions, reinforcing the theoretical understanding of politeness as a crucial communication component in EFL settings.

Politeness' Relation to Socio-Pragmatics vs. Pragma-Linguistics	**Males**	**Females**	**Total**
Strongly Disagree	10%	1.5%	2.7%
Disagree	30%	6.2%	9.5%
Undecided	10%	29.6%	27%
Agree	10%	42.1%	37.8%
Strongly Agree	40%	20.3%	23%

Table 6 Students' Responses on Whether Politeness is More Related to Socio-Pragmatics Than to Pragma-Linguistics

Many students. (37.8%) agree that politeness is more related to socio-pragmatics than to pragma-linguistics, which underscores the recognition of politeness's cultural and social aspects. This shows that students understand that politeness strategies need to match the context shaped by cultural norms and social rules that govern how we communicate.

The data from the questionnaire clearly indicates that students are highly proficient in English and engage with the language frequently in both academic and social contexts. This is reflected in the high percentages of students who report using English "often" (33.78%) or "sometimes" (37.83%) in their EFL environment. The fact that a small percentage (1.35%) reports never using English in this setting indicates the widespread use of English in higher education, particularly within language and literature departments. This result suggests a general familiarity with the language, which is expected for first-year Master's students in linguistics, who are already expected to have a high level of competency in English.

However, the gender distribution within this data is an important consideration. The more significant number of female participants (86.48%) compared to male participants (13.51%) is not unusual in Algerian linguistic and literary studies, where women tend to outnumber men in these fields. This discrepancy in sample sizes may have influenced the results, particularly regarding language use, as females typically engage more in language-related activities than their male counterparts. The slight differences in language usage frequency between males and females could be attributed to this sample bias. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the overall use of English remains high among both genders, suggesting that language proficiency is a shared priority among the students, regardless of gender. These findings align with broader trends in global studies, where female students often report higher engagement in language learning and usage (Trudgill, 1995). However, the impact of gender imbalance on the results must be considered in future analyses.

The findings related to students' awareness of politeness indicate a high level of recognition regarding its importance in communication, which aligns with the general understanding of politeness in pragmatic theories. Most respondents (50%) strongly agreed that politeness is crucial to producing speech acts, with 36.5% agreeing. This suggests that most students recognize the importance of politeness as a fundamental component of effective communication, particularly within formal and academic contexts. They seem to appreciate that maintaining a respectful and courteous demeanor not only facilitates smoother interactions but also fosters a positive atmosphere conducive to learning and collaboration. The importance of politeness in EFL classrooms is widely acknowledged in the literature, as politeness strategies help manage social relationships and reduce the likelihood of face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This awareness is vital for students engaging in intercultural communication, where maintaining politeness is crucial for building rapport and avoiding misunderstandings (Holmes, 1995).

The strong agreement from students regarding the importance of politeness also reflects a cultural and educational shift toward greater emphasis on social skills in language acquisition. Previous studies, such as those by Scollon and Scollon (2001), have highlighted how politeness strategies help students navigate linguistic correctness and social appropriateness, making it an essential skill in any language-learning context. Thus, the responses here indicate that the students understand politeness as a tool for ensuring smoother interactions and maintaining

positive relationships within academic environments. However, it is essential to consider the slight differences between male and female responses in this section. While both genders largely agreed that politeness is important, a slightly higher percentage of female students strongly agreed than male students (48.4% vs. 60%), suggesting that female students are more attuned to the significance of politeness in communication. This finding might be linked to the broader socialization processes that often emphasize social and communicative behaviors for females, encouraging them to be more mindful of interpersonal dynamics in both social and academic contexts (Tannen, 1990).

Although students recognize the importance of politeness, their awareness of specific politeness strategies appears more limited. The responses indicate that most students understand the concept of solidarity (51.4% agreement) and the importance of formal language (35.1% agreement) as politeness strategies. However, they show less confidence regarding strategies such as indirectness and hedging. This is evident from the higher percentage of undecided responses (36.5%) regarding using indirectness as a politeness strategy. This suggests that while students may conceptually understand that politeness is important, they may not fully grasp or apply more nuanced strategies like hedging or indirectness in their communication.

Hedging, a strategy often used to mitigate the force of an utterance and reduce imposition, was recognized by a substantial portion of the students (47.3% agreeing and 29.7% strongly agreeing). However, a significant percentage of students (36.5%) remained undecided about this strategy, indicating uncertainty regarding its application in everyday communication. This could indicate a gap in their ability to practically apply such strategies, especially in more complex or culturally sensitive interactions. Indirectness, which is often used to save face and reduce the directness of speech acts, is another strategy with which students showed limited familiarity. Indirectness is a key element of politeness strategies in many cultures and can help maintain harmony in communication. However, the lack of consensus on this strategy might suggest that students are more focused on direct forms of communication, which could be more typical in their classroom interactions or personal communication styles.This gap in students' awareness of subtle politeness strategies, like hedging and indirectness, aligns with research by Kasper and Rose (2001), who noted that learners often struggle with the pragmatic aspects of language, especially those strategies that involve nuanced social awareness. It indicates that while students may be able to identify basic strategies, they may lack the deeper cultural and contextual understanding required to use strategies like indirectness effectively, particularly in situations that involve high impositions or when interacting with strangers or higher-status individuals. Therefore, while students appreciate the theoretical value of politeness strategies, they may need further exposure and training in applying these strategies effectively, particularly in contexts where face-threatening acts are more likely. Additionally, the discrepancy between students' recognition of solidarity and their understanding of hedging or indirectness might reflect a broader tendency to prioritize direct communication, especially in academic environments where clarity and precision are emphasized. However, as they engage more in real-world language use outside of the classroom, these students may need further guidance on the subtleties of politeness in varied social contexts.

These findings from the questionnaire suggest that while Master I students are aware of the importance of politeness in communication, they still face challenges in applying nuanced politeness strategies, particularly indirectness and hedging. The following section will delve deeper into the students' use of these strategies in specific communicative scenarios, as examined through the discourse completion task (DCT). Through the DCT, we will be able to triangulate the results from the questionnaire and further explore how students' theoretical awareness of politeness aligns with their actual use of these strategies in different contexts

3.2.Discourse Completion Task (DCT)

In this section, the responses to the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) are analyzed through the lens of politeness strategies as conceptualized by Brown and Levinson (1987). These strategies—positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record, and bald on-record—offer insight into how students navigate the delicate balance of social norms and expectations in their interactions, particularly in a classroom context.

3.2.1.General Overview of Politeness Strategies Used

From the responses to the DCT, negative politeness emerged as the most dominant strategy employed by students across various situations. This strategy is typically used when the speaker wants to avoid imposing on the hearer and recognizes the potential face-threatening nature of the act. Negative politeness was predominantly used in situations involving making requests, offering apologies, or refusing a request from a stranger or authority figure, which are typical of face-threatening acts (FTAs).

This preference for negative politeness can be interpreted as an explicit acknowledgment by students of the power dynamics in their classroom environment. Students know that requests and apologies directed toward their teachers or individuals of higher social standing demand careful attention to the other's autonomy. This aligns with Brown and Levinson's assertion that negative politeness is employed in interactions with a social distance or an inherent imbalance of power, as it minimizes the threat to the hearer's face by hedging and providing room for refusal or rejection.

3.2.2.Off-record Strategies

Though less frequent than negative politeness, off-record strategies were still used in several situations, particularly where the speaker may want to avoid confrontation or face-threatening behaviour. These strategies involve indirectness or ambiguity in communication, allowing the speaker to make the FTA less explicit and thus less threatening to the hearer's face.
In the DCT responses, students often employed off-record strategies in situations involving refusal or disagreement. These situations inherently create a potential threat to the hearer's face, and students likely turned to indirect language to avoid direct face-threatening confrontation. For example, when refusing a classmate's request or disagreeing with a teacher, students used vaguer, more indirect language that could allow for interpretation, thereby softening the imposition.

This indicates that students understand the subtleties involved in maintaining interpersonal harmony. Using off-record strategies suggests a cultural inclination towards avoiding direct or harsh denials, consistent with societal norms prioritizing maintaining good relationships, especially within the classroom.

3.2.3.Bald-on-Record and Positive Politeness

The employment of bald-on-record was unexpectedly sparse in the responses analyzed. This politeness strategy is generally utilized in contexts characterized by minimal social distance between participants or when the speaker possesses a sufficient degree of comfort to articulate a direct assertion. Given the classroom context and the hierarchical relationship between students and teachers, it is unsurprising that bald-on-record strategies were avoided when face-threatening acts were at stake. Similarly, positive politeness strategies were less frequently used, emphasizing friendliness, solidarity, and shared identity between the speaker and the hearer. These strategies are typically used to mitigate the threat to the hearer's positive face by affirming their value, offering compliments, or showing warmth. While positive politeness was evident in certain situations, mainly when students made requests or offered apologies, it was not as widely adopted as negative politeness. The limited use of positive politeness might suggest that students are less inclined to emphasize solidarity and rapport in contexts involving authority figures or formal settings, such as classroom interactions. In these settings, the need to show respect and minimize imposition outweighs the desire to affirm solidarity or express warmth, reflecting a more formal classroom communication approach.

3.2.4.Gender Differences in Strategy Use

Regarding gender differences, both male and female students predominantly relied on negative politeness strategies, which suggests a shared understanding of the need to mitigate imposition in formal or power-imbalanced interactions. However, slight variations were observed in how males and females employed other strategies. Males showed a stronger preference for positive politeness in certain situations, particularly in contexts of disagreement or refusal. This may reflect a tendency among male students to soften the potential threat of a disagreement by maintaining rapport and acknowledging the teacher's position in a more overtly respectful manner, as opposed to distancing themselves. Females, conversely, were more likely to use negative politeness or off-record strategies, possibly reflecting a greater sensitivity to preserving the teacher's face and avoiding confrontation or imposition. Females' responses suggest a higher emphasis on respecting authority figures and maintaining a more cautious, reserved approach in their interactions.

3.2.5.Interpretation of the DCT Results

The tendency to use negative politeness strategies aligns with the cultural expectations and norms related to classroom interactions in Algeria, where respect for authority and protecting one's image are very important. The consistent use of indirectness through off-record strategies further suggests that students are conscious of the delicate balance required in academic settings, where direct confrontation or overly assertive behavior may be viewed negatively. Moreover, the minimal use of positive politeness and bald-on-record strategies could indicate that students are less concerned with establishing solidarity or displaying familiarity in formal classroom settings, where social hierarchies are more prominent. These findings suggest that students prioritize maintaining social distance and avoiding face-threatening situations rather than emphasizing warmth and closeness.

The results from the DCT align with the questionnaire data in several ways. The questionnaire revealed that students are generally aware of the importance of politeness in communication, with a strong consensus around the idea that politeness strategies contribute to successful English communication. This awareness was reflected in the DCT responses, where

students preferred strategies that minimize imposition and respect the teacher's authority. However, the questionnaire also revealed that students are more concerned with fluency, pronunciation, and accuracy in their spoken English than politeness, which might explain the relatively limited use of positive politeness in the DCT. Students prioritize communication effectiveness over the nuanced application of politeness strategies, especially when interacting with peers. The intersection of the questionnaire and DCT findings suggests that while students understand the theoretical importance of politeness, their practical application of politeness strategies—especially in balancing directness and indirectness—can be improved. The over-reliance on negative politeness and off-record strategies may indicate that students tend to err on the side of caution, possibly due to a lack of familiarity or confidence in applying more diverse politeness strategies in everyday communication.

3.3.Discussion and Interpretation

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The Discourse Completion Task (DCT) results indicate a clear pattern in the use of negative politeness strategies by Master I students in their interactions within the EFL classroom. This aligns with findings in the questionnaire, where students acknowledged the importance of politeness and its relevance in communication. The negative politeness strategy was primarily used across various situations, notably when students requested favours, refused requests, or apologized. This indicates that students prioritize respecting others' autonomy and minimizing imposition, characteristic of the negative politeness strategy, designed to avoid threatening the hearer's negative face (Brown and Levinson, 1987). The frequent use of off-record strategies further supports this, as students often employed indirect forms of Speech to maintain social harmony and avoid confrontation. When they needed to refuse requests or express disagreement, students opted for more indirect forms of communication, which allowed them to avoid face-threatening acts and preserve the relationship with the interlocutor.

This behavior aligns with off-record strategies, which involve indirectness or vagueness, allowing for more remarkable politeness by allowing the hearer to disregard the request without a direct refusal. Interestingly, positive politeness was less commonly used across the

board, suggesting that students are more concerned with respecting authority figures and maintaining social distance than engaging in strategies to foster closeness or solidarity. This could reflect the more formal, hierarchical nature of classroom settings, where students may feel less comfortable employing strategies that involve creating personal connections or closeness with teachers and peers. Bald on-record strategies involving direct and unambiguous Speech were rarely employed, especially in situations involving authority figures. This suggests that students are aware of the potential risks of using blunt language when interacting with teachers, given the power dynamics in the EFL classroom. The rare use of this strategy indicates that students likely understand that maintaining politeness through mitigated language is more appropriate in academic settings.

Gender differences were also apparent in the DCT results, particularly in terms of using positive politeness strategies. Male students demonstrated a slight preference for employing positive politeness when disagreeing with teachers, which could be interpreted as a strategy to soften the impact of their disagreement and maintain a more harmonious interaction. On the other hand, female students predominantly used negative politeness strategies in similar situations, indicating a preference for distancing themselves from imposing on others or threatening their autonomy.

In conclusion, the interpretation of both the questionnaire and DCT findings highlights that negative politeness is the most frequently used strategy by Master I students in their EFL classroom interactions. This is in line with their awareness of the importance of politeness, as demonstrated in the questionnaire, where most students acknowledged politeness's role in communication. However, the practical application of politeness strategies, especially those related to indirectness and hedging, shows that students may need further guidance in understanding the subtleties of these strategies. Using off-record strategies, while less frequent than negative politeness, also reflects students' awareness of the need to mitigate face-threatening acts in their classroom interactions. The findings suggest that students are sensitive to their classroom's power dynamics and social context, preferring strategies that preserve social distance and respect for authority. These findings provide valuable insights into the students' pragmatic competence and ability to use politeness strategies effectively in real-life EFL classroom settings.

4. Pedagogical Implications

The findings from this research reveal that Master I students in the EFL classroom know the importance of politeness in communication. However, their practical use of politeness strategies is limited. While negative politeness strategies were the most frequently used across various situations, positive politeness, off-record, and bald on-record strategies were less pronounced. This gap between awareness and practical application highlights several important implications for teachers, students, curriculum designers, and policymakers.

4.1. For Teachers

Teachers play a crucial role in developing students' pragmatic competence. The findings suggest that, while students understand the importance of politeness in communication, their use of politeness strategies often lacks subtlety, particularly in more complex interpersonal situations. To address this issue, teachers should:

- Explicitly teach politeness strategies: Teachers can integrate explicit instruction on various politeness strategies (e.g., negative politeness, positive politeness, off-record, and bald on-record) into classroom activities. By presenting these strategies within context and explaining their cultural and social relevance, teachers can help students become more aware of their practical applications in different settings.
- Encourage practice in real-life scenarios: Teachers should provide students with opportunities to practice politeness strategies in authentic communication settings, such as role plays, debates, or group discussions. This will help students better understand how to navigate real-world conversations with peers, teachers, and authority figures.
- Foster reflection on intercultural differences: Teachers should encourage students to explore how politeness varies across cultures, fostering a deeper understanding of the socio-pragmatic aspects of communication. This could be done through discussions, case studies, or analysis of cross-cultural communication scenarios.

4.2. For Students

The study suggests that students may have a theoretical understanding of politeness but lack the practical skills to use politeness strategies effectively. Students should:

- Focus on expanding their pragmatic competence: Students must understand how politeness strategies are used in honest communication, not just in theory. They can achieve this by engaging in more communicative activities, seeking authentic language input (such as media, literature, or conversations with native speakers), and applying politeness strategies in formal and informal contexts.
- Embrace indirectness and hedging: Given that indirectness and hedging are essential components of politeness in many situations, students should be more aware of these strategies and practice incorporating them into their Speech. Understanding when and how to use indirect Speech can help students navigate socially sensitive situations and communicate more effectively.
- Develop an awareness of gender differences: Gender differences were observed in the use of politeness strategies (particularly positive politeness). Students should reflect on how their own language use might be influenced by gender and other social factors. Developing a more nuanced understanding of these differences can enhance their interpersonal communication skills.

4.3. For Curriculum Designers

The findings suggest that while politeness is acknowledged in the curriculum, there is insufficient emphasis on the practical application of politeness strategies in communication. Curriculum designers should:

- Integrate pragmatics into language learning: Curriculum designers should prioritize pragmatic competence by incorporating activities that focus on the theoretical and practical aspects of politeness. This includes integrating discourse analysis, role-playing exercises, and simulations of real-world communication scenarios.
- Ensure intercultural competence: Since politeness norms can differ significantly across cultures, curriculum designers should ensure students are exposed to diverse cultural norms and practices. This will prepare students to engage in intercultural communication and understand the socio-pragmatic context in which language is used.

- Provide practical frameworks for politeness: Designing materials and exercises that allow students to practice politeness strategies in a variety of contexts-academic, professional, and social-will be crucial in bridging the gap between students' theoretical knowledge and their practical application of politeness strategies.

4.4. For Policymakers

Policymakers involved in education reform and curriculum development must recognize the role of pragmatics in language proficiency. Based on the findings of this study, policymakers should:

- Support the inclusion of pragmatics in national curricula: Policymakers should advocate for integrating pragmatics, including politeness strategies, into the language curricula at all educational levels. This will enhance students' language proficiency and prepare them for the social and professional communication challenges they will face.
- Promote teacher training in pragmatics: Given that students may struggle to apply politeness strategies effectively, policymakers should ensure that teacher training programs incorporate instruction on pragmatics and socio-pragmatics. Teachers need professional development opportunities to learn how to teach these skills effectively.

5. Recommendations

It is recommended that teachers explicitly incorporate pragmatic instruction into the classroom. Teachers can integrate role-plays, dialogues, and case studies focused on real-life situations where politeness strategies are necessary, providing students with opportunities to practice using negative politeness, positive politeness, off-record, and bald on-record strategies in varied contexts. By embedding pragmatic lessons into everyday communication activities, students can better understand how politeness functions in different settings and become better equipped to navigate complex social interactions. Cultural norms deeply influence politeness strategies, which should be a central focus in language instruction. Teachers and curriculum designers must provide students with a solid understanding of how politeness varies across cultures. This can be achieved by integrating cross-cultural communication exercises, films, readings, and discussions into the curriculum, highlighting these cultural differences. By contextualizing politeness strategies within the broader framework of intercultural communication, students can develop a more nuanced appreciation of the diversity of social practices and expectations in different linguistic and cultural settings.

The results indicated some gender-based differences in the use of politeness strategies. These differences, which societal expectations and norms may influence, offer an opportunity for further study and reflection. Teachers can use this information to discuss how language and politeness are interconnected with social factors such as gender, power, and status. Incorporating these discussions into classroom activities can deepen students' understanding of the nuances of politeness and encourage critical thinking about how language can reflect and reinforce societal roles.

Students should be encouraged to engage with authentic materials, such as films, interviews, podcasts, and literature, demonstrating politeness strategies in real-life contexts. This exposure can help students recognize how politeness strategies function in various formal and informal communicative settings. Students can learn to identify and apply these strategies naturally by interacting with real-world examples of language use, improving their pragmatic

competence in everyday communication. Furthermore, students can benefit greatly from peer interactions where they practice politeness strategies in a supportive environment. Peer feedback, particularly during role-playing exercises, allows students to evaluate and refine their use of these strategies. This collaborative learning process can foster a deeper understanding of pragmatics as students receive constructive feedback and gain insights into how others approach politeness in communication.

It is recommended that further research be conducted to examine the application of politeness strategies among different student populations, including those from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This will allow for more targeted pedagogical recommendations and contribute to refining the strategies used in teaching pragmatics in EFL classrooms. Additionally, exploring gender and cultural variables in the context of politeness strategies can offer further insights into the complexities of communication and contribute to more inclusive, context-sensitive language education.

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