

ADDRESSING THE ISSUE OF MIXED-ABILITY STUDENTS IN CLT CLASSROOMS WITH THE TEACHING OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES

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Abstract: This study examines the use of politeness strategies among learners of English as a second language (ESL) at Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Kelantan Branch Machang Campus. The respondents were in a class of mixed-ability students, taking Integrated Language Skills 1 (ELC121) course which is offered to all part one diploma students at UiTM. This qualitative study involved non-participant observations on 15 role-play sessions in which students were put in pairs. The sessions were video-recorded to facilitate the researchers in transcribing the data and further, analyzing them using content analysis anchored in Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness strategy (1978). The analysis was further extended to examine the types of politeness strategies employed by ESL learners of different proficiency levels. The results indicated that the most preferred strategy was "Negative Politeness" (38.59%) which is employed to mitigate the face-threatening acts (FTA) on the hearer. This is followed by "Positive Politeness" (36.69%) which is employed to reduce the threat towards the hearer's positive face. The third is "Bald on Record" (22.55%) which does not seek to mitigate the threat to the hearer's face. Finally, the least preferred politeness strategy is "Off-Record" (2.17%) that is employed to indirectly give responses as to minimize conflict. The results also revealed that more Less Proficient Students (referred to Moderately Proficient) employed more "Bald on Record" compared to More Proficient Students (referred to Highly Proficient) who appeared to be using more of "Negative Politeness". As students display different levels of politeness, it is important to expose them to various ways to respond in communication as shown in this paper. While Self-Check Politeness could serve the same function, cooperative learning in CLT classrooms definitely would offer great help for ESL speakers to communicate more competently.

Keywords: Communication skills, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), mixed-ability students, politeness strategies, second language learning

1. Introduction

Communication skills, a major area of soft skills are undeniably essential to every speaker since these skills indicate the approach a speaker gives and receives information as well as to convey his ideas and opinions with those around him (Prodanovic, 2014). Politeness, being part of such skills, helps to promote rapport and mutual comfort among L2 speakers in their communication. According to Trần (2015), it is important for two speakers to understand social conventions and the concepts of politeness and face for more effective communication. Without this kind of competency, miscommunication can occur.

In addressing this issue, Malaysian government has made a move to adopt Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in the teaching of English language in Malaysian schools since 1970s. However, after more than three decades of its adoption, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach is yet to prove its effectiveness in this country. In fact, the standard of English among Malaysian students is reported to be declining (Arshad Ayub 2012; Ghazali Mustapha 2008), leading to great concern over Malaysian students' ability to function in the English language in real communication situations (Tan 2012; Patrick 2013). In this regard, it has been reported by the local newspapers that many Malaysian graduates have been falling short of expectations during interviews mainly due to poor communication skills (Shamsuddin Bardan 2012). As politeness is part of such skills and it greatly influences communication, the ways how they are employed by our students have become the focus of this study. They are referred to as "politeness strategies".

The notion of politeness strategies is rooted from Hymes' concept of "communicative competence" (1972); the term that he coined to refer to having the knowledge of linguistic rules and the ability to use language appropriately that makes one a competent speaker. Since its proposal, the notion of "communicative competence" has received great advocacies from many, including Canale and Swain (1983) who proposed four components that make up communicative competence namely grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. While grammatical competence and discourse competence reflect the use of the linguistic system, the other two define the functional aspects of communication. Grammatical competence, according to Canale and Swain (1980: 29), encompasses "knowledge of lexical items and of rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology". Discourse competence, on the other hand, is the ability to connect sentences in stretches of discourse, forming a meaningful whole out of a series of utterances. The third, sociolinguistic competence is the knowledge of the sociocultural rules of language and of discourse (Canale & Swain 1980:30) while strategic competence is made up of "the verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or due to insufficient competence".

As an influential model, Canale and Swain's model has been referred to by many researchers and scholars. These include Bachman (1990) who later revised this model and proposed his own language competence model, which, according to him, consists of two types namely organizational competence and pragmatic competence. Organizational competence is further divided into grammatical and textual competence while the sub components for pragmatic competence are illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic and strategic competence.

While grammatical competence, according to Bachman (1990) deals with the aspects of vocabulary, morphology, syntax and phonology, textual competence, on the other hand, covers the aspects of cohesion and rhetorical organization. Illocutionary competence consists of the ability to manipulate the functions of language (such as in requesting, greeting, parting etc.). Sociolinguistic and strategic competence on the other hand, deals with the issues of politeness, formality, metaphor and other culturally related aspect of language. As clearly highlighted by Bachman, the notion of politeness has its place in communication.

One prominent theory of politeness widely referred to by many, including this study, is Brown and Levinson's (1978) theory of politeness strategies. This theory categorizes politeness strategies into Bald on record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, Off-record and Don't do the Face Threatening Act (FTA) which generally ranges from the least polite to the most polite. More about these strategies is explained in the next section.

Acknowledging the importance of politeness in communication, the current study was conducted to answer the following research questions.

1. What are the preferred types of politeness strategies employed by ESL learners.
2. What are the preferred types of politeness strategies employed by ESL learners of different proficiency levels.

The respondents of this study were students enrolling in Integrated Language Skills 1 (ELC121) course offered by the Academy of Language Studies at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Kelantan Machang campus. Being in a mixed-ability group, the students display different levels of English language proficiency but managed to cooperate well in their ESL classroom activities.

ELC 121 is a course which is designed to build listening, speaking and reading skills to help students perform effectively and competently in the social and academic contexts. The course emphasizes the ability of the students to use conversation strategies and appropriate language functions in social interactions. It is a 60% on-going assessment and 40% final exam based course in which 15% is contributed by the role-play assessment. This role-play presentation is performed in pairs within 10 minutes based on one specified theme.

It should be noted that student role-play presentation becomes the unit of analysis of this study as it requires spontaneity, immediate and within the vicinity of real-life interactions (Van Hasselt et al. cited in Stokoe, 2011). Linguistically, such verbal communication brings about the elements of politeness provided that both speakers maintain common ground throughout the course of conversation. This study in particular, aims to identify the most preferred politeness strategies employed by ELC121 takers of different English language proficiency level during role-play assessment. From the research findings, the authors offer recommendations on how more proficient students could help their less proficient classmates in order to bring about positive changes in the use of English language among the latter.

As mentioned earlier, the main motivation for this study is the prolonged issue among Malaysian graduates who are claimed to be lacking competency when communicating in English. They are said to be struggling not only in the linguistic aspect but also interpersonal skills [Seetha, 2014; Omar & Rajoo, 2016; Nor Fadhilah & Hamidah, 2017]. With regard to the latter, politeness deserves serious attention as it is part of one's communicative competence as evident in Milroy's statement below.

Even if (a person's) knowledge of (syntactic, semantic and phonological rules) is complete,
he must also acquire communicative competence-knowledge of when to
speak or to be silent; how to speak in each occasion; how to communicate (and
interpret) meanings of respect, seriousness, humour, politeness or intimacy.
(Milroy, 1987)

Undeniably, engaging the right politeness level in communication is a must in order to avoid miscommunication which subsequently could lead to communication breakdown (Willems, as cited in Chiu, 2010). In this regard, studies have shown that politeness strategies employed by L2 learners are greatly dependent on their L2 proficiency level (Al-Gahtani & Roever 2012; Thitinant & Prachamon's 2011). While it is a well-known fact that Malaysian classrooms consist of mixed-ability students, it is worth to investigate the use of politeness strategies among them since the research findings could provide insights on how the students could help each other in order to improve their competency in using the English language.

Indirectly, this gives greater recognition for cooperative learning. Based on the current scenario in Malaysian job market where more proficient interview candidates are less criticized compared to the less proficient ones, it is reasonable to believe that learning from the former would benefit the latter. As such, the recommendations offered on how the less proficient students could benefit from the more proficient classmates makes this study significant.

2. Methods

The research design for this study is based the objective of this study, i.e. to examine the use of politeness strategies among students enrolling in Integrated Language Skills 1 (ELC121) course offered by the Academy of Language Studies at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Kelantan Machang campus. The main source of data in the study is oral data gathered through observations. As its analysis involves construction of meaning of these data through the researcher's interpretation, this study is regarded as a basic qualitative research (Meriam 2009: 22). One prominent characteristic of a basic qualitative study as highlighted by Merriam (2009: 23) is that, what is observed in the data "will depend on the disciplinary theoretical framework of this study". This basically means that the findings that emerge from the data would be very much determined by the theoretical framework set earlier. In addition, Merriam (2009) asserted that, by adopting a qualitative-interpretive mode, researchers do not "find" knowledge but construct it, based on their interpretations which are framed by the underlying theories of the study. She added that the purpose of data analysis in studies such as the current study, is to identify recurring pattern or emergent themes which then leads to the findings of the study.

As this study involves observing students' real assessment, the data collection was conducted in the 13th and 14th weeks of the semester in which role-play assessment took place as stipulated in the course content. Prior to the assement, the students were informed that they would be observed and video-recorded for research purpose.

In collecting the data, the study employed non-participant observations as the researcher was not involved in the interaction with the people studied so as to avoid compromising the integrity of the data through bias (Nor Fariza Mohd Nor 2008: 85).The significance of using observations for data collection, as posited by Merriam (2002: 13), is that, the data "represent a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest". This implies that, by being present at the research sites, the researcher would gain pure data which are then left to her interpretation. She would also be able to gain greater understanding of the whole process during interviews as well as take note of anything significant that relates to the study.

At this point, it is worth mentioning the recording process did not seem to obstruct their role-play performance. They in fact, appeared to behave naturally throughout the sessions, hence providing a support for what is claimed by Morse and Richards (2002) that as the use of video cameras is becoming more common nowadays, their presence becomes less intrusive to participants. Similarly, Vine et al. (2008) asserted that recordings should not be a matter of concern as they found that over the recording period, people increasingly ignore the video cameras. In fact, this methodology gives the researcher maximum control over the data collection process as interactions are recorded as unobtrusively as possible. The possibility of losing the data is also minimized while at the same time, the researcher is able to review the data as and when necessary.

On the scope of data analysis, it should be noted that the focus of the study was only on the candidates' use of politeness strategies based on Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness strategy (1978). There were a total of 15 role-play sessions involving 30 students as they were put in pairs. These were part one diploma students at Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Kelantan Machang Campus, 24 of whom were female and 6 were male from various areas of disciplines which include Accounting, Computer Science, Information Management, Mathematical Science and Public Administration & Policy Studies. These ELC 121 students aged from 18 to 20. The participants' demographic data which includes SPM English results, gender, age, and areas of studies are shown in Table 1.

This study employed the convenience technique of sampling which involves drawing samples that are both easily accessible and willing to participate in a study (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). The procedure is relatively an easy choice for researchers whereby the participants can readily be accessible (Latham, 2007) within the period of study since they are the researchers' students and the role-play assessment must be conducted by the researchers themselves.

As mentioned earlier, this qualitative study involved observing a group of ELC121 students who acted out their role play tasks as part of ELC121 assessments. These students in a mixed-ability classroom, were put in pairs and given five minutes to prepare the responses on one specified situation randomly selected by the researchers (see Appendix 1) and the other five minutes were given for them to act out the role-play. Being informal, the situations requires interpersonal communication in which the use of politeness strategies were expected to emerge from their interactions.

In addition to observing students' role-play activities, the 15 different role-play sessions were video-recorded in order to facilitate the researchers in the data analysis later before these oral data were transcribed in a verbatim form (the oral data were transcribed without amending the real utterances expressed by the participants). The transcriptions were based on complete interactions that would allow full understanding of the conversations.

Based on the transcriptions, the data were analyzed using content analysis anchored in Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness strategy (1978). This theory categorizes politeness strategies into the following:

1. Bald on record: The least polite form of committing FTAs shocks and embarrasses the addressees; thus, it is frequently used when the speaker has a close relationship with the hearer. The speaker's purpose is to convey the message explicitly and unambiguously. Such instances can be seen in situations of urgency, ("Watch out!"), efficiency, ("Hear me out") and imperative manner ("Give your examples").
2. Positive Politeness: The speaker shows an attempt to reduce threat to the hearer's positive face. In other words, the speaker recognizes the friendliness in the relationship with the listener and the desire to be liked and accepted. For example: "Oh, dear, I got very unhappy when I heard that" (giving gift to the hearer in the form of sympathy), "Let's start answering exercises of the book" (including both speaker and hearer in an activity) and "Why don't we answer exercises of the book?" (telling or asking for reasons).
3. Negative Politeness: Conversely, this is usually oriented from the hearer's negative face as the aim is to avoid being imposed on others. Negative politeness strategies can be executed through distancing styles like apologies, using questions and hedges, and being pessimistic. For instance: "You must forgive me but I could not understand the meaning of the poem you have written", "Can I ask you some questions?", and "Can't we ask questions about other participants? Can we?".
4. Off-record (Indirect Strategy): This strategy uses indirect language to remove the speaker from the potential to be imposed by the other party. The speaker will opt for connotations, hints and implicature instead of direct requests. The example of the utterance "Wow, it is really hot here" implies the listener to turn on the air-conditioner or to switch on the fan, without directly requesting the listener to do so.
5. Don't do the FTA: The strategy which is the most polite form is employed when a speaker feels uncomfortable making mitigated requests by applying any of the above strategies; therefore, the speaker would rather give hints to satisfy his or her wants ("There is a hammer right behind you") or the speaker simply keeps silent, says nothing.

Table 1: Students' demographic data

Students' Demographic Data	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender:		
Male	6	20.00
Female	24	80.00
Age:		
18 years old	26	86.66
19 years old	2	6.67
20 years old	2	6.67
SPM English Results:		
A+, A, A- (Highly Proficient)	10	33.33
B+, B, B- (Proficient)	15	50.00
C+, C, C- (Moderately Proficient)	5	16.67
Faculties:		
Accounting	6	20.00
Computer Science	4	13.33
Information Management	8	26.67
Mathematical Science	4	13.33
Public Administration & Policy Studies	8	26.67

3. Findings And Discussion

From data analysis, there were 368 politeness utterances identified according to Brown and Levinson framework (1978) derived from five different role-play assessment topics performed by 15 pairs of participants. Table 2 illustrates the detailed frequency of politeness strategies used by each pair in the role-play assessment.

Table 2: The frequency of politeness strategies used by each pair in the role-play assessments.

POLITENESS STRATEGIES/PAIRS	Bald-on record	Positive	Negative	Off-record	TOTAL
Pair 1	5	7	11	0	23
Pair 2	1	4	6	0	11
Pair 3	5	11	15	0	31
Pair 4	1	7	9	1	18
Pair 5	6	14	10	1	31
Pair 6	17	12	10	0	39
Pair 7	10	13	10	0	33
Pair 8	5	10	7	1	23
Pair 9	5	8	9	0	22
Pair 10	2	10	4	1	17
Pair 11	6	11	6	0	23
Pair 12	8	6	9	0	23
Pair 13	5	10	11	0	26
Pair 14	2	3	18	2	25
Pair 15	5	9	7	2	23
TOTAL	83	135	142	8	368

The results in Table 3 shows the frequency counts of the most preferred strategies employed by the participants. Note that the types of these strategies presented in Table 3 are ordered according to their appearance in Brown and Levinson (1978).

Table 3: Frequency of the type of politeness strategies used by the students in the role-play assessment

Types of Politeness Strategies	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Bald on record	83	22.55
Positive Politeness	135	36.69
Negative Politeness	142	38.59
Off-record	8	2.17
TOTAL	368	100.00

Based on Table 3, it can be concluded that the most preferred strategy is “Negative Politeness” which recorded 38.59% (see Table 3). This strategy is employed to mitigate the face threatening acts (FTA) that consequently save the face of the hearer. One example of this is “Can you give me a example of food that I can eat?”. Notice that the use of auxiliary word “can” helps to mitigate the request by inserting an element of politeness in the request. This is followed by “Positive Politeness” which is employed 36.69% by the students. This includes utterances such as “Indoor game? What kind of indoor game are you playing?” in order to reduce the threat towards the hearer’s positive face. Then, 22.55% “Bald on Record” is used as the third most selected strategies in the role-play. This strategy does not seek to mitigate the threat to the hearer’s face. For example, one student uttered “why suddenly you tell me you want to travel independently?” Lastly, the least preferred politeness strategy is “Off-Record (2.17%) that is employed to indirectly give responses as to minimize conflict. For example, “you know...nowadays it’s very hot in Malaysia”. This type of strategy requires both speaker and hearer to have mutual understanding of the topic in order to grasp the hints and hidden meaning of the utterances.

When the frequency of the politeness strategies is classified according to students’ SPM grades, the results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: The percentage of frequency of the politeness strategies used across different proficiency levels based on students’ SPM English grades

TYPES/GRADES (%)	A (Highly proficient)	B (Proficient)	C (Moderately proficient)
Bald on record	14.85	21.29	38.46
Positive Politeness	32.67	41.09	29.23
Negative Politeness	49.50	35.15	32.31
Off-record	2.97	2.48	0.00

Referring to Table 4, it can be concluded that Highly Proficient (grade A) students employed more “Negative Politeness” strategy while Proficient students who obtained grade B in their SPM English results preferred to use more “Positive Politeness” strategy. Meanwhile, “Bald on record” appeared to be most frequently employed by Moderately Proficient (grade C) students. In addition, “Off-record” is the least used politeness strategy among all students of different L2 proficiency levels.

As this paper aims to offer recommendations on how the less proficient students could benefit from more proficient ones, its discussion focuses on interactions involving the pairs that consist students of different proficiency levels in the English language. Here, Pairs 9 and 12 are chosen to be discussed mainly because the differences in the types of politeness strategies employed by the two (2) students were rather noticeable.

The first pair is Pair 9 which involves a proficient student (Std B) who obtained a B for his SPM English result and a moderately proficient student (Std A) who obtained a C- in the same examination. The pair was given Situation 1 which required them to plan activities to do during their leisure time. Here, one of them suggested playing an outdoor game while the other thought that they should play an indoor game.

Pair 9 (Situation 1)

Excerpt 1

Std A: Do you have any time to talk about our leisure time?

Std B: Yes, I always have time for you Aiman. Just came...Just come in.

Std A: I want to talk to you about our leisure time. Do you have any suggestion?

Std B: Do you mean our leisure time?

Std A: Yes

Std B: I just suggest for the indoor game for the activity. What do you think?

Std A: But I have one plan that I think is suitable for our leisure time that is outdoor activities.

Std B: Outdoor? Oh my God! I don't like outdoor activities you know

Std A: But why?

Std B: Because outdoor activity is very risk for us because it's very hot. Because you know Malaysia is very hot.

Std A: Yes, that is the disadvantages but outdoor activities also have many advantages such as we can be fit and healthy our body when we play outdoor activities such as football, futsal or badminton. They can help us to be a more effective student.

Std B: Only that reason? Oh my God! I just.. you know, you know me. I'm just take care about my look. I don't want skin good look very dark.

Std A: I don't care about it. I just want to be fit and healthy for our... for my body

Std B: Don't you think indoor game also have benefit, such as puzzle games, chess games.. it can sharp our mind too.

In the above excerpt, it can be seen that student B who is Moderately Proficient utilized direct utterances when responding "Outdoor? Oh my God! I don't like outdoor activities you know" when student A (Std A) suggested to fulfill their leisure time with outdoor games, indicating his ignorance for Std A's feeling. This contradicts to student A who employed higher level of politeness (i.e Negative Politeness) when, at the beginning of the interaction, uttered "do you have any time...?" in order to lessen the threat towards Std B's face and to appear more polite in the conversation.

Std B's lack of politeness is seen again as he gave a similar response in the later part of the interactions at the point when Std A highlighted some advantages of playing outdoor games. Here, Std B responded by saying "Only that reason? Oh my God! I just.. you know, you know me. I'm just take care about my look. I don't want skin good look very dark". Obviously, Std B's lack of politeness caused an offence to Std A who later responded "I don't care about it. I just want to be fit and healthy for our... for my body".

Taking into consideration the above interactions, ESL teachers could encourage cooperative learning in their classrooms. One way to do this is by highlighting the differences in politeness strategies displayed in the responses given above. Std A could be asked about his feeling upon hearing Std B's responses to his idea of playing outdoor games during their leisure time. At this point, Std A's honest answer is extremely important as it becomes important input for Std B to improve his communicative competency. If Std A doesn't favour Std B's responses, he might want to suggest the appropriate strategies that could be employed Std B so as not to cause an offence on Std A. For example, instead of saying "Outdoor? Oh my God! I don't like outdoor activities you know", Std B could response "I see... but sorry, I'm not into outdoor games". Here, the phrases "sorry" and "I'm not into" help to save Std A's face when his idea was rejected. This is one example of cooperative learning which has been recognized as one the most effective learning strategies (Slavin, 1996). Receiving feedback from their own friends could make learning more successful as studies have shown that friendship groups leads to superior learning outcomes compared to those with random or ability groupings (Kutnick et al., 2005; Zajac & Hartup, 1997). In Malaysian context where English teaching adopts CLT approach, English classes are perfect platforms to carry out this suggestion. At this juncture, it is also important that all students are made aware that one's politeness is much determined by the context in which the interactions take place. These include cultural values as well as social and power distance.

Other examples of the use of different types of politeness strategies by two (2) speakers of different English language proficiency level are seen in Pair 12. Given Situation 5, both speakers were discussing a plan to celebrate Teacher's Day. Here, Std A who was Highly Proficient (grade A) wanted to organize an appreciation party at a famous restaurant while Std B who was Moderately Proficient (grade C+) planned to have a potluck party and celebrate it in a classroom. Observe the following excerpt to see the differences in their politeness strategies.

Pair 12 (Situation 5)

Excerpt 2:

Std A: There is still a lot of money and we have enough money because we haven't used much money this year. And then, another reason is the restaurant that I have been planning to celebrate Teacher's Day has very high quality of foods.

Std B: Are your sure with that?

Std A: Yes, I'm very sure because I have been there so many time. It was one of the famous restaurant and yaa... I've seen a lot of good feedback and staff... well,, I know these from my relatives and I... I have friend he said they have celebrate their reunion there as well..

Std B: You know, famous restaurant not really sweet than we celebrate in our classroom. It will be like take time and money to celebrate at a restaurant.

Std A: Okay, let me explain. Actually a lot of our members are suggesting to celebrate at a famous restaurant and they said they are willing to their money... to use all of the money in our financial. So...

Std B: I'm agree with that

Std A: Sure? It doesn't look like one.

Std B: Hurmm

In the above excerpt, Std B's bald on strategy was obvious when he responded "are your sure with that?" to Std A's idea to celebrate Teacher's Day at a restaurant. Apparently, his response indicated that he was skeptical about Std A's idea. Later, when Std A justified his ideas by saying that his friend had good experience having a reunion at a restaurant, Std B showed his boldness again by asserting that it was inappropriate to hold an event at a famous restaurant. At this point, Std A could no longer accept Std B's response and started to stay firm with his idea by

giving other justifications. Giving justifications for his idea is indeed Std A's use of positive politeness strategy to avoid disagreement with Std B. Defined as "attempts to reduce the threat to the hearer's positive face and to ensure that the hearer is comfortable" (Zena Moayad et al., 2012), positive politeness strategies employed by Std A seemed to work when Std B finally agreed with his suggestion.

Similar to the earlier discussion where the less proficient student could be taught to speak more politely, Std A could share with Std B more appropriate and polite expressions that would be more acceptable to many. For instance, instead of saying "are you sure of that?", Std B could be coached to say "Oh really?" which is more likely to be acceptable by Std A. With regard to this, it must also be noted that input on appropriate types of politeness strategies from more proficient students are extremely important because they are the ones who know how it feels after receiving inappropriate responses from their interlocutors.

4. Conclusions

The present study examined the use of politeness strategies in role-play assessments among L2 students of different proficiency levels. The results of the study revealed that more less proficient students (referred to Moderately Proficient) employed more bald on strategies compared to more proficient students (referred to Highly Proficient) who appeared to be using more of negative politeness. When all these politeness strategies emerge in a conversation, it is important to point out the unfavourable strategies so that the one who utter would be more careful with their words in the future. More important than this, less competent speakers could be taught on how to express the same message in a more polite manner by their more competent counterparts, hence, promoting cooperative learning. To a certain extent, Self-Check Politeness Kit could help to expose learners to various ways of responses while at the same time, help them identify their own politeness level. Coupled with the practice of cooperative learning in CLT classrooms, this will help the students become more versatile and competent ESL speakers.

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Appendix 1

The five situations performed by the participants of the role-play assessment:

Situation 1: Two roommates are planning for activities to do during their leisure time. One of them suggests playing an outdoor game while the other thinks that they should play an indoor game. Act out the conversation that takes place at their hostel.

Situation 2: You noticed that your best friend always skips his/her breakfast. He/She suffers from gastritis which makes him/her feels a burning pain in the stomach. This poor health condition distracts his/her attention in class. As a friend, advise him/her on the importance of having breakfast every day. Act out the scene that takes place in the classroom.

Situation 3: You are discussing a wedding preparation with your cousin. He/She plans to have a grand, luxurious wedding ceremony as he/she is the eldest child in the family. Advise him/her to be moderate or reasonable in the preparation. Act out the scene that takes place at a one-stop wedding exhibition.

Situation 4: Two travel mates are planning for a vacation in Indonesia. One of them suggests hiring the service of a travel agency to get the best offer while the other prefers to travel independently to save money. Act out the conversation that takes place at the office.

Situation 5: A class representative is discussing with is/her assistant on a plan to celebrate Teacher's Day for their teachers. One of them suggests organizing an appreciation party at a famous restaurant and the other plans to have a potluck party and celebrate it in a classroom. Act out the conversation that takes place in the classroom.