

# Leech's Politeness Principle Used by Teachers in English Language Teaching

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**ABSTRACT.** This study investigates the types and forms of politeness principle used by the teachers in English language teaching. Further, it also aims at finding the types and forms of politeness principles that are frequently used by the teachers. This study focuses on analyzing all utterances containing Leech's politeness principle used by the teachers. In collecting the data, this study uses the documentation technique. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive analysis method. The result of this research showed that there are nine types of Leech's politeness principles: tact maxim, generosity maxim, approbation maxim, agreement maxim, sympathy maxim, feeling reticence maxim, opinion reticence, obligation of S to O, and obligation of O to S. While the forms of Leech's politeness principle found in this study are declarative, interrogative and imperative.

**Keywords:** *Politeness, Teacher, English Language.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is the process of transferring thought and feeling which is done by the people in society, and it includes the use of signs (see [1]). [2] states "Communication refers to the transmission and reception of information (a 'message') between a source and a receiver using a signaling system." In linguistics terms, communication can be defined as the oral or written activity between source and receiver carrying a linguistics symbol to convey a message. When communication happened, the speaker will utter a meaning. The meaning depends on the speaker's intention. The speaker might intend to carry the literal meaning without any particular intention, or he might carry beyond the literal meaning. The speaker will expect the hearer to interpret the speaker's intention as the speaker wishes. While in reality, the hearer sometimes may understand the speaker's intention differently. Therefore, the speaker and hearer must consider the context and the situation to get an appropriate purpose of communication. This term strictly refers to the analysis of pragmatics (e.g. [3]–[5]).

According to [1], pragmatics is the study of how utterance has a meaning in the situation. In pragmatic communication, there are some criteria that should be considered to make pragmatic communication happen. The criteria are the

addressers or addressees, the context of an utterance, and the goals of an utterance [4], [6]. Leech [7] argues that pragmatics is the science of problem-solving. In pragmatics, there are two main problems that need to be solved. The first problem is the problem faced by the speaker. In pragmatics the speaker wants to convey his intention or purpose through a speech, the utterance is always delivered by using indirect speech and it is conveyed implicitly. From the point of view of the speaker, the problem that must be solved is how to communicate with people in a good way (between speaker-hearer).

The second is the problem faced by the hearer, from the hearer's point of view, the problem that must be solved is "S says this and that, what is meant by the S?". In pragmatic communication, sometimes the hearers find it difficult to interpret the meanings spoken by the speakers because only the speakers who know the real meaning. From the two problems above, it can be concluded that the speaker wants to form meaning or purpose through his speech, while the hearer wants to convince the meaning conveyed by the speaker. [7] states that the problems in the scope of pragmatics are closely related to behavior or habits that occur in pragmatic communication. In pragmatic communication, the speaker will aim to fulfill his intention or desire through his utterances while the hearer determines

the intention of the speech delivered by the speaker. From the point of view of the speaker, the need is to determine the communicative means that will fulfill that goal. From the listener's point of view, the need is to determine communicative goals in the message uttered by the speaker.

The communicative goals of communication happen where people are obligated to create a polite conversation [8]–[10]. They will choose certain strategies to have a polite conversation in order to maintain communication. People do this in order to get their conversation to run well and more acceptable by the others. Politeness principles commonly occur in the communication process both formal or informal situation [11]. Politeness is one of the branches of pragmatics which investigates a way of behaving and speaking well in accordance with the rules applied in the community. The principle of politeness becomes an important aspect in society and everyday life because it is used to recognize the socio-culture in a society. Furthermore, politeness can also be considered as a kind of social norm determined by a community. According to [12], politeness strategies are very important to investigate as they are used by people in their social interactions and in the specific contexts, knowing what to say, how to say, when to say, and to be with other people. Whilst, [7] states that the principle of politeness is minimizing the expression of impolite beliefs, and there is an appropriate positive version or maximizing the expression of polite beliefs.

The politeness principle studies about the use of language in communication [13]. Leech [1] proposed it to produce and understand language based on politeness. The purpose of politeness principles is to establish a feeling of community and social relationships. Further, Leech proposed six maxims, namely tact maxim, generosity maxim, approbation maxim, modesty maxim, agreement maxim, sympathy maxim, feeling reticence, opinion reticence, obligation reticence, and obligation reticence (see [14];[15]).

Politeness can also be regarded as some kind of social norm determined by the convention of the community [16]. A politeness conversation can be used in classroom interaction. As it is commonly known that the teaching and learning process in classrooms should be interactive. In teaching and learning activity, teachers play an important role such as teachers' academic instructions, motivating the class, and evaluating students (e.g. [2];[17]). Harmer [18] states that one of the important teacher skills without any technical skills demand is how the teacher communicates and interacts with students. It requires teachers to empathize with the people they are talking to.

In education, teachers are expected to play vital roles in the lives of the students in their classrooms

[19]. As supported by Nuh quoted by [11] asserts that politeness of Indonesian students is in a state of decline. It means that a teacher has a responsibility to teach their students how to speak politely and warning them if they speak impolitely at school especially during classroom interaction. Also, in order to influence the students to speak politely, teachers need to speak politely especially during the teaching and learning process.

As commonly known, the conversations between the teachers and the students in the classroom might reflect numerous aspects of politeness. Unconsciously, by the time the teachers teach the students, the teachers are expected to express the politeness utterance to make the students fulfill teachers' intentions. This study will focus on Geoffrey Leech's politeness utterances uttered by the teacher to the students in the classroom. This study finds it different from several previous studies that have been conducted. Most of the previous studies apply the old Politeness Principle theory by Leech. Most of the researcher tends to use the leech's 1983 theory, while this study applies the Leech's theory. In addition, the implementation of politeness strategy is also relevant to the 2013 curriculum which emphasizes on good character, since politeness strategy deals with someone's ability to show his/her good character. Thus, the teacher should implement it in language learning activities along with language usage.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This study uses a qualitative method that enabled a detailed investigation of the politeness principle used by the English teachers in the classroom. This study is conducted in a private Junior High School in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Further, two English teachers were chosen purposively as the participants of this study. While collecting the data, this study uses classroom observation and questionnaires as instruments.

## **3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### ***1.1 The Types of Politeness Principle Used by The English Teachers***

Politeness is a sequence of behavior that makes the participants are able to engage and participate in social interaction [1]. Politeness deals with the existence of self and others. Self is represented as a speaker and the other is represented as hearer (Leech, 2014). Further, he mentions some types of politeness principle such as tact maxim, generosity maxim, approbation maxim, modesty maxim, agreement maxim, sympathy maxim, feeling reticence maxim, opinion reticence maxim, obligation of S to O, obligation of O to S. In this study, it is only found nine types of Leech's politeness principle. The teachers' utterances that

show the types of politeness principle are mentioned as follows:

**3.1.1 Tact maxim**

It deals with directive speech [11]. It is usually applied in commanding or ordering utterances, such as “Open the door, please!” and “Can you read the article, please?”. In this study, tact maxim occurs when the teacher asks her students to answer the question verbally. It is showed in the following conversation:

**Conversation 1**

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Teacher	:	Anyone who can answer the questions, please come forward and help me to answer the questions.
Student	:	Translating “ <i>Rumah</i> ” in English Bu?

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The utterance delivered by the teacher above is a commanding utterance in the form of request. The teacher delivers the utterance in imperative form. As have been stated by Jing et al., (2018) imperative sentence can be used to make someone do something. She delivers the request directly and the student as a hearer seems to convey the request by saying “Translating “*Rumah*” in English Bu?”

**Conversation 2**

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Teacher	:	This is how to pronounce the word m-o-s-q-u-e. Ok, please repeat after me.
Student	:	Mosque, m-o-s-q-u-e.

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In the conversation 2, the teacher asks her students to re-pronounce the vocabulary. In asking her students to do the request, she avoids the force or the pressure by giving the students an appropriate example. The notion is supported by Leech’s theory. Leech [7] defines that requests are often indirect, tentative, giving an opportunity to refuse, and also softening, or mitigating, S’s imposition on H.

**Conversation 3**

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Teacher	:	Number 9? Student number 9, can you read your answer?
Student	:	Oh no, it is me. My answer is church and bus stop.

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In the conversation 3, the teacher asks the student number 9 to answer the question verbally. The teacher also uses the modal “can” that actually allows the student as hearer to refuse the question, fortunately the student number 9 fulfills the teacher’s request by answering the teacher question “Oh no, it is me. My answer is church and bus stop”.

**Conversation 4**

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Teacher	:	This city. “There is library...” Library, what is library? Well, Riza, what do you think? What is the meaning of library in Bahasa?
Student	:	<i>Perpustakaan</i> Bu.

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In conversation 4, the teacher is delivering a question to her student. Actually, this is an implicit question since she actually asks her student to answer the question. The students answer by saying “*Perpustakaan Bu*”

**3.1.2 Generosity Maxim**

Offers and invitations are speech-events that belong to the generosity maxim[7]. In generosity maxim, the speaker will utter an utterance that minimizes benefit to herself. It can be seen from the conversation below.

**Conversation 1**

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Student	:	I know the answer Bu, but I cannot pronounce it.
Teacher	:	Just try to read it, let me help you if you make a mistake.

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It can be seen that the teacher gives a hand to her student by offering guidance since the student feels unconfident to answer the question. An offer belongs to commissive types of speech act, where the speaker does a certain act that benefits the hearer. In this context, the hearer will receive guidance from the teacher as a benefit.

**Conversation 2**

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Teacher	:	“ <i>Makanya belajar. Kamu belajar ya, nanti saya bantu</i> ” (Therefore, you have to study. I will help you).
Student	:	Yes Bu, I have tried.

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In audio excerpt 4.8, line 1-2, the teacher seems quite disappointed and angry with her student. It can be seen through the usage “*makanya*” word. In Bahasa, mostly we use the word “*makanya*” to identify something negative. In this context, instead of getting angry, the teacher tends to give the student support by giving an offer.

**Conversation 3**

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Teacher	:	Just do it by yourself, if you find any difficulties, you can ask me anyway.
Student	:	Ok Bu.

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In conversation 3, firstly, the teacher asks the students to do the assignment by their self. Actually, the utterance uttered by the teacher above contains two maxims, the first maxim is tact maxim. The tact maxim utterance is reflected through the utterance “Just do it by yourself”

(commanding). The second maxim belongs to the generosity maxim. The generosity maxim is reflected through the offer uttered by the teacher. She offered a favor for the students who cannot accomplish their tasks.

**Conversation 4**

It is free to choose the number you want, next.  
 Teacher : Come on, let's go. If you can do the task, I will treat you in the school canteen later.  
 Student : Ok Bu.

In conversation 4, the teacher motivates the students to be more courageous in answering the question. The courageous utterance is delivered by the teacher offering a reward for the students by treating them in the school canteen. As it is commonly known, offers and invitations are speech-events that belong to the generosity maxim. The students as the hearer will benefit the moment.

**3.1.3 Approbation Maxim**

In this study, the approbation maxim of the principle politeness usually occurs when the teachers give compliments to the students [11]. The teachers give compliments usually when the students can finish their tasks, answer the teachers' questions perfectly, etc. For example, it is showed when the teacher asked the student to spell an English word. It can be seen in the conversation below:

**Conversation 1**

Student : Mosque. M-O-S-Q-U-E.  
 You are perfect. For anyone who  
 Teacher : do not finish the task yet, just keep going. Complete your task.

In conversation 1, the teacher gives compliments to her student by saying "perfect". As it is known that the word "perfect" is categorized as an adjective word, especially positive adjective. The usage of a positive adjective is being crucial in approbation maxim.

**Conversation 2**

Student : I... I am fine.  
 Very good Fara, you still  
 Teacher : remember it. You have already studied. If I say "How do you do?", what will you say?

In conversation 2, the teacher give compliments to her student since she still remembers the teacher's previous explanation. The teacher uses the adjective "good". After she uses the adjective, she puts the intensifier "very". As it is commonly known that as a speaker, the teacher gives high value to the student (hearer).

**3.1.4 Agreement Maxim**

There is a tendency to refuse someone's opinion on social interaction and conversation. When the speaker and hearer are sharing their opinion, and both of them agree with the opinion being shared, the agreement maxim happened. On the other hand, if one of them disagreed, the disagreement happened. Agreement maxim is divided into two types, partial and fully agreement[7]. The example of agreement maxim in this study can be seen in the following conversations:

**Conversation 1**

Well, now just do the task. How  
 Teacher : many times do you need to finish it?  
 Student : How about 20 minutes Bu?  
 Teacher : **Well**, I give you 20 minutes.

The conversation above is considered as an agreement, since the teacher agrees with the student's offer. The usage of "well" word marks the agreement between the student and teacher. In this context, the speaker (self) gives high value to the hearer (other).

**Conversation 2**

Teacher : Beside?  
 Student : Next to the school?  
 Teacher : Beside the school. Almost correct. We should use "beside", since the hospital is a bit far from the church.

In conversation 2, the teacher utters partial agreement. Instead of showing the direct disagreement, she tends to use the word "almost correct" to mitigate the student's opinion. In this context, the teacher still wants to give value to her student as the hearer.

**3.1.5 Sympathy Maxim**

In our daily lives, we often show our sympathy toward others. Sympathy is usually given to appreciate or give high value to the other. Leech [7] defines the speech acts such as congratulations and condolences into sympathy maxim. In this study, it can be seen from the following dialogue:

**Conversation 1**

Teacher : Was he sick yesterday?  
 Student : He is sick  
 Teacher : A lot of people get sick nowadays. I hope he will get better soon.

In the conversation above, the teacher asks the student's condition since he does not attend the class. Then, the other student informs that the student who does not attend the class is sick. In this context, the teacher gives high value towards the student's feelings by saying "I hope he will get better soon". It works as an intensifier that indicates sympathy maxim.

**Conversation 2**

Teacher	:	Attention please, if you are still noisy, I will not tell you the result of your test.
Student	:	Silent please.
Teacher	:	Well, that's good. The first one is Abiyu, 50. I hope you will get better score next time and I hope you will not sleep in class anymore.

In conversation 2, the teacher shows her sympathy towards her student who gets a bad score in English. The words "I hope" indicates the sympathy intensifier. In the context, the utterance stated by the teacher above has another intention. She intends to tease her student since her student is lazy and loves to sleep during the lesson.

**Conversation 3**

Teacher	:	Fardila 60, then Ghassan 90. Congratulation Ghassan, you got the highest score.
Student	:	Owesome, Ghassan you are great.

In conversation 3, the teacher congratulates her student. The utterance uttered by the teacher consists of sympathy maxim intensifier, as the speaker, the teacher intends to give high values to the other's feelings. Leech [7] states that several speech acts are categorized as the sympathy maxims; one of them is congratulation.

*3.1.6 Feeling-Reticence Maxim*

Some people tend to show their feeling to the others who undergo misfortune. Some people also have a tendency to share their bad feeling towards the other. The example of feeling-Reticence maxim is shown in the conversation below:

Teacher	:	How are you today?
Student	:	I'm fine thank you, and you?
Teacher	:	Actually, I'm not really good because I have got cough. So, I ask you to be quiet today.

The first response to questions like "I am fine, thank you, and you" have a purpose to reveal the bad news which probably happens. Then, the teacher replied, "actually, I am not really good because I have got a cough". In this context, the teacher gives low value to her own feeling, she cannot deny that she tries to share her problem.

*3.1.7 Reticence Maxim*

The usage of hedges is usually to soften someone's opinion or idea. It can be used to avoid a contradiction and gives the hearer high value. Mostly, the speaker softens the force of their own opinions, by adding a hedging word such as I think, I guess, I don't suppose, it might be that, etc. (Leech, 2014). Further, the opinion-reticence maxim can be seen in the conversation below:

**Conversation 1**

Teacher	:	Don't forget to study at home, good luck. I have given you the test result. I think you should improve your effort in learning so you can get better score.
Student	:	Amien Bu.

In the conversation above, the teacher shares her opinion. According to her opinion, the student can pass the examination if they keep practicing and learning. The utterance stated by teacher above is categorized as an opinion-reticence maxim. It can be seen through the usage hedging word "think". It is categorized as the stance verb.

**Conversation 2**

Teacher	:	Wanda, why are you sleeping? Mas, please wake him up. Wanda, good afternoon, do you have a good sleep? It seems you will not pass this English class, right? What time did you sleep last night?
Student	:	1 a.m Bu.

In conversation 2, actually, the teacher wants to tease her student. Surprisingly, to soften her utterance, she delivers it by using an opinion-reticence maxim. It can be seen through the sentence "It seems you will not pass this English class, right?". The word "will" is categorized as a modal verb that is usually used to hedge an utterance.

*3.1.8 The obligation of S to O*

It means that S gives a high value to O. An apology is mainly used in polite speech events to promote the S's obligation to O. Beside to show an apology, obligation of S to O maxim is used by. It can be seen in the following conversation:

**Conversation 1**

Teacher : The door is open. Can you close the door please?  
 Student : Yes Bu.  
 Teacher : Yes, thank you very much Firdha.

In the conversation it is showed that the teacher thanks her student for a favor. Actually, there are two maxims based on the teacher’s utterance. The first one is tact maxim (1), the second one is obligation S to O maxim (3). The second maxim can be indicated through the sentence “yes, thank you very much Firdha”. The utterance means that it gives a high value to S’s obligation to O.

**Conversation 2**

Teacher : Any homework? Well, who is on duty today? I will check the schedule. Today is Tuesday, well Firdha is your duty today. Firdha can you clean the white board please?  
 Student : Okay Bu.  
 Teacher : Thank you Firdha. Well, is there any homework?

In conversation 2, the teacher is thanking her student, Firdha. Firdha helps her clean up the whiteboard. The teacher expresses her gratitude by uttering “thank you Firdha”. As it is commonly known, this maxim strictly refers to someone’s psychological feeling (as happened in expressive speech act). In the conversation above, it is clear that the teacher shows her psychological feeling, thanking.

**3.1.9 The obligation of O to S**

The obligation of O to S intends to give a low value to other’s obligation to the speaker (Leech, 2014). It can be seen in the following conversations:

**Conversation 1**

Teacher : Ok. Number 8 is apologizing. What is the example of apologizing?  
 Student : I am sorry Bu, Pak Priyoto asked all IPM students to prepare and practice for the weekly flag ceremony.  
 Teacher : Okay, no problem, but next time you should ask for my permission.

In the conversation it is showed that the teacher is giving a response to the student’s apology since her students are late to attend the class. The teacher is giving a low value to her student’s obligation to

feel sorry to her. In conclusion, the teacher as the self (speaker) tries to decrease the student’s (other/hearer) fault by uttering “okay, no problem”.

**Conversation 2**

Teacher : Well, we will discuss our previous task. I will call your name randomly as usual. Since the date of today is 12<sup>th</sup>. I will call the student number 12. Well, Deni what is your answer?  
 Student : I am sorry Bu, I did not come to the class yesterday. I have not done my task.  
 Teacher : Really? Let me check it on my note. Our last meeting is on 10<sup>th</sup>. Well, right, you did not come to the class. It is better to ask your friend about the task next time.

In conversation 2, the teacher wants to discuss the previous task with her student. As the teacher does in the previous meeting, she will call her student’s names randomly. Unfortunately, the student who was called did not do the task because he did not come to the class in the previous meeting. Then, the student apologizes to the teacher, and the teacher responds to her student’s apology by saying, “It is better to ask your friend about the task next time.”

**3.1.11 The Form Politeness Principle Used by The Teachers**

According to [3] there are three forms of sentences: declarative, imperative, and interrogative. This study found three forms of politeness principle uttered by the teachers, such as declarative, imperative and interrogative.

Firstly, the declarative sentence refers to a declarative clause that declares a piece of information or statement [21]. If a speaker tends to use a declarative sentence, her utterance will be preceded by the subject and followed by the verb. The utterance or statement will be ended by the usage of the full stop. This study found 18 forms of declarative politeness principle uttered by the teachers. For example, when the student feels unconfident in pronouncing the vocabulary, the teacher encourages the students to be confident by uttering a declarative sentence. She says, “*Bu Ria bantu nanti kalau salah* (Bu Ria will help you if you make mistake). If we break down the sentence pattern, the pattern will be Subject (Bu Ria), Verb “*bantu* (help)”, adverbial “*kalau tidak bisa* (If you can’t). followed by the verb “*bantu*(help)”. As we have known, a simple declarative sentence is preceded by the subject and followed by a verb.

Secondly, the interrogative sentence is a sentence that is usually not preceded by subject or

verb [22]. The auxiliary verbs is usually preceded by the interrogative sentence, such as to be, modal, and “do or does” auxiliary. The interrogative sentence ended with a question mark. This study found five forms of declarative politeness principle uttered by the teachers in the teaching and learning process in the classroom. For example, the teacher asks the student by saying, “what is the meaning of library?” As we have known in English, we studied about WH- questions. The utterance stated by the teacher earlier is preceded by the WH- question word “what”. The question delivered by the teacher has the illocutionary meaning. In this context, the teacher wants the students to answer her question.

Thirdly, imperative. An imperative sentence is a form of sentence that strictly refers to give advice, command, or instruction [23]. The sentence in imperative will be ended by the exclamation mark. By using an imperative sentence, we can point someone to do something [24]. This study found eight forms of imperative politeness principle uttered by the teachers in the teaching-learning process in the classroom. For example, when the teacher requests her student to re-pronounce the vocabulary. She says, “*Ayo tolong diulang lagi ya bacanya (read it again please)*”. The teacher’s utterance could be referred as the imperative sentence as a request. Actually, it is quite the same with the command, but the form is more polite than a command. We can see, the teacher puts the word “*tolong (please)*”.

*3.1.12 The Types and Forms of Politeness Principle Frequently Used by The Teachers*

TABLE 1. The amount and percentage of the types of politeness principle

No	Types of Politeness Principle	Total	Total (%)
1	Tact Maxim	6	20%
2	Generosity Maxim	4	13,33%
3	Approbation Maxim	5	16,67%
4	Agreement Maxim	3	10%
5	Sympathy Maxim	4	13,33%
6	Feeling Reticence	1	3,33%
7	Opinion Reticence	3	10%
8	Obligation of S to O	2	6,67%
9	Obligation of O to S	2	6,67%
<b>Total</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Table I describes the nine types of politeness principle frequently used by the teachers such as, tact maxim, generosity maxim, approbation maxim, agreement maxim, sympathy maxim, feeling reticence, opinion reticence, the obligation of S to O, and obligation of S to O. According to the table I, there are 6 utterances of tact maxim (20 %), 5 utterances of approbation maxims (16,67%), there are 4 utterances of generosity maxim (13,33 %), 4 utterances of sympathy maxim (13,33 %), 3

utterances of agreement maxim (10%), 3 utterances of opinion reticence (10%), 2 utterances of the obligation of S to O (6,67 %), 2 utterances of the obligation of S to O (6,67%), and 1 utterance of feeling reticence (3,33%).

TABLE 2. The amount and percentage of the form of politeness principle

No	Form of Politeness Principle	Total	Total (%)
1	Declarative	18	60 %
2	Interrogative	5	16.67
3	Imperative	8	23,33 %
<b>Total</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table II describes the three forms of politeness principle frequently used by the teachers. There are declarative, interrogative, and imperative. According to table II, there are 18 utterances of declarative (60 %), 8 utterances of imperative (8%), and 5 utterances of interrogative (5%).

**4. CONCLUSION**

This study found 9 types of politeness principle uttered by the English teachers: (1) tact maxim, which mostly deals with the directive utterances. (2) generosity maxim, which mostly shows an offer. (3) approbation maxim, which deals with the usage of the positive adjective. (4) agreement maxim, which deals with the agreement utterances in the maxim. (5) sympathy maxim, which is delivered in declarative form. (6). Feeling reticence, which is also mostly delivered in declarative form. (7). Opinion reticence, which is commonly signed by the use of hedging words. (8). Obligation S to O, which is marked by the use of apology and gratitude statements. (9). The obligation of O to S, which is marked by the thanking and apologizing responses. Furthermore, the teachers used 3 forms of politeness principle such as declarative, interrogative, and imperative. A declarative sentence is the most frequent form of politeness principle used by the teacher. While the most frequent type of politeness principle used by the teachers is tact maxim.

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