

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Politeness is a fundamental aspect of human communication that plays a crucial role in maintaining social harmony and interpersonal relationships. Effective communication in the language being studied is becoming increasingly important in today's digitally connected global society. With the help of technology and communication, students are becoming more connected and communicative (Erlinda, 2019). Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness strategies provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how speakers manage face-threatening acts (FTAs) during interactions.

The theoretical background of this study is based on pragmatics, particularly Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which explains how speakers use language to maintain positive and negative face and to minimize face-threatening acts through strategies such as bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. Within the framework of classroom interaction, these concepts are interpreted as students' linguistic efforts to manage social relationships, power differences, and institutional norms when communicating with teachers and peers. However, previous studies have largely focused on teachers' politeness or on higher educational levels, while students'

politeness strategies at the junior level, especially in Islamic school (madrasah) contexts, remain underexplored.

Research on politeness strategies is important to discuss because language plays a significant role in maintaining effective and harmonious communication, particularly in classroom interactions. The use of politeness strategies allows speakers, both teachers and students, to convey opinions, requests, or instructions while respecting the other person and minimizing potential conflict. In an educational context, this contributes to the creation of a comfortable, participatory, and respectful learning environment, thus motivating students to actively participate in the learning process. Furthermore, research on politeness strategies is also important for developing students' pragmatic competence in language learning, as students are required not only to understand language structure but also to use language appropriately within social and cultural contexts.

This research was conducted at MTsN 5 Padang, a State Islamic Junior High School (Madrasah Tsanawiyah) in Padang City under the auspices of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, and plays a key role in the provision of Islamic-based junior high school education. This school provides learning that integrates general subjects with Islamic religious education, thus emphasizing not only academic achievement but also the formation of students' character and moral values. The school environment is relatively conducive to teaching and learning

activities, with interactions between teachers and students and between students in an orderly and religious atmosphere. In addition to academic activities, MTsN 5 Padang is also active in various extracurricular activities and habituation programs aimed at developing students' interests, talents, and social skills. Overall, MTsN 5 Padang is an educational institution that strives to create a balanced learning atmosphere between intellectual, social, and spiritual aspects.

In classroom interactions, students politeness can be observed through their choice of words, tone of voice, and adherence to social norms when communicating with their teacher and peers. As language learners, students may apply politeness strategies differently base on their cultural background, level of familiarity, and the formality of the classroom environment.

Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that power relations, such as the hierarchical structure between teachers and students, influence how politeness strategies are employed. For example, students may use more negative politeness strategies, such as indirect requests or hedging, when addressing teachers to show respect and minimize imposition. In contrast, they may employ positive politeness strategies, such as jokes and informal language, when interacting with classmates to build solidarity.

Observing how students respond politely in class interactions is crucial because civility is crucial to preserving efficient communication and

creating a respectful learning environment. The purpose of this study is to look at the civility techniques that ninth-grade students at State Madrasah Tsanawiyah 5 Padang employ when interacting and having class discussions.

The theory of Brown & Levinson (1987) is one of the most dominant models in pragmatics, but this theory has several shortcomings because it tends to be oriented towards Western culture, considers the concept of face to be universal, and pays less attention to cultural differences and dynamic social contexts, so it is not always able to explain the diverse and complex practices of politeness in real life. The main criticism of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory focuses on Western cultural biases that overemphasize individualism and self-autonomy through the concept of "negative face." Experts from ResearchGate and other linguistic journals argue that the theory's assumed universality fails to accommodate collectivist cultures (such as those in Asia or Africa) that prioritize social harmony and group norms over personal self-image. Furthermore, the model has been criticized for being too focused on mitigating strategies for Face Threatening Acts (FTAs), thus tending to view social interactions as potentially conflictual rather than collaborative, and ignoring the dynamics of politeness within the broader context of discourse.

The ten relevant studies reviewed indicate that politeness strategies are a central component of classroom interaction and are strongly influenced by power relations, institutional roles, and sociocultural values. Most of the studies adopted qualitative descriptive approaches using classroom observation and discourse analysis grounded in Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, and consistently found positive politeness to be the most frequently used strategy, particularly to build solidarity and support learning engagement. While several studies focused on tactics in highschool EFL classroom with an emphasis on a teacher-student interaction (Fitriyani, 2020), how teachers gentleness and kindness influenced student's polite behaviour (Pituti, 2019) and others emphasized character education or sociopragmatic variables such as gender (Ningrum et. al, 2018), they provide important theoretical and empirical support for this study, and show the positive politeness used in English textbook for the students (Erlinda, 2023).

Previous studies have widely discussed politeness strategies in classroom interaction, focusing on teachers and students in general school settings. Most of these studies were conducted in public schools and emphasized the types of politeness strategies based on Brown and Levinson's theory. However, limited attention has been given to politeness strategies used by students in Islamic-based educational institutions, particularly at the ninth-grade level of state Madrasah Tsanawiyah.

Therefore, this study addresses this gap by investigating the politeness strategies found in classroom interaction at the ninth grade of State Madrasah Tsanawiyah 5 Padang. This research is expected to contribute to the understanding of politeness strategies in classroom interaction within a madrasah context.

Based on the background of the problem above, the researcher is interested to conduct the research entitled

**“STUDENTS POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN
CLASSROOM INTERACTION AT NINTH GRADE STATE
MADRASAH TSANAWIYAH 5 PADANG”**

B. Focus of the Study

This study focuses on observing students politeness in classroom interaction by examining the politeness strategies they use when communicating with teachers and peers. It identifies and analyzes the types of politeness strategies, including positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record politeness, as observe in verbal interactions within a formal classroom setting.

This study does not include written communication or non-verbal politeness cues such as gestures and facial expressions. Additionally, it explores sociolinguistic factors influencing students' politeness, such as power relations and social distance, while also considering the impact of cultural background and language proficiency. The research is conducted

among ninth-grade students at State Madrasah Tsanawiyah 5 Padang, focusing only on classroom interactions during formal lessons.

C. Formulation of the Problem

Based on the background of the study, this research seek to answer the following question: What types of politeness strategies are found in classroom interaction at ninth-grade students at State Madrasah Tsanawiyah 5 Padang?

D. Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the types of Politeness Strategies found in classroom interaction ninth grade students at state madrasah tsanawiyah 5 padang. This study aims to understand how students communicate politely while expressing ideas, asking questions, responding, or participating in discussions in the classroom setting

E. Significance of the Study

This study is significance for two reasons. First, it contributes to a deeper understanding of how students employ politeness strategies during classroom interactions, particularly within the context of a religious-based educational institution like Madrasah Tsanawiyah. By identifying the types and functions of politeness strategies used by ninth-grade students, this research provides valuable insights into their communication behavior, which reflects both linguistic competence and social awareness.

Second, the findings of this study is beneficial for English teachers and educators in designing more effective classroom management and teaching strategies that foster respectful and meaningful communication. Understanding how students express politeness can help teachers encourage more positive interactions and create a supportive learning environment.

F. Definition and Key Terms

1. Politeness Strategies

Politeness strategies refer to the ways individuals use language to show respect, avoid conflict, and maintain social harmony during interaction. In this study, the concept is based on Brown and Levinson's theory (1987), which classifies politeness strategies into four types: bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record.

2. Classroom Interaction

Classroom interaction is defined as the verbal communication that takes place between students and teachers or among students during teaching and learning activities. It includes asking and answering questions, giving opinions, responding to instructions, and other forms of spoken exchange within the classroom setting (Brown H.D., 2001)

3. Madrasah Tsanawiyah

Madrasah Tsanawiyah is an Islamic Junior High school in Indonesia that provides both general and religious education. In this study, it refers to State Madrasah Tsanawiyah 5 Padang, the specific educational institution where the research is conducted.

