

# How did the Teachers Talk? Investigating Politeness Strategies in Teachers' Utterances during Classroom Interactions in English Subject

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## ABSTRACT

Analyzing politeness strategies in classroom interaction can reveal the communications between teachers and students during classes. Furthermore, it can reflect the relationship of both parties and thus can be used as a mean to improve the quality of the teaching-learning process. This research is conducted to analyze the types of politeness strategies found in the teachers' utterances in English teaching-learning process. Observations were conducted in two English classes at one of public schools in Karanganyar, Central Java, Indonesia. The subjects of the research are two English teachers. The data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, conclusion, and verification. The data were classified under the theory of politeness strategies as proposed by Brown and Levinson. The results reveal that the English teachers performed politeness strategies with a total of 239 data. Teacher B employed all types of politeness strategies, while teacher A showed bald on record, positive politeness, and negative politeness strategies. The different dominant politeness strategies from the two teachers show that the intentions aimed by the teachers in classroom interactions are different. Teacher A showed

the use of bald on record strategy as the dominant strategy showing the emphasis on directness and the use of simple utterances. Meanwhile, the Teacher B tended to use politeness strategy to show closeness and friendliness to the students.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the Indonesian context, the concept of English learning at the formal education in schools is guided by the curriculum set by the government. This means that the success of English learning is measured based on the extent to which the material can be delivered by the teacher. However, the function of language as a means of communication, in this case English as a foreign language, certainly cannot be denied. Communicative competence is also one of the learning goals that must be achieved by students. It includes students' ability to apply appropriate vocabulary and grammar choices and use sentences contextually (Tanaka & Kawade, 1982; Leung, 2005; Xiuwen & Razali, 2021). In achieving the aforementioned goals, the choice of learning strategies becomes very fundamental in teaching English. Research on English teaching strategies have been widely studied in order to find the best learning formulas and models within various contexts (Giambo et al., 2005; Facella et al., 2005; Ahmadi & Gilakjani, 2012; Ashraf, 2018).

However, the challenges of teachers in English learning are not only about learning strategies. The way the teachers communicate in classroom interaction also affects the atmosphere and effectiveness of learning in the classroom. The communication style in the classroom interaction can reflect how the teacher builds relationships with the students. The case of effective communication, combined with various interactive teaching strategies, in classroom interaction can guarantee the well-informed materials during the class (Wardhaugh, 1969).

Particularly in English lesson, where English acts as a foreign language, a dilemma that often occurs is when the teachers have to use English to familiarize the students with a language that sounds unfamiliar to them in order to achieve the communicative competence. On the other hand, the use of English for students who rarely use it in their daily conversation will be very difficult. Students are faced with the fact that the teacher uses a foreign language and at the same time they must understand the materials presented by the teachers. Innovation and

creativity of teachers in implementing learning strategies, one of which is reflected in the language used in the classroom, plays a major role in determining students' competence to comprehend the lesson.

Indeed, in the discipline of teaching studies, the importance of communication between teachers and students during lessons makes it as a very interesting inquiry to discuss. The topic of teachers' language can be examined with various approaches; for example: studies on non-verbal language (Negi, 2014), studies on pragmatics (Peng et al., 2014; Monsefi & Hadidi, 2015; Kurdghelashvili, 2015; Mahmud, 2019; Fitriyani & Andriyanti, 2020; Rahayuningsih et al., 2020), studies on communicative approach (Leung, 2005; Makruf et al., 2021), and also studies on multiple intelligent approach (Abenti, 2020). Among those approaches, pragmatics has been vastly popular because classroom interaction contexts are in line with pragmatic principles as a branch of linguistics that analyzes the use of language in everyday life. Some of the researchers take the perspective of speech acts (Basra & Thooyibah, 2017; Faturrochman et al., 2021; and Hidayat et al., 2022). Meanwhile, the perspective of politeness strategies as proposed by Brown & Levinson (1987) is also mostly-used since there is a strong relation between politeness and culture. It is undoubtedly denied that in learning English as a foreign language, cultural barrier is one of the challenges faced by the teachers. Research within this field in various countries has ever been conducted, as in Iran (Mohammad et al., 2016), Georgia (Kurdghelashvili, 2015), and China (Peng et al., 2014). While in Indonesia, this topic is also widely-analyzed, not only in the case of face-to-face meeting (Fitriyani & Andriyanti, 2020; Mahmud, 2019; Rahayuningsih et al., 2020) but also the study of politeness in textbooks (Meiratnasari & Wijayanto, 2019) as well as learning through online application (Mulyono et al., 2019).

The previous researches on politeness strategies as reflected in the English teachers' utterances mostly focus on the number of politeness strategies found during the observation. Considering the design of the researches as qualitative research, the number of the phenomena found is not the main element to be explored. The occurrence of the other significant phenomenon around the topic of politeness in classroom context can be further explored. In fact, in a classroom in which the teachers and students' cultural background is closely-related to Indonesian, and, specifically Javanese cultures, the use of mix languages influences the purpose of the utterances. Departing from this research gap, this research wants to answer the following question: What are the types of the politeness strategies used by the teachers during the English class. The politeness strategies are investigated under the theory of Brown & Levinson (1987).

According to Yule (1996), politeness, in the context of communication, refers to a means to show awareness of another person's face. He also states that if a speaker says something that contains a threat to another individual's expectations regarding self-image, this is described as a Face Threatening Act (FTA). Brown & Levinson (1987) states that politeness is one of the important problems in speech acts because it is considered as a universal phenomenon in the use of language. Brown and Levinson argue that 'face' is the public self-image that each member wants to claim for himself and divided into two related aspects: (1) 'negative face' refers freedom of action and freedom from imposition, someone's desire to be free to do an action and free from a given imposition, and (2) 'positive face' refers to the activities or someone's matters which can be approved or appreciated as something good by others. In other words, negative face is the need to be independent while positive face is the need to connect with others. Politeness is a cultural language product created by society that influences people's perceptions of what is appropriate or inappropriate language use in various contexts.

In order to maintain the flow of communication in a conversation, (Brown & Levinson, 1987) propose four types of politeness strategies. The first is '*bald on record*' strategy which means there is no effort from the speakers to minimize the impact of the FTA because it is stated clearly and unambiguously. The main reason for this strategy is that the speaker is more concerned with the effectiveness of communication than saving the hearer's face. The second strategy is '*positive politeness*' which refers showing the situation when the hearer wants to be appreciated and accepted by speaker. The purpose of this strategy is to facilitate communication in which the speaker attempts to convey the same impression as the hearers. The third is '*negative politeness*' which is described as showing the social distance between the speaker and the hearer. It is oriented that the speaker respects the listener's negative face and will not interfere with his freedom by showing respect to the hearer. The fourth strategy is '*off record*' in which the speaker leaves the hearers with a number of hints or interpretations. This strategy is done by uttering indirect languages.

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1. Data source

The data sources in this study were taken from observation of the teachers on the English teaching-learning process at one of public high school in Karanganyar, Central Java, Indonesia. The researcher used an audio recorder to record the English classroom interaction from the opening until the closing activity. The researchers conducted observations in two classes taught by Teacher A and Teacher B. The observations were conducted twice for each class. The data of the research are all the teachers' utterances which contain politeness strategies.

## 2.2. Data collecting

The data of this study were collected through observations. The observations were conducted twice in Teacher A’s class, and also twice in Teacher B’s class. During the observations, the researchers recorded the classroom interaction activities and then transcribed the utterances of the teachers and students. The researchers also took notes of some important events related to the politeness strategies performed by the teacher during the class. The transcripts of the teachers-students’ classroom conversation was then analysed to find the data.

## 2.3. Data analysis

The data analysis was conducted through four steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After collecting the data of teachers’ utterances, the data reduction step was conducted by selecting and simplifying the data, and identifying politeness strategy used by English teachers in the English teaching learning process. In data display step, the researcher used an informative table. The researcher classified the data of the politeness strategies in the teachers’ utterances and displayed them in informative table. The data analysis was continued by interpreting the findings after classifying the politeness strategies. Investigator triangulation was also applied by the aims of validating the data analysis related to the types of politeness strategies.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Results

#### 3.1.1. The types of politeness strategies used by the English teachers

The results of the types of politeness strategies are shown in the following table:

**Table 1.** The types of politeness strategies used by Teacher A

Politeness Strategies	Frequency
Bald on Record	67
Positive Politeness	43
Negative Politeness	15

**Table 2.** The types of politeness strategies used by Teacher B

Politeness Strategies	Frequency
Bald on Record	47
Positive Politeness	57
Negative Politeness	6
Off Record	4

The above strategies were found in the three classroom activities, including: opening, main activity, and closing. Teacher A used bald on record more often, while teacher B used positive politeness more often. Teacher B rarely applied off record strategy, while teacher A never used off record strategy. The strategies found above were identified by analyzing the sub strategies found in each type of strategy.

#### 3.1.1.1. Bald on record

The main reason for performing bald on record is that the speaker wants their wishes to be completed by the hearers soon. Table 1 and Table 2 show that both teachers used bald on record while teaching English. Teacher A used bald on record more often (66 data) and it even became the most used strategies for teacher A. Meanwhile, Teacher B also used bald on record though it was not the dominant politeness strategies performed by teacher B.

Context : In the opening session, the teacher asked the students to put their cellphones on their bag.  
 Teacher A : *Hape nya ditaruh dulu, hape hape hape, hape nya ditaruh.* (Put your mobile phones --on your bag--, your mobile phones, your mobile phones, put your mobile phones)

Context : In the opening session, the teacher asked the students to put their cellphones on their bag.  
 Teacher B : Put your mobile phones. *Hape nya ditaruh. Hape ne ditaruh sek, bapak sudah dapat satu lho.* (Put your mobile phones --on your bag--. Put them first, I have got one of yours here.)

The same contexts are seen in the above data, so does the same politeness strategy, bald on record. However, teacher A applied ‘maximum efficiency’ by repeating the commands. Meanwhile, teacher B used ‘metaphorical urgency for emphasis’ by repeating the command “*Hape nya ditaruh. Hape ne ditaruh sek, ...*” (Put your mobile phones --on your bag-- Put them first, ..) and adding expression showing urgency “*Bapak sudah dapat satu lho.*” (I have got one of yours here.)

- Context : The situation of the utterance above when the teacher tried to make an agreement with the students by offering the rule about not looking for references on the internet when doing the task.
- Teacher A : *Setuju gak? Sepakat gak?* (Do you agree? Do you agree?)
- Context : The situation of the utterance above when the teacher asked and instructed the students to immediately come to in front of the class and did the test.
- Teacher B : *Go on, dicari teksnya, sini. Ayo cepetan!* (Go on, find the text here. Go!)

Teacher A used ‘offering’ sub strategy in the data above. The utterance was actually an effort of the teacher to force his/her wish to the students. On the other hand, teacher A was not truly asking, instead it was actually an instruction that the students must obey. The command was wrapped in an offer by asking *Setuju gak? Sepakat gak?* (Do you agree? Do you agree?). The repetition of the offer is a sign that teacher A wanted his/her wish to be completed by the students. Meanwhile, teacher B applied ‘maximum efficiency’ in the data above. The maximum command is seen in the use of the expressions *Go on* and *Ayo cepetan!*. Both expressions have the same meaning and repeated as a sign that teacher B wanted the students to undertake the command soon.

- Context : The teacher gave warning to the students to pay attention and remind them about the procedure of the speaking test.
- Teacher A : *Ingat! Ulangan lisannya hari ini yang akan saya ambil nilainya cara membacanya.* (Remember! The oral exam today will assess the way you read the text.)
- Context : The teacher instructed the student to find the song for their task on the main activity.
- Teacher B : Now please try to find of the song.

Based on the examples above, teacher A gave ‘sympathetic warnings’ by warning the students to pay attention on the aspect assessed during the oral test. The warning is obviously seen in the expression *Ingat!* (Remember!). Meanwhile, teacher B used ‘task or paradigmatic form of instruction’ by giving a task to the students to find a song. Other sub strategies are also found on the analysis of bald on record as seen in the following chart:

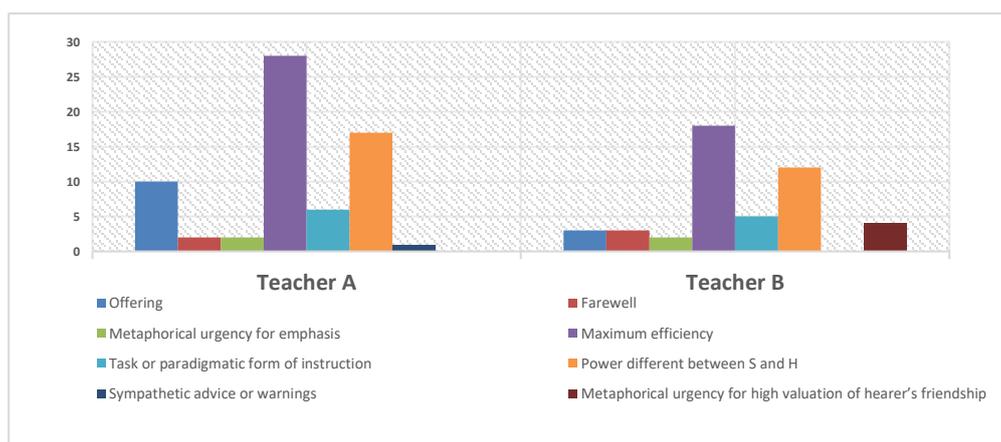


Figure 1. Bald on record sub strategies used by teacher A and teacher B

### 3.1.1.2. Positive politeness

Positive politeness refers to showing the situation when the hearer wants to be appreciated and accepted by speaker. The purpose of this strategy is to facilitate communication in which the speaker attempts to convey the same impression as the hearers. Thus, usually the speakers would show that at some aspects they have the same interest with the hearers. Other possibility is that the speakers often show closeness to the hearers. The research shows that teacher B used positive politeness more often than the other strategies (47 data). On the other hand,

though positive politeness is not the dominant data found in teacher A, this strategy was still relatively used by teacher A (43 data).

Context : The teacher gave explanation about the module to the students.  
 Teacher A : *Semua penjelasan di modul sudah saya pakaikan bahasa Indonesia. Tujuannya biar kamu gampang mempelajari.* (I have translated all explanation in the module into Indonesian. It will ease you to learn the module.)

Context : The teacher asked the students on the class to give support to the student who sang a song in front of the class.  
 Teacher B : *Dikasih semangat ya temannya.* (Give support to your friend)

The data above show the use of positive politeness by noticing the hearers. Teacher A showed interest to the hearers' interest by providing solutions to their possible problems when learning English. Meanwhile, teacher B noticed the hearers by asking supports to the students.

Context : The teacher needed the students' attention.  
 Teacher A : *Halo... guys, guys, guys.*

Context : The teacher asked the students, about the meaning of "through" in Indonesian. The teacher called his students with, *Mas, Mbak.*  
 Teacher B : *"Through" itu artinya apa mas mbak?* (What is the meaning of 'through', students?)

Both teacher A and B also used in group identity markers by greeting the students with 'guys' (teacher A) and *mas mbak* (teacher B). Teacher A accommodated the English word 'guys' to refer to the students. Meanwhile, teacher B involved the used of Javanese terms *mas mbak*, --*mas* means 'boys' referring to the male students, while *mbak* means 'girls' referring to the female students.

Context : The teacher showed her expression on the last meeting that she was happy because the students were supportive and active to did the speaking test.  
 Teacher A : *Jadi senang luar biasa, pada tanpa dipanggil, maju.* (I'm extremely happy that all of you are very active.)

Teacher A applied exaggerate expression by saying *jadi senang luar biasa* (I'm extremely happy) to show appreciation to the students while doing speaking test. This expression also arouse the students' interest in showing active participation during the class.

Context : The teacher recorded the student who sang a song for a test but suddenly the student laughed and then teacher stopped recorded her.  
 Teacher B : *Untung tidak siaran langsung.* (Luckily, it is not a live show.)

Meanwhile, teacher B showed the use of joke when performing politeness strategy. Joke is used to entertain the students while having a quite challenging task, i.e. singing English song in front of the other students. The joke was expected to reduce the students' nervousness while doing the task. Other positive politeness markers are presented in the following figure:

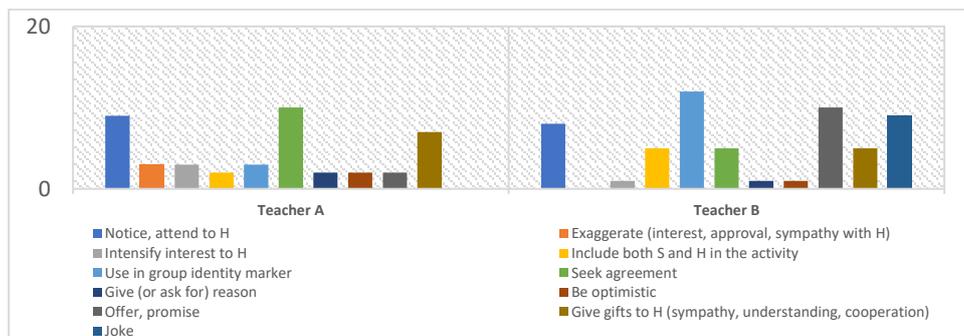


Figure 2. Positive politeness sub strategies used by teacher A and teacher B

### 3.1.1.3. Negative politeness

Negative politeness was rarely used either by teacher A (11 data) or teacher B (6 data). This strategy is described as showing the social distance between the speaker and the hearer. It is oriented that the speaker respects the listener's negative face and will not interfere with his freedom by showing respect to the hearer.

Context : The teacher asked students' readiness for the speaking test.  
 Teacher A : *Sudah siap untuk ulangan lisannya?* (Are you ready for the oral test?)

Teacher A showed negative politeness by uttering a question which was actually meant a confirmation, the students did not have any choice but to be ready for the test. The expression was above actually an effort of made by the teacher to show her power in the relationship between teacher-students. By uttering *Sudah siap untuk ulangan lisannya?* (Are you ready for the oral test?), the teacher did not want to 'No' as the answer since he wished that the students were ready for the test.

Context : The teacher confirmed the paper test as the students said that they had sorted the names on the paper.  
 Teacher B : *Lha ini katanya sudah diurutkan?* (You all said that it has been sorted by names.)

Meanwhile, teacher B showed his disappointment in the data above by performing negative politeness strategy. An expression of disappointment must threaten the hearers' face. However, it was uttered in a question by means of making the expression softer but, at the same time, showing his role in the speaker-hearers relationship as someone who has power over the students.

Context : The teacher told her students that she would ask the students about their opinion so the teacher will know the students learned the text or not for the speaking test on the next week.  
 Teacher A : *Cuma saya pengen kamu berpendapat, kamu berargumen. Disertai alasan-alasan, contoh-contoh yang menguatkan argumenmu.* (I only want you to give your opinion, your arguments. With reasons and examples that can strengthen your arguments.)

Teacher A was actually asked or commanded the students to do something in the utterance above. In order to show his role as a teacher, he used the word *cuma* or 'only' to minimize the imposition, by doing so, it was expected that the imposition would sound easier and that the students may respond to his command by being active in class participation.

Context : The teacher offered five students to do the English singing performance. It turned out only female students who were ready for the test.  
 Teacher B : *The boy, the boy? Yang laki-laki gak berani.* (The male students are not dare enough to perform the song.)

On the other hand, being pessimistic was also shown by teacher B in performing negative politeness. The above data shows teacher B's effort in stimulating the male students to be active in class. It does not mean that all the male students were not dare enough to perform the English song in front of the class, it was just his attempts in stimulating the male students to perform the song. The other sub strategies are presented in the following figure:

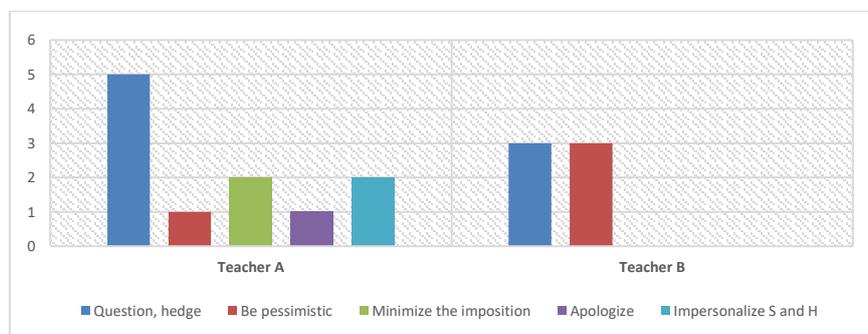


Figure 3. Negative politeness sub strategies used by teacher A and teacher B

3.1.1.4. *Off record*

This strategy was only used by teacher B. When this strategy was performed, this means that off record politeness strategy is applied. As it is uttered using indirect utterances, the speaker leaves the hearers with a number of hints or interpretations. This strategy is rarely used by both of the teachers.

Context : The teacher asked the students who were making noise to be quiet.  
 Teacher B : *Mbak, tolong. (Girls, please.)*

Teacher B performed off record strategy by giving hint in the data above. The hint was given as the teacher thought that the context in which he and the students were engaged on had been clear to develop the meaning. The other sub strategies in off record are seen in the following figure:

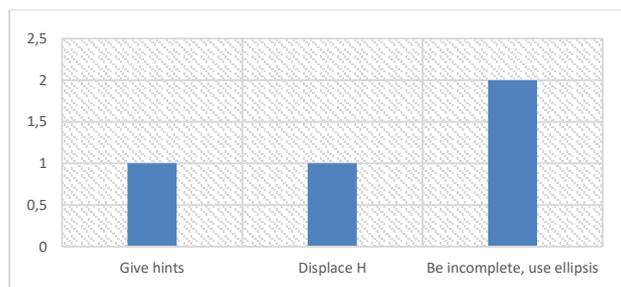


Figure 4. Off record politeness sub strategies used by teacher B

3.2. *Discussion*

The findings revealed that the dominant strategies used by teacher A and teacher B are bald on record and positive politeness. Teacher A used bald on record more often which means that the teacher tends to deliver his intention directly to the students. By applying mostly direct utterances, teacher A wishes that his wishes can be fulfilled by the students completely. Simple utterances were used quite often in bald on record showing the necessity of the utterances, such as: commanding, offering, sympathetic warning, maximum efficiency, etc. The tendency of repeating or emphasizing crucial words, such as: *Ingat, Setuju gak, Hapenya ditaruh*, is applied by means of emphasizing the actions intended by teacher A. Besides, directness is usually used by speakers who have a higher status than the listener. Therefore, bald on record commonly spoken by a speaker who is in a higher or more powerful position than the listener. The use of the bald on record strategy is shown when the teacher said the command to the students. By applying this strategy, the speaker makes it simple for the listener to understand what they mean, helping to avoid misunderstandings.

On the other hand, teacher B mostly used positive politeness in his classroom interaction. Positive politeness is aimed to emphasize the hearer’s positive face, to satisfy hearer’s positive face in some respect (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In this context, teacher B involves himself as being close to the students by noticing the students’ participations, showing interest to the students’ activities, putting jokes in his conversations, showing sympathy and appreciation to the students, etc. It is reflected when the teacher called the students with second person plural pronoun, like *mbak* or *mas*. Other example when the teacher gave the joke, *Ini korban ghosting gitu* (You are a ghosting victim.). By giving jokes to his students, the relationship between the teacher and students can be closer. Teacher A also used positive politeness strategy during teaching, though it was not the dominant strategy performed by him. These efforts tend to reduce the social distance between teacher B, who is considered as the speaker who has higher rank and power, and his students. Reducing the social distance in classroom activity is one of the most effective ways in creating successful teaching learning activities in classroom context (Fitriyani & Andriyanti, 2020; Peng et al., 2014; Rahayuningsih et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, unlike teacher B, who used positive politeness not only by means of explaining the materials of English subjects but also to share interesting stories or involve joke to relieve the class nuance, teacher A used positive politeness mostly to explain and emphasize the materials. This means that teacher A wants his students to understand that he had done various attempts to make the English subject easier to learn for the students. Thus, he wanted that the students understand the importance of this subject for their education. In the context of classroom activity, delivering materials by showing the same interest, giving sympathy, trying to seek agreement for confirmation, and being optimistic can also be a good way in order to achieve the success of the teaching learning process (Fitriyani & Andriyanti, 2020). The positive politeness strategy as applied by teacher B is also applicable in maintaining discipline since the teacher tried to show friendliness but in still emphasizing on the importance of studying to students (Kurdghelashvili, 2015).

Negative politeness is also applied by both teachers. Generally, this strategy was used when the teachers gave commands to the students. In doing this, both teachers showed their authority as someone who have higher power over the students. The commands were related to the tasks the students must completed, such as performing task in front of the class, giving opinions and feedback to the teachers' explanation, getting ready for quiz, etc. Meanwhile, off record is the most rarely used strategy. It is only performed by teacher B (4 data). Classroom interaction needs clarity in communication since the aim of this activity is to provide students with clear information related to the subjects. Thus, off record strategy should not be applied except when communicating information which are not related to the materials.

The data also showed that although the classes observed are English classes, the teachers mostly used Indonesian language. Indeed, code switching in the form of intra-sentential switching mostly occurred as the teachers switched some of the English vocabularies within Indonesian sentences. These efforts were done in order to prioritize the delivery of the materials as stated by the curriculum. Communicative competence is yet still important in teaching English as foreign language. However, as the demand of the curriculum is also necessary and must be completed in limited times, communicative competence cannot be prioritized in the context of English teaching-learning at public school.

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Teacher A used three types of politeness strategies, including: bald on record, positive politeness, and negative politeness. Meanwhile, teacher B used all of politeness strategies, including: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record in the English teaching learning process. The use of politeness strategies by teacher A was dominated on bald on record strategy, the researcher found 66 times of this strategy. The teacher used bald on record to command the students in the class. Teacher B used positive politeness strategy as the dominant strategy. The teacher wanted to satisfied the students' face in some respect, such as: calling the students with second person plural pronoun with *mbak* or *mas* or giving jokes in his utterances. By giving applying positive politeness, the relationship between the teacher and students can be more friendly and the situation of the class get more interactive.

The results revealed that clarity is important in teaching-learning communication. Various politeness strategies can be applied according to particular contexts the teachers-students are engaged in. Both teachers and students must also develop the pragmatics competency in order to understand the utterances occurred during the teaching learning process.

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