Cause-Effect Relation in Language Use Among English Department Students Towards Their Lecturers on WhatsApp Chat

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Abstract. This study aims to reveal a cause-effect relationship in language use among students towards their lecturers in the English department UNESA on *WhatsApp* as one of the online communication platforms. This study's objectives are to seek the language style used by the students in contacting their lecturers through *WhatsApp* chat, their lecturers' responses, and how it affects their relations as learners and educators. A documentation technique was used in collecting chat proofs between students and lecturers to reveal which language styles were used. In discovering lecturers' opinions towards students' language styles, an online questionnaire with open and close-ended questions was distributed to all lecturers in the English department UNESA. This study adopted a qualitative approach by applying descriptive analysis. The results show that the students and lecturers use the *tu* and *vous* language style to express politeness and solidarity. However, in some cases, students used informal language unacceptable to some lecturers. As impolite as those are, the analysis shows that students' informal language style has little effect on their student-lecturers relationship. This study may help other researchers later within the same topic by exploring more depth-analysis among different social environments to see if the results show the same outcome.

Keywords: Language style · Politeness · WhatsApp chat · UNESA English Department

1 Introduction

Due to the worldwide pandemic that has been happening for two years in Indonesia, the education system has changed drastically. All activities were done online at the university level through several online platforms. However, students could not directly communicate with their lecturers outside the synchronous classes. Since communication is essential, as Tuhovsky [1] stated, human success comes down to communication, so students need an alternative to connect with their lecturers. WhatsApp has become one of the online communication platforms that both students and lecturers frequently use in the English Department of UNESA.

It has been culturally and socially accepted in the educational domain that students must respect their educators through their behaviors and utterances [2]. One way to express respect towards others is by choosing the correct language style. According to Wardhaugh & Fuller [3], style is the level of formality a speaker may choose depending on various factors, such as the kinds of occasion and the age and social differences among the participants. As lecturers are likely to be older and more "powerful" than their students, a formal language style is more appropriate. Moreover, the apparent social rank difference between students and lecturers leads to the proletarian solidarity between the two. A low solidarity relationship must have a different language use [4]. However, in the practice of students-lecturers communication through WhatsApp chats, in some cases, students are found to be less polite by using an informal language style towards their lecturers.

Three previous studies cover the same topic regarding politeness practices among students and educators through language use, including studies from Fitriyani & Andriyanti [5], Rahayuningsih et al. [6], and Senowasito [7]. These studies were conducted to explore the politeness strategy proposed by Brown & Levinson [8], which occurs in the interaction among EFL classroom students. By using a descriptive qualitative research design, these studies revealed that there are three forms of politeness strategy inside the class.

From the explanations of the previous studies above, the research gap can be found. Since all three previous studies use live class interactions, the study which analyses the politeness practices outside of a class, usually called "asynchronous," needs to be done. This study can answer that research gap by using WhatsApp chat interactions as the primary data source. Moreover, the politeness strategy theory opposed by Brown & Levinson [8] seems to be overused by the previous study. Therefore, this study will be using a different theory that was opposed by Brown & Gilman [9] and supported by Wardhaugh [4] about *Tu and Vous* language style. With every novelty this study had, it is expected that various findings of politeness practices within an educational domain will be revealed.

This study aims to dig deeper into politeness practices through the language style used by UNESA English Department students toward their lecturers in WhatsApp chats. Based on the research questions mentioned previously, this study aims to discover students' language styles, their lecturers' responses, and the effect on their relationships.

1.1 Language Style

According to Wardhaugh & Fuller [3], style is one of the identifiers of a person's dialect, along with registers and genres. Even though those three terms mostly to overlap [10], style is usually used to discuss formality differences in a person's speech. There are levels of formality contained in a style that can be adjusted to several circumstances. Several factors that could adjust the level of formality in a person's speech include domain, addressee, setting, and topic [11].

Domain means the relational context within the addressees. The speakers and the interlocutors are called addresses. The setting is where the conversation or interaction takes place. The intention of making the conversation is the topic. These determining factors in this example will lead to the high formality of speech.

1.1.1 Tu and Vous

Brown & Gilman [9] stated that *Tu* and *Vous* usage determines the solidarity between speakers and their interlocutors in a conversation. *Tu* is described as the 'familiar' form of a language, while *vous* is described as the 'polite' one [6]. In the practice of these language styles, there are three possible forms of usage: symmetrical T, symmetrical V, and asymmetrical T/V.

Symmetrical T means both speakers use the 'familiar' or the less-formal language style in a conversation. This form of usage shows an intense intimacy among the addressees. As stated by Wardhaugh [4], strong solidarity is often more important than politeness in a personal relationship.

Contrary to the previous form, symmetrical V means both speakers use the 'polite' or the formal language style in a conversation. With a high-level formality and politeness between the addressees, this form is frequently used in conversations between colleagues or business partners.

The final form of this language style is the one that must be the finding of this study. This form describes when one side of speakers uses *tu* (the higher power addressee) while the other (the lower power addressee) uses *vous* in a conversation. The main reason for this form usage is a power gap between the addressees. It can be caused by differences in age, experience, intelligence, and many others. Therefore, Wardhaugh [4] insisted that the asymmetrical T/V usage symbolizes a power relationship.

1.2 Politeness Characteristics

In understanding what behaviors are considered polite and impolite, Watts [2] divided politeness behaviors characteristics into five categories, including the avoidance of too-direct expression, the addition of respectful forms of addresses, and social and cultural acceptance.

1.2.1 Avoidance of Too-Direct Expressions

Indirect speech is taken as more polite than straightforward expression, especially in speech acts like requests. This statement was supported by Blum-Kulka [12], in the experimental research that showed that most participants rated indirect requests as more polite. For instance, in the case of students who want to consult with their lecturers, the sentence "Excuse me, may I know when you will be at the campus?" is taken as more polite rather than the sentence "I want to meet you at the campus."

1.2.2 Addition of Respectful Forms of Addresses

Several addresses such as Mr., Mrs., Ms., Ma'am., and many others are needed in addressing someone, especially who has a higher power. The reason for the addition is to express respect towards the interlocutors and avoid any troubles. Correlating with the essence of politeness, Leech [13] defines it as 'strategic conflict avoidance', which 'can be measured in terms of the degree of effort put into the avoidance of a conflict situation', and the establishment and maintenance of comity. Wardhaugh [4] stated that there are several forms of addresses, including Title and Last Name (TLN), First Name (FN), nickname,

or combinations between any of those. Similar to the previous language style form, the addressing system has three forms: asymmetric TLN/FN, mutual TLN, and mutual FN.

In some cases, different cultures have different systems of addressing forms. For example, in Indonesia, students will use TLN addressing form to be polite and respectful. However, in several western countries, it is considered unnecessary. As simple as it sounds, the failure to use an addressing form can cause danger since people assume that the speaker does not know how to appreciate the relationship and is offensive [14].

1.2.3 Social and Cultural Acceptance

Despite the other two characteristics, politeness behavior is nothing without the acceptance of the society with a particular culture. According to Watts [2], the essence of politeness is socio-culturally determined behaviour directed towards establishing and/or maintaining in a state of equilibrium the personal relationships between the individuals of a social group. Like the famous quote, "when in Rome, do as the Romans do." It insists that different societies can have different cultures. People must adjust their politeness behaviour to what is acceptable in social environments.

1.3 Structures of Linguistic Politeness

Not only in the form of behavior, but Watts [2] also revealed the oral form of politeness. Therefore, Watts [2] divided politeness with linguistic approaches into five structures: Formulaic and Ritualised Utterances, Semi-formulaic Utterances, Ideational & Interpersonal Meaning, and Procedural Meaning.

1.3.1 Formulaic, Ritualised Utterances

According to Watts [2], this structure contains highly conventionalized utterances, which contains linguistic expressions used in ritualized forms of verbal interaction. It also has been reduced from fully grammatical structures to the status of extra-sentential markers of political behavior. They have little or no internal syntactic-semantic structure. This structure consists of addressing terms, formulaic expressions of thanking, and ritualized expressions of leave-taking such as "bye-bye."

1.3.2 Semi-formulaic Utterances

This structure consists of conventionalized utterances containing linguistic expressions that carry out indirect speech acts appropriate to the political behavior of a social situation. In certain circumstances, they may also be used as propositional structures in their own right [6]. There are several forms of this structure, including hedges like "I think", solidarity markers such as "You know,", and boosters like "of course".

1.3.3 Ideational and Interpersonal Meaning

Since these two structures are connected, the explanations will be in one section. Ideational meaning is an utterance that leaves others to interpret what the speaker is

saying. It is concerned with propositions, which are assigned truth values [2]. Meanwhile, interpersonal meaning is a meaning of an utterance that links the connection between the interlocutors. For instance, the sentence "Nice weather today, yeah", in ideational meaning, leaves the receiver to interpret what that sentence means; it could be "today has a nice weather" or "I think today has nice weather." However, in interpersonal meaning, that sentence is used for indirectly greeting someone.

1.3.4 Procedural Meaning

In politeness practice in a conversation, there may be an error made by an addressee. Therefore, the error will be processed using the procedural meaning in an utterance. Procedural meaning gives the receiver a procedure to evaluate his/her utterance [2]. In this study, this structure will be the main finding from the data from the lecturers' perspectives.

2 Methods

This study adopted a qualitative approach to analyze the effects of language style used by UNESA English Department students on their lecturers on WhatsApp chats. According to Creswell & Creswell [15], qualitative methods depend on the text and image of the data, have specific data analysis steps, and draw on diverse designs. Two techniques were used to collect the data: documentation and a questionnaire. The documentation technique collected screenshots of WhatsApp chats between students and lecturers in the English Department UNESA. This technique was used in answering the first research question regarding students' language styles. Once the data were collected, they would be presented as screenshots. It would also be classified into two language styles opposed by Brown & Gilman [9]. Furthermore, an online questionnaire with open and close-ended questions was distributed to all UNESA English Department lecturers via WhatsApp group and gained twelve respondents from both study programs. This technique was used to answer the second and third research questions concerning the lecturers' opinions and relationships with their students. The data will be classified into several categories and cohered with the politeness characteristics theory by Watts [2]. At last, the conclusion will be drawn from the analysis with evidence of the data.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Students' Tu and Vous Language Styles Towards Their Lecturers

The first data gathered from both perspectives, including from the students and lecturers, come up with different results. From the students' perspectives, which were taken from several screenshots, most students used *vous* language style towards their lecturers, which will be presented in Fig. 1. However, some of them used the *tu* language style not on purpose because of the addressing forms, which will be presented in Fig. 2 and Fig. 3.

From the lectures' perspectives, there are more varieties of *tu* language styles that the students used in contacting them through WhatsApp. From the closed-ended question,
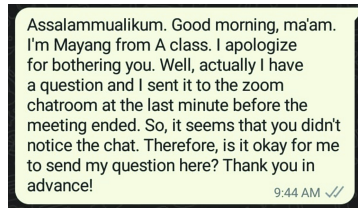
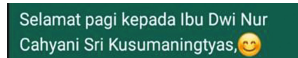**Fig. 1.** Student using *vous* language style

Fig. 2. Student A using wrong addresses form (English Translation: Good morning to Mrs. Dwi Nur Cahyani Sri Kusumaningtyas).
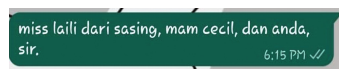

Fig. 3. Student B using wrong addresses form (English Translation: Miss Laili from English literature, Ma'am Cecil, and you, Sir).

out of twelve lecturers, six found students using slangs (including contractions and abbreviations), five of them found students being too direct, and four of them being offensive. There are fifteen less formal or impolite students' language style found by twelve lecturers (the questionnaire is designed for lecturers to answer more than one answer).

Moreover, in the open-ended question requesting the example of students' *tu* language style found by the lecturers from their actual experiences, some of them found students calling them by an inappropriate form of addresses, such as "*pean*", "you", "*anda*" (Bahasa). Others found students who were being too direct in requests, such as "I sent the draft, Sir. Please correct it" or "Where are you, Ma'am? I want to consult".

Furthermore, Figs. 2 and 3 show that both *Tu* language styles applied by students are impolite addressing forms. As stated by Wardhaugh [4], asymmetrical TLN/FN (Title + Last Name/First Name) needs to be used in unequal power. Since lecturers are older than their students, they need to be respected by the particular form of address. In the first evidence, the student wrote too many names to be the address. Therefore, it should have been "Mrs. Dwi" or "Mrs. Kusumaningtyas" in the correct form.

The second piece of evidence is the use of "*anda*" (Bahasa) or "you" (English). In some countries, especially the ones from western, it is socially and culturally acceptable for students to call their lecturers using the "you" address form. The lack of vocabulary causes this condition to express respect besides the word "you." However, a different case happens in Indonesia, especially in Java. Other vocabularies can express more respect, such as "*panjenengan*". This phenomenon supports the theory opposed by Ervin-Tripp [14], stating that different regions containing different cultures will have different systems of politeness.
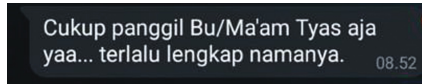
Fig. 4. Example of lecturer's correction (English Translation: Call me Mrs./Ma'am Tyas, no need to be complete).
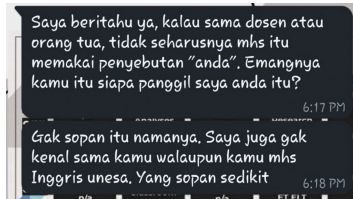

Fig. 5. Other example of lecturer's correction (English Translation: Let me tell you if you talk with lecturers or the elderly, a student is not supposed to use "you" as the address. Who do you think you are? It's impolite. I don't even know you even though you are a student here).

On the chat of the *vous* language style, the less-direct expressions of the student show in the sentences of "So, it seems that you didn't notice the chat. Therefore, is it okay for me to send my questions here?". Instead of giving direct instructions to the lecturer, such as "Please notify my questions.", she could manage how to sound more polite by giving a little introduction and stating her request in an interrogative form. The expression of leave-taking was also evident in her final sentence saying, "Thank you in advance!". In the culture of the English Department UNESA, students must state their identity before stating their necessities so that lecturers do not consider the message as spam. She applied that in the initial sentence, "I'm Mayang from A class". To be socially accepted, she apologized for texting in case the lecturer is busy by saying, "I apologize for bothering you".

3.2 Lecturers' Responses Towards Students' Language Styles

From an open-ended question on the questionnaire, the results regarding lecturers' responses show two types of reactions, including correcting the language styles and ignoring them. Out of twelve lecturers, nine of them chose to be helping the students in evaluating their language styles. There are several examples of corrections, such as giving them the right words to use. One lecturer explained his experience correcting students' impolite language style in addressing form, he stated, I usually explain to them what should be seen from a sociolinguistic point of view. E.g., addressing me using "sampean" that is supposed to "panjenengan". The other example of correction is simply reminding them to be more careful in choosing language style. The other three lecturers ignored the impolite language style with various reactions, like leaving the message on reading, giving a terse reply, or going along with it.

The two Figs. 4 and 5 are evidence of the lecturer's response toward students' *tu* language style in WhatsApp. Figure 4 is the response of the first *tu* language example on Fig. 2. Figure 5 is the second tu language example response on Fig. 3.

Based on the other questions concerning the reasons why students need to apply the polite language style in contacting their lecturers result in different answers from the lecturers. Five lecturers think students need to use the polite language since they are educated. One explained further: when one acts politely through his manner and utterances, it shows his value as an educated one. Four lecturers think it has to deal with norms and ethics. Two relate it to the professional context between students and lecturers in the education domain. And one lecturer did not have an answer for this.

Moreover, Figs. 4 and 5 show that both lecturers are correcting the use of addresses form. Moreover, the other nine lecturers' answers from the questionnaire also insisted that this correction on impolite language style is necessary. This response relates to one of the linguistic politeness structures opposed by Watts [2], which is procedural meaning. Since the language styles that the students used seemed to be inappropriate, some lecturers evaluated their students' utterances. Both examples prove that the failure to use an addressing form can cause danger since people will assume that the speaker does not know how to appreciate the relationship and is offensive [14].

3.3 Language Styles' Effect Towards Students-Lecturers Relationship

To answer this question, the researcher put a question on the questionnaire about the relationships between students with polite and impolite language styles. The result shows that ten of twelve lecturers do not discriminate or apply different treatments to the ones with impolite language styles. Meanwhile, two lecturers respect students with polite language styles more than the ones with impolite ones. As impolite as it is, ten out of twelve lecturers still think that all students must be treated equally.

As impolite as it sounds, the result shows that most lecturers still treated their students equally, despite their less-formal language styles. This condition does not go far from the theory of language dimension opposed by Fishman [11]. The formality factors such as domain, addressee, setting, and topic caused lecturers to respond professionally to their students' language use. Lecturers could wisely respond to them in a university setting, with its education domain, and as educators. Moreover, from a lecturer's opinion, he stated that students-lecturers' relationships should be kept professional contextually. So, when it comes to academic situations, students need to communicate politely in all kinds at all costs.

4   Conclusion

Based on the results and discussion, it can be concluded that students' language styles toward their lecturers did not affect their relationship in the professional context of education. Students must use *various* language styles towards people with a higher power, which are their lecturers in the domain of education. However, in some cases, students did the contrary by making the common language mistake in a conversation. This type of incorrect situation of language phenomenon resulted in the correction and evaluation from the lecturers in various ways. As impolite as students' language style is, lecturers would maintain their students-lecturers' relationship with professionalism due to the education domain and their occupation as educators in the setting of a university.

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