

# Developing Students' Intelligent Character through Linguistic Politeness: The Case of English as a Foreign Language for Indonesian Students

Nanik Mariani<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Lambung Mangkurat (Unlam), Jl. Brigjen H. Hasan Basri, Banjarmasin, Indonesia

Correspondence: Nanik Mariani, Universitas Lambung Mangkurat (Unlam), Jl. Brigjen H. Hasan Basri, P. O. Box 219, Banjarmasin 70123, South Kalimantan, Indonesia. E-mail: mnanik33@yahoo.com

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## Abstract

English is a foreign language that must be taught at school, particularly in secondary school. Based on a preliminary observation of several secondary schools in Banjarmasin, it appears that the English taught focuses most on concepts or language formulas. Most of the students who interact in English during the learning process do not use expressions that contain linguistic politeness, as is required. The learning of linguistic politeness is not emphasized, while it is an effort to develop students' intelligent characters. This study primarily focuses on the investigation of teachers' linguistic politeness while interacting with the students, students' linguistic politeness, while interacting with the teachers, the students' linguistic politeness while interacting with their peers during the learning process in the classroom, how the teacher forms the students' linguistic politeness in the classroom, and how the linguistic politeness can develop students' intelligent characters. This study is one of classroom action research. Two cycles, in which each cycle consists of two meetings, are employed. After linguistic politeness is taught in four meetings through students' wheel and role play, it can be stated that during the English learning process in the classroom, the students have the opportunity to speak and practice linguistic politeness in English while interacting with their teachers and or other students. The forming of linguistic politeness in English can develop the students' intelligent characters from the beginning to the end of the learning activities. The students also become accustomed to employing polite vocabulary or expression in English that can improve their spiritual and emotional development, the aim of which is to lead to intelligence, primarily emotional intelligence.

**Keywords:** linguistic politeness, English learning, intelligent character

## 1. Introduction

In the effort to develop better citizens, both teachers and students are required to implement politeness principles (Leech, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1994; Azis, 2008). The formation of linguistic politeness develops through verbal and or non-verbal speeches and attitudes. Indonesia's education regulation No 20, Year 2003, Article 3 states that national education functions to develop capacity, character, and a dignified society by enhancing its intellectual capacity. In addition, Indonesia's education has also been tasked to develop students' potential so that they become faithful and pious citizens who able to respect each other and believe in the values of democratic and peaceful living.

According to Lickona (1991) education has two great goals, which are to guide the young generation to be smart and to guide them to be well behaved. The awareness of intelligent character and that of good behavior are not similar. Policy makers have enacted a policy regarding moral education that is intended to be the major part of school education. For instance, teach society character in line with intelligence education. They teach politeness in accordance with literacy education. They also teach good values in conformity with science education.

Intelligence and character are combined in the cultural and polite behavior in using the language. The quality of language indirectly shows the intelligent character quality of the language users. The term "language indicates the nation" means that one's intelligent character quality is shown by how he uses language, whether local dialect, Indonesian, or foreign language. This indicates that there is no better or worse language possessed and used by humans.

In Indonesia, English is taught from the first grade of secondary school through university. Nevertheless, the

demands of mastering written and spoken English in this globalization era are unavoidable. Although English is learned for almost seven years in formal education, its learning mainly focuses on concept mastery or language formulas related to the four competency standards and four language skills, which are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Its learning is also based on the competency standard that will be achieved. This implies that English learning only emphasizes language competence and cognitive skills and values in language remain ignored.

Yet character values should be integrated into all subjects. In terms of politeness, English learning has two goals: making the students able to communicate effectively and efficiently, both through writing and speaking, according to the prevailing politeness, and making the students able to use English language to improve their intellectual, emotional, and social abilities. These two goals are embedded in the four language skills -- listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

According to Muslich (2006) Indonesian society is highly concerned with politeness in using language. The uttered meaning deals not only with the word choices but also with its delivery. English language does not convey meanings related to social hierarchy. Nevertheless, according to Watts (2003) the word “Sir” and “Madam” are used to show honor to someone.

That shows that most secondary school students in Banjarmasin lack the ability to choose the proper vocabulary in English. Regarding this, in the Grand Design of Character Education –‘Pendidikan Karakter’ (2010), it is stated that all components including educational components, should be involved in implementing character education at school. For instance, they should participate in deciding curriculum content, learning process and assessment, relational quality, subject management, school management, the implementation of co-curricular activities, infrastructures, funding, and the work ethos of all people in the school environment, including teachers and students.

The Directorate of Secondary Schools has provided training for English teachers concerning affective skills formed through character education, which are integrated in teaching and the learning process. Thus, teachers can implement politeness values in English learning. Moreover, teachers have also been trained to make lesson plans containing character values or character education and have practiced it in the learning process in the classroom. Hence, both cognitive and affective skills are given in balance.

The English learning process containing politeness values at secondary schools is inseparable from the development of students’ intelligent character. As stated by Prayitno and Manullang (2010) that each individual has a certain level of intelligence that is reflected in affective, objective, analytic, aspiratory, creative, innovative, dynamic, and anticipative, open-minded, solvable behaviors. The material of intelligent character education should become an integral part of all learning programs. In other words, the material for fostering intelligent characters can be inserted into all subject materials, including English, particularly those that are related to intelligent character education in formal and non-formal education.

As previously discussed- a school is a place that helps students to develop their character, including politeness and intelligent characters. Based on the above explanation, this study aims to describe the efforts made by English teachers at SMPN 1 Banjarmasin (Government Junior High School) to instill and integrate good values and character among students. This study also aims to investigate the formation of politeness through English learning and how leads to intelligent character.

## **2. Methodology**

This study followed a descriptive qualitative approach by using the classroom action research model. This model was selected because it was in line with the purpose of this study, which investigated both teachers and the students’ utterances during English learning processes. This is supported by Alwasilah (2011:22) who states that classroom action research is intended to improve the learning process in the classroom.

The study was conducted at a Government Junior High school (SMP Negeri 1) in Banjarmasin, located on Mulawarman Street within the city. The respondents of this study were a teacher and eighth grade students. The eighth grade students were chosen because they had learned English previously in the seventh grade. The investigated teacher was an English teacher of the eighth grade. The investigation focused on the teacher’s preparation for and teaching process.

## **3. Literature Review**

### *3.1 Character*

According to Majid (2010) character is an important part of human life, including that of students. Character is a

thing that should be formed. It has been largely discussed by many people. The reasons are: 1) It is the most prominent aspect of several aspects of people. 2) It can change and can be affected by a situation or event occurring around the people or societal environment. 3) It can change due to one's physical and non-physical factors. 4) It is affected by one's attitude toward the community or individual life styles that are assumed to be strange or new.

Character is formed through the development of human dignity elements that are consistent with the Pancasila values. For instance, human beings were created as creatures who are faithful and pious, who are perfect, who are of a high level, who represent a viceguarants on this earth, and who have rights (human right). These five elements are used in building character.

The Dimension of Humanity- there are five dimensions of humanity, which include: the natural disposition (truth and glory), individuality (potency and difference), sociality (communication and togetherness), morals (value and moral), and diversity (faithful and piousness). These five dimensions reflect the individual character. The five capacities of humans. The five basic capacities of human beings are: faith, creativity, emotional, initiative, and work. These five capacities form characterized individuality.

According to Kesuma, Triatna, and Permana (2011) the values reflecting good behavior can be learned from the prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Those values are: truth, honesty, intelligent and communicative. These four values do not represent all characteristics possessed by Muhammad (pbuh), who is patient, strong, and who has other good characteristics. Being right indicates that Muhammad (pbuh) has high commitment to the truth. He always says and does the right thing. He also upholds the truth. Trusted means honesty and reliability. In this case, Muhammad's utterances and actions are trustworthy. Intelligent means intelligence, wise, having broad knowledge, skilled, and professional. It implies that the actions done by Muhammad (pbuh) are reliable in solving problems. Good at communication means communicative. It indicates that Muhammad's utterances can be easily understood by his partners.

### *3.2 Components of Good Character*

Character basically comprises three operative values (values in action) that are related. Those values are: moral knowledge, moral sense, and moral behavior (moral action). Lickona (1991) asserts that in character education, it is clear we want our children to be able to judge what is right, care deeply about what is right, and then do what they believe to be right - even in the face of pressure from without and temptation from within.

### *3.3 Character Education*

Character education is a system that is used to embed character values (including knowledge, consciousness, and willingness) and action to the school community to implement those values for God Almighty, ourselves, others, the environment, and the nation. In education character, all components should be involved, including the educational components. People can be educated in various ways to have mutual respect and responsibility. One of them is through the implementation of values in students' life (Lickona, 1991). The teachers who succeed in building the students' character usually have moral awareness, perspective, and moral reason. They also recognize moral values. They are also able to make decisions and are knowledgeable. Moreover, teachers also have the following: conscience, confidence, self-control, empathy, kindness, humbleness, ability, willingness, and good habits.

According to the Ministry of Education in the Grand Design of Character Education (2010), the main function of character education is to establish a nation that is strong and competitive; that possesses morals, tolerance, mutual cooperation, patriotic spirit, and dynamic development; and that is oriented towards science and technology, which is based on faith and piety to God Almighty and Pancasila. At school, character education is related to the model given by the teachers that can influence the students' character. This action includes the teachers' methods to deliver the material; teachers' actions; and how the teachers express tolerance.

Moreover, character education also functions to develop the basic strength of the students to have good hearts, thinking patterns, and behavior; to strengthen and establish the multicultural behavior of the nation; and to improve the competitive civilization of the nation in world interaction.

### *3.4 Intelligent Character*

In general, Prayito and Manullang (2010) defines intelligence as the ability to manipulate the experienced condition elements to attain a certain goal. The distinct explanation of this definition is elaborated below:

- Ability is the individual or community character that is used to fulfill a certain demand/need.

- Manipulation is an active behavior that is intended to see and organize the relation of elements in a certain condition
- Elements are the sorting/separating result of parts in a particular entity.
- Goal is an expected condition that is formed through effort.
- Success is a condition that is in line with the expected criterion.

As discussed above, intelligence is the ability to manipulate the experienced conditions' elements to gain a certain condition. Regarding this, each individual has a certain level of intelligence that is reflected in the behavior. This behavior has several indicators, including: active; dynamics and directed; analytics and objective; aspiration; creative and innovative; anticipation; open-minded and advanced; and solvability.

Intelligent character is formed through education by using a learning process that consistently instills and integrates the character and intelligent values to a high level. Learned limitations are varied, but it has one aim, which is to become skilled at a new thing. One of the learnt limitations is known as the learning dimension, which comprises five dimensions: knowing, having capability, having willingness, becoming accustomed to something, and acting sincerely.

### 3.5 Language and Philosophy

In linguistics, language is defined as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols that are used as communication or a social integration tool (Chaer, 2010). The strength of human thinking is expressed through language. With language, people can think continuously, regularly, and systematically. Sauri (2002) mentions four circles of meaning in language, which are:

- The meaning of the speaker's utterance reflects his thinking content.
- The thinking content is expressed through the meaning of sentences.
- The meaning is then expressed through conventional meaning.
- Conventional meaning is expressed from the meaning of the speaker's utterances.

Pranowo (2008) states there is no better or worse language. If there is a language that can be used to express most thoughts and feeling more than any other language, it is due to the speaker's ability to explore the language's potency.

### 3.6 Politeness in Language

Humans are basically social beings who always communicate verbally. In communicating, the ability to select and use the proper and polite words (diction) is really required. Politeness in using the language, however, is an ethic to socialize with the society. In this case, several things should be considered while communicating with others, such as the word choices, the time and place of the language being used, the hearer, and the purpose of the utterances.

Politeness in interaction is reflected by the language used, without considering the social status of the society (Gumperz as cited by Brown & Levinson, 1994). Meanwhile, according to Geertz as cited by Sauri (2006) polite language is how the language used by society considers the social relationship between the speaker and hearer in the form of familiarity or status.

Muslich (2006) asserts that politeness in language is the ways, customs, or habits prevailing in society. Politeness is behavior rules that are determined or agreed upon by a certain society so that it becomes a social behavior. Meanwhile, a clear definition of polite behavior is given by Watts (2003) who says that "Polite behavior is equivalent to socially 'correct' or appropriate behavior; others considers it to be the hallmark of the cultivated man or woman. Some might characterize a polite person as always being considerate towards other people; others might suggest that a polite person is self-effacing".

The politeness theory proposed by Leech (1983) is based on the politeness principles. These principles are elaborated by six maxims: the tact maxim; generosity maxim; approbation maxim; modesty maxim; agreement maxim; and sympathy maxim.

According to Brown and Levinson as cited by Chaer (2010) politeness theory is related to the notion of "face" (self-esteem). A rational person has "face" that should be kept and maintained. In Indonesia, the terms "losing face", "hiding face", "saving face", and "falling face" probably can explain the face concept in politeness, in which it should not be debased by other people. While Azis (2008) The formulation of politeness theory should contain at least three types of politeness: pre-communicative politeness; on-the-spot politeness; and

post-communicative politeness.

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

##### 4.1 *The Teacher's Linguistic Politeness while Interacting with the Students during the English Learning Process*

The teacher implemented the linguistic politeness aspects, particularly the politeness principles and scale. As the speaker, the teacher respected the students as the hearers. He also preserved the students' feelings. Instead of using command or imperative sentences, he preferred to use request statements when giving instructions to the students. He usually called the students by using the word "dear" to show respect to the students. He also did not forget to say "thank you" when the students completed their tasks. In this communication, the emotional relationship between father and children was felt. Nevertheless, the teacher still maintained formality and distance with the students.

##### 4.2 *The Students' Linguistic Politeness while Interacting with the Teacher during the English Learning Process*

In the process of English learning, particularly English speaking skills, the students implemented linguistic politeness aspects when communicating with the teacher. The aspects used primarily focused on the politeness principles and scale that were based on the rank scale and social status between the students and the teacher. The students called the teacher by using the word "Sir" as a sign of respect for the older person. They were also becoming accustomed to saying "thank you", and thus, as the hearer, the teacher felt he was respected. Moreover, the students also made other polite utterances, such as: "what should we do, Sir?"; "could we change the sentence, Sir?"; "so ..... We can give some additional speech, can't we?"; and "excuse me, Sir. May I go out?"

##### 4.3 *The Students' Linguistic Politeness while Interacting with Their Peers during the English Learning Process*

Although the utterances were meant for their classmates, the students implemented politeness aspects while interacting with them. This was in line with the politeness scale proposed by Leech that stated, social distance between the speaker and hearer existed in the classmate relationship. Polite utterances made by the students were: "Please guys, let's do our job!"; "Come on buddy, let's do it"; and "Yes, but my answer should be different than before". They also used the word "guys" and "buddy" for those assumed as best friends. Moreover, they also used the word "please" while asking something of their peers.

##### 4.4 *The Forming of Students' Linguistic Politeness during the English Learning Process*

The forming of students' linguistic politeness occurred in the entire process of the learning activity. At the beginning and the end of the lesson, the politeness in using the language could be seen from the greetings made by the students. In response to this, the teacher usually said "thank you". In the learning process, the linguistic politeness was demonstrated by verbal/non-verbal speech or actions made by a teacher or the students. The teacher, for instance, always respected the response or answer given by the students. He also gave the opportunity for all students to answer his question. In other words, he did not only focus on certain students. The forming of students' linguistic politeness was done through a cooperative learning model by using students' wheels. The students, in this case, practiced the polite utterance taught by the teachers using the face-to-face dialogue in two circles. They performed it in front of the class.

The politeness in using English language could develop students' intelligent character during the entire process of English learning in the context of five capacities (faithful, creativity, emotion, initiative, and work), which was proposed by Prayitno (2011) as the characteristics of intelligent character. This was in line with the Grand Design formulated by the Ministry of Education (2010) which was thinking development, spiritual development, emotional development, innovative development, and work development. These developments were components in Human Right. It could be developed through politeness in using the language. The greetings made at the beginning of the lesson formed students' emotional development. The prayer made at the beginning of the lesson formed students' spiritual development. Meanwhile, the politeness expressed through students' wheels improved students' spiritual and emotional development, which led to the forming of intelligence, particularly emotional intelligence.

#### 5. Conclusion

It has been concluded that through language, students are able develop intelligent characters by using polite words. In the process of English learning, particularly English speaking skills, the students implement linguistic politeness aspects when communicating with the teacher. The aspects used primarily focus on the politeness principles and scale used to rank words and social status between the students and the teacher. The students call the teacher using words "Sir and Master" as a sign of respect for the older people.

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