

THE SPEECH ACT OF DISAGREEMENT BY INDONESIAN EFL LEARNERS: POLITENESS STRATEGIES AND APPROPRIATENESS

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ABSTRACT

Expressing disagreement is quite challenging for EFL learners especially because it may threaten the interlocutor's face. Some studies reveal that the speech act of disagreement is a dispreferred or undesired response for the previous speaker (Pomerantz 1984, Spencer-Oatey 2000, Cheng & Tsui 2009). Unless disagreement expression is conducted appropriately, the communication breakdown or pragmatic failure possibly happens during the interaction. Therefore, to elicit the speech act of agreement, the speaker should employ politeness strategies accurately that are influenced by power, distance and rank between the communications participants (Brown and Levinson, 1987). This paper explores disagreement strategies elicited by Indonesian EFL learners, and evaluates the appropriateness of those strategies in L2 cultural context. Nineteen EFL undergraduate students took part in this research and filled out the discourse completion tasks (DCTs) concerning with disagreement expressions. The elicited responses were analyzed primarily by using disagreement strategies theories proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Muntigl & Turnbull (1998). In order to identify the appropriateness level of the expression, the data were rated by an American native speaker by using the Likert scale. The findings showed that the EFL learners used counterclaims most frequently (47%). It was followed by contradiction (22.8%), contradiction and counterclaim (7.6%), and token agreement (4.09%). Besides, the combination of strategies were also utilized by the respondents such as contradiction and reasoning (4.1%), counterclaim and contradiction (2.9%), token agreement and thanking (1.2%), counterclaim and thanking (2.3%), token agreement and reasoning (0.6%), thanking and token agreement (1.2%), thanking and counterclaim (1.2%), refusal and counterclaim (1.8%), refusal and contradiction (1.7%). It was also found that EFL learners used apology (0.58%), thanking (0.58%) and refusal (1.16%). In relation to the appropriateness level, the results showed that only 6.5% of the responses were considered appropriate. It indicated that most of the EFL learners' disagreement responses were inappropriate or less appropriate due to the effect of L1 interference.

Keywords: *disagreement, EFL learners, politeness strategy, appropriateness*

INTRODUCTION

Speech act of disagreement is a speech act expressing speaker's opinion or belief, which is different from the interlocutor's view or belief. It is expressed as a response opposing a statement made by a prior speaker (Pomerantz, 1984). Clearly, it is not easy for EFL learners to comply disagreement since they have to adapt second language (L2) cultural knowledge during interaction with Native Speaker (NS) to prevent miscommunication. This paper explores the disagreement strategies elicited by Indonesian EFL learners and evaluates whether the strategies used are appropriate in L2 cultural context.

Unlike politeness, appropriateness in pragmatic production is reflected in multi levels; it manifests the knowledge of the convention of communication and linguistic ability that assist the learners to communicate successfully in L2 (Taguchi, 2006; Norquist, 2017). To analyze the status of appropriate/inappropriate in a speech act refers to felicity conditions. Austin (1962 in Norquist, 2017) emphasizes that felicity conditions refer to the condition that 'must be in place and the criteria that must be satisfied for a speech act to achieve its purpose' (p.4). Hence, it is crucial for EFL learners to comprehend the cultural context difference and linguistic devices simultaneously to express speech act of disagreement. The focus of this article was to find out the strategies used by EFL students in expressing disagreement related to power and the appropriateness those strategies with L2 cultural context. Therefore, the following research questions were central to this study:

- RQ1: What are the strategies used by EFL students in expressing disagreement related to power?
- RQ2: To what extent are those strategies appropriate with L2 cultural context?

METHODOLOGY

Nineteen EFL undergraduate students took part in this research. They have learned English as a foreign language since they were in junior high school, and recently continue their study in teacher training faculty in one of the private colleges in Banten - Indonesia.

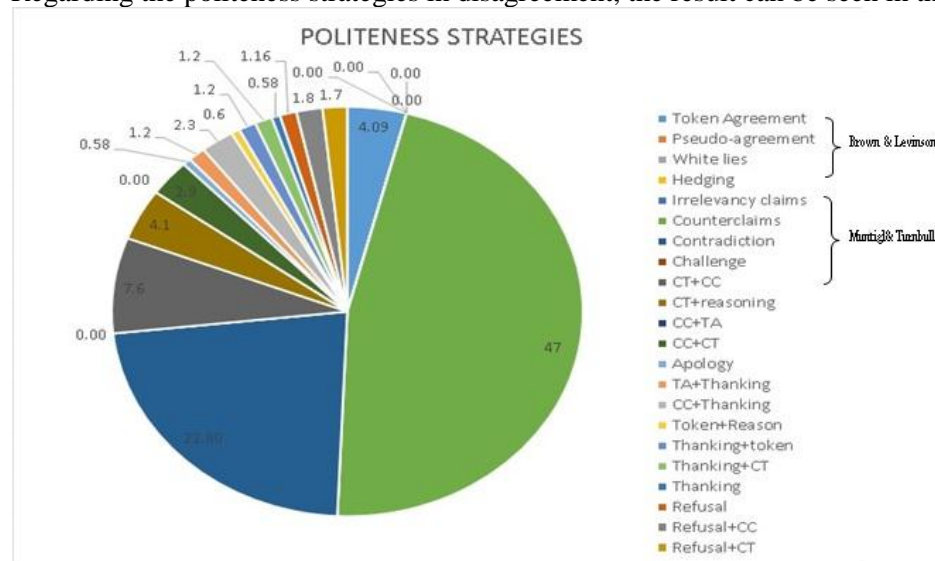
The respondents were asked to do a task created in the form of DCT after giving a short briefing and filling the form of consent. As the instrument of the research, DCT can be used to elicit the required speech act from the participants based on the given context situation (Aufa, 2014). In this study, DCT was designed to stimulate the participants to express their speech act of disagreement to different interlocutors and context situations. There are three types of situations: interlocutor's power differences (P), social distance (D) and the size of the imposition (R) (Brown and Levinson 1987). In situation A, the interlocutor's power was higher than the respondents. In condition B, the power relationship between the participants and interlocutors are equal. In situation C, the position of the interlocutors was lower than the respondents. Both situations A and C depicted the social distance, and the degree of imposition between the participants was large. The participants' responses were analyzed by using two methods: First, coding the linguistic expressions by identifying and classifying them by applying disagreement strategy proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), Muntigl, and Turnbull (1998).

Second, measuring the appropriateness level of EFL learners' production by using Likert Scale in scale 1 (very inappropriate) up to 5 (very appropriate). This method was combined with the feedback from a native American speaker who rated the level of the appropriateness as Wolfson (1986 in Shcherbakova, 2010) remarked that "native speakers are very well able to judge correctness and appropriateness of speech behavior in the everyday setting in which it occurs" (p.45).

ANALYSIS

Politeness Strategies

Regarding the politeness strategies in disagreement, the result can be seen in the following figure.



The figure showed the EFL learners used counterclaims most frequently (47%). It was followed by contradiction (22.8%), contradiction and counterclaim (7.6%), and token agreement (4.09%). Besides, the combination of strategies were also utilized by the respondents such as contradiction and reasoning (4.1%), counterclaim and contradiction (2.9%), token agreement and thanking (1.2%), counterclaim and thanking (2.3%), token agreement and reasoning (0.6%), thanking and token agreement (1.2%), thanking and counterclaim (1.2%), refusal and counterclaim (1.8%), refusal and contradiction (1.7%). It was also found that EFL learners used apology (0.58%), thanking (0.58%) and refusal (1.16%). For the politeness strategy of each situation will be described as follows.

Situations with higher interlocutors

With higher interlocutors, there are three situations provided. In this case, they disagree with the rector, supervisor, and policeman. The results of disagreement strategies employed by students with higher interlocutors showed that 3.50% of the participants used token agreement. There were 56.14% of the participants used counterclaim, 7.01% of the participants used contradiction, and 15.78% of the participants used contradiction followed by counterclaims. Referring to strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson, the data showed that only token agreement strategy employed by the participants. It could be seen that 3.50% of the participants used token agreement. It is one of strategy to show politeness when they disagree with their interlocutors. They are pretending to agree. The utterances used are "yes, but...". The response taken from participants such as "your suggestion is good but don't you think is it clear

research question?" it was the response when they disagree with their supervisor dealing with research questions modification.

Concerning the strategies proposed by Muntigl and Turnbull (1995), the data revealed that counterclaims are the most frequently used strategy by the participants. There were 56.14% of the participants using counterclaim. The counterclaim is the least face-threatening act comparing to other procedures. In this case, the speaker does not contradict directly (Muntigl & Turnbull, 1995). For examples the participants' utterances like "I think you must consider students' aspect", "excuse me, in my opinion, it should do step by step", "I am so sorry, I think it will be difficult," and many others are recognized as a counterclaim strategy. Those utterances reflected the speakers' disagreement, but they did not contradict directly. It was employed to save the interlocutor's positive face and try to be more indirect and more polite which is inlined with the study of Sadrameli and Haghverdi (2016).

Besides the previous strategies, the respondents also employ the contradiction followed by reasoning (10.52%), counterclaim followed by contradiction (1.75%), and apology (1.75%). For example *"I am sorry sir, I disagree with your plan because it is impossible", "I have formulated research questions clearly, so I think it is not necessary to modify them", "I am sorry sir."* The use of the expression 'I am sorry' in disagreement statement is quite interesting here. Based on the data, most of the participants said 'I am sorry.' Instead of showing apologize, the statement has function as show the politeness which is influenced by their cultural background to save the interlocutors' face since they had a different opinion with them.

Situations with equal interlocutors

While for the situations with equal interlocutors, there are three situations provided, i.e., disagree with a close friend, spouse, and neighbor. The results of disagreement strategies employed by students with equal interlocutors referring to disagreement strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) showed that there were 1.75% of the participants used token agreement, and 56.14% of participants applied counterclaim strategy. The data also depicted that 7.01% of participants employed contradiction, and 15.78% utilized contradiction strategy followed by counterclaim. Similar to the high interlocutors, only token agreement operated by the participant and the counterclaim was still the most frequently used strategy such as "sorry, but I like this a lot."

In addition, the data shows other strategies used by respondents which refer to Muntigl and Turnbull (1998). They were counterclaim followed by contradiction (5.26%) such as "This is my style. I disagree with your opinion", token agreement followed by thanking (3.50%) such as "I am sorry, but I love this style so much. Thanks for your suggestion", counterclaim followed by thanking (7.01%) such as "I like this style. Thanks for your suggestion", token followed by reasoning (1.75%) such as "Really? But I like it a lot. Probably because I never styled like this, so it looks weird. But later it will look interesting", and thank followed by token such as "Thank you, but I think he is good at working and I like his working" (1.75%). In this situation, some of the participants used thanking to save the interlocutors' face by not producing a direct contradiction. It is inlined with the study conducted by Bavarsad and Simin (2015).

Situations with lower interlocutors

For the situations with lower interlocutors, there were three situations provided, i.e. disagree with the babysitter, water, and sweeper of the street. The results of disagreement strategies employed by students with lower interlocutors showed that there were 7.01% of the participants used token agreement such as "Oh okay but I have searched for this house." There were 31.57% of the participants used counterclaims such as "I think this house is better than that house." There were 33.33% of the participants used contradiction such as "I think my kid is not necessary to be monitored by a psychiatrist." There were 5.26% used contradiction followed by counterclaims such as "I do not think so. I prefer my first choice".

In this situation, the data revealed that contradiction was the most frequently used strategy. The participants contradicted directly with their interlocutors. It seemed that they do not keep save the face of their interlocutors. They treated their interlocutors differently. They tried to save interlocutors' face when their interlocutors were higher. However, they did not save their lower interlocutors' face. Thus, power and distance greatly influenced to face-threatening act. According to Brown and Levinson (1999) power, distance, and relation contributed to the seriousness of an FTA, and thus to a determination of the level of politeness, which with other things being equal, an FTA will be communicated. Besides, the expressions

of the respondents are also identified by using contradiction followed by reasoning (1.75%) such as "It is not necessary to do this because my kids is good", counterclaim followed by contradiction, such as "My son is fine. He does not need to be taken to a psychiatrist". Then it was followed by thanking followed by token agreement, such as "Thanks for your information but I like this house", and thanking. In addition, 3.50% of the participants used thanking followed by contradiction, such as "thanks for the suggestion. My child does not need that", refusal, such as, "No, thanks", and refusal followed by contradiction, such as "No, thanks. I do not like the food". Furthermore, 5.26% of the participants used refusal followed by counterclaims, such as "No thanks, I just want to order my favorite food." For other strategies, most strategy used was a combination of contradiction. The participants showed their contradiction directly. It was related to findings of Guodong and Jing (2005) reported that Chinese students employed more politeness strategies and address form when disagreeing with a superior. However, they applied fewer politeness strategies.

Appropriateness

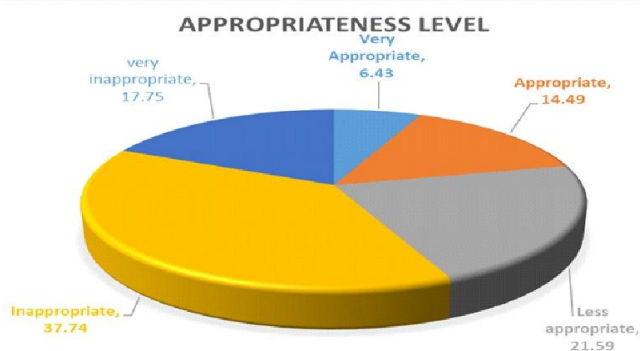


Figure : Appropriate level of disagreement expression

The figure above displays the descriptive statistics of appropriateness rating obtained from the EFL learners' speech act of disagreement. It can be seen that most of the disagreement statements produced were inappropriate (37.7 %). Then, it was followed by less appropriate (21,6%), and very inappropriate (17.8). The trend for the positive result showed statically significant differences, 20.9 %. The lowest number is for very appropriate (6.4 %), and it was followed by appropriate 14.4%. The evaluation of the NS depicts that the EFL learners encountered some difficulties in expressing appropriate speech act disagreement based on the L2 standard. The evaluation by NS shows that the politeness strategies used by EFL learners were not appropriate. This condition possibly is the effect of L1 inference. Their speech act of disagreement is monotonous in every given situation. They produce their disagreement linguistically 'simple' (e.g., short and minimalist), so to some extent it is considered too direct and rude by NS. Confronting different cultural backgrounds and using different language at the same time create a problematic situation for the EFL learners to produce speech act of disagreement appropriately.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the study provides the practical outcomes regarding politeness strategies used by the EFL learners regarding power and social distance, and also the level appropriateness. Based on findings, several conclusions can be drawn. First, the politeness strategy used by the participants predominantly was counterclaim when they interact with higher and equal interlocutor. Second, contradiction strategy was frequently applied to the lower interlocutor. Third, most of the disagreement expression produced by students were inappropriate in term of felicity condition due to the influences of the L1 interference. Regardless of the shortcomings of this research, this study shows essential findings related to learning English as a foreign language. It is crucial for having pedagogical aspects of speech act disagreement to enable the EFL learners to encounter an undesired situation when having cross-cultural communication.

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