Age Impact on the Use of Politeness Strategies in Online Interaction by EFL Students in Al-Anbar Distinguished School for Girls

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ABSTRACT:
        The present paper concentrates on the linguistic behaviors prevailing in EFL students in Al-Anbar distinguished school for Girls. These behaviors are displayed through the choice of language, and politeness strategies employed by EFL students in their interaction with each other. Thus, the population of the current study is EFL students from the second intermediate and fifth preparatory classes in the secondary distinguished school for girls in Al-Anbar Province in the first and second semester of their academic year 2021-2022. Based on this population, a total of 40 students have volunteered to participate in this study. The age of the participants is in-between (14-17) years. Consequently, more than 30 samples of their online messages are collected by the researcher. These messages are sent by the participants of the study via Whatsapp groups established by the teachers of English language in this secondary distinguished school. To deeply explore the politeness strategies and to find the difference in age for these groups, these messages are analyzed by adopting the qualitative content analysis technique informed by Brown and Levisohn's theory (1987) of politeness strategies. The findings reveal that EFL students from that school utilize various politeness strategies. Based on the frequency of these strategies, the researcher concludes that the age differences among participants play a pivotal role in determining the application and the choices of politeness strategies through their online interaction. As a result, the data of the present paper shows that participants from the fifth stage are more aware and knowledgeable of these strategies than those who are from the second intermediate stage.
KEYWORDS: Age differences, Distinguished Schools, Politeness strategies, Online interaction.

1. Introduction:

Over the past four decades, a range of fields, including pragmatics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, language analysis, and discourse analysis, have all conducted extensive researches on politeness (Kádar and Bargiela-Chiappini, 2011). However, this kind of politeness is not the same as the other that was once linked with acting in a way that was considered appropriate in society. Those who research it see politeness as a useful problem that needs to be investigated on different levels (Dimitrova-Galaczi, 2002).

One of the major debatable problem is the use of language in online communication. People use online platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, Whatsapp and blogs to share their words, feelings, and ideas. Particularly on social media platforms like Telegram and WhatsApp, people are becoming more fearless in the words, feelings, and thoughts they use. Therefore, when one uses social media, communication will differ from face-to-face interactions (Ammaida, 2020). Accordingly, linguistic scholars attempt to investigate this phenomenon and show the impact of online communication on individuals' behaviors.

Consequently, the way individuals connect and communicate with each other has improved during the past 10 years as a result of the use of technology, such as the Internet and cellphones. Thus, people can engage in computer-mediated communication through the use of electronic gadgets. Since teachers used to build online groups and include their students in and to stay in touch with them beyond school hours, this change in communication methods has an impact on education in general and English language instruction in particular. Despite the benefits of using Telegram and WhatsApp for communication in classroom context, controversial issues with the way of employing politeness strategies among the participants have been identified. One of the prominent issues that is noticed when people engage with each other messages is the lack of awareness to the employment of linguistics traits in their speech.

In order to provide English language teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, Iraqi schools and colleges used online learning platforms powered by the mobile applications Whatsapp, Telegram, and Viber. Among these institutions are the distinguished schools of Al-Anbar province. Students in these schools are seen to utilize various politeness strategies when communicating with their classmates. This study is carried out in Al-Anbar's secondary distinguished school for girls with the aim of addressing these politeness strategies used by the students from second intermediate and fifth preparatory classes during their online chatting with each other.

However, the present paper concentrates on the linguistic behaviors prevailing in EFL selected distinguished school, which are displayed through the choice of language, and politeness strategies employed by EFL students in their interaction with their colleagues. These linguistic selections demonstrate the fundamental nature of politeness, the speaker-recipient connection, and the influence of age on these decisions.

1.2. Research Question of the Study:

The following research question is targeted in the current paper:

1. Is there any association between EFL students' age and their choice of politeness strategies in online interaction in English language class?

1.3. Objective of the Study:

The present study addresses the following objective:

1. To investigate the impact of age on EFL students' choice of politeness strategies in online interaction in English language class.

1.4. Scope and Limitations of the Study:

The investigation of a language phenomenon within the context of pragmatics is the exclusive focus of the current work. It is restricted to study the politeness strategies used by Iraqi EFL students in Al-Anbar Distinguished Secondary School when they communicate with their friends. Through using Whatsapp Application, EFL students at Al-Anbar Secondary Distinguished School for girls have been communicated with each other. This study aimed to determine the positive and negative politeness strategies, as well as **Bald-on Record** that they employed in their online communication. Moreover, the study is confined to the EFL students who are studying English as a foreign language as one of the courses required in the first and second semester of their academic year 2021-2022. Then, the selection of the participated students is from fifth preparatory and second intermediate stages in Al-Anbar secondary distinguished school for girls.

1.5. Significance of the Study:

The current study is important because it examines the politeness strategies used by Iraqi EFL students in Al-Anbar secondary distinguished school for girls when they are communicating with each other virtually. As a result, the researcher gives an effort to determine how participants' age plays a major role in influencing the use of politeness strategies when the selected participants are chatting online with their classmates. In this regard, the results of the current study may be important to people who are interested in pragmatic analysis of politeness strategies and how age affects the speaker's behavior.

2. Literature Review:

According to recent studies, emotional aspects improves as people get older, and older people use more positive affective language than younger people. The use of politeness strategies in verbal encounters, which involves considering others' feelings and demonstrating consideration for their emotional fulfillment, is relevant to the use of affective language, or language containing emotional content. In reality, being polite is a crucial aspect of affective conversational conduct because it entails expressing one's thoughts toward the speaker through language choices (Emara, 2017). According to Gudykunst & Hall (1994), interactions that adhere to politeness strategies lead to positive emotions whereas those that don't produce negative emotions.

In a research on online communication, an expert disproved the idea that older persons are more diligent than younger ones. According to her research, persons under the age of 30 are more careful when correcting themselves, use broader terms to be polite, and utilize a wider vocabulary to communicate their ideas (Bashir, 2022).

In another study entitled " Analising EFL Teacher's Politeness Strategies in Classroom Interaction", Rifai & Cirebon (2022) analyzes how politeness strategies are applied in senior high school of EFL classroom interactions. This study used a descriptive qualitative research approach to examine the politeness strategies used by the teacher and students in their interactions with each other. Therefore, 35 students and one English teacher participated in this study and the data that is used in this study extracted from utterances that used politeness strategies. A 90-minute videotaped English class served as the source of the information. The results showed that there were six extracts that used each of the three politeness strategies: **positive politeness strategy**, **negative politeness strategy**, and **bald-on-record strategy**. The exchanges were under the teacher's control. The politeness tactics utilized in classroom interactions were also impacted by a number of variables, including age disparity, institutional position, authority, and social distance.

"Invitations and politeness in Greek: The age variable" is another research that addresses Greek invites, invitation declines, and politeness within the paradigm of Brown and Levisohn (1987). On the basis of the data that is taken from role plays and verbal reports from informants, it is asserted that age determines both the shape of the speech event of inviting/refusing and the politeness strategies favoured for its fulfillment. It has been demonstrated that younger age groups view invitations as activities that enhance the addressee's appearance; as a result, they urge more and favor positive politeness strategies. In contrast, older age groups rarely demand and seem to favor unkind forms of politeness because they view invitations as acts that endanger the addressee's face. This latter observation appears to contradict past results about the Greek society's propensity towards politeness. However, a closer examination of the data demonstrates that the deployed **negative politeness strategies** are mixed in with positive politeness ones or they serve that purpose in the particular setting. These results highlight a number of problems with Brown's and Levisohn's theory, including the challenge of clearly defining positive and negative politeness strategies (Bella, 2009)

3. Methodology:

The subject of the current paper is EFL students in secondary distinguished school for girls in Al-Anbar Province in the first and second semester of the academic year 2021-2022. Based on this population, a total of 40 students are volunteer to participate in the study. The age of the selected participants is in-between (14-17) years.

However, the present study is qualitative in its research methodology design, a qualitative data collection instrument is used to collect data that help to attain the objectives of the study. Thus, the data of the current study

is represented by the documented online discussion chats written by the participants of the study while they are discussing certain English language issues with each other.

The current study is qualitative since it aims to thoroughly investigate the phenomenon of "politeness strategies" in its natural environment, namely "Iraqi distinguished schools." Thus, Creswell (2007), deals with things in their natural environments and seek to understand or interpret particular phenomena in light of the meanings provided by humans. Additionally, the qualitative research approach is ideal for the current study since it enables the researcher to thoroughly analyze the various politeness strategies as they are naturally employed by the participants of the study. As a result, it allows for a thorough analysis of the data in light of the study's goals and research questions.

In line with the aforementioned facts and to collect data relevant to the phenomenon under study, the researcher engaged with the participants of the study in online chatting with their friends as a research instrument. Consequently, more than 30 samples of their online messages are collected by the researcher. These messages are sent by the participants of the study via Whatsapp groups established by the teachers of English language in the secondary distinguished school for girls. To deeply explore the politeness strategies used by EFL students in Al-Anbar Secondary distinguished school for girls with each other, these messages are analyzed based on qualitative content analysis technique informed by Brown's and Levisohn's theory (1987) of politeness strategies.

4. Findings of the Study:

The core focus of this paper is to investigate the impact of age on the usage of politeness strategies that are employed by Iraqi EFL students in Al-Anbar secondary distinguished school for girls in their online chatting with each other. Consequently, the researcher examined the frequency of the EFL students' use of politeness strategies in online chatting. To attain this, the data are collected by the means of online chatting among participants of the study. Thus, the data is analyzed qualitatively using content analysis procedure. Based on this way of analysis, the findings reveal that there is unbalance between students from fifth stage with students from second stage in the use of politeness strategies. See table 4.1 and 4.2

Table 4.1: The frequency of politeness strategies in second intermediate students' online interaction.

N.	Politeness strategies	Sub strategies	Example	The frequency of politeness strategies
1.	Negative Politeness	Seeking for information	how can we enter the lesson?	17
		Greeting	Hello	7
		Request	Add the students.	4
	Total			28
2.	Bald on Record	Seeking for information	Why did not include all the students in this group.	15
		Request	send me the homework.	5
		Greeting	null	null
	Total			20
3.	Positive Politeness	Intensify interest	ok, we will go to review now.	7
		Seeking for information	can you add the student?	4
		Greeting	good evening.	2
	Total			13
	Total of frequencies			61

As shown in the table above, **Negative Politeness Strategies** which counted (28) frequencies got the first rank among the others. In addition, **Bald on Record Politeness Strategies** got the second rank among the others which counted (20) frequencies as illustrated above. The third rank is **Positive Politeness Strategies** which got (13) frequencies.

Accordingly, the researcher found that students from the second intermediate class in Al-Anbar secondary distinguished school for girls are lass aware of using appropriate polite strategy to communicate with each other in virtual platforms. This result leads to be in agreement with

Ammaida's (2020) findings when she proves that communication virtually might affect the behavior of the people on two levels: linguistic choices and self-awareness.

In contrast, the participants from the fifth preparatory stage of Al-Anbar distinguished school for girls are a bit more awareness and using an appropriate politeness strategy to talk with each other. As explained in the below table (4.2)

Table 4.2: The frequency of politeness strategies in fifth preparatory students' online interaction.

N.	Politeness Strategies	Sub-Strategies	Example	Frequency of politeness strategies
1.	Positive Politeness	Greeting	Good morning miss happy new year	12
		Seeking for information	what about texts	5
		Intensify interest	Ok, thank you	3
	Total			20
2.	Bald on Record	Request	Miss can you explain the difference between (look-looks)?	6
		Seeking for information	Is it important sub?	4
		Greeting	Hello	4
	Total			14
3.	Negative Politeness	Seeking for information	Not rly good nor rely bad.. what about you?	5
		Request	Hi there	2
		Greeting	Please delay the writing exam	2
	Total			9
	Total of frequencies			43

As shown in the table above, **Positive Politeness Strategies** which counted (20) frequencies got the first rank among the others. In addition, **Bald on Record politeness Strategies** got the second rank among the others which counted (14) frequencies as illustrated above. The third rank is **Negative Politeness Strategies** which got (9) frequencies.

Accordingly, the researcher found that students from the fifth preparatory class in Al-Anbar secondary distinguished school for girls are a bit more aware of using politeness strategies to communicate with each other via virtual platform. This might be a result of their majority because most linguistic scholars argue that age is one of facts that plays a major role in shaping and formulating individuals' behavior. Moreover, they used politeness strategies correctly in many times but they still do not have an enough capacity to be professional in employing these politeness strategies because they lack to a comprehensive understanding of these aforementioned strategies. This might be another fact that need to be considered when the researchers investigate politeness strategies in the context of EFL students' behavior.

5. Discussion:

As it is stated earlier that the aim of this research is to display politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levisohn (1987). Furthermore, the researcher also wants to see if the application of politeness strategies changes with the progression of participants' age. The results show that age plays a major role in shaping and formulating the linguistic choices of individuals. According to the data that is analyzed in this paper the researcher found that the participants who are from fifth stages that their age was in (17 years) were more aware than those who are from second stage who usually their age in (14 years).

Accordingly, the present study provides an investigation on the impact of age differences on the use of politeness strategies in EFL students in Al-Anbar secondary distinguished school for girls. The findings demonstrate that the participants from fifth stage show tendency to use politeness strategies in its correct context and this can be clearly notable based on the frequency of the sub-strategies above. Although there are certain similarities in the employment of politeness strategies among the selected participants, the results show that the students from fifth stage are a bit more aware in their talking with their colleagues and they are politer especially in the contexts of greeting and asking than those who are from second intermediate class.

However, the results also do not show much differences in the use of politeness strategies among the participants who are from two different stages and ages. This might be resulted from the environment that the participants belong to. This means that although there is an influential role of age in the usage of politeness strategies, this is not enough to make the communication polite in its pure meaning unless there are also changes on educational system and cultural awareness.

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تأثير العمر على استخدام استراتيجيات التأدب – التفاعل عبر الإنترنت من قبل طالبات اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة اجنبية في مدرسة الانبار للمتميزات

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الملخص:

يركــز هــذا البحــث علــى الســلوكيات اللغويــة الســائدة لــدى طالبــات اللغــة الإنجليزيــة كلغــة أجنبيــة فــي مدرسة الأنبــار المتميـزة للبنــات. يتم عـرض هـذه الســلوكيات مـن خـلال اختيـار اللغـة واستراتيجيات التـأدب التي يستخدمها طـلاب اللغة الإنجليزيـة كلغـة أجنبيـة فـي تفاعلهم مـع بعضـهم البعض. وهكذا فـإن موضوع البحـث الحــالي هـو طالبــات اللغــة الإنجليزيــة كلغــة أجنبيــة مـن الصـفين الثـاني المتوسـط والخـامس الإعـدادي في المدرسـة الثانويـة المتميـزة للبنــات فـي محافظـة الأنبـار فـي الفصــل الأول والثــاني مــن العــام الدراسـي ٢٠٢١-٢٠٢٢. بنــاءً علــى هــذه المجموعــة، تطـوع مـا مجموعـه ٤٠ طالبًـا للمشاركة فــي هـذه الدراسـة. يتـراوح عمـر المشاركين المختارين بـين (١٤-١٧) عامًـا، وبالتـالي، يـتم جمـع أكثـر مـن ٣٠ عينـة مـن رسـائلهم عبـر الإنترنت مـن قبـل الباحـث. يـتم إرسـال هـذه الرسـائل مـن قبـل المشــاركين فـي الدراسـة عبـر مجموعـات Whatsapp التـي أنشأها مدرسـو اللغـة الإنجليزيـة فـي هـذه المدرسـة الثانويـة المتميـزة. لاستكشاف استراتيجيات التـأدب بعمـق ولإيجـاد الاختـلاف فـي العمـر لهـذه المجموعـات، يـتم تحليـل هـذه الرسـائل مـن خـلال اعتمـاد تقنيـة تحليـل المحتوى النـوعي المستنيرة مـن نظريـة بـراون وليفيسـون (١٩٨٧) لاستراتيجيات الأدب. تكشف النتـائج أن طـلاب اللغـة الإنجليزيـة كلغـة أجنبيـة مـن تلـك المدرســة يسـتخدمون اسـتراتيجيات أدب مختلفــة. وبنــاءً علــى تكـرار هـذه الاستراتيجيات، استنتج الباحـث أن الفـروق العمريـة بـين المشاركين تلعـب دورًا محوريًـا فـي تحديـد التطبيـق وخيـارات استراتيجيات التـأدب مـن خـلال تفـاعلهم عبـر الإنترنت. ونتيجـة لـذلك، تظهـر بيانـات هـذه الورقـة أن المشاركين مـن المرحلـة الخامسـة أكثـر وعيا ومعرفة لتك الاستراتيجيات من أولئك الذين هم من المرحلة المتوسطة الثانية.