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# Politeness Strategies in Compliment Responses Among Indonesian EFL University Students

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**Abstract**. Compliment responses are an important indicator of pragmatic competence because they require speakers to acknowledge appreciation while avoiding excessive self-praise. This study examines the politeness strategies Indonesian university students learning English as a foreign language employ when responding to compliments, identifies the dominant strategy, and explores factors shaping their choices. Using a qualitative descriptive design, the study involved 30 undergraduate English Education students at Universitas Riau, selected purposively. Data were gathered through a Discourse Completion Task comprising ten compliment scenarios and semi-structured interviews with ten selected participants. The scenarios addressed appearance, academic achievement, language proficiency, possessions, and helpfulness in interactions. Responses were categorized using Brown and Levinson's framework of positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record, and bald-on-record strategies, while interview data supported interpretation of students' pragmatic considerations. Of 300 responses, positive politeness predominated (168 responses; 56%), followed by negative politeness (72; 24%), off-record strategies (42; 14%), and bald-on-record strategies (18; 6%). Students commonly expressed gratitude, accepted positive evaluations, and reinforced interpersonal solidarity. Negative politeness reflected modesty and efforts to minimize self-praise, whereas off-record responses often redirected credit to others or external circumstances. Strategy selection varied with compliment topics and contextual considerations, including familiarity, social distance, and interlocutor status. These findings suggest that participants demonstrated awareness of the interpersonal demands of compliment responses, although their strategy use varied across situations. The study highlights the value of explicit pragmatic instruction through role plays, discourse completion activities, and conversational analysis to support contextually appropriate English communication in university classrooms.

**Keywords**: Brown and Levinson; Compliment Responses; Politeness Strategies; Pragmatic Competence; Pragmatics.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

An Pragmatic competence has become an essential component of communicative competence in English language learning. The concept of communicative competence was first introduced by Hymes (1972) and later elaborated by Canale and Swain (1980) as well as Canale (1983), who emphasized that successful communication requires not only grammatical competence but also sociolinguistic and strategic competence. Although English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners may possess adequate grammatical knowledge and vocabulary, successful communication depends not only on linguistic accuracy but also on the ability to use language appropriately according to social context. Inappropriate language use may result in pragmatic failure, where speakers unintentionally violate social norms despite producing grammatically correct utterances (Thomas, 1983). Therefore, pragmatic competence plays a crucial role in helping learners communicate effectively and maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships in various communicative situations

Among various pragmatic phenomena, compliments and compliment responses have attracted considerable attention because they represent everyday speech acts that serve important interpersonal functions. Compliments are generally employed to express admiration,

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approval, appreciation, or positive evaluation toward another person regarding appearance, ability, achievement, personality, or possessions. Besides expressing positive feelings, compliments also function as social lubricants that strengthen solidarity, establish rapport, reduce interpersonal distance, and maintain social harmony. Consequently, compliments are frequently exchanged in both academic and non-academic interactions.

However, responding to compliments is often more challenging than giving compliments. When receiving a compliment, speakers face a pragmatic dilemma. On the one hand, accepting the compliment directly may imply self-praise or arrogance. On the other hand, rejecting or minimizing the compliment may appear impolite, ungrateful, or dismissive of the speaker's positive intention. Therefore, compliment responses require speakers to balance appreciation toward the compliment giver while simultaneously maintaining modesty and protecting their own social image. This balance demonstrates speakers' pragmatic competence and their ability to employ appropriate politeness strategies.

From the perspective of speech act theory, compliments belong to the category of expressive speech acts because they express the speaker's psychological attitude toward another individual. Likewise, compliment responses also function as expressive acts since recipients communicate gratitude, agreement, disagreement, modesty, or appreciation through their responses. The realization of these speech acts is strongly influenced by contextual factors such as the relationship between interlocutors, social distance, relative power, and the communicative setting. Consequently, identical compliments may receive different responses depending on the particular social circumstances in which they occur.

One of the most influential theories for explaining language use in interpersonal communication is the politeness theory proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson. According to this theory, every individual possesses two aspects of face: positive face and negative face. Positive face refers to an individual's desire to be appreciated, accepted, and approved by others, whereas negative face concerns the desire to maintain personal autonomy and freedom from imposition. During communication, speakers employ various politeness strategies to minimize potential threats to these aspects of face. Brown and Levinson classify these strategies into four major categories: bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. These categories have become one of the most widely applied analytical frameworks in pragmatic studies, including research on compliment responses.

In compliment response situations, positive politeness strategies are frequently realized through expressions of gratitude, agreement, appreciation, or reciprocal compliments.

Meanwhile, negative politeness strategies may appear when speakers attempt to reduce self-praise through modest expressions or indirect acknowledgments. Off-record strategies allow speakers to respond ambiguously or indirectly, whereas bald-on-record responses express acceptance or rejection without mitigation. The selection of these strategies reflects speakers' consideration of social relationships and communicative goals rather than merely their linguistic competence.

Within Indonesian EFL classrooms, pragmatic competence has received less attention than grammatical competence. English instruction at the university level generally emphasizes grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, reading comprehension, and writing skills, while pragmatic aspects of communication are often addressed only implicitly. As a result, many students can produce grammatically accurate English but still experience difficulty selecting socially appropriate expressions in authentic interactions. Compliment responses illustrate this challenge because learners must determine not only what to say but also how to say it politely in accordance with the interactional context.

Indonesian university students regularly engage in English communication through classroom discussions, presentations, peer interactions, international exchange programs, and online learning environments. During these interactions, compliments frequently arise in response to academic performance, presentations, language proficiency, appearance, or personal achievements. Appropriate responses to such compliments contribute to effective communication and positive interpersonal relationships. Conversely, inappropriate responses may create awkwardness or reduce communicative effectiveness. Therefore, investigating how Indonesian EFL students respond to compliments provides valuable insights into their pragmatic competence and their ability to employ politeness strategies in English.

Previous studies have explored compliment responses from various perspectives. Research involving EFL learners has demonstrated that expressions of gratitude such as Thank you remain the most common response strategy because they represent a socially acceptable and relatively simple means of acknowledging compliments. Nevertheless, learners also employ strategies such as agreement, downgrading, transferring credit, questioning the compliment, joking, or providing explanations depending on the communicative context. These findings indicate that compliment responses are multifaceted speech acts influenced by both linguistic knowledge and pragmatic considerations.

Research conducted in Indonesia has similarly examined compliment production and compliment responses among EFL learners. Existing studies have shown that Indonesian learners generally prefer acceptance strategies, particularly appreciation tokens, while also

employing modesty-oriented responses in certain situations. These studies suggest that learners possess varying levels of pragmatic awareness when responding to compliments in English. However, most previous investigations have primarily classified compliment response strategies without specifically examining how those responses reflect Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies.

Furthermore, many previous studies have relied exclusively on Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) as their primary instrument for data collection. Although DCTs are effective in eliciting speech act realizations, they provide limited information regarding participants' underlying reasons for selecting particular responses. Consequently, the interpretation of politeness strategies may remain incomplete without qualitative explanations from participants. Integrating interviews into the research design enables researchers to explore the considerations that influence learners' pragmatic choices and provides a richer understanding of their language use.

Another limitation of existing studies concerns the application of politeness theory. Several studies classify compliment responses according to taxonomies of acceptance, rejection, or evasion without connecting these response patterns to Brown and Levinson's four politeness strategies. As a result, there remains limited empirical evidence regarding how Indonesian EFL university students employ positive politeness, negative politeness, bald-on-record, and off-record strategies when responding to compliments in English. Addressing this issue is important because politeness theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the relationship between language choice and interpersonal interaction.

Accordingly, the present study investigates the politeness strategies employed by Indonesian EFL university students in responding to compliments. Specifically, it seeks to identify the types of politeness strategies used, determine the dominant strategy employed across different compliment situations, and examine the factors influencing students' selection of those strategies. By focusing on politeness strategies rather than merely categorizing compliment responses, this study provides a deeper understanding of how Indonesian EFL learners manage interpersonal relationships through English.

The findings are expected to contribute to the field of pragmatics and English language teaching by enriching the literature on compliment responses among Indonesian EFL learners. From a theoretical perspective, the study extends the application of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory to the analysis of compliment responses in an Indonesian university context. From a pedagogical perspective, the findings may assist English lecturers in designing classroom activities that promote pragmatic competence alongside grammatical proficiency.

Explicit instruction on compliment responses and politeness strategies may help students communicate more naturally, appropriately, and confidently in academic interactions.

Based on these considerations, this study addresses the following research questions:

a. What politeness strategies are employed by Indonesian EFL university students in responding to compliments?
b. Which politeness strategy is most frequently used by Indonesian EFL university students?
c. What factors influence Indonesian EFL university students in selecting politeness strategies when responding to compliments?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that studies how language is used and interpreted in context. Unlike semantics, which focuses on the literal meaning of linguistic expressions, pragmatics emphasizes how speakers and hearers construct meaning through interaction. The interpretation of an utterance depends not only on its grammatical structure but also on contextual factors such as the relationship between speakers, the communicative setting, social norms, and shared background knowledge. Therefore, pragmatic competence refers to an individual's ability to use language appropriately according to specific communicative situations.

In English language learning, pragmatic competence is considered an essential component of communicative competence. Learners who possess grammatical competence may still experience communication problems if they fail to recognize the social meaning of an utterance or choose expressions that are inappropriate for a particular context. Such failures, commonly referred to as pragmatic failures, may lead to misunderstanding, awkwardness, or unintended impoliteness. Consequently, the development of pragmatic competence has become one of the major concerns in EFL education.

Among various pragmatic phenomena, speech acts have received significant scholarly attention because they represent language as action. Everyday communication involves not only conveying information but also performing social actions such as requesting, apologizing, thanking, complimenting, refusing, and responding to compliments. Each speech act requires speakers to consider contextual variables including social distance, relative power, familiarity, and communicative purpose before selecting appropriate linguistic forms.

**Speech Act Theory**

Speech Act Theory was first introduced by J. L. Austin and later developed by John Searle. According to Austin, uttering a sentence is not merely producing words but performing actions. Every utterance consists of three dimensions: the locutionary act (the literal production of an utterance), the illocutionary act (the speaker's intended communicative function), and the perlocutionary act (the effect of the utterance on the hearer).

Searle further classified speech acts into five major categories:

a. Representatives, which commit speakers to the truth of a proposition.
b. Directives, intended to get hearers to perform an action.
c. Commissives, expressing commitment to future actions.
d. Expressives, expressing psychological states or attitudes.
e. Declarations, which change institutional reality through utterance.

Compliments belong to the category of expressive speech acts because they express admiration, approval, or appreciation toward another person. Likewise, compliment responses are also expressive speech acts because recipients express gratitude, acceptance, modesty, disagreement, or appreciation in response to positive evaluations. The successful realization of these speech acts depends heavily on pragmatic competence and appropriate politeness strategies.

**Compliments and Compliment Responses**

Compliments are among the most frequently occurring speech acts in everyday interaction. They function not only as expressions of admiration but also as mechanisms for establishing solidarity, maintaining interpersonal relationships, encouraging others, and creating positive social interaction. Early studies by Nessa Wolfson and Joan Manes demonstrated that compliments commonly focus on four topics: appearance, possessions, abilities, and achievements. These compliment topics are consistently found across various speech communities, although their linguistic realizations differ according to cultural and situational contexts.

Responding to compliments is considerably more complex than producing compliments. Elaine Pomerantz argued that recipients face two competing conversational pressures: they are expected to agree with the compliment giver while simultaneously avoiding self-praise. This tension explains why compliment responses exhibit considerable variation.

Several researchers have proposed classifications of compliment responses. One of the most influential is Robert K. Herbert, who categorizes responses into three broad groups:

a. Acceptance, including appreciation tokens, agreement, and compliment upgrades.

b. Rejection, including disagreement and questioning sincerity.
c. Evasion, including shifting credit, returning compliments, or providing explanations.

Although Herbert's taxonomy focuses on response types, the present study employs Brown and Levinson's politeness theory to explain why speakers choose particular response strategies in different communicative situations.

**Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory**

One of the most influential frameworks in pragmatic research is the politeness theory proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson. Their theory is based on the concept of face, originally introduced by Goffman, referring to an individual's public self-image.
Brown and Levinson distinguish two aspects of face:

a. Positive face, referring to the desire to be appreciated, accepted, and approved by others.
b. Negative face, referring to the desire to act freely without interference or imposition.

Communication frequently involves Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) that potentially damage either positive or negative face. To minimize these threats, speakers employ four major politeness strategies:

a. Bald-on-record strategy

This strategy expresses messages directly without mitigation. Speakers prioritize efficiency over politeness. Example:
"Thank you."

b. Positive politeness strategy

Positive politeness emphasizes solidarity, friendliness, and shared identity. Speakers attempt to satisfy the hearer's positive face through appreciation, agreement, compliments, or expressions of closeness. Example:
"Thank you so much! I'm really happy you liked it."

Positive politeness is expected to be the dominant strategy among university students because compliments themselves function as positive interpersonal acts.

c. Negative politeness strategy

Negative politeness minimizes self-praise and respects interpersonal distance. Speakers often use hedges, modest expressions, apologies, or indirect acknowledgments. Example:
"Thank you, but I still need a lot of practice."

d. Off-record strategy

Off-record strategies express meaning indirectly, allowing multiple interpretations. Example:
"I was just lucky today."

This strategy enables speakers to acknowledge compliments while avoiding explicit acceptance.

Brown and Levinson's framework provides a useful analytical lens for examining compliment responses because recipients continuously negotiate between accepting appreciation and maintaining modesty.

**Previous Studies**

Previous research has consistently demonstrated that compliment responses constitute an important indicator of pragmatic competence. Herbert (1989) classified compliment responses into acceptance, rejection, and evasion strategies, providing one of the earliest and most influential taxonomies for analyzing compliment responses. The strength of Herbert's framework lies in its comprehensive classification of response types. However, it focuses primarily on categorizing responses rather than explaining the underlying politeness motivations behind speakers' choices.

Similarly, Pomerantz (1978) argued that compliment responses involve a dilemma between accepting a compliment to maintain agreement and avoiding self-praise to preserve modesty. This study successfully explained the conversational constraints underlying compliment responses, yet it did not specifically examine these responses through a comprehensive politeness framework.

Research applying Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory has shown that positive politeness is generally the dominant strategy in compliment responses, particularly in interactions characterized by close social relationships. Studies by Hatay and Tuncer (2022) and Alsuhaibani (2022) found that EFL learners frequently employed expressions of gratitude and compliment acceptance as manifestations of positive politeness, while negative politeness strategies were used to express modesty and reduce self-praise. The advantage of Brown and Levinson's theory is that it provides a comprehensive explanation of how speakers maintain interpersonal relationships through language use. Nevertheless, the theory has also been criticized for emphasizing universal politeness principles while giving less attention to cultural variations that may influence pragmatic behavior in different speech communities.

More recent studies have expanded the investigation of compliment responses in EFL contexts. Zhang (2025) explored the development of learners' compliment responses through technology-assisted learning and different communicative settings. These studies demonstrated that instructional approaches and communication contexts significantly influence learners' pragmatic competence. However, their primary focus was on instructional effectiveness rather

than providing an in-depth analysis of politeness strategies in authentic Indonesian EFL contexts.

In the Indonesian EFL context, existing studies indicate that university students generally respond to compliments by expressing gratitude and modesty. These studies have contributed valuable insights into learners' pragmatic competence. However, most of them primarily classify compliment response types without critically analyzing how these responses reflect Brown and Levinson's four politeness strategies. Furthermore, many previous studies rely solely on Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs), providing limited explanation of the participants' underlying reasons for selecting particular responses.

These limitations indicate the need for further research that not only categorizes compliment responses but also explores the politeness strategies underlying those responses. By integrating Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) with semi-structured interviews, the present study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how Indonesian EFL university students employ positive politeness, negative politeness, bald-on-record, and off-record strategies when responding to compliments. This combination of analytical framework, research context, and data collection methods constitutes the novelty of the present study and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of pragmatic competence among Indonesian EFL learners.

**Research Gap**

Although previous studies have significantly contributed to the understanding of compliment responses, several important gaps remain. Early studies, such as those by Herbert (1989) and Pomerantz (1978), primarily focused on classifying compliment response strategies and explaining the conversational constraints underlying speakers' responses. While these studies provide valuable theoretical foundations, they offer limited explanation of how politeness strategies are realized in different social and cultural contexts.

Subsequent studies employing Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, including those by Hatay and Tuncer (2022) and Alsuhaibani (2022), demonstrated that positive politeness is the dominant strategy in compliment responses. However, these studies were conducted in different EFL contexts, making their findings difficult to generalize to Indonesian university students, whose pragmatic behavior is strongly influenced by local sociocultural values.

Moreover, recent studies by Zhang (2025) have mainly examined the development of compliment responses through instructional interventions and technology-assisted learning. Although these studies provide valuable pedagogical insights, they pay less attention to

explaining why learners select particular politeness strategies in authentic communicative situations.

Methodologically, many previous studies have relied primarily on Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) to elicit compliment responses. While DCTs effectively generate comparable pragmatic data, they provide limited insight into the participants' underlying considerations when choosing specific responses. Consequently, the interpretation of learners' pragmatic behavior remains incomplete without qualitative data that capture their reasoning.

Based on these limitations, the present study addresses these gaps by investigating compliment responses among Indonesian EFL university students through Brown and Levinson's four politeness strategies as the primary analytical framework. In addition, this study combines Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) with semi-structured interviews to obtain both linguistic data and participants' explanations of their pragmatic choices. This integration provides a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between compliment responses, politeness strategies, and pragmatic competence. Therefore, The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive analysis of compliment responses among Indonesian EFL university students by integrating Brown and Levinson's politeness theory with qualitative interview data, enabling a deeper explanation of learners' pragmatic considerations that has received limited attention in previous studies.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate the politeness strategies used by Indonesian EFL university students in responding to compliments. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to describe and interpret the participants' language use in natural communicative situations rather than to test hypotheses or examine causal relationships. The research focused on identifying the types of politeness strategies employed by the participants and exploring the factors underlying their choice of responses. By adopting a qualitative descriptive approach, the study sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of how politeness is realized in compliment responses within an Indonesian EFL context.

The participants of this study consisted of 30 undergraduate students enrolled in the English Education Study Program at Universitas Riau. The participants were selected using purposive sampling based on several criteria. They had completed at least four semesters of study, had taken courses related to speaking and English pragmatics, and voluntarily agreed to participate in the research. These participants were considered suitable because they had

sufficient English proficiency and classroom experience to produce meaningful responses to the research instruments. Their ages ranged from 20 to 23 years, representing intermediate to advanced EFL learners who frequently used English in academic settings.

Data were collected using two research instruments, namely a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) and semi-structured interviews. The DCT was designed to elicit participants' compliment responses in various everyday situations commonly encountered by university students. It consisted of ten scenarios involving compliments on appearance, academic achievement, English proficiency, personal belongings, presentations, and individual abilities. Participants were instructed to write the responses they would naturally produce if they encountered each situation in real-life communication. The use of DCT enabled the researcher to obtain comparable pragmatic data from all participants while maintaining consistency across different communicative contexts.

To gain a deeper understanding of the participants' pragmatic considerations, semi-structured interviews were conducted after the completion of the DCT. Ten participants were purposively selected to represent different patterns of compliment responses identified during the initial analysis. The interviews explored the reasons underlying their linguistic choices, their perceptions of politeness, and the considerations influencing the selection of particular response strategies. All interviews were conducted in Indonesian to ensure that participants could express their ideas clearly and accurately. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

The data collection process was conducted over approximately two weeks. After obtaining informed consent from all participants, the DCT was administered in a classroom setting under the researcher's supervision. Participants completed the task individually without discussing their answers with others. The completed responses were collected and coded according to each participant's identification number. The interview sessions were then scheduled separately and conducted in a quiet environment to facilitate open and detailed discussion. Both written and interview data were organized systematically before the analysis began.

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of qualitative data analysis proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During the data condensation stage, all compliment responses were carefully read, categorized, and coded according to the politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), namely bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. Responses sharing similar pragmatic

characteristics were grouped into the same category. Subsequently, the categorized data were presented in tables to facilitate comparison across participants and compliment situations. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying recurring patterns, determining the dominant politeness strategies, and interpreting the participants' responses in relation to the theoretical framework. The interview transcripts were analyzed alongside the DCT responses to provide richer explanations of the participants' pragmatic choices and to strengthen the interpretation of the findings.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings, several strategies were employed. Method triangulation was achieved by combining data obtained from the DCT and semi-structured interviews, allowing the researcher to compare participants' written responses with their explanations during the interviews. In addition, peer debriefing was conducted by discussing the coding process with another researcher specializing in English pragmatics to enhance coding consistency and minimize subjective interpretation. The researcher also repeatedly reviewed the coding results throughout the analysis to ensure that each compliment response was categorized accurately according to Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. These procedures enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the study.

## 4. RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

### Overall Findings

The present study examined the politeness strategies employed by Indonesian EFL university students in responding to compliments across ten Discourse Completion Task (DCT) scenarios. The responses were analyzed based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which classifies politeness into four strategies: bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record.often.

**Table 1.** Frequency and Percentage of Politeness Strategies in Compliment Responses.

| Politeness Strategy | Example Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Positive Politeness | 168 | 56.0% |
| Negative Politeness | 72 | 24.0% |
| Off-record | 42 | 14.0% |
| Bald-on-record | 18 | 6.0% |
| **Total** | **300** | **100%** |

In Table 1, positive politeness was the most frequently observed strategy. Participants generally expressed gratitude, accepted compliments, and maintained friendly interpersonal relationships. Negative politeness was employed when participants attempted to minimize self-praise by showing modesty. Off-record strategies appeared when participants shifted credit to

others or attributed success to external factors, while bald-on-record responses occurred least frequently because participants tended to avoid overly direct responses.

**Scenario 1: Compliment on Appearance**

Participants received the following compliment:

"You look really nice today. I like your outfit."

Most participants responded by thanking the compliment giver. Several participants also expressed happiness or appreciation.

Participants' responses:

P1: Thank you so much. I'm happy you like it.

P7: Thank you. I just bought it yesterday.

P12: Really? Thank you!

The majority of these responses were categorized as positive politeness because the participants accepted the compliment while strengthening solidarity through appreciation. Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that positive politeness seeks to satisfy the hearer's positive face by expressing friendliness and approval.

Some participants demonstrated negative politeness:

P15: Thank you, but it's just a simple outfit.

P19: Thanks, it's nothing special.

These responses reduced self-praise by minimizing the value of the compliment, reflecting modesty.

A few participants employed off-record strategies:

P24: My sister actually chose this outfit.

Instead of directly accepting the compliment, the participant shifted credit to another person.

Overall, appearance-related compliments elicited predominantly positive politeness because accepting compliments on appearance does not usually threaten interpersonal relationships among classmates.

**Scenario 2: Compliment on Academic Achievement**

Participants received the compliment:

"Congratulations! You did an excellent job on the final exam."

Many participants expressed gratitude before acknowledging their effort. Examples include:

P3: Thank you very much. I studied really hard for it.

P9: Thank you. I'm glad my effort paid off.

These responses indicate positive politeness, combining appreciation with agreement.

Some participants attempted to reduce self-praise:

P14: Thank you, but I was just lucky.

P18: Thanks. The exam was actually easier than I expected.

These responses illustrate negative politeness, as the speakers attempted to appear modest.

Others shifted the success to external factors:

P22: Thank you. My friends helped me prepare.

This represents an off-record strategy because the participant redirected the compliment.

The findings suggest that participants tended to acknowledge academic compliments politely while simultaneously avoiding appearing arrogant.

**Scenario 3: Compliment on English Speaking Ability**

Participants responded to the compliment:

"Your English presentation was excellent. You spoke very fluently."

Most participants appreciated the compliment. Examples include:

P2: Thank you. I'm happy to hear that.

P6: Thank you so much. I've practiced a lot.

These responses demonstrate positive politeness.

Several participants emphasized that improvement was still necessary:

P10: Thank you, but I still need more practice.

P21: Thanks. My English isn't perfect yet.

These responses represent negative politeness.

The participants appeared aware that accepting compliments too enthusiastically might be interpreted as boasting.

**Scenario 4: Compliment on a New Laptop**

Most participants accepted the compliment by thanking the speaker. Examples:

a. Thank you.

b. Thanks! I really like it too.

c. Some shifted credit.

d. My parents bought it for me.

This represents an off-record strategy because the speaker attributes ownership to another person's support rather than personal achievement.

**Scenario 5: Compliment on Classroom Presentation**

Participants generally appreciated the compliment. Examples:

a. Thank you. I'm glad you enjoyed it.

b. Thank you. We worked very hard.

The second response combines positive politeness with shared achievement.

**Scenario 6: Compliment on Helping a Friend**

Typical responses included:

a. You're welcome. I'm happy I could help.

b. No problem. Anytime.

These responses clearly demonstrate positive politeness because they strengthen solidarity.

**Scenario 7: Compliment on Writing Improvement**

Most participants responded:

a. Thank you. I'll keep improving.

b. Thank you for your encouragement.

These responses acknowledge appreciation while expressing future commitment.

**Scenario 8: Compliment on Singing Performance**

Several participants replied:

a. Thank you. I'm glad you enjoyed it.

b. Others minimized the compliment.

c. I was really nervous.

The second response reflects negative politeness, reducing self-praise.

**Scenario 9: Compliment on Leadership**

Participants commonly answered:

a. Thank you, but everyone contributed equally.

This represents off-record because credit is redirected to the team. Others replied:

b. Thank you so much.

This reflects positive politeness.

**Scenario 10: Compliment on Helping the LecturerTypical responses were:**

a. You're welcome, Sir.

b. It was my pleasure.

These responses demonstrate positive politeness by showing respect and appreciation.

**Discussion**

Overall, the analysis indicates that positive politeness is the dominant strategy across the ten scenarios. Participants most frequently responded to compliments by expressing gratitude, accepting positive evaluations, and maintaining friendly interpersonal relationships. Such responses are consistent with Brown and Levinson's (1987) claim that positive politeness functions to enhance solidarity and satisfy the interlocutor's positive face.

Negative politeness occurred when participants attempted to avoid excessive self-praisethrough modest expressions such as "I still need more practice" or "It's nothing special." These responses suggest that speakers balanced appreciation with humility, particularly in situations involving personal ability or academic achievement.

Off-record strategies were primarily observed when participants shifted credit to other people or external factors, for example by acknowledging assistance from friends, family members, or teammates. These indirect responses enabled participants to accept compliments without explicitly praising themselves.

Bald-on-record responses appeared only occasionally because simple expressions such as "Thanks" provided limited interpersonal engagement. Participants generally preferred more elaborated responses that conveyed appreciation and maintained social harmony.

Overall, the findings suggest that Indonesian EFL university students tend to employ politeness strategies that emphasize gratitude, modesty, and harmonious interpersonal relationships when responding to compliments in English.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The Conclusions present this study investigated the politeness strategies employed by Indonesian EFL university students in responding to compliments in English. Drawing on Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, the study analyzed participants' responses elicited through a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) and supported by semi-structured interviews. The findings indicate that the participants employed all four politeness strategies identified by Brown and Levinson, namely positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record, and bald-on-record strategies. Among these, positive politeness emerged as the dominant strategy, as participants most frequently expressed gratitude, accepted compliments, and attempted to maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships.

The findings also demonstrate that the selection of politeness strategies varied according to the contet of the compliment. Compliments related to appearance, academic achievement, English proficiency, leadership, and helpfulness elicited different patterns of

responses depending on the participants' perception of the communicative situation. While positive politeness was commonly realized through appreciation tokens and expressions of agreement, negative politeness appeared when participants minimized self-praise by using modest expressions such as "I still need more practice" or "It was nothing special." Off-record strategies were employed when participants shifted credit to other people or external circumstances, whereas bald-on-record responses were relatively infrequent because participants generally preferred responses that maintained interpersonal harmony.

These findings suggest that Indonesian EFL university students have developed a basic level of pragmatic competence in responding to compliments in English. Nevertheless, the variation in response strategies indicates that learners still require greater awareness of how different politeness strategies function in diverse communicative contexts. Explicit instruction on compliment responses and politeness strategies should therefore be incorporated into English language teaching, particularly in speaking and pragmatics courses. Classroom activities such as role plays, discourse completion tasks, and authentic conversation analysis may help students become more confident and appropriate users of English in everyday communication.

The study contributes to the growing body of research on pragmatics by providing insights into the realization of politeness strategies among Indonesian EFL learners. It also demonstrates the usefulness of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory as an analytical framework for examining compliment responses in higher education contexts. However, the study is limited by its relatively small number of participants and its focus on a single university. Future research is therefore recommended to involve participants from different universities and educational backgrounds, employ larger samples, and combine DCTs with naturally occurring conversational data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of compliment response behavior among Indonesian EFL learners.

Overall, the study confirms that responding to compliments is not merely a matter of linguistic competence but also a reflection of pragmatic competence and politeness.

Understanding how learners employ politeness strategies in compliment responses can support English language educators in designing instructional practices that enhance learners' communicative effectiveness and pragmatic awareness.

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