THE IMPLEMENTATION OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE THE SPEECH ACT COMPETENCE OF ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDENTS: A STUDY AT ENGLISH DEPARTMENT AT INSTITUT AGAMA ISLAM NEGERI KERINCI

Ami Fauzia[1], Holis Idami[2], Muhammad Husaini[3]

[1,2,3]IAIN (Institut Agama Islam Negeri) Kerinci
E-mail : amifauzia@iainkerinci.ac.id[1], holisidami001@gmail.com[2], muhammadhusaini@iainkerinci.ac.id[3]

ABSTRACT

This study examines the use of politeness strategies and their relation to students' speech act competence in various communication contexts. The objectives are to identify the types of politeness strategies employed in students' utterances and to describe in detail how these strategies are realized in both daily interactions and academic settings. This research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach, designed to present observed phenomena naturally without any modification or manipulation. The study was conducted at the English Education Study Program, Institute Agama Islam Negeri Kerinci, with fifth-semester students as the population and sample, as they are assumed to have sufficient knowledge and communication experience. Data were collected using observation and conversational methods, while analysis was carried out using equivalent and pragmatic approaches to interpret the intended meaning accurately. The results are presented descriptively. The findings reveal three categories of speech acts: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. Politeness strategies are manifested in two forms: direct and indirect speech acts. Both forms contain politeness elements including giving reasons, making apologies, expressing gratitude, and making requests.

Keywords : *Politeness Strategies, Speech Acts, Speech Competence, Communication*

INTRODUCTION

Language serves as the primary tool of communication used by humans to convey intentions, thoughts, and feelings to others. In the process of communication, speakers do not merely transmit information; they also perform certain actions through their utterances. This phenomenon, known in pragmatics as speech acts, was first introduced by Austin (1962) and later developed by Searle (1969). They explain that every utterance consists of three dimensions of action: the locutionary act, the illocutionary act, and the perlocutionary act. These three dimensions are interrelated and determine the success of communication between the speaker and the interlocutor.

In the context of English language education, speech act competence is one of the essential aspects that students must master, particularly those in the English Education Study Program who are preparing to become future educators. Mastery of speech acts involves not only grammatical proficiency but also pragmatic competence—the ability to understand and use language appropriately according to its social and cultural context. One pragmatic aspect closely linked to speech acts is the use of politeness strategies.

Politeness in language plays a vital role in maintaining social relationships between speakers, especially in communities that uphold values of respect and courtesy, such as in an Islamic-based academic environment. Brown and Levinson (1987) propose that politeness strategies are employed by speakers to minimize threats to the interlocutor's "face," using both positive and negative politeness approaches. These strategies can be realized through direct speech acts or indirect speech acts, each serving distinct communicative functions and effects.

Although numerous studies have investigated speech acts and politeness strategies in educational settings, limited research has specifically examined how politeness strategies contribute to the development of speech act competence among English Education students in Islamic higher education contexts, particularly at IAIN Kerinci. Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the realization of politeness strategies and their role in enhancing students' speech act competence. Recent studies have highlighted the importance of social and academic factors in shaping students' communicative competence. Ihsan et al. (2025) demonstrated that linguistic choices are influenced by social class and power relations within the Kerinci community, indicating that language use is closely related to social context. In addition, Husaini and Fauzia (2025) found that linguistic education-based learning models contribute significantly to the development of students' academic literacy, which supports their ability to understand and apply language appropriately in academic interactions. These findings suggest that both social awareness and academic literacy play important roles in the realization of speech acts and politeness strategies among university students.

Based on preliminary observations conducted at the English Education Study Program of the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Kerinci, it was found that fifth-semester students—who theoretically have acquired sufficient knowledge of pragmatics and communication experience—still show variations in applying politeness strategies during interactions, both in daily conversation and academic settings such as class discussions, presentations, and communication with lecturers. Some students tend to use direct speech acts without considering elements of politeness, while others are able to apply politeness strategies through expressions such as providing reasons, offering apologies, expressing gratitude, and making requests in a respectful manner.

This phenomenon warrants further investigation, as competent use of speech acts accompanied by appropriate politeness strategies significantly supports students' academic and professional development. This is especially important for those training to become English teachers, who must communicate effectively and courteously with students, fellow educators, and the wider community. Therefore, this study aims to identify the types of politeness strategies used by students and to describe in detail how these strategies are realized in their utterances, both through direct and indirect speech acts. The findings are intended to deepen understanding of how politeness strategies can be applied to improve the speech act competence of students in the English Education Study Program.

METHOD

Research methodology refers to the tools, procedures, and techniques employed to conduct a study and achieve its objectives (Djajasudarma, 1993, p. 3). Consistent with the issues raised in the background, namely the need to identify and describe the application of politeness strategies and their realization in speech acts, this study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. As stated by Arikunto (1993, p. 310), the descriptive method presents data objectively, factually, and in accordance with actual conditions without manipulation. This method is appropriate as it aims to describe the phenomenon of language use as it naturally occurs, providing an accurate and detailed account of the observed patterns. The data used in this study are primary data, obtained directly from the research setting and relevant to the problem under investigation.

The source consists of utterances, dialogues, and conversations produced by students of the English Education Study Program, which contain instances of politeness and speech acts. Data were collected using two techniques: the observational method, which involves carefully listening to and recording conversations, and the conversational method, where the researcher participates directly in interactions to obtain natural and authentic data. Data analysis was carried out using the pragmatic equivalent method. According to Sudaryanto (1993, pp. 13–15), this approach interprets utterances by referring to the context of communication and the interlocutor as the main reference points. The analysis involves classifying utterances according to their speech act types and politeness forms, interpreting their intended meanings, and presenting the findings in a descriptive narrative form.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Results of the Study

This section presents the findings obtained from analyzing the utterances and interactions of fifth-semester students of the English Education Study Program at Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kerinci. The data were collected through observation and participation in daily conversations, class discussions, presentations, and interactions between students and lecturers. The analysis focuses on two main variables: the types of speech acts performed by students and the realization of politeness strategies in those speech acts.

Types of Speech Acts Used by Students

Based on the classification proposed by Austin (1962) and further developed by Searle (1969), every utterance carries three dimensions of action: locutionary act, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary act. The results show that all three types of speech acts were clearly identified in

the students' communication, indicating that their language use goes beyond mere grammatical correctness and serves specific communicative purposes.

a. Locutionary Act

The locutionary act refers to the physical production of sounds, words, and sentences with a specific literal meaning. In this study, locutionary acts were found in all forms of communication, ranging from simple statements to complex expressions. For example, when a student says, *"I cannot do this job alone,"* the locutionary act is the utterance itself, which literally means that the speaker is unable to complete the task without help. The analysis revealed that students generally have good control over this aspect; they can construct sentences correctly and convey the literal meaning of their messages clearly. This is understandable given their training in English grammar and structure since the first semester of their study.

b. Illocutionary Act

The illocutionary act refers to the intention or communicative function behind the utterance. This is the most important dimension in pragmatics, as it explains *what the speaker does* by speaking. The findings show that students use various illocutionary acts, including making requests, giving reasons, apologizing, expressing gratitude, asking for permission, and giving opinions. For instance, the utterance *"I cannot do this job alone"* not only states a fact but also functions as an indirect request for assistance. The study found that illocutionary acts were realized in two ways: explicitly, where the intention is directly stated, and implicitly, where the intention is inferred from the context.

c. Perlocutionary Act

The perlocutionary act refers to the effect or impact that the utterance has on the listener or the situation. It represents the result achieved through communication. In the data collected, perlocutionary acts included receiving help, obtaining permission, getting a positive response, maintaining a good relationship, or avoiding conflict. For example, when a student politely asks for an extension of time to submit work, the perlocutionary effect could be the lecturer granting the request or at least understanding the student's situation. The results indicate that when students used appropriate politeness strategies, their utterances tended to produce positive and cooperative responses from others.

Realization of Politeness Strategies

The fifth major finding concerns how politeness strategies are applied in students' speech acts. Referring to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, speakers use strategies to minimize threats to the interlocutor's "face," the public self-image that every person wants to maintain. The analysis shows that students use two main forms of speech acts to express politeness: direct speech acts and indirect speech acts.

a. Politeness in Direct Speech Acts

Direct speech acts occur when the structure of the utterance directly matches its intended function. For example, using an interrogative sentence to ask a question, or an imperative sentence to give a command or make a request. The results show that direct speech acts were mostly used in situations where the social distance between speakers was small, such as conversations between close friends, or when the matter was simple and informal.

However, even in direct speech acts, students still applied elements of politeness to avoid sounding rude or imposing. The data shows that politeness was achieved through the inclusion of supporting expressions, such as:

Giving reasons: *"May I borrow your pen? I left my pen at home."*

Expressing apologies: *"I am sorry, but could you repeat this part again?"*
Showing gratitude: *"Thank you for coming to my house ."*
Using polite markers: Words such as *please, excuse me, may,* and *could* were frequently added to soften the tone.

This indicates that students understand that directness does not necessarily mean impoliteness; it can still be acceptable if accompanied by appropriate linguistic markers and consideration for the listener.

b. Politeness in Indirect Speech Acts

Indirect speech acts occur when the intended meaning differs from the literal meaning of the utterance. This strategy is used to reduce the pressure or imposition on the listener, thus preserving their face and showing greater respect. The findings reveal that indirect speech acts were more commonly used in formal contexts, such as when speaking to lecturers, seniors, or people of higher status.

For example, instead of saying directly *"Open the door,"* a student would say *"It feels a bit warm in here, doesn't it?"* The literal meaning is a comment on the temperature, but the intended function is a request to open the window. The analysis shows that this strategy was preferred when making requests, giving suggestions, or expressing disagreement, as it sounds more tactful and respectful.

The elements of politeness found in indirect speech acts were similar to those in direct speech acts, but they were embedded in a more subtle way. Reasons, apologies, and gratitude were often used to frame the utterance so that the listener would understand the intention without feeling pressured.

Discussion

The results of this study provide important insights into the speech act competence and politeness awareness of English Education students at IAIN Kerinci. The findings are discussed in relation to the theories used, previous research, and the context of this study.

Speech Act Competence of Students

The presence of all three types of speech acts, locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary, confirms that students have developed more than just linguistic competence; they are also developing pragmatic competence. According to Canale and Swain (1980), communicative competence consists of four components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. In this study, the ability to produce locutionary acts reflects their grammatical competence, while the ability to perform illocutionary and perlocutionary acts reflects their sociolinguistic and strategic competence.

This finding is consistent with the curriculum of the English Education program, which includes courses such as Pragmatics, Sociolinguistics, and Speaking Skills. By the fifth semester, students have been exposed to these concepts and are expected to apply them in real communication. However, the data also shows variations in performance: some students are more skilled at conveying their intentions clearly and appropriately, while others still rely heavily on direct utterances that may sometimes sound too straightforward. This suggests that while they have the theoretical knowledge, they still need more practice in using language according to social context.

The findings also support Husaini and Fauzia (2025), who emphasize the importance of academic literacy in language learning. Students who demonstrate higher levels of literacy tend to

show greater awareness of communicative purposes and pragmatic appropriateness, which contributes to the effective use of speech acts in academic settings.

Application of Politeness Strategies

The use of both direct and indirect speech acts as politeness strategies supports Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, which states that the choice of strategy depends on three factors: the social distance between speakers, the relative power or status, and the degree of imposition involved in the utterance. In this study, students naturally adjusted their speech according to these factors. They used direct forms with friends and indirect forms with lecturers or in formal situations. This shows that they are already aware of the social rules governing language use in their environment.

The influence of social context observed in this study is consistent with the findings of Ihsan et al. (2025), who reported that linguistic choices are often shaped by social class and power relations. Similarly, the participants adjusted their politeness strategies according to the status and relationship of their interlocutors.

Furthermore, the findings reflect the cultural and religious values of the institution. IAIN Kerinci is an Islamic-based university, where respect, modesty, and good manners are highly emphasized. The use of reasons, apologies, and expressions of gratitude found in the data is not only a linguistic choice but also a reflection of the local culture and Islamic teachings that encourage polite and respectful behavior in all interactions. This aligns with the view of Wierzbicka (2003), who argues that politeness is not universal but is shaped by cultural norms and values.

Implications for Future Educators

Since the participants in this study are training to become English teachers, their competence in speech acts and politeness strategies has significant professional implications. As future educators, they will not only teach language rules but also serve as role models for their students. A teacher who understands how to use language appropriately and politely can create a positive classroom atmosphere, build good relationships with students, and demonstrate effective communication.

The results show that students already possess a basic foundation in this area, but there is still room for improvement. Some students tend to be too direct when making requests or giving opinions, which in certain contexts may be perceived as impolite or disrespectful. This indicates that the teaching of pragmatics and politeness should be given more emphasis in the classroom, with more examples and practice activities that simulate real-life situations. By strengthening this competence, students will be better prepared to communicate effectively and professionally in their future careers.

Comparison with Previous Studies

These findings are in line with several previous studies in the field of pragmatics. For example, a study by Pratiwi (2020) on speech acts and politeness among university students found similar results: students use both direct and indirect strategies, and their choice is influenced by context and social relationship. Another study by Sari (2021) in an Islamic university setting also noted that students apply politeness markers such as apologies, reasons, and gratitude, influenced by both language learning and cultural values. This confirms that the pattern observed in this research is consistent with general trends in language learning and social interaction in Indonesia.

3. Conclusion of the Results

The analysis of data collected from observations and interactions among fifth-semester students of the English Education Study Program shows that their communication involves all three dimensions of speech acts: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary. This indicates that students have developed not only grammatical competence to produce correct utterances but also the ability to convey clear intentions and achieve desired effects in conversation. From the data, politeness strategies are realized through two main patterns direct and indirect speech acts which are adjusted according to the context and social relationship between speakers. Direct utterances mostly appear in informal situations with peers, while indirect forms are more frequently used in formal interactions, such as when speaking with lecturers, to reduce imposition and show respect. The data also reveals that politeness is consistently marked by supporting elements, including giving reasons, making apologies, expressing gratitude, and using polite expressions. These patterns reflect both the students' learning progress and the cultural-religious values upheld in the academic environment. Although the findings show that students already possess sufficient awareness and basic ability to apply appropriate strategies, variations in their performance suggest that further practice and exposure to different communication situations are still needed to improve their competence.

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