Research on College Teachers' Politeness Strategies in EFL Classrooms[*]

Liu Peng
School of Foreign Languages, Sichuan University of Science and Technology, Zigong, Sichuan, China
Email: wwpengliu@hotmail.com

Lingling Cai
School of Foreign Languages, Sichuan University of Science and Technology, Zigong, Sichuan, China
Email: cherrylingling1130@163.com

Xianjun Tan
School of Foreign Languages, Sichuan University of Science and Technology, Zigong, Sichuan, China
Email: tanxianjun821@yahoo.com.cn

Abstract—**Politeness is a common phenomenon in any society. Thus conventions of politeness vary from culture to culture. How people value politeness or show politeness is influenced by many factors such as age, gender, knowledge level, or social status or power. In this research, we deal with politeness in China EFL classrooms. Based on Brown and Levinson's Face Theory and applying a series of research methods like class observation, survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews in a case study, the researcher tries to find out: how students' gender and level of English proficiency influence their understanding of teachers' politeness strategies, what attitudes they have towards the application of teachers' PS, and how students value politeness strategies in EFL classrooms. In conclusion, on one hand, teachers should increase their own politeness awareness as well as students'; on the other hand, it is very important to improve students' English proficiency, which can help them understand situational contexts in English and interpret teachers' well meaning in the term of politeness.**

Index Terms—**politeness, face theory, politeness strategies, EFL classrooms**

I. INTRODUCTION

According to College English Curriculum Requirement issued in 2007, China College English is aimed at developing college students' comprehensive abilities in using English, especially in reinforcing listening and speaking skills in order that they will be able to communicate effectively, increase their ability in independent studying and improve their general cultural awareness to meet the minimum standard of China's economic prosperity and international exchanges. From the *Requirement*, it is easy to tell that the key point is effective communication. As we know, "knowledge of the elements of a language in fact counts for nothing unless the user is able to combine them in new and appropriate ways to meet the linguistic demands of the situation in which he wishes to use the language" (Morrow, 1979:145). Consequently, language learners need to understand culture, context and politeness so as to be able to function and communicate appropriately in the target language.

In this research, politeness is the main theme of the thesis, while Brown and Levinson's model of politeness acts as the major theory for it. Based on theories above and through a series of research methods, the researcher aims at exploring: a) students' gender difference and levels of English proficiency influencing their comprehension of teachers' politeness strategies; b) the existence of the gap between teachers' initial intention of using PS and students' perception of teachers' politeness strategies; c) students' expectation of teachers' politeness strategies; d) students' attitudes towards teachers' application of politeness strategies; and e) contextual factor affecting students' interpretation of teachers' politeness strategies;.

II. RELEVANT THEORIES

A. Brown and Levinson's Face Theory

1. The notion of face

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model is considered as the most influential politeness theory (Fukushima, 2000; Thomas, 1995). The heart of it is *face*, originated from Goffman (1957, 1967). Brown and Levinson define face

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as "the public self-image that every human being wants to claims for himself" (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p.61). Comparing with the two definitions of face, we notice that the former emphasizes its social significance, while the latter stresses individual wants. In this study, Brown and Levinson's redefinition bears a more practical meaning. According to Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987), there are two types of face: positive face and negative face. Positive Face refers to one's self-esteem, while negative face refers to one's freedom to act. The two aspects of face are the basic wants in any social interaction, and so cooperation is needed for the participants to maintain each other's faces.

2. Politeness strategies

According to Brown and Levinson, positive and negative faces exist universally in human culture. Normally any rational individual cooperates in maintaining both the speaker's and the hearer's faces. But it is not always the case in reality. During social interactions, face-threatening acts (FTAs) are at times inevitable based on the terms of the conversation. Thus four main types of politeness strategies are proposed: bald on-record (without any redressive action to minimize H's FTAS), positive politeness (S satisfies H's desires of being liked or approved of), negative politeness (S satisfies H's desires to be unimpeded), off-record (S has the chance to evade responsibility by claiming that H's interpretation of the utterance as an FTA is wrong). Sometimes if the potential for loss of face is too great, the speaker may abandon the FTA completely and say nothing, which is understood as the highest degree of politeness strategy of "Don't do FTAs".

Formulating Brown and Levinson's degrees of politeness strategies, the researcher of this study designed a questionnaire with five degrees of options for the students to determine the teacher's politeness strategies. Differently from Brown and Levinson and also following their theory that any speech act can be FTAs, the researcher abandoned their highest degree of politeness (5. Don't do FTAs), instead, the researcher set "4. Off record" as the highest degree of politeness, and the others moved upwards a bit, and the least degree of politeness was highest risk of FTAs. In this way the researcher attempts to find out whether the students comprehend the teacher's politeness strategies as Brown and Levinson have postulated.

3. Three sociological variables in degree of politeness

To illustrate when deciding whether and how to use the various strategies in real life situations, Brown and Levinson (1987, pp.71-84) propose three sociological variables in choosing politeness strategies. 1) Social distance between the speaker and the hearer. For example, we may use less elaborate positive strategies or we may choose to use positive rather than negative strategies when speaking with family. Regarding social distance between teachers and students, their relation is far, e.g. due to age gap, gender difference, and how teachers develop relations with students. 2) Power relations between the speaker and the hearer. In classrooms teachers have higher power over students in a traditional sense other than age gap etc. How teachers use this power in class varies individually, which can affect the building of the teacher-student relation. 3) The absolute ranking of impositions in a particular culture, in other words, the absolute ranking of threat of the FTA. Highly imposing acts like requests demand more redress to mitigate their increased threat level.

B. Student Factors Influencing Teachers' Politeness Strategies

The first, students' age is the initial consideration. As a saying goes, suit the remedy to the case. Different age groups of students have different tendencies or expectations from the teacher. Younger students don't have much knowledge of face saving or face losing or face wanting. What they want most is to get as many as positive comments from teachers. In this case, teacher's continuous praise or agreement is the source of greater motivation in learning. The targeted subjects of this research are freshmen whose age ranges from 18 to 20. On one hand, they have the same wish for the teacher, such as seeking agreement; they want the respects of their self-esteem, and if possible, they try not to suffer the less FTAs. On the other hand, like other adults, they are realistic about the world and accept challenges in a critical way. Since the students in this research belong to the same age group. Students' age factor is overlooked on purpose.

The second, gender difference is an important factor. Through class observations, the researcher noticed that girls use more auxiliary means (e.g. hand gestures, facial expression) to show their politeness in making class presentations. Here it is worth mentioning that another obvious difference in girls' speech lies in their normative language. More often girl students give answers following the teacher's question pattern, and thus they speak longer sentences than boys. With regard to the comprehension of teachers' politeness strategies, do boy and girl students apply the same standards to judging the teacher's language? How do boy and girl students respond to the teacher's politeness strategies differently? The following discloses them on the basis of an empirical study.

The last, the level of English proficiency is a key ingredient other than age and gender factors in EFL classrooms. Following Brown and Levinson (1987), higher levels of indirectness may result in higher levels of politeness, that is to say, the lower level learners show strong tendency towards the use of the most direct type of politeness strategy. Likewise, EFL learners with lower English proficiency are less capable of giving clear and specific explanations than those with higher language proficiency.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Questions

In this study, there are seven questions to be explored via class observations, survey questionnaires and

semi-structured interviews.
    1) How students' gender and levels of English proficiency influence students' comprehension of teachers' PS?
    2) Is there any gap between teachers' initial intention and students' perception?
    3) How does contextual factor affect students' interpretation of teachers' PS?
    4) What expectations do students have of teachers' PS?
    5) How do students value teachers' application of teachers' PS?

B.   Research Procedures

    Altogether the research consists of seven steps. The first step was to determine how to collect and analyze data. The second step was to observe classes in EFL classrooms and record teachers' language via MP4. The third step was to design questions for survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The fourth step was to invite seventy-four students to conduct survey questionnaires during break between classes after the researcher finished non-participant observation, and then collected back on the spot. The fifth step was to have individual interviews with four students (Boy A, Boy B; Girl A, Girl B) in different times at their convenience. The sixth step was to analyze data collected from questionnaires and interviews. And the final step was to have a discussion based on data analysis.

C.   Subjects

    In this research there are two groups of subjects from Sichuan University of Science and Engineering. One group is a female teacher aged 30, and with eight years of teaching career. The other group is her seventy-four students at their first semester of freshmen year. Normally in this university there are about thirty students in each class, and an English teacher gives lessons to a mixed class (two natural classes are combined into one in English class). It is engineering major, boys outnumber girls: there are fifty-one boys and twenty-three girls. The e-commerce major sounds "hot" for most college-bound students. There are more than 35 students in each natural class. Their levels of English proficiency are measured by college entrance exam scores: advanced level (AL), intermediate level (IL), ordinary level (OL) and low level (LL). From the *Figures 4.3* below, we can see that each level of students' English proficiency take on almost an even distribution of all subjects: Advanced level accounts for 26%, IL 23%, OL 20% and LL 31%. Among four semi-structured interviewees, Boy A belongs to low level, Girl A average level, Boy B intermediate level and Girl B advanced level.
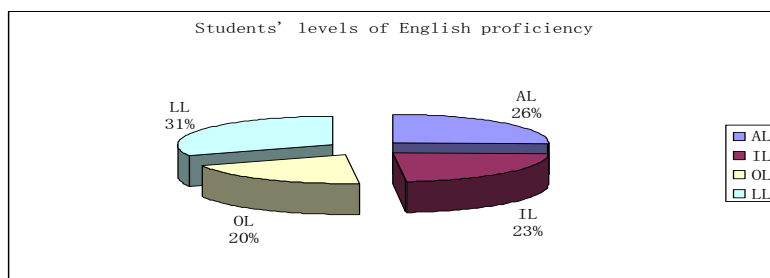

Fig. C Students' levels of English proficiency in the research
Note:
1. Students' levels of English proficiency are measured by college entrance exam scores
2. AL=Average level; IL=Intermediate level' OL=Ordinary level; LL=Low level
3. AL≥110; 100≤IL≤109; 90≤OL≤99; LL<90

D.   Instruments

    In this study, the researcher implements data collection and analysis techniques from quantitative and qualitative researches. It involves class observation, questionnaires, and interviews. Given the purpose of this study, mixed research methods are the most appropriate research methodology to be used. It is not only significant to investigate the teacher's practice of politeness strategies in EFL classrooms, but also it is crucial to explore students' response to the teacher's politeness strategies. In such cases, the teacher's action and students' reaction are correlated. Besides, two main types of data collection methods were employed: survey questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. These instruments permitted the researcher to identify students' perception and interpretation of teachers' politeness strategies as well as the significance of using them, and what relevant politeness strategies can be highlighted for the good of teachers and learners.

1. Data collection

    Before data collection started, the researcher made it clear to the subjects (the teacher and the students) in private respectively that it was part of M.A. program related to teachers' politeness strategies. When inviting the English teacher, the researcher informed that there was no risk of privacy-revealing or academic interference. When talking to the students, the researcher promised that there was no threat to their academic achievements. The data is only for an English teaching and researching project.

1.1 Class observation

The researcher had one-week class observation in the first month of the students' entering college. The researcher observed twice in a week. Each time it lasted 45 minutes, i.e. one class period. During observation, the researcher recorded the teacher's language with MP4. Altogether the researcher collected thirty-six sentences related to Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies. When creating a survey for the students, the researcher picked out the most frequently-used sentences as questions to create survey questionnaires.

1.2 Survey questionnaire

In this research there involves a questionnaire (Appendix A) aimed at students. There are two parts: part one is to find out how students interpret teachers' politeness strategies in their language use; part two is to probe into how students evaluate the significance of teachers' application of politeness strategies. Part one is based on class observation. There are ten multiple-choice questions followed by five rating choices on basis of Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies. According to them, there are five degrees of politeness strategies: 5. Don't do FTAs; 4. Off-record; 3. Negative politeness strategy; 2. Positive politeness strategy; 1. Bald on record. However in EFL classrooms, it is almost impossible for the teacher not to do FTAs. Again according to Brown and Levinson, all speech acts involve a certain kind of face threat. Modeling them, the researcher created five rating of choices to let students decide the teacher's politeness: A. Off-record; B. Negative PS; C. Positive PS; D. Bald on-record; and E. Highest rank of FTAs (Appendix Two). For part two there are also five rating choices of (dis)agreement: A. Totally agreement; B. Agreement; C. No idea; D. Disagreement; E. Totally disagreement. The survey was conducted during break between classes. Students were given 15 minutes to finish it and then handed it in on the spot. Altogether seventy-five questionnaires were handed out, all were returned but one questionnaire was invalid as he/she failed to tell "gender".

1.3 Semi-structured interview

There are two parts for students' interview (Appendix B). Part one is situational questions based on four classroom situations. Followed by each situation, four politeness strategies are given in case students may need them in order to let the interview move on successfully. Its aim is to know about students' expectation of teachers' application of politeness strategies. Part two is to ask about students' opinions about teachers' politeness strategies in a general sense. Four questions are listed, and the last question is an optional one. For this research method, four students are chose according to their level of English proficiency. To achieve gender balance, two boys and two girls are invited. Boy A's English belongs to low level, girl A belongs to ordinary level, boy B's belongs to intermediate level, and girl B's belongs to advanced level. The interview was conducted at different times of the four students' free time respectively. For each student it lasted thirty minutes, and the researcher recorded the whole process with MP4 after being granted the permission. Considering that the language difficulty might hinder them from giving an honest answer and making the interview more comfortable, the interviewees were allowed to use Chinese. Plus, they were reminded that extra questions might be added based on their responses. Once the interviewee finished all the required questions, the researcher played the recording to him/her for verification so that extra information might be added.

IV.   DATA ANALYSIS

A.   Students' Comprehension of Teachers' Politeness Strategies

Face want is an essential ingredient that people in all cultures try to save and maintain. Since introduced to China in 1980s, Face Theory and politeness strategies have been researched by many Chinese scholars (Gu, 1992; Shu, 1993; Gao, 1996; He, 1995; Wang, 2001, Xiong, 2002). Here the present study attempts to reveal that when teachers assume they are using higher or lower degree of politeness strategies, do students rate the same degree of their politeness strategies? Is there any gap in existence between the teacher's expectation and students' comprehension in term of politeness strategies? How boy students and girl students decide the teacher's rating of politeness strategies respectively? And how differently students with different levels of English interpret the teacher's politeness strategies? Decoding data from questionnaires and converting into digits, the researcher input them via SPSS 19.0 version for statistical calculation and then output the results shown as figures below.

1. Students' gender difference

From fig. A.1, there are three implications in students' comprehension of teachers' politeness strategies.
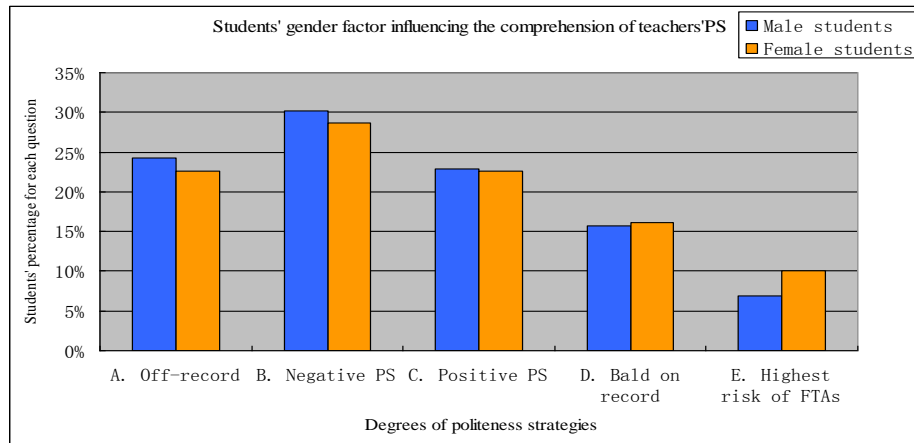
Fig .A.1 Students' gender factor influencing the comprehension of teachers' PS

a). Boy and girl students share common ground in determining that the teacher uses more higher degrees of politeness strategies, i.e. A. Off-record; B. Negative PS; and C. Positive PS. It is a happy thing as we can tell the teacher has built a friendly relationship with students from the very beginning.

b). Boy students emphasize the teacher's literal intention conveyed by speech acts and decide its degree of politeness strategies; while girl students tries harder to interpret the teacher's speech act beyond words, and understand the depth meaning in term of politeness strategies. It is easy to tell from the figure above that boy students have higher percentage than girl students in option A, option B and option C (which are ranked as higher degrees of politeness strategies), but in option D and option E girl students outnumber boy students.

c). This difference can be understood in accordance to other previous researchers besides Brown and Levinson. Females are concerned about the application of their own politeness strategies in speeches. Likewise, they adopt the same standards to treat and measure others' degree of politeness strategies. EFL classrooms are no exception.

2. Students' different levels of English proficiency

According to Fig.A.2, we can tell that students' different levels of English proficiency influence students' comprehension of teachers' politeness strategies. The researcher divides them into four levels referring to their college entrance exam scares.
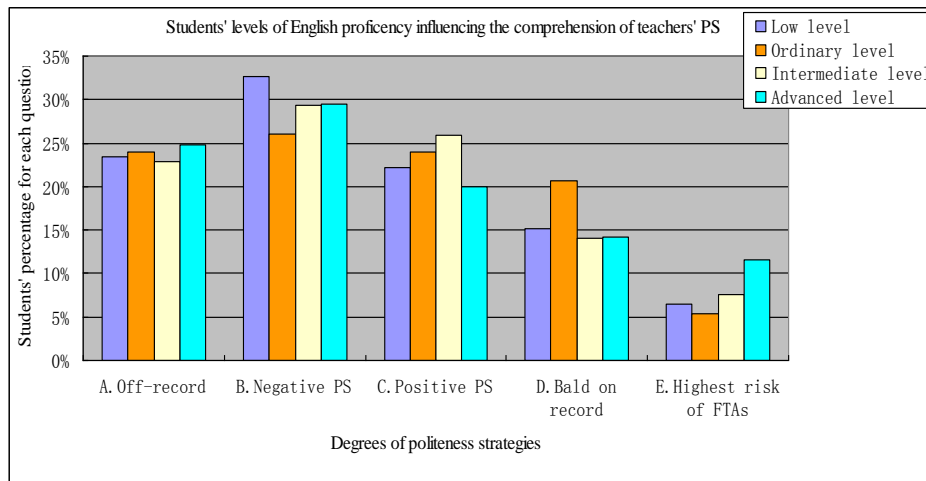

Fig.A.2 Students' levels of English proficiency influencing the comprehension of teachers' PS

a). Low level of students are most liberal about teachers' politeness strategies. Maybe because the correct comprehension is limited by their poor English, what they care most in class is to understand what the teacher says in a literal sense instead of rating the teacher's degree of politeness strategies. Teachers' directness strategies are more suitable if the teacher means to communicate with them effectively. Their preference is reflected in their choice of higher degrees of teachers' politeness strategies.

b). Ordinary level of students are more likely to go two extremes. Their English allows them to make some judgments on their own but their comprehension is restrained by the lower level of English too. They are sensitive and fragile when understanding what the teacher says. Once they catch some "improper" word in teachers' speeches, they might abandon objectivity and assume that the teacher is "impolite". This attitude is disclosed in the figure above: in options A, B, C the percentages stay stable, while in option D (bald on-record) the number rises highest sharply and in option E the percentage drops the lowest extent.

c). Intermediate level of students are most neutral. Their English is good. Normally for most students there is no problem to understand the teacher's literal meaning. Plus they enjoy better advantages in class. As a result, they give most objective ratings of teacher's politeness strategies.

d). Advanced level of students are most critical about teachers' politeness strategies. Attributing to their excellence in English, they can understand the teacher's literal and implied meanings in the speeches. When they decide the teacher's degree of politeness strategies, they might go two extremes like OL students. Based on independent critical thinking and decision making, in order to protect their self-esteem and public self-image they appeal for higher standards of teacher's politeness strategies, also they are more indirect in judging the teacher.

B. Gap between Teachers' Expectation and Students' Comprehension

This part is most surprising. As we know when the teacher uses some politeness strategies, he/she means students to "read" them correctly and helps to bridge the gap between teachers and students. Examining the table above, the researcher notices that there exists much difference between the teacher's anticipation and students' comprehension. Among ten questions in the first part of the questionnaire, both teachers and students have reached an agreement at question one. Fortunately for questions 2-4, 7-10, students choose higher degrees of politeness strategies than what the teacher expects to achieve. But how do student comprehend question 5 and 6? In order to tap into the truth, the researcher commented out each question with situations, and then talked to the teacher in private and to the students in class for further information. She was quite supportive and stressed what she meant when saying out each sentence. Her words and intention go in accordance with Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies in column two (teachers' expectation in the table 5.3). Back to class, the researcher asked students how they interpret the teacher's speeches in question 5 and 6 without explaining anything. The same result had gained. Next the researcher showed them the same two questions but with annotations. *Question 5,* I'm afraid it is not a *best* word here. (When a student gives a wrong word, the teacher doesn't want to point it out directly.). *Question 6*, Is he *go* to work on time every day? (The teacher repeats the sentence that a student has said. In fact there is a grammatical mistake in it.) This time most students chose higher degrees of politeness strategies than the teacher's original intention. When asked why, they explained that they failed to figure out why (in what situation) the teacher said so. Some thought of them as the teacher's normal speech acts instead of kind reminders for students' mistakes.

TABLE B.
COMPARISON BETWEEN TEACHERS' EXPECTATION AND STUDENTS' COMPREHENSION

Questions	Teachers' Expectation	(Students' comprehension） A	B	C	D	E
1	B	36%	**39%**	12%	5%	7%
2	D	16%	28%	**46%**	9%	0%
3	C	**38%**	24%	24%	11%	3%
4	D	32%	**46%**	18%	3%	1%
5	A	18%	**39%**	30%	8%	5%
6	A	9%	28%	**31%**	27%	4%
7	B	**51%**	39%	9%	0%	0%
8	E	0%	8%	30%	**45%**	18%
9	E	1%	1%	9%	**47%**	41%
10	C	35%	**43%**	19%	3%	0%

Note: The number in blue is teachers' expectation in using politeness strategies; the number in bold is highest percentage of students' comprehension.
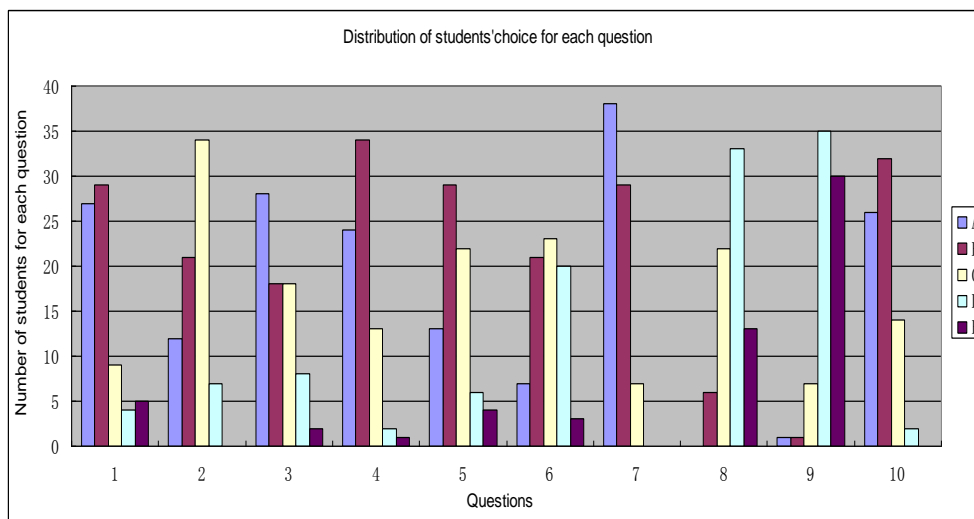

Fig. B. Distribution of students' choice for each question
Note: A. Off-record, B. Negative politeness strategy, C. Positive politeness strategy, D. Bald on-record, E .Highest degree of FTAs

Generally speaking, there exists a problem how to bridge the gap though students tend to be tolerant about the teacher's politeness strategies. Maybe the teacher is a young female, always has a pleasant relationship with students, and students like her. Or maybe students are new here, feel excited about college life, and look at everyone and everything around with a positive heart. The result is encouraging for the teacher. However, how will it be if the researcher uses sophomore, junior or senior as the survey respondents? Perhaps the best policy is to increase the politeness awareness of teachers and students and improve their language communication competence.

C. Students' Expectation of Teachers' Politeness Strategies

According to one finding of the survey questionnaire in 5.3, we know that there exists a gap between teachers' initial expectation and students' ultimate comprehension in term of teachers' politeness strategies. But what do students expect the teacher to do when there involves some kind of FTAs? Do they really value the teacher's employment of politeness strategies in classrooms? In order to answer them, the researcher invited four students to have semi-structured interviews one by one. As was mentioned in 4.5.3, there are two parts of questions. In part one, four tips followed by each question are ranked as off-record, negative PS, positive PS, bald on-record. The four situations are designed out of toughest activity for teachers and students and might incur highest risk of FTAs if dealing with them carelessly. Analyzing four students' answers in part one, all interviewees chose to answer from four options and then explain something relevant.

TABLE C.
INTERVIEWEES' OPTIONS FOR SITUATION QUESTION

S1	Misbehaving such as dozing off, talking in private			
	Boy A: Talk to me in private after class (Positive PS)	Girl A: Talk to me in private after class (Positive PS)	Boy B: Ask me to answer a question (Off-record)	Girl A: Ask me to answer a question (Off-record)
S2	Encounter difficulty with the study			
	Boy A: Offer to help (Bald on-record)	Girl A: Wait till students ask for help (Negative PS)	Boy B: Encourage me to solve it by myself (Positive PS)	Girl A: Wait till students ask for help (Negative PS)
S3	Giving wrong answer			
	Boy A: Make positive comment on it (Positive PS)	Girl A: Help to solve it patiently (Off-record)	Boy B: Correct it directly (Negative PS)	Girl A: Correct it directly (Negative PS)
S4	Teachers' FTAs			
	Boy A: Explain it (Off-record)	Girl A: Minimize the threat (Positive PS)	Boy B: Be straightforward (Bald on-record)	Girl A: Apologize to me after that (Negative PS)

In situation one, students are divided into two groups: lower levels are weak group in class and hope that the teacher shows concerns in private, while higher levels show more confidence in class and prefer that the teacher deals with it in an indirect way.

In situation two, students show different preferences in teachers' application of politeness strategies. Boy A is an outgoing happy person. Though his English is not good, he is brave enough to face the reality. When he has difficulty with study, he would like the teacher to offer help directly. Boy B is a cheerful person, his good English builds up his confidence, and during the whole interview, he is very talkative. When he has some trouble, he enjoys gaining positive support from the teacher. For two girls, though with different levels of English proficiency, they hope to obtain more freedom in handling their difficulty with study. Both of them explained if the teacher offers to help, they will feel more embarrassed than being appreciative.

In situation three, Boy A expects that the teacher will be optimistic about his answer. For Girl A, perhaps because of gender difference, she appreciates that the teacher treats it indirectly and helps to solve it patiently. Boy B and Girl A are higher levels and they don't want the teacher to do anything else that may threaten their face wants, instead, they would like the teacher to get to the point. If their answers are wrong, the teacher is supposed to give the right answer immediately, which is what "good" students want most.

In situation four, the four students have their own attitudes towards it. Boy A, firstly explained that he totally understood the teacher if she didn't mean to damage students' face wants but she did so in reality. In addition, he still expects the teacher to say something before or afterwards to make him feel better. He doesn't want to have a feeling that the teacher is prejudiced against him because of his bad English. Girl A's thought is understandable. Her English is not good, she is compromising about the teacher's dilemma, but she says she will be thankful if the teacher tries not to damage her face want. Boy B is confident about himself and his English too. He said he quite understood the teacher if she had to make him lose face in class. Girl A is a nice girl but kind of overconfident or straightforward in character. She contended that teachers and students should respect each other. If the teacher makes her lose face, she expects the teacher to do something to remedy it like apology.

As to the second part questions, all the four different levels of students chose to answer items 1, 3, and 4. When the researcher asked why, there was a great consistency in their responses that their teacher adopted politeness strategies often and they liked it when the teacher used it. In addition, they expressed that it was important for the teacher to use

politeness strategies in class. He said he'd like the teacher to employ politeness strategies as they make them feel comfortable and confident about class participation and performance. Boy A (low level) said that although his English was bad, he didn't want to give it up easily. He added that it didn't matter a lot how often the teacher uses politeness strategies; what he cares more about is how much he learns in class. But at the same time, he told that teachers' politeness helps build up "bad" students' confidence. Girl B (advanced level) explained that she was greatly interested in English and wanted to use it in her future employment. Thus she wishes that the teacher uses politeness strategies frequently because it helps build a harmonious relationship between teachers and students. She explained she enjoyed working hard in a pleasant environment. For Boy B (intermediate level) and Girl A (ordinary level), the former expressed his satisfaction with the teacher's current application of politeness strategies, while the latter suggested that it would be better if the teacher could stick to using politeness strategies consistently.

D.   Students' Attitudes towards the Importance of Teachers' Politeness Strategies

To find out the students' attitudes towards the importance of teachers' politeness strategies, four relevant statements were designed and placed in the second part of the survey questionnaire (Appendix A). For each statement there are five ratings of "agreement" is provided: A. Totally agree; B. Agree; C. No idea; D. Disagree; E. Totally disagree. To the researcher's relief, there is none to choose E (Totally disagree).
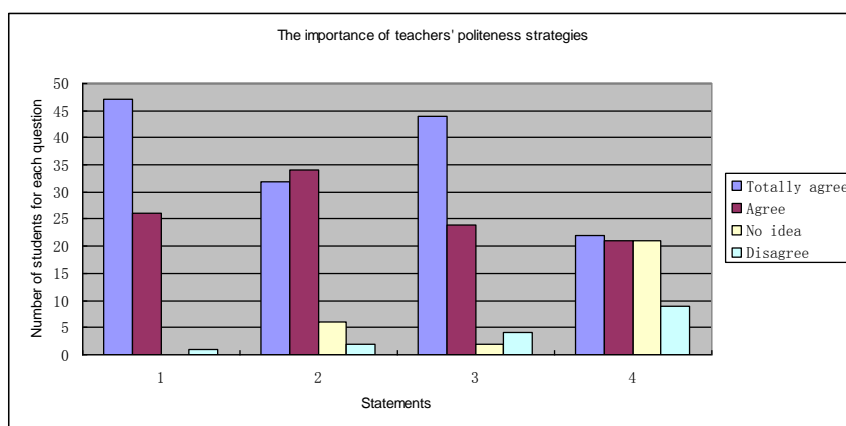

Fig. D. Students' attitudes towards the importance of teachers' politeness strategies

Statement One: It is very important for the teachers to apply politeness strategies. This statement has the least controversy. Of 74 respondents, 73 students chose A (47 students) or B (26 students), while only one chose D (disagree). The researcher didn't go to the class and find out the "D" student because the personal information tells it is a boy and his college entrance exam in English is 68, the lowest score among the respondents. Based on the analysis above, the researcher assumed that his bad English stops him from having any other interests except improving his own language knowledge itself. Why is it important for the teachers to adopt politeness strategies? The following three statements explain something and the students' choice validates it.

Statement Two: The application of teachers' politeness strategies can reinforce students' learning interests. 66 students chose A (32 students) or B (34 students), 6 student chose C (no idea) and 2 chose D (disagree). Revisiting the class, the researcher was told that their learning interests were determined by internal cause instead of external one. The truth that most students chose A or B is to let the teacher know he/she is not alone. It sounds harsh; however, we can tell that the teacher has succeeded in building a friendly relation with her students.

Statement Three: The application of teachers' politeness strategies can promote the establishment of harmonious relation between teachers and students. The result of it show a similar tendency as statement one except that 2 students chose C (No idea). It is easy to understand the students' attitude on this aspect. Literally "politeness" is a pleasant manner in any society. Since there is no cultural confusion or misunderstanding, the teacher can achieve this goal just by observing Chinese "courtesy". Concerning politeness in pragmatics, few students thinks about it seriously or they become acquainted with some basic knowledge related.

Statement Four: The application of teachers' politeness strategies can facilitate the comprehensive development of language skills. On one hand, it is very surprising that quite a number of students ("A", "B" and "C" almost share the name number of students) haven't realized the important connection between teachers' politeness strategies and cultivation of English skills. Even some students disagree with it. On the other hand, it is understandable that students don't have enough politeness awareness. Before quality education prevails all over the country, high school students are faced with "one-size-fits-all" exam system, which emphasizes grammatical competence, reading and writing skills more than language communication competence such as speak and writing skills, cultural knowledge. What they (and their teachers) are concerned most is to obtain high scores, and English course is no exception. In class they care about how many notes they have taken and what language problems they have solved with the help of the teacher. As to whether the teacher applies any politeness strategies or what politeness strategies the teacher adopts, it is beyond their concern.

V. DISCUSSION

According to the researcher's observation, we have a feeling that the teacher manages to build a friendly relation with students, and their class environment is cheerful and relaxing. As to the teacher's teaching objects, her students are in the first month of entering college and their language ability and knowledge level vary a great deal ranging from 126 to 70 in their college entrance exam. By talking to the whole class again, we try to explore how students determine the degree of teachers' politeness. In class students' reply is shocking: they tried to figure out what each question sentence meant word by work, regardless of its contextual situation. Through further inquiry, we notice that in Appendix A, there are two questions that confused students most because they are highly context-dependent. They are question 3 (Hello? Mr. Zhang. Would you like to share your funny story with us?) and 5 (Is he *go* to work on time every day?): question 3 belongs to class management in class activity; question 6 is teachers' evaluation. We know that class management involves teachers' much attention in class while evaluation is a most sensitive part of teachers' class activities, and thus they have to be more diplomatic to deal with it. At such times teachers' politeness strategies and contextual understanding matter much. According to Brown and Levinson, the teacher used positive politeness strategy in question 3 and off-record strategies in question 6. Take a close look at figure 5.3. For question 3, most students chose A (Off-record), next B (Negative PS) and C (Positive PS), and few chose (Bald on-record) and E (Highest risk of FTAs). However, when asked about how they interpreted the context, they gave a surprising response. They said it was about when the teacher asked the student (Mr. Zhang) to tell a funny story. As we know, the real context is that Mr. Zhang was talking and laughing with his desk-mate. In order not to make him to lose face in class, the teacher said something irrelevant to his misbehavior using a favorable strategy. If the teacher used direct strategy by saying "stop talking and laughing", it is a highest risk of FTAs which threatens the student's face completely. For question 6, both students' choices and their contextual interpretation are shocking. Most chose C (Positive PS) and B (Negative PS), next D (Bald on-record) and few chose A (Off-record) and E (Highest risk of FTAs). Students explained that they didn't understand the situation; rather, they understood each question in a liter. Some explained this is one of teachers' class languages, and there is nothing special at all. When the researcher reminded them of correcting a grammatical mistake, they just couldn't find it. The truth is when a student answered a question with "Is he *go* to work on time every day?", there was a grammatical mistake. Still the teacher didn't want to damage the student's face-want; she chose to point it out indirectly by repeating his wrong sentence, expecting to catch his/her (or the whole class') attention.

Revising the questionnaires based on class observation and attaching some annotations of contextual situations to each question, the researcher invited them to make their choice again. This time most of the students rated the other eight questions as A (Off-record) and B (Negative PS), when they marked question 8 and 9 as D (Bald on-record) and E (Highest risk of FTAs). A small percentage found it little of use; they said their English knowledge failed them to understand "new" words in the contextual annotations. Once again we emphasize that two factors can be understood important: a) students' gender difference; b) students' English proficiency. Apparently the second factor plays the most important role in it when student participants try to understand both what the teacher says and in what context the teacher says so.

VI. CONCLUSION

As is indicated in this study, we know that positive and negative politeness strategies are mainly used by college teachers in EFL classrooms, which shows the teacher of this research is highly aware of politeness strategies and enjoys her models of "positive" control over students in order to obtain their approval or favor, or seek their agreement and attend to their interests. Praising and complimenting helps develop students' positive self images. This point is emphasized in the process of teachers' academic instructions and evaluations, which we can see helps bridge the gap between teachers and students, and build a more relaxing and friendly relationship between them.

However, the researcher also finds out that there exists a gap between the teacher's intention and students' expectation in term of politeness strategies. This can be interpreted from two viewpoints of gender differences and different levels of English proficiency.

In addition, by way of individual interviews, the researcher discovers that students' expectation of the teacher's politeness strategies presents similar characteristics as in the results of questionnaires due to two factors of gender differences and different levels of English proficiency.

In general, both teachers and students realize its importance of politeness strategies, and the teacher does apply them to EFL classrooms. Since there is a gap between the teacher's original intention and students' final comprehension, it is significant to increase teachers' and students' politeness awareness and competence in order that the difference is ironed out and EFL teaching benefits teachers as well as students.

APPENDIX A SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

调查对象：四川理工学院 2011 级（大一新生）

英语高考分：_____   性别：_____

问卷共两部分

问卷一

以下都是英语老师课堂用语，请您理解后根据 5 个等级判断老师的礼貌用语。

1. Please read carefully and find a similar word for "nasty".
   A. 很有礼貌   B. 有礼貌   C. 基本礼貌   D. 不礼貌   E. 很不礼貌
2. Now look at the phrase "take a dive".
   A. 很有礼貌   B. 有礼貌   C. 基本礼貌   D. 不礼貌   E. 很不礼貌
3. Hello? Mr. Zhang. Would you like to share your funny story with us?
   A. 很有礼貌   B. 有礼貌   C. 基本礼貌   D. 不礼貌   E. 很不礼貌
4. Now it is your show time. Don't be shy.
   A. 很有礼貌   B. 有礼貌   C. 基本礼貌   D. 不礼貌   E. 很不礼貌
5. I'm afraid it is not a *best* word here.
   A. 很有礼貌   B. 有礼貌   C. 基本礼貌   D. 不礼貌   E. 很不礼貌
6. Is he *go* to work on time every day?
   A. 很有礼貌   B. 有礼貌   C. 基本礼貌   D. 不礼貌   E. 很不礼貌
7. It's my fault. I forgot to remind you of it last time.
   A. 很有礼貌   B. 有礼貌   C. 基本礼貌   D. 不礼貌   E. 很不礼貌
8. Wang Yong, don't talk.
   A. 很有礼貌   B. 有礼貌   C. 基本礼貌   D. 不礼貌   E. 很不礼貌
9. You are terribly wrong.
   A. 很有礼貌   B. 有礼貌   C. 基本礼貌   D. 不礼貌   E. 很不礼貌
10. Excellent.
   A. 很有礼貌   B. 有礼貌   C. 基本礼貌   D. 不礼貌   E. 很不礼貌

问卷二

以下是关于老师礼貌策略重要性的认识。您的诚实选择关系到研究结果的准确程度。谢谢！

1. 老师礼貌策略的使用在课堂中很重要。
   A. 完全同意   B. 同意   C. 不知道   D. 不同意   E. 完全不同意
2. 老师礼貌策略的使用能够增强学生学习兴趣。
   A. 完全同意   B. 同意   C. 不知道   D. 不同意   E. 完全不同意
3. 老师礼貌策略的使用能够推进和谐友好师生关系的建立。
   A. 完全同意   B. 同意   C. 不知道   D. 不同意   E. 完全不同意
4. 老师礼貌策略的使用能够帮助学生语言运用能力的提高。
   A. 完全同意   B. 同意   C. 不知道   D. 不同意   E. 完全不同意

APPENDIX B SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

For each part, you are allowed to preview all the five questions in 5 minutes before real interview starts.

Part I Situational questions

The following are four situations in class. What do you expect the teacher to do?

1. Suppose you don't behave appropriately in class, such as talking and dozing off.

Ask me to answer a question; pay little attention; talk to me privately after class; point it out directly.

2. Suppose you have some difficulty with the study.

Ask about whether students have problems; wait till students ask for help; encourage students to solve it by themselves; offer to help

3. Suppose you give wrong answers.

Help to solve it patiently; correct it directly; make positive comments on the correct part of the answer; make negative remarks on the wrong answers first and then correct it.

4. Suppose the teacher has to say something that makes you lose face in class.

Explain it before or afterwards; apologize to me after that; minimize the threat; be straightforward.

Part II *What do you think?*

Opinions about the teacher who uses politeness strategies.   I admire him/her; It is encouraging; I don't take it seriously; I care more about what to learn
Opinions about the teacher who doesn't use politeness strategies.   I won't like him/her; It is discouraging; I don't take it seriously; I care more about what to learn
Preference to the teacher with(out) politeness strategies   Why
Expectation of the teacher in term of politeness strategies   Use it all the time; Use it sometimes; I don't care   Why
5. Extra Information related to teachers' politeness strategies

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Liu Peng was born in Chongqing on Nov. 22nd, 1976. In July 2001 she graduated from Chongqing Technology and Business University (Chongqing, China) with B.A. degree in English education and teaching. In June 2012 she graduates from University of Electronic Science and Technology of China (Chengdu, China) with M.A. degree in applied linguistics.

She attends various summer training projects every year. Most is about textbook compiling sessions or teaching methodologies with support of modern technologies. In 2011, she published an article related to the current research. Liu Peng (2011). China College English Teaching with the Support of Modern Technologies. *China South-west Technology 8, 80-81.* Besides, politeness theory in China EFL is a major research in her M.D. thesis.

Lingling Cai was born in Nanchong on Nov. 30, 1980. In July 2003 she graduated from China West Normal University (Nanchong, China) with B.A. degree in English education and teaching. From Feb-July 2010, she studied European Integration in Sabanci University (Istanbul, Turkey) as an exchange student in Erasmus Mundus Scholarships (Europe and China).   In June 2011 she graduated from Sichuan University with M.A. degree in European Culture. In 2010 she had a relevant article published. Lingling Cai (2010). An Investigation of Qualitative Research: College English Teachers' Tenets and China College English Teaching Reformation. *Journal* of *Sichuan University of Science and Technology 6, 72-73.*

Xianjun Tan was born in Zigong on Dec. 30 1981. In 2004 he graduated from Luzhou Medical College (Luzhou, China) with B.A. degree in Medical English. From Sep. 2007 to July 2008 he studied the Spanish language in Havana University (Havana, Cuba) in a national project "Human Resources Training of West China". In June 2009 he graduated from University of Electronic Science and Technology of China (Chengdu, China) with M.A. degree in applied linguistics. His previous related research is about the M.D. thesis, in which he writes about the comparison of English learning and Spanish learning.