Research Article

Investigation of the Effectiveness of Gender on the Use of Politeness Requests in Communication in Teaching

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Abstract: During communication in the formal teaching and learning time in the classroom, teachers and students often make polite requests. However, the use of politeness in requests among the students and students' reactions to teachers' polite requests could be influenced by gender. This study attempted to explore the difference between male and female students in using politeness in request, an element of the politeness theory, and reaction towards the polite ones from teachers at the English language teaching (ELT) context at the Asian International School (AIS). The participants in the current study are 100 first-year students from four classes of the English language teaching department in the third semester of 2023. The data research was collected by the questionnaires. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to analyze the collected data and find out the results. The result showed that the use of politeness in requests among the students and their reaction towards teachers' polite requests in the classroom between male and female students are quite different. Specifically, the result of the study revealed that female students use politeness in requests more regularly than males' and they tend to need teachers' polite requests more than boys.

Keywords: politeness in request; ELT; teaching methods; linguistic and non-linguistic behavior

1. Introduction

In teaching in general and ELT in specific, building a good relationship between teachers and learners are really important. To be successful in applying teaching methods or techniques into ELT, teachers need to create a comfortable atmosphere or even a gentle one in the classes. To meet students' needs, teachers have to demonstrate that they are good listeners and sympathetic persons. Whenever the students feel safely and comfortable in the classes, they could share what they want to learn or suggest the appropriate methods through which they can enhance the lessons better. Those things are definitely helping the teaching staffs could adjust their teaching methods towards the good and effective ones and motivate their students' learning process. Therefore, maintaining good interpersonal relationship in the classrooms should not be ignored, especially in the teaching in the digital era. From my point of view, one of the effective ways to build the good relationship in the classrooms is the use of politeness in request among students and between students and teachers.

In fact, politeness is one of the important factors that strongly affects on our relationship with people around. It involves both linguistic and non-linguistic behavior. According to Tran (2010), politeness is one of "the key factors in the value system and, thereby, an indispensable part of effective communication" and it expressed "through respectful attitudes depending on who the listener is, and how close relationship between the speaker and the listener is". In other words, depending on age, relationship, social statue, social context et cetera, politeness could have the different ways to expose. It plays an important role to build and maintain relationship between speaker and listener in communication. Haugh (2006) claimed that politeness could be considered and defined differently depending on the concept of the certain cultures, communities or societies. In other words, in the different contexts, politeness could express in the different ways at different levels and towards to different purposes.

In ELT classroom context, applying of politeness in request should be paid more attention. Specially, in the context of violence in school environment gets worse and worse. This has become one of the issues in Vietnamese modern society as well as the barrier for

development of Vietnamese education system. In fact, politeness in request has regarded as an indispensable guideline in Vietnam educational systems as well as the world through the school regulation, slogans or school year's indoctrination policy. In addition, politeness shows in students and teachers' behavior, as well.

Actually, to delivery the politeness in request in the classrooms effectively, teachers need to determine factors that could affect to this process. In my opinion, there are many elements which influence the effectiveness of teachers' applying politeness in request in ELT, one of them is gender.

However, the effect of gender into the effectiveness of applying politeness in general and politeness in request in specific among students and between teachers and students has not the clear study. Thus, the main points in this paper indicate the questions of whether gender affects to use of politeness in requests at school and whether male students are different from female students in applying of politeness in requests. This research is implicated to find out the answer to these questions.

First, the study aims to determine whether the difference in the use of politeness in request between male and female students. Second, it also recognizes male or female students need request more polite. In other words, the current study attempts to explore between male and female students, who should teachers need to give the requests in a polite way more. Through the result of the study, the author submits several ways to apply politeness in request in teaching and learning filed more successful.

To achieve the mentioned aims above, the current study attempts to find out the answers for the two following questions:

(1)   Is there any difference between male and female students in the use of politeness in request in ELT classroom?

(2)   Is there any difference between male and female students in receiving teachers' politeness in request in ELT classroom?

Based on the research questions, the author offers the following hypotheses. First, there is difference between male and female students in the use of politeness in request in ELT classroom (H01). Second, there is difference between male and female students in receiving teachers' politeness in request in ELT classroom (H02).

In each hypothesis, by comparing the P-value in data analysis with 0.05, if the null hypothesis is rejected, the difference between the two means is statistically significant and vice versa.

With the effort to answer the research questions, the study will offer some help to the ELT teachers of AIS to built good relationship between teachers and students, thereby motivating students' learning process and improving   the quality of teaching and learning. By knowing whether male and female students are different in the use of politeness in request and which group refers politeness in request more, the teachers in the English teaching department at AIS can understand their students better and make suitable changes for their interaction and communication whereby helping their students improve their learning process.

2. Literature Review

According to Kenji (1990), request appears in the conversation when speaker asks hearer to do something. At that time, between speaker and hearer is under opposite situation. Speaker profits meanwhile the other is imposed. "The larger the request, the greater the imposition on hearer" (Kenji, 1990). The imposition can be divided into two types: absolute and relative imposition. The first one is the imposition that is determined by the size of the request. The other one is "affected by various factors, including social distance (familiarity) and social statue (power)" (Scollon & Scollon, 1983). If familiarity is high, relative imposition is bigger. If familiarity is low, relative imposition is smaller. And if speaker has more power than hearer, the relative imposition is smaller. Therefore, the absolute imposition is mediated by relational distance between speaker and hearer (familiarity and power) and situational variables and becomes the relative imposition which hearer experiences.

According to Leech (1983), politeness defined that politeness as forms of behavior that established and maintained feeling of comity within the social group. This is the ability of participants in a social interaction to engage the interaction in an atmosphere of relative harmony. It can be expressed by certain polite formulaic utterances like please, thank you, excuse me, sorry et cetera. Moreover, politeness can also be considered as a "diplomatic strategy of communication" (Kummer, 1992) which means that politeness belongs to the

range of communication skills. Participants in the conversations use tactful ways to build and sustain the relationship.

According to Grice (1975), conversers can use four diplomatic strategies to make the communications politely. That is true (i.e quality), brief (i.e quantity), relevant (i.e relation) and clear (i.e manner). That means making the successful conversations equivalent to build politeness in communication. Lakoff (1973) submitted three rules of politeness. First, speaker should not impose his/her viewpoints into listeners. In any conversation, the converser must be having his/her own point of view relevant to the issues. Second, speakers should give to listeners the options. Suggesting the choices is determined as an effective strategy for implication of politeness in communication. Finally, speaker should make addressee feel good through positive attitude and good behavior with listener.

In term of politeness principles, Leech (1983) submitted six maxims. That is maxim of tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement and sympathy. Each maxim has three pragmatic scales to determine the degree of politeness: cost-benefit scale, option scale and indirectness. According to Homby (1974), tact is "(the use of) skill and understanding shown by somebody who handles people and situation successfully and without causing offence". Leech (1983) claimed that this is the most important kind of politeness in English-speaking society. The degree of tact depends on cost-benefit scale (i.e minimizing the cost to others and maximizing the benefit to others), option scale (i.e the amount of choice or option that speaker allows the hearer) and indirectness scale (i.e the higher of cost, the more indirect language will be; the higher the benefit, the less indirect). Second, maxim of generosity means minimizing the benefit to self and maximizing the cost to self. In other words, the self is the center. Maxim of generosity correlates with the tact maxim. Third, maxim of approbation is minimizing the dispraise of other and maximizing the praise of other. Fourth, maxim of modesty means minimizing the praise of self and maximizing the dispraise of self. Fifth, maxim of agreement expresses through minimizing disagreement between self and other as well as maximizing agreement between self and other. Finally, maxim of sympathy focuses on minimizing antipathy between self and other and maximizing sympathy between self and other.

Besides that, Brown and Levinson (1987) considered politeness consists of two important elements: positive and negative faces. Positive face focuses to "involve the desire of every member of a culture that his/her wants to be desirable to at least some others" (Brown & Levinson, 1987). On other words, this is the desire to be accepted, treated equally and shared. This is the needs to be connected of everyone. Conversely, negative face refers to "the desire of every competent adult member of a culture that his/her actions be unimpeded by others" (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This is the need to be independent to have a freedom of action and not to be imposed by others.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Participants

100 students, including 42 males and 58 females, were invited to participate in this study. The participants are from two classes which are taught by the author in Cao Thang Campus of AIS in the third semester in 2023 school year.

3.2. Research instruments

The result of this study is found out through comparing the result of the two questionnaires between the two groups, male and female students. In order to find out the effect of gender on applying of politeness in request in ELT classrooms, the two questionnaires (see a sample on the appendix A and B), which were received and adapted from Kenji (1990), were delivered to participants by hand. The first questionnaire consists of fifteen types of politeness in request, meanwhile the second one focuses on the students' feeling towards to the using of politeness in request of the teachers in classrooms. Specifically, the participants were asked to choose the level of the the politeness in request that they frequently use and their reaction to teachers' politeness in request during teaching and learning progress.

3.3. Data collection procedure

First, the author introduced and explained the aims and importance of the research to wards to ELT as well as answering the questions relevant to the study from the participants. The author guided participants carefully how to complete the questionnaire.

Then, the participants would read and choose the best answer they want within twenty minutes. Subsequently, the author collected the questionnaires to implicate data analysis procedure through SPSS software.

3.4. Data analysis procedure

As mentioned above, the collected data of the study was imported into SPSS software. First, the Cronbach's alpha tool is used to determine the reality of the collected data of the study. Then, a compare mean tool (pair sample t-test) is used to analyze the data and come to the result. In other words, through the compare mean tool, the author determined the difference between the use of the politeness in request between male or female students as well as their viewpoints about teachers' politeness in request in the classrooms.

4. Results

As mentioned above, the Cronbach's alpha tool is used to determine the reality of the collected data from the two questionnaires. The following tables show the result of the data analysis.

Table 1. Reliability statistics of collected data related to students' use of the politeness level in requests.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
0.840	100

Table 2. Reliability statistics of collected data related to students' reaction to teachers' use of the politeness level in requests.

Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
0.895	100

Table 1 and table 2 showed that P= 0.840 and P= 0.895 respectively which are higher than the standard P-value (P=0.5). Obviously, this means that the collected data from the two questionnaires of this research is significant.

Table 3 and 4 show the difference between male and female students in use of politeness in request in the classroom on the basis of paired samples statistics and paired samples test.

Table 3. Paired samples statistics.

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Male	3.1850	42	.34531	.07721
	Female	4.8600	58	.53351	.11930

Table 4. Paired samples test.

		Paired Differences							
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Male Female	-1.675	.562777	.12584	-3.33838	-2.81162	-24.436	19	.000

Table 3 shows the mean scores of male students and females (M1 = 3.1850 and M2 = 4.8600). This means that there is a difference in the use of politeness in requests between male and female students. Specifically, the mean score of females was higher than male students.

Table 4 points out that the P-value (Sig. (2-tailed)) is equal to 0.000< 0,05 (5%). Therefore, the first null hypothesis (H01) is rejected. The author concludes that the difference between the two means is statistically significant. The collected data provides strong enough evidence to point out that the two means are not equal. The different value is -1.675.

The next two tables showed the difference between male and female students' reactions towards their teachers' politeness in requests in the classroom.

Table 5. Paired samples statistics.

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Male	2.9780	42	.29321	.08122
	Female	4.9210	58	.45929	.12115

Table 6. Paired samples test.

		Paired Differences						t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
					Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	Male Female	-1.943	.65365	.13294	-3.21257	-2.78621		-23.219	19	.000

Table 5 revealed the mean score of female and male students (M1 = 4.9210 and M2 = 2.9780). There is a difference in reaction between male and female students in teachers' politeness in requests in ELT classrooms. Specifically, the mean score of females was higher than male students.

In table 6, it can recognize clearly that the P-value (Sig. (2-tailed)) is equal to 0.000< 0,05 (5%). This means that the second null hypothesis (H02) is rejected, as well. This result indicated that the difference between the two means is statistically significant whereby it can claim that we have strong enough evidence to conclude that the two means are not equal. The different value is quite high (Mean = -1.943).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the statistics found the answers to the two research questions.

First one, the use of politeness in request in the classroom is different between male and female students. Specifically, female students tend to apply the type of politeness in request in the classes more than male students. This is an understandable result because males in general and male students in specific like exposing their ideas or requests directly. Thus, they often reveal the main purpose of what they want and avoid using long sentences or long utterances. Another reason for the sparing of politeness at the request of the male students is the effect of gendered language. Many female students believe that using the structures like "Might I…", "Could I…", "If you do not mind…" and so on is too lithe or even quite "cheesy". This shows that in some specific contexts or situations, politeness in general and politeness in request have different ways to be exposed, as well.

Second, this result points out clearly that female students tend to need the polite request more than males. This might be because the females prefer soft manners or gentleness, they love to hear catchy words and polite utterances.

Through this result, it hoped to help teachers in general and teaching staff in the English teaching department at AIS in specific pay more attention to their interaction and communication with students as well as adjust their requests correctly for the specific group of students (e.g. male or female students). Specifically, teachers could offer their requests to the male students without worrying about their negative reactions. However, for females, polite utterances and structures should not be ignored.

Through the research, the author suggests some good ways to raise politeness in requests for ELT teachers, as well. First, teachers should use suitable polite requests for the specific group of students, and formal request forms for female students such as "Might I…", "Could I…", "May I…", "Could you…", "Would you mind…" and so on and less formal requests to male students, including "Can I…", "Can you…" or other direct requests.

It also hoped that this research will help teachers to build good relationships with students and create a comfortable atmosphere in the classroom whereby encouraging students to learn as well as apply politeness in request in daily life.

However, besides revealing a clear conclusion related to the difference between male and female students in using polite requests in the classroom as well as their reaction to the teachers' polite requests in the ELT environment, this study also comprises some shortcomings related to object factors, including limitation of sample and time in research. Specifically, the research only collected data from 100 students from AIS (sample). This figure is quite small compared with the current number of students in AIS, over 1000 students

(population). Thus, the collected data might not reveal their opinion of the whole one. The other limitation is relevant to the time for collecting the data. Because the questionnaires were delivered and collected depending on the student's official schedule for learning, the participants had to answer thirty questions within twenty minutes. Indeed, the reliability of the data could be negatively affected by the cursory responses.

Thus, it is necessary to conduct more research on this issue thereby helping to submit more firm proofs relevant to the difference in using politeness in requests between male and female students and their reaction to wards to teachers' polite requests

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

This questionnaire is designed to find out how you use the politeness level of requests. The questionnaire consists of fifteen types of politeness in requests you may use in the classroom. Please use your intuition to answer the following questions. Please put a tick (√) in your answers.

1: You are never use it

2: You are seldom use it

3: You are sometime use it

4: You are often use it

5: You are usually use it

No.	Types of politeness in request	1	2	3	4	5
1	Could you… Ex: Could you open the window?					
2	Can you… Ex: Can you close the door?					
3	Would you… Ex: Would you give me your pen?					
4	Will you… Ex: Will you give me your notebook?					
5	…, please. Ex: Speak louder, please.					
6	Would you …, please? Ex: Would you speak louder, please?					
7	You might … Ex: You might keep silent.					
8	You might …, please. Ex: You might be quiet, please.					
9	Can I …? Ex: Can I borrow your cell phone?					
10	I would like … Ex: I would like to go out.					
11	I want …, please. Ex: I want a glass of water, please.					

12	Do you mind …? Ex: Do you mind bringing me a glass of water?					
13	How about …? Ex: How about bringing me a glass of water?					
14	…, could you? Ex: Open the window, could you?					
15	May I …? Ex: May I ask you a question?					

Appendix B

This questionnaire is designed to find out how you react to teachers' politeness in requests. The questionnaire consists of fifteen types of politeness in request your teachers may use in the classroom. Please use your intuition to answer the following questions. Please put a tick (√) in your answers.

1: You strongly disagree

2: You disagree

3: You have no idea

4: You agree

5: You strongly agree

No.	How do you feel if your teachers use the following sentence structures for request in the classrooms?	1	2	3	4	5
1	Could you… Ex: Could you stand up?					
2	Can you… Ex: Can you close the door?					
3	Would you… Ex: Would you show your homework?					
4	Will you… Ex: Will you give me the answer?					
5	…, please. Ex: Keep silent, please.					
6	Would you …, please? Ex: Would you open the window, please?					
7	You might … Ex: You might turn off your cell phone ring.					
8	You might …, please. Ex: You might wear a face mask, please.					
9	Can I …? Ex: Can I ask you a question?					
10	I would like … Ex: I would like to assign five students to a group randomly.					
11	I want …, please. Ex: I want someone volunteer, please.					

12	Do you mind …? Ex: Do you mind attending a make-up session on Sunday?					
13	How about …? Ex: How about finding your partners by yourself?					
14	…, could you? Ex: Complete your exercise within 10 minutes, could you?					
15	May I …? Ex: May I ask you a question?					

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