

ROLE OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN ENHANCING L2 ORAL PROFICIENCY OF ESL LEARNERS AT ELEMENTARY LEVELDr. Shahid Nawaz¹, Muhammad Ammar², Ms. Sadia Parveen³, Rida Akram⁴**Original Article**

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Abstract

Politeness has a paramount and significant part in reducing pressure and anxiety. Pakistani ESL learners perform better if they are taught through politeness strategies. The researchers, through this study, have tried to explore whether there appeared any significant raise in the oral proficiency of elementary level ESL learners through the use of politeness strategies. The study is quantitative in its nature. Sample of this study consisted, 60 students and 30 teachers, who were randomly selected. First, the study used two questionnaires; the first one was administered to identify the reason of poor oral performance of the students by using close-ended questions and the other was employed to know about the politeness strategies teachers were using in their ESL classrooms. The questionnaires were consisted of five point likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). Secondly, the study also included pre and posttests. These tests were based on TOEIC Speaking Test Manual. The responses to the questionnaires and tests results were analyzed through SPSS for obtaining precise and accurate results. The responses to students' questionnaire indicated that lack of motivation, frequent correction of mistakes, criticism, pace of class, and new questions asked by the teacher affected students' oral skill development. The findings from the teachers' questionnaire showed that teachers were aware of politeness strategies, but they were not practicing them more frequently in their classrooms. They showed optimism for the failure and appreciated the learners in their academic success. The results of posttest of experimental group, which was taught through politeness strategies, showed significant improvements in students' oral proficiency.

Keywords: Politeness, Politeness Strategies, Interactive Classrooms, English as Second Language Teaching, ESL Teachers, ESL Learners.

Introduction

English is not a language of choice. It has a global significance in almost every area of study. Scientific knowledge, literature, historical annals and memoirs, and many other nature of information are stored in English. It has become extremely important for a student, expert, scientist or researcher to learn it. Studies show that among all language skills, the most crucial is speaking skills. It is the primary way to

communicate your message to another person. In a language learning classroom, students also find it the most difficult skill as it involves many factors which determine the quality of language use. One of those factors is the comfort that student feels in a learning setup.

Politeness strategies can affect students' comfort in classroom setting. Brown and Levinson (1987) stated that communication is a hostile and precarious act and it is important that

learner speaks language without any fear of insult or mockery. They are of the view that 'face' plays an immense role in achieving learners comfort. Face is described by Brown and Levinson (1987) as the public self-image of a person. It is the social value a person claims for himself (Goffman, 1967). Face is not personal, it is social. It is a picture of you that is created by your own and others' actions. If you are playing a role successfully, your face will be intact. For example, if you are a teacher and the class continues to accept that, your face is intact.

There is positive and negative face. Positive face is a continuous image a person has for himself which also demands approval of others, and negative face is sovereignty and control on your decisions that is not obstructed by anyone. It is a desire to keep status quo, control in decisions or thoughts. The loss of positive and negative face of a person can be caused by face threatening acts (FTAs). Similarly, there are some roles that can be played to protect the loss of face by FTAs.

In this study, we used one of the four politeness strategies i.e., positive politeness strategies shared by Brown and Levinson (1987). By using these strategies speaker can understand the need of maintaining hearer's respect. They have been proven useful in reducing threat to hearer's face. Positive politeness strategies can be used to build relationship of esteem, concern, agreement and unity. Following are some examples that reflect positive politeness.

- Let's do it together
- You and I have the same problem.
- Let's put some efforts together into finding answers to these questions.

If we use these strategies in an L2 setup, they will generate a feeling of responsibility, harmony, easiness, and acceptance. Therefore, in this paper we will put emphasis on the use of these

strategies in goal-oriented interactions of language learning.

Literature Review

According to Brown and Yule (1983), oral speaking skill is one of the most difficult skills while learning a language. There are many reasons for poor oral skills of a learner. Some students lack in basic language skills. They find it extremely difficult to find the suitable word to share a meaning. Some suffer through anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Many students fear other students' reaction in the classroom.

Anxiety is basically a feeling of fear, restlessness and worry. The link of anxiety and language learning has been under observation by second language researchers. To learn language in a short period of time, anxiety must be triumphed over. There are many approaches such as Suggestopedia and Community Language Learning which are equipped to reduce students' anxiety in classroom setup (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Aida's (1994) study provided evidence that fear of negative evaluation and speech anxiety is a very significant part of foreign language anxiety. Tanya Glaser also cited in Punyasirikul (2006) that sometimes people may be apprehensive of negative feedback from other people which can cause anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) has claimed that sometimes learners avoid such evaluative situations in which they fear negative evaluations by other people. Learners in such situation expect that other people would ignore their efforts and evaluate them negatively. It is also called situation-specific anxiety.

Poor self-esteem can be another reason which affects oral proficiency. Some people are skilled and creative; therefore, they have high self-esteem. Some people aren't much skilled or technical in doing numerous tasks. These people may have low self-esteem. Poor self-esteem is also one of the reasons of communication apprehension (McCroskey, 1984).

According to Khan and Ali (2009), students sometimes are not interested in speaking English because of fear of laughter by other people. This fear makes them introverted to speak and affects their language learning in L2 classrooms. Students avoid speaking in target language to save their respect.

Some teachers have a habit of regularly correcting students' mistakes. Hamer (1997) advised that if a teacher regularly corrects students' mistakes it may de-motivate them; especially, when they are involved in any speaking activity. Baker and Westrup (2003) advised the teacher to correct the mistakes made by the students in a positive and motivating manner. They may correct it after the activity or in the beginning of the next lesson.

Face and politeness are two most important concepts for this study. Face can be defined as self-image of a person that he keeps for public. This self-image is called face. People would want that this self-image must be recognized and respected by others. When a person shows alertness, concern, or attention to other person's face, it is called politeness (Yule, 1996). Leech (1983) describes some meta-linguistics aspects of politeness by stating that politeness can be found in the content of conversation and also the way it is ordered. If someone is speaking at an inappropriate time or rather not speaking at the right time, this will surely impact politeness in conversation.

There are two types of face, positive and negative. Positive face is the desire of having a consistent self-image that everyone agrees with. Negative face is when a person desires that he should have freedom and should never be imposed to do something in a social interaction. It means that he should never be forced by any means to form a pledge or do a task unwillingly (Watts, 2003).

To completely understand politeness and its role, we need to discuss two further acts. According to Yule (1996), these acts are face threatening acts and face saving acts. When any person feels that his self image is under a threat due to an act, such act is called face threatening act; whereas, if by any act that threat is reduced, such act can be termed as face saving act. It is pertinent to mention here that students in classroom environment also feel such threats due to which they avoid oral interaction with teacher and students.

Park (2008) has conveyed that positive courteous strategies stand under the umbrella of three main paradigms e.g. to stand and claim at the same grounds, to co operate in speech acts among participants, and to perform actions for

the completion of desire of addressee. For all three strategic scenarios examples are here as under.

- 1) Common ground claim:
 - a) You are very right. I think we should have been winners, but how they have snatched a chance this time?
 - b) If I am not wrong they are dangerous people?
 - c) You are absolutely correct; let them go.
- 2) Two participants' co operates in speech acts.
 - a) If you will give me smile on your face, I will serve you a gift!
 - b) We will work collectively for your help if you wake up late today!
 - c) I did your job yesterday; can you take it mine for today?
- 3) Action to complete the desire of addressee.
 - a). Receive your pen which you have asked for.

It is argued by Lakoff (1975) also for politeness strategies regarding to be polite or rude. He (1975) has said that these are demarcated by certain rules which are useful in various and different cultural settings. These three rules include: Formality: stay away, Give honor: give choice, and Friendship: show sympathy. Lakoff (1975) suggests that it is necessary to maintain distance between listener and speakers. She suggests that a doctor should use carcinoma in place of cancer so that he may appear distant to his patient, or use euphemism i.e., using the word cardiac arrest for heart attack to look polite to his patient. He further suggests that if we create options for someone so that he can freely choose, it is also a way of being polite (Lakoff, 1975).

In Computer-Mediated Communication, the politeness strategies of linguistics have been investigated by Park (2008). This analysis propagates that politeness strategies are employed in the agenda of interpersonal communication. Politeness strategies are explored by Shallert (2009) and he elucidates that more opportunities are provided by social comments, information provision and information receiving. It is examined politeness strategies (IM) in the block oriented discussion in academic by Luzon (2013) which "indicates high occurrence of the strategies used to construe

conflict". The realization of impoliteness has been probed by Chejnova (2014) by taking the data from email platform. In this data he analyzed politeness expressions verbal means, and external and lexical amounts of modification. The conceptualization of politeness in Twitter discourse was studied which determined that politeness strategies are affected in new medium Sifianou (2015).

In Iran, Izadi and Zilaie (2012) examined the use of politeness strategies. Srinivasan and Takayama (2016) conducted research on robot politeness strategies for seeking help from humans. Khusnia (2017) concluded that the positive values such as politeness helped in improving proficiency of ESL Learners.

Abdulfattah et al. (2018) explored the importance of politeness strategies in media discourses and concluded that these strategies in written narratives were of significant and positive value.

Sekhudin et al. (2018) concluded that there was statistically significant difference between upper intermediate and intermediate level Learners' proficiency and academic achievement. Mahmud (2019) has justified politeness is encoded by English Language learning students in class rooms settings by using different kind of expressions. Indirect strategies like hints, hedged performative are used by Malay representatives while other communities like Arabs were using explicit discourse and direct requesting strategies Alakrash and Bustan (2020).

Gratch (2021) carried out research pertaining to the role of politeness strategies in agreement and arbitration which results in successful meetings and decisions.

Research Questions

1. What reasons behind poor oral proficiency are creating hindrances for learners?
2. Which strategies of politeness are used in ESL classrooms setting by English teacher at elementary level?
3. What reasons are affecting politeness strategies on oral performance of learners at elementary level?

Research Methodology

The research was a quantitative in nature and was based on two parts. First part was descriptive and the second was experimental. The first part of the research included two questionnaires: first questionnaire was submitted to identify the reason of poor oral performance of students by using close-ended questions and other questionnaire was submitted to learn about the politeness strategies that teachers are using in their classroom. The questionnaires were five point likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). Secondly, the study included a pretest and posttest. These tests were developed and based on TOEIC Speaking Test Format. First test was taken with both the controlled and experimental groups before the application of positive politeness strategies. After a comprehensive and careful delivery of instructions and activities involving positive politeness strategies in controlled group and traditional teaching in the other, a posttest was administered in both groups. Sample of this study consisted 60 students and 30 teachers who have been randomly selected. Data collected from both questionnaires, pretest and posttest, was analyzed by using SPSS 21.

Data Analysis

This section of the research is dealing with topic by analyzing data. The data of this research was completed in two portions. The research studied questionnaire in first portion and pretest and posttest was completed in second part. The first part of the study is based on two questionnaires and different schools of Bahawalpur. The first questionnaire has the purpose to know the causes of weak presentation presented by students by collecting data from public and private schools and then by analyzing data through SPSS version 21.

Second questionnaire has the purpose to find civility of teachers. The questionnaire is based on the Brown and Levinson's (1987) described politeness strategies in positive mood. Responses have been taken from teachers and analyzed. For pretest and posttest, 30 students of elementary level have been taken from Beaconhouse School System, Bahawalpur, and divided into two equal groups. A pretest has been taken, then they have been taught English for four months, and then a posttest was administered. During these four months experimental group was taught using positive

politeness strategies. The comparison between pretest and posttest made it easier to

understand the above mentioned questions.

Sr. No.	Respondents	Mean	SD
1	Students Questionnaire	4.03	0.967
2	Teachers Questionnaire	4.15	0.905
	Overall	4.09	0.936

Students' opinions about Politeness Strategies in Enhancing L2 Oral Proficiency

Sr.No.	Item	M	SD
1	I feel motivated to work hard in English classes.	4.68	.701
2	I feel uncomfortable in English class.	4.50	.813
3	My teachers correct my mistakes when I attend classes.	4.28	.715
4	Pressure to compete well with others affects my ability to speak.	2.55	1.455
5	My oral bad performance is linked with the management of time.	4.17	.827
6	Short subject knowledge causes me to speak irrelevant.	3.82	1.347
7	Due to the majority strength of local students I have very rare chance to speak in class.	3.98	.983
8	I do not get the chance to speak in class because of more vocal students.	4.13	.833
9	There is a lack of confidence in oral performance in English class about my responses.	3.93	.936
10	Teachers English speaking cause me nervous in comprehending their language.	4.38	.922
11	I am concerned about achieving low in English class.	4.18	.911
12	I get so nervous when I forget things I know.	3.80	1.176
13	It worries me to volunteer answers.	3.92	1.013
14	Speaking in front of other students make me self conscious.	3.68	1.157
15	Achievement of language teacher pace has made me worried.	3.87	.873
16	The questions of language teacher make me nervous when I am not ready in advance.	4.30	.850
17	Laughing stock restrict me to ask the questions.	3.73	1.177
18	The negative feelings of teacher about me worried me because I have very bad performance in listening comprehension..	4.32	.833
19	My broken pronunciation is a cause of my fun in front of others.	4.18	.911
20	Negative effects are imposed by my communication skills in big English classes.	4.33	.914
	Average	4.03	0.967

In Students' opinions about the usage of Politeness Strategies in Enhancing L2 Oral Proficiency, the respondents responded that they felt motivated to work hard, their teacher corrected their mistakes, they were concerned on low proficiency in English, they took time management as an issue in learning, and their communication practices were hampered due to large classes. These responses with mean value of 4.68, 4.38, 4.33 and 4.30 respectively

remained with high mean value. The students' responses, like they felt fearful of criticism, they felt worried to voluntarily speaking in the class, they were worried about achieving the required pace, and they felt self-conscious while speaking in front of their language instructors, had Medium Mean Values i.e., 3.98, 3.92, 3.87 and 3.68. Students' response about pressure to compete well with others' had low mean value which was 2.55.

Teachers' opinions about Politeness Strategies in Enhancing L2 Oral Proficiency

Sr.No.	Item	Mean	SD
1	I motivate my students when they give a correct answer.	4.30	.889
2	I notice and attend learners.	4.35	.880
3	I make jokes during the lesson.	4.18	.965
4	I show concerns to the learners' wants.	4.35	.709
5	All the students are encouraged by me to participate in the class.	4.15	.971
6	Learners are appreciated by me to achieve their goals.	4.10	.915
7	Learners are optimized by me on their failure.	3.77	1.170
8	Pseudo Agreement is avoided by me.	4.13	.791
9	To switch the topic politely disagreement is avoided by me.	4.30	.830
10	I offer positive gestures to the students.	4.15	.820
11	I make promises and remember them.	4.22	.904
12	Different tone, intonation, and different intensifying moderator are used by me for exaggeration..	4.32	.701
13	I impose different things on learner.	3.83	1.028
14	Common grounds are built by me for learners to talk on sports, music and films.	4.10	.877
15	Importance of students in class is realized by me.	3.88	1.166
16	Learners' problems are asked by me.	3.98	1.049
17	To make the agreement with students are tried by me if required.	4.20	.935
18	I reward to students on their success.	4.28	.761
19	I struggle to convince students to avoid making fun of others and it is an excess to maintain positive situation in the class.	4.30	.850
Average		4.15	0.905

In teachers' questionnaire, teachers responses, like they noticed and attended their students, they motivated their students to learn, they used different intonation patterns, to avoid disagreement they switched politely, had mean scores 4.35, 4.32, 4.30 and 4.30 respectively. These responses were considered among High

Mean Values. Statements and responses, like they asked for the reasons if learners had any problem, they made students realize their importance, they imposed different tasks on learners and showed optimism on the failure of the students, had mean values 3.98, 3.88, 3.83, 3.77, respectively.

Result of Paired Sample Statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pretestgroup#1	23.73	15	7.025	1.814
	Posttestgroup#1	26.73	15	7.796	2.013
Pair 2	Pretestgroup#2	23.53	15	7.945	2.051
	Posttestgroup#2	40.47	15	4.794	1.238

The above table is showing the difference between pair 1 and 2's result with the help of mean, standard error and standard deviation. The result of, very minor differences are observed. On the other hand, pair 2's pretest and posttest results show significant difference. These results made it clear that the traditional method in control group did not show much improvement in the speaking abilities of the students; whereas, method of teaching which involves politeness strategies (experimental group) shows significant improvement in the oral abilities of the students.

Findings and Discussions

The purpose of this research was to bring improvement in traditional classroom environment. During the research, ESL learners were provided a conducive environment to develop their oral skill using positive politeness strategies. This study primarily focused on students and teachers of elementary level. The first stage of the study included collection of descriptive data using two questionnaires.

The first questionnaire was prepared to learn students' problems during their learning of oral skills. The questionnaire was distributed in various schools of Bahawalpur to identify the problems which students face in development of their oral skills. Questionnaire's result show that lack of motivation, frequent correction of mistakes, criticism, pace of class, and new questions asked by the teacher poorly affect students' oral skill development. In addition to that, student claimed that laughing reaction from other students on their poor or broken pronunciation de-motivated them. Students have developed nervousness and anxiety due to large

classes. Students feared that they will be mocked on a wrong answer or poor pronunciation of a word.

The second questionnaire was prepared to learn about the politeness strategies that teachers have been using during their L2 classes. The findings of this questionnaire show that teachers do not practice some very important strategies in their classrooms. They do not show optimism or appreciate the learners on their achievements. They rarely motivate them on their correct answers. It is important to give students a comfortable environment for which teachers do not put much effort. They hardly build common grounds through discussing their favorite topics. They do not make the students realize that their learning and progress is important. Noticing the learner and giving positive gestures have also been avoided by most teachers. They do not try to seek disagreement with the students, or avoid disagreement using pseudo or partial agreements. Jokes and gifts can be very fruitful for encouragements which were mostly not considered as an option by them.

The third phase of this research is based on an experiment in which two groups have been created i.e., experimental and controlled groups. These groups have been given pretest and a posttest using TOEIC Speaking Test Format. The results of this phase are quite encouraging and interesting. The pretest and posttest of controlled group did not show much difference. The students' improvements are insignificant. On the other hand, students of experimental group show significant improvement in their posttest. These tests have been analyzed using paired t test.

During the application of politeness strategies in the experimental group, it has been observed that students' participation drastically increased, and they were more enthusiastic and interested in the speaking tasks of the class. Each student showed significant improvement in responding to questions and holding discussions. Students were more energetic, fearless, and creative. Students frequently share their problems and meet the teacher personally to find a solution for them. Students verbally state that they feel very light during the classroom activities and forget even if they are tired.

Conclusion

The results of this study makes it clear that the positive politeness strategies introduced by Ben and Levinson (1987) can be applied in a language classroom, and they boast of the oral proficiency of the students. The basic purpose of the study is to enhance the oral abilities of the students which have been achieved using politeness strategies.

Using the first question, researchers tried to find the problems that students were facing in their classrooms. Students shared the reasons of poor oral performance by themselves. This helps the researcher to find innovative solutions to those problems. Using the second questionnaire, researchers find out that the elementary level teachers are lacking politeness strategies in their L2 classroom which are hindering students' oral growth.

It has been concluded that we need to use politeness strategies in our L2 setups to speed-up students' oral development. Teacher must build a type of healthy environment in the classroom which results in better fluency of the students. Teacher's spontaneous, positive feedback protects the face of students, and they participate with more energy in the class activities and discussions. Hence, it is proved that saving and protecting students' face is very important. Students should never feel insulted or ridiculed in a classroom environment. Once teacher starts practicing positive politeness strategies in classroom, students will also share the same attitude and approach. The whole classroom environment will see a significant change due to these strategies. These politeness strategies will build students' trust in this study format.

Recommendations

Following recommendations are suggested to the teachers who are teaching English for oral proficiency at elementary level. Teachers of other levels can also use these politeness strategies for improvement in students' oral proficiency.

- Teachers should make jokes in the class.
- They should seek agreement with the students and for the sake of it, use partial or pseudo agreement.
- They should motivate students on their success and show them optimism on failure.
- They should build common grounds with the students and discuss the topics in which students are more interested.
- They should use intonation and intensifying markers while encouraging students.
- They should ask students if they are facing a problem or if they need anything. In short they should notice and attend learners.
- They should make students feel that they are important.
- They should assure students that their face will be saved no matter what type of situation is created in the classroom.

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