Politeness Strategies Used by Japanese Learners in Language-learning Mobile App *HelloTalk*

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze Japanese as second language learners' use of politeness strategies when asking Japanese native speaker to do the language exchange in the mobile app *HelloTalk* based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) classifications of politeness strategies. The research was conducted using descriptive method with quantitative approach. The data were collected from 30 *HelloTalk* accounts of Japanese as second language learners, consisting of the request expressions to Japanese native speaker to learn and teach about each other's language (language exchange activity). The findings revealed that most Japanese learners used positive politeness strategy to show friendliness and closeness with the native Japanese speakers, so they do not hesitate to send a message and do the language learning activity together. Meanwhile, the least strategy used by Japanese learners in the *HelloTalk* app is the off-record strategy, as it requires higher Japanese language proficiency.

Keywords: HelloTalk, Japanese learners, Language exchange, Politeness strategy.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the recent years, software developers in the world do not stop creating and developing countless media such as mobile applications that can be helpful in various fields, as well as language-learning field. Without going anywhere or using any physical book, language learning now can be done just in hand. However, a mobile device with an internet connection may be a minimum requirement for making that happen.

One of the mobile applications that is commonly used for language learning is *HelloTalk*. Unlike other language learning applications that only provide self-study features such as learning materials and practice quizzes, *HelloTalk* is a social media-based language exchange application that allows its users to interact with native speakers of the target language. *HelloTalk* also has unique features such as on-the-text corrections, automatic translation, or a feature called "Moments", which is a place where users can share their story through texts, photos, videos, or voice recordings. The users can also give a like, comment, or correct any grammatical errors in each other's posts.

Nushi and Makiabadi (2018) said that *HelloTalk* is an effective language learning application especially for the

young generations regarding current situation that affect their social environment. Polovin (2021) also stated that *HelloTalk* is one of the best free applications to interact directly with native speakers of various languages around the world that can be used anytime and anywhere.

Native speakers of the target language are generally people from countries with different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, to make a good communication, it is important to use certain methods or strategies. One thing that can help is the use of politeness. Not only about ethic and how polite we are in using language, but also the realization of the politeness theory which describes language forms we use depending on social conditions and interpretation of the language forms (Goldsmith, 2008).

The politeness theory originally begins with Erving Goffman's concept about "face" (Goldsmith, 2008). In short, face can be described as the public self-image that can describe social relations, which everyone has and maintain each other's (Johansson, 2018). This concept was adopted and developed by Brown and Levinson (1987) which came up with a notion about the classification of face.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), there are two kinds of face regarding one's desire. The first one is
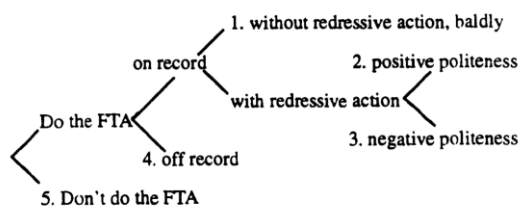
Figure 1 Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies.

called 'negative face', the desire of not to be disturbed by others' action, and the second one is 'positive face', the desire to be approved and recognized by others (Kitamura, 2000). However, there is an inevitable condition when the speaker's action is contrary to both or one of the hearer's desires (face), Brown and Levinson called it as Face Threatening Acts (hereafter FTA).

In order to avoid conducting the FTAs, Brown and Levinson proposed politeness strategies which include four main strategies as shown in the Figure 1 (Longcope, 1995, p. 71).

This theory of politeness strategies has been applied in many kinds of situation in our daily lives. Therefore, numerous studies have been conducted to analyze the use of politeness strategy in various circumstances, such as online conversation (Pathanasin & Eschstruth, 2022; Algiovan, 2022; Mulyono, Amalia, & Suryoputro, 2019; Sembiring & Sianturi, 2021; Pratiwi & Anindyarini, 2021), social media (Maros & Rosli, 2017; Sagala, 2021; Rosyadie, 2021; Ammaida, 2020).

Especially in social media Twitter, it was found that the user employed the four politeness strategies with positive politeness as the most employed strategy and negative politeness as the least (Maros & Rosli, 2017). The reasons of using politeness in social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, are assumed to show the common desire of the writer, reduce the distance gap and social status differences between the writer and the interlocutor (Sagala, 2021).

Meanwhile, for second language learners, there are things that affects their use of politeness strategy, such as language proficiency (Pathanasin & Eschstruth, 2022). When communicating with their teacher, second language students used more politeness strategies regarding age and social status (Mulyono et al., 2019; Amanda, Herlina, & Ratnawati, 2021).

This present study is contributing to the field by using social media-based language learning mobile application *HelloTalk,* to investigate the use of politeness strategies with Japanese learners as the locutor, and native Japanese speakers as the interlocutor. Moreover, the analysis of politeness strategies is focused on how Japanese as second language learners ask native Japanese speakers to do the language exchange in the application.

As a country that upholds etiquette and manners, Japan pays great attention to politeness in its language. Therefore, the use of politeness in communicating with Japanese people will greatly affect the smoothness of the communication process.

2. METHOD

This research was conducted using descriptive method with quantitative approach. The data collected from 30 *HelloTalk* accounts of Japanese as second language learners, consisting of the request expressions to Japanese native speaker to learn and teach about each other's language (language exchange activity). The politeness strategies that Japanese learners used in their *HelloTalk* bio were analyzed qualitatively based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) classifications of politeness strategies as follows (Longcope, 1995; Brown, 1990; Yoshioka, 2011).

a. Without redressive action, baldly (Bald on record), which means to express something directly and clearly without minding hearer's face.
b. Positive politeness, which means to satisfy hearer's positive face.
c. Negative politeness, which means to satisfy hearer's negative face.
d. Off record, which means to express something implicitly like giving a suggestion.

The data was first documented from *HelloTalk* user bio profile with total 30 accounts of Japanese as second language learners. Then, every sentence in the bio profile that consisted of politeness strategies were collected in a data card. The analysis started with classifying the politeness strategies based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory and calculating the frequency of usage for each strategy quantitatively. Furthermore, the findings were described in sentences to finally draw a conclusion.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the analysis of politeness strategies used by Japanese learners in language-learning mobile app *HelloTalk*, it can be concluded that the most used strategy among the Japanese learners was negative politeness. Overall, the percentage of politeness strategies is summarized in Table 1.

Most Japanese learners used polite form in their sentences which indicates a distance between them and Japanese speakers as the hearer, so they can avoid

Table 1. Percentage of politeness strategies

Politeness Strategy	Percentage (%)
Bald On Record	16
Positive Politeness	47
Negative Politeness	31
Off Record	6

threatening hearer's negative face. Meanwhile, the bald on record is the least used politeness strategy.

3.1. Bald on Record Strategy

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), this strategy is usually used when someone wants to say something without any minimization to the imposition, direct, and clear (Sapitri, Chasanah, Putri, & Paulima, 2019). From Table 1, it can be known that the frequency of bald on record strategy among Japanese learner was only 16%. It is contrary from Maros and Rosli's (2017) study, where bald on record strategy is the second most used politeness strategy in the social media Twitter. From the analysis, it can be inferred that the 140-character limitation for each Twitter post might have influenced the user to use direct and concise expressions (Maros & Rosli, 2017).

Meanwhile in this present study, the Japanese learners used bald on record strategy to express their intention directly and clearly in the mobile app *HelloTalk* directly to Japanese native speaker. As in the sentences (1).

(1) *Douzo, chatto shite kudasai.*
    Please chat me.

From the sentence (1), it can be seen clearly that the Japanese learner as speaker wants the Japanese native speaker as hearer to send a message and chat. The speaker did not use any other phrase to express his intention to the hearer. This strategy may threaten the Japanese native speaker's face because it is like they must start a conversation with someone they did not know before.

In Japanese, the sentence pattern of "*shite kudasai*" means to give orders or to make someone do something we asked. Without any other expressions, this pattern is just making an imperative sentence. Another bald on record strategy is also used by Japanese learner in the sentence (2) below.

(2) *Nihonjin no tomodachi ga hoshii! Nihongo o oshiete!*
    I want Japanese friends! Teach me Japanese!

According to the sentence structure, the expression used by Japanese learner in sentence (2) is less polite than sentence (1). It showed in the word "*oshiete*", which is a verb using *te*-form. In Japanese, the *te*-form in verbs is mainly used for making a request or giving an order to someone. Meanwhile in sentence (1), the use of "*te kudasai*" expression makes the sentence sounds more polite.

This result is aligned with Amanda et al.'s (2021) study, where bald on record strategy was only employed in the student-to-student online conversation and was not found in the student-to-teacher interaction. The reason is because among students, they did not try to lower the threat to other's face, instead they only thought of what they want to say (Amanda et al., 2021).

3.2. Positive Politeness Strategy

The purpose of using politeness strategy in speaker's utterances is to protect or to fulfill the hearer's *want* about having his public self-image appreciated and approved by others, especially the speaker (Brown, 1990). Brown and Levinson identified 15 kinds of positive politeness strategy. These includes noticing hearer's interest or needs, showing sympathies, seeking agreement, including both speaker and hearer in the activity, and so on (Yoshioka, 2011).

According to Table 1, 47% of Japanese learners using positive politeness strategies in their profile on *HelloTalk* app to engage Japanese speaker doing language exchange activity. They emphasize hearer's interest such as learning Indonesian and practice conversation using Indonesian or English as hearer's second language as shown on sentence (3).

(3) *Eigo ya Indoneshia-go ni kyoumi motteiru kata, kaiwa no renshuu shitai kata, itsudemo messeji o!*
    If you are interested in English or Indonesian, want to practice conversation, please send me a message anytime!

The expression used by a Japanese learner in sentence (3) is considered to be polite but friendly. As explained before, the request to do a language exchange started with an emphasis to Japanese speaker's common interest and needs in the use of *HelloTalk* app. Furthermore, the phrase "please send me a message anytime" indicates closeness between speaker and the hearer, also that the speaker is feeling free to be reached by hearers.

Similar result is also found in Maros and Rosli (2017), where positive politeness strategy was the most used politeness strategy in Twitter. The findings of the study showed that the users employed positive politeness strategy in order to express friendliness and closeness with the hearer (Maros & Rosli, 2017).

(4) *Nihonjin no tomodachi ga hoshīdesu. Indoneshia-go o oshieru koto ga dekimasu. Issho ni benkyō shimashou.*
    I want to be friends with Japanese people. I can teach you Indonesian. Let's learn together.

In sentence (4), Japanese learner as the speaker also emphasize hearer's needs by stating the speaker's ability to teach Indonesian as the hearers' second language that they want to learn. Moreover, a different varieties of positive politeness strategy is given in sentence (4). It is the latter sentence "let's learn together" that shows that both speaker and hearer are in the same activity. This identification of politeness strategy is based on Brown and Levinson's theory (Yoshioka, 2011).

3.3. Negative Politeness Strategy

Based on the data, negative politeness is the second most used strategy by the Japanese learner on *HelloTalk* app with a frequency of 31%. Negative politeness strategy is used to avoid threatening hearers' negative face such as showing imposition. Brown and Levinson (1987) mentioned 10 varieties of negative politeness strategies that includes hedging, giving questions, apologizing, impersonalizing speakers and hearers, etc. (Yoshioka, 2011). The attempt to save hearer's negative face by using negative politeness strategy is commonly shown by the use of polite forms or expressions that maintain a certain distance between hearer and speaker. The example is in sentence (5).

(5) *Mokuhyou wa Tokyo no hito no intoneeshon o masutaa shitakute, yokereba gengo koukan shimasenka.*
My purpose is to master Tokyo people's intonation. So, would you like to exchange languages if you like?

The first sentence is stating the speaker's purpose in reaching Japanese speakers as the hearer to do some language exchange in *HelloTalk* app. While in the following sentence, the Japanese learner as the speaker used a very polite expression in giving a request. This makes a distance between hearer and speaker so the speaker can avoid intruding the hearer's negative face.

Furthermore, the very polite expression that found in almost all the Japanese learners in their profile is "*douzo yoroshiku onegaishimasu*" that means "nice to meet you" and "please treat me well". The use of this expression in certain form gives a difference to the hearer. In Amanda et al.'s (2021) analysis of the usage of politeness strategies in student and lecturer communication, also found that negative politeness is commonly used by the students to differentiate their utterances to their friend and the lecturer.

(6) *Nihonjin no kata to o tomodachi ni naretara ureshii desu.*
I would be happy if I could make friends with Japanese people.

Another example of the usage of negative politeness strategy by Japanese learners in the *HelloTalk* app is shown in Sentence (6). First, they gave deference to the hearer which is native Japanese speaker by using the word '*nihonjin no kata*' (Japanese people), instead of '*nihonjin*' (Japanese) only even though it is grammatically correct. Moreover, the student generalizes the expression rather than addressing the native Japanese speaker directly (Adel, Davoudi, & Ramezanzadeh, 2016).

3.4. Off Record

The last politeness strategy according to Brown and Levinson (1987) is off record strategy, or it also called indirect strategy. In this strategy, the speaker uses indirect yet ambiguous expression and let the hearer decides how to interpret it (Sapitri et al., 2019). Thus, the speaker can possibly take the face threatening act while avoiding responsibility of imposing the hearer (Xafizovna, 2022).

Brown and Levinson (1987) stated that there are 15 strategies that classified into off record strategy such as giving hints or association clues, stating information more than what is needed, being ambiguous, etc. (Adel et al., 2016). This strategy has the least risk of face threatening, as the hearer is expected to draw conclusion by themselves (Pathanasin & Eschstruth, 2022).

Based on the findings of the study, only 6% of Japanese learners practiced off record strategy in the language learning mobile app *HelloTalk*. The example of the sentence is shown in Sentence (7).

(7) *Nihongo ga mada mada benkyou busoku desu.*
I still haven't studied enough Japanese

The context of the sentence is a request by a Japanese learner to native Japanese speakers to do the language exchange and to help him/her learning Japanese in the *HelloTalk* app. Instead of directly asking native Japanese speakers for help, the Japanese learner only said "I still haven't studied enough Japanese" to show that he/she needs to learn Japanese more and expects someone to help. However, those speaker's intentions were vague and ambiguous, so the hearer have to interpret it by himself.

Nevertheless, according to the result, off record strategy was the least used politeness strategy by Japanese learners. This result is in line with Pathanasin and Eschstruth's (2022) research, where second language learners rarely employed off record strategy due to their language proficiency. Pathanasin and Eschstruth (2022) stated that politeness strategy has an inverse relationship with the speaker's language proficiency, thus the off-record strategy required broader knowledge about the target language as shown in Figure 2.
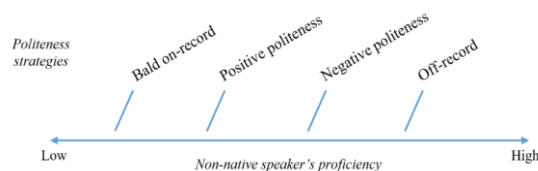
Figure 2 Tendency of politeness strategy among non-native speakers (Pathanasin & Eschstruth, 2022, p. 202).

4. CONCLUSION

Japanese learners use various strategies in their profile on *HelloTalk* app in order to attract or make a request to Japanese speakers to do some language exchange. From the results, it can be concluded that the Japanese learners employed all four politeness strategies, with positive politeness as the most used strategy, followed by negative politeness, bald on record, and lastly off record strategy.

Most Japanese learners use positive politeness strategy in their bio profile on the *HelloTalk* app to indicate friendliness and closeness with the native Japanese speakers, so they do not hesitate to send a message and do the language learning activity together. Meanwhile, some of them chose to keep the distance with the native Japanese speakers to give a deference by using negative politeness strategy. It was shown by the usage of very polite form and expression that lessen the threat of hearers' negative face.

Furthermore, a small number of the Japanese learners practiced bald on record strategy to express their intention directly and clearly in the mobile app *HelloTalk* directly to Japanese native speaker. This strategy may threaten the Japanese native speaker's face because it is like they must start a conversation with someone they did not know before. However, as the expression is direct and straight to the point, bald on record strategy only require a simple grammatical structure that the learners in the beginner level of Japanese can easily practice.

It is contrary with the off-record strategy which has more complicated grammatical structure in the expression and required broader knowledge about the target language, even though this strategy has the least risk of face threatening.

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