

# Language politeness in French

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**ABSTRACT.** Language politeness is part of an attitude that contains the value of politeness in everyday interactions. Politeness will always be reflected in the level of speech (language). This needs to get attention in learning French as an effort to help second language learners, so they can use it in communication. The object of this research is the form of speech used in communication via WhatsApp by students to lecturers according to the context of language politeness. Data collection was carried out using observation techniques, namely by reading carefully the utterances containing student language politeness contained in the lecturer's WA. Data analysis was carried out from the beginning, the researchers collected data using the model proposed by Ricoeur, namely with semantic, reflective, and existential understanding. The results showed that in representing politeness in language, students used various utterances such as (a) greetings, (b) apologies, (c) regrets, (d) introducing themselves before conveying their meaning. In addition, there are also speeches that reduce the politeness of students in speaking, such as: starting a conversation without using greetings and introducing themselves. Therefore, competence in matters relating to the socio-cultural of the French language must be mastered by the learner (students) in order to be able to use the learned French appropriately and politely.

**Keywords:** *french, language, learners, politeness*

**RÉSUMÉ.** La politesse linguistique fait partie d'une attitude qui contient la valeur de la politesse dans les interactions quotidiennes. La politesse se reflète toujours au niveau du discours (langue). Il convient d'y prêter attention dans le cadre de l'apprentissage du français afin d'aider les apprenants d'une deuxième langue et de leur permettre de l'utiliser dans la communication. L'objet de cette recherche est la forme de discours utilisée dans la communication via WhatsApp (WA) par les étudiants avec les professeurs en fonction du contexte de la politesse linguistique. La collecte des données a été effectuée à l'aide de techniques d'observation, c'est-à-dire en lisant attentivement les énoncés contenant des formules de politesse de l'étudiant dans la conversation WA du professeur. L'analyse des données a été effectuée dès le début, les chercheurs ont recueilli des données en utilisant le modèle proposé par Ricoeur, à savoir avec une compréhension sémantique, réflexive et existentielle. Les résultats ont montré qu'en représentant la politesse dans le langage, les étudiants ont utilisé diverses expressions telles que (a) les salutations, (b) les excuses, (c) les regrets, (d) se présenter avant de transmettre leur signification. En outre, il existe également des discours qui réduisent la politesse des étudiants à l'oral, tels que : commencer une conversation sans utiliser les salutations et se présenter. Par conséquent, la compétence en matière socioculturelle de la langue française doit être maîtrisée par l'apprenant (les étudiants) afin de pouvoir utiliser le français appris de manière appropriée et polie.

**Mots-clés :** *apprenants, français, langue, politesse*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language is a tool for communicating with one another, conveying its purpose and purpose to the intended person. When conveying the purpose and objectives, a person who will convey his intentions or objectives must pay attention to politeness in the language to be used. Civility is seen in various aspects of daily life. Politeness shows an attitude that contains the value of manners in everyday associations. One of the politeness is reflected in the level of speech (language). Language indicates a person's personal reflection. A person's character can be seen through spoken words. The use of polite, polite, orderly, clear, and straightforward language reflects the personality of its speakers. It is also explained by Seken (2011) that language politeness is reflected in speech that carries the meaning that the speaker wants to convey to the opposite of speech. The way one person relates the intended message and conveys it to the recipient is limited by internal and external factors. One of the internal factors influencing the choice of the speaker is the intention of the speaker to be polite to the speech opponent. This is related to his efforts to choose and produce a speech that is in accordance with his intentions in communicating with the opponent of the speech.

Factors - sociocultural, pragmatic, and situational, to ensure that communication will run smoothly, and the intentions of each communicant participant are adequately fulfilled, without violating conventions or ethical values, are also the focus of attention of language politeness theorists who His works have illuminated the study of language from a pragmatic perspective.

Based on a pragmatic point of view, the way in which groups of people behave politely, which is expressed in language is referred to as the strategy of politeness. A community group uses a different politeness strategy than that used by other community groups. As part of a community, we have a responsibility to behave politely in our own way. We will also use different language politeness strategies, verbal or nonverbal. In

general, our behavior in expressing language politeness is based on the cultural values we adhere to, which may be different from those embraced by people in other communities.

In a language interaction, communication is expected to achieve the goal, therefore, so that in the interaction there is no friction, the interactant must realize that speech partners and speakers have the right to be respected. Thus, communicants need to implement the principles of cooperation (cooperative principles) and the principle of politeness (politeness principles). Grice (1989) explained that the interaction will go well, uninterrupted and achieve the goal, if the interaction participants always try to maintain cooperation. Grice (in Rahardi, 2010,p.52) explained four principles of cooperation, namely (1) providing sufficient information that is in accordance with what the partner asked, (2) avoiding giving false information, (3) providing logical information with the requested by speech partners, and (4) provide information in a good way. The principles mentioned above, by Leech (2014) are referred to as four maxims in the principle of cooperation, namely (1) conversational maxim, maxim of quantity refers to the contribution of giving sufficient information that is in accordance with what the speech partner needs, (2) maxim of quality by providing an actual and adequate explanation, (3) maxim of relevance ( maxim of relevance) wants the speech to be in accordance with what is being discussed, and (4) the maxim of manner wants the speech participant not to speak excessive and coherent as expected by the participants. So that in the interaction there is no friction or feud, the speakers are expected to realize that the speech partner has the right to be respected just as the speaker also has the right to be respected by the speech partner.

Similarly, in life on campus, the interaction of lecturers with polite students is a reflection of academic campus culture. The academic community (lecturers and students) can build a culture that is polite in interacting. Polite language in living on campus will avoid frictions and conflicts between lecturers and students in lecture interactions. With

pragmatic studies on 'linguistics politeness', this paper attempts to discuss how the concept of language politeness is placed in the context of French language learning.

Leech (2015) explains that pragmatics examines meaning in relation to word situations. There are five aspects of speech situation: (1) who greets or who is greeted, (2) context of speech, (3) purpose of speech, (4) speech as a form of an action or activity, (5) speech is a product of verbal action. Speech acts are actions that are shown by producing an utterance and are related to the behavior of speakers of a language with their interlocutors (Austin in Oktavianus, 2006, Yule, 2006). Tian and Zhao, (2006) also explained that in communicating you must speak politely, be humble, respect the other person you are talking to.

The universality of politeness has been proven from several studies in various parts of the world. East Asian countries, such as China, Vietnam, Japan, Korea and Singapore, although they have different politeness, in general the people of these countries prioritize politeness so that their people live in harmony and avoid conflict (Okamoto, 2010; Obana, 2011; Pan, 2011; Sirimangkala, 2013). Likewise, in 22 countries in Europe, politeness is prioritized to ensure a harmonious and friendly life (Hall, 2010). This is in line with Gunarwan's explanation (2007) that politeness in language is universal, its manifestations vary according to the cultural community. The most important thing is that language politeness has an important role in fostering the positive character of its speakers, as well as showing national identity (Zamzani, et al. 2012).

Watts (in Agung Pramujijono et al, 2020) explains that lingual forms that can be used to express language politeness include, among other things, lingual units: (1) in the form of greetings related to personal names and titles (honorary and academic), (2) to express gratitude and apology, (3) to express farewell, (4) as a sign of solidarity, and (5) modality as a tool for expressing indirect speech.

One of the aspects of language that can improve emotional intelligence is language

politeness, therefore, in order that harmony of relationships in communicating can be maintained properly, so each speech participant does not embarrass each other in delivering the fish of truth with the form of indirectness, it is also explained by Gunarwan (2008) that the form of indirectness in speech will always be parallel to politeness. Gunarwan also goes into more detail for harmony that maintains harmony with four maxims: (1) *kurmat* (respect) maxim that advocates for a person to respect a person according to his *strata/position* in society, This maxim implies that the language used by speakers must demonstrate that speech partners feel respected, therefore using speech levels according to position and social distancing between speech participants is part of the to consider, (2) the maxim *andhap asor* (humble) who advocates to always be humble, and feels that the speech partner feels praised, and avoiding honorific forms used for oneself. Thus the speech partner knows that the speaker is not arrogant, (3) the maxim of the *empan papan* (placing the self) which advocates to be able to carry oneself, realizing oneself as a member of society, with Thus the position that has been established needs to be considered so as not to disturb the balance which results in disharmony in communication, and (4) the maxim of *tepa seliro* maxim (tolerance) which recommends always avoiding words that are inappropriate to use in speaking. This maxim refers to the use of polite language to the interlocutor as the speaker also wants to use polite language for him. Speakers should avoid profane language. The explanation above is in line with the explanation of Pranowo (2009) who said that in communicating activities, speech will reflect a sense of courtesy if (a) use the word 'please' if you want to ask someone for help, (b) use the word 'sorry' when there is a speech that is thought to offend the speech partner, (c) use the lingual 'thank you' as a form of respect for the good done by the speech partner, (d) using the word 'please' to ask for the willingness of speech partners to do something, (e) using the form of greeting 'he' in referring to a third

person whom we respect and (f) use the word 'ladies and gentlemen' to say hello. The explanation of language politeness as explained by the experts above, subsequently by Brown and Levinson presented in Wijana (1996) is referred to as the strategy of politeness. There are 4 politeness strategies in communicating: (1) communication strategies with close friends, (2) communication strategies with friends/ ages, but not yet well acquainted, (3) communication strategies with someone who is not known yet and (4) communication strategies with someone who older or who has a higher social status. In its implementation, the four strategies above are included in pragmatic parameters, namely (a) the level of social distancing (distance rating) or social distance between speakers and speech partners (social distance between speakers and hearers) related to age, gender and sociocultural.

Based on the explanation above, this article aims to describe the language politeness of students to lecturers. In detail, this article discusses the language politeness of students and lecturers in interactions via WhatsApp in French.

## 2. METHOD

This research was conducted by describing written statements made by students in WhatsApp and during e-learning activities (Research data was taken by students' speech on WhatsApp and during online learning)

The validity of this research is semantic validity, to measure the degree of sensitivity of a technique to symbolic meanings relevant to the context certain (Zuchdi, 1993). Semantic validity can be achieved if the semantic meanings relate to or correspond to the source of the message, the recipient of the message, or other context of the analyzed data.

Reliability Used in this study is intrarater, the research group reads repeatedly and understands the object of study so that the data obtained becomes reliable. Measurement of data feasibility is also carried out with expert-judgement where people who are

considered to master the French language and culture are asked for help by researchers to be asked for consideration, namely lecturer of French Language Department.

Analysis of research data was carried out from the beginning of the researcher collecting data using the model proposed by Ricoeur, namely with a semantic, reflective, and existential understanding.

Discussion of the results of the study used the Leech Politeness Measurement Scale (1983) to determine the politeness rating of an utterance by utilizing interpersonal maxims. The five kinds of Leech's politeness measuring scale are explained as follows. (1) the cost-benefit scale or the scale of losses and gains, refers to the size of the losses and gains caused by a speech act in an utterance. The more the speech is detrimental to the speaker, the more polite the speech will be considered. conversely, the more the speech benefits the speaker, the more impolite the utterance is considered. (2) optionality scale or choice scale, refers to the number of choices (options) that the speaker conveys to the speech partner in the speaking activity. The more the speech allows speakers or speech partners to make many and flexible choices, the more polite the speech will be considered. Conversely, if the speech does not provide the possibility of choosing between the speaker and the speech partner at all, the speech will be considered impolite. (3) The indirectness scale refers to the direct or indirect ranking of the intent of an utterance. The more direct the speech, the more impolite the speech will be considered. The more indirect the intent of an utterance, the more polite the utterance is considered. (4) The authority scale refers to the social status relationship between the speaker and the speech partner involved in the conversation. The farther the distance of authority (authority scale) between the speaker and the speech partner, the speech used will tend to be more polite and vice versa, the closer the distance of authority between the speaker and the speech partner, the speech used will tend to be increasingly impolite. (5) The social distance scale refers to the level of social relations between speakers and speech partners involved in a conversation. There is

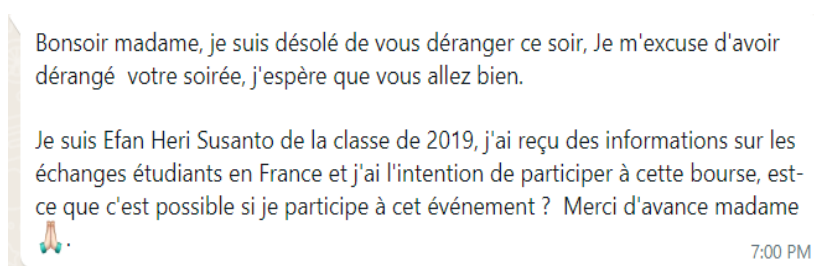
a tendency that the closer the social ranking distance between the two, the less polite the speech will be, the farther the social ranking distance between the speaker and the speech partner, the more polite the speech used will be. In other words, the level of familiarity of the relationship between the speaker and the speech partner greatly determines the level of politeness used in speaking.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the data analysis show that the linguistics politeness used by students in utterances via WhatsApp are the use of greetings, expressing the apologies, opinions, asking for permission and thanking.

The following is a discussion of several forms of linguistics politeness from the results of this study.

The students as French language learners can use speech acts in the language they are learning according to communicative situations. As in the following data.



*'Good afternoon Mrs., I'm sorry to disturb you, I hope that you are fine. I am Efan Heri Susanto from Class of 2019, I have received the information about sending students to study in France with scholarships, and I am interested in participating, is it possible if I participate in the activity? Thank you very much Mrs.'*

Figure 1. Data 1

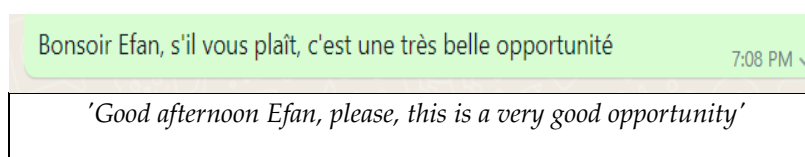


Figure 2. Lecturers' responses to students

The utterance above is a student's utterance to the lecturer sent via WhatsApp. In the speech, students use the greeting 'vous'. The greeting shows that students have used politeness strategies in communicating related to social distancing levels (*distance rating*), communication strategies with someone (lecturers) who are older or who have a higher social status in lecture classes. using the 'mother' form of greeting to say hello. As explained by Gunawan, namely the *kurmat* (respect) maxim which advocates always respecting a person according to his

strata / position in society, and (2) the maxim *andhap asor* (humble) which advocates always being humble. The respect for the utterances above is evident in the use of the greeting 'Madame' (Mrs). The lecturer who became a speech partner was a woman. Students started their speech with the greeting 'Bonsoir madame' (good afternoon, Mrs.) which is the implementation of the fatigue function and to honor the speech partner. The utterance 'je suis désolé de vous déranger ce soir' as a form of 'apology' for disturbing the speech partner (lecturer) outside working hours. The

utterance as one of the *linguistics of politeness* related to pragmatic parameters. The utterance '*est-ce que c'est possible si je participe à cet événement?*' refers to an application to a lecturer to give permission to register as a student who will participate in a student exchange to France. The utterance contains a conative function, with the expectation that the petition submitted by the student is in the form of an '*est-ce que c'est possible question*'. And the permit application received a response from the speech partner (lecturer) and supported the wishes of the students. This can be seen in the lecturer's speech: '*s'il*

*vous plait*' and is reinforced by the next utterance, namely '*cest une belle oppotunité*', to encourage students to participate in student exchange activities carried out by the French government. Furthermore, at the end of the speech, students use the lingual '**thank you**' as a form of student respect for the kindness done by the speech partner (lecturer) who gives permission and supports the application submitted by the student, namely: '*merci d'avance madame*' (*Thank you very much Mrs.*) The form of the same speech act can be seen as follows

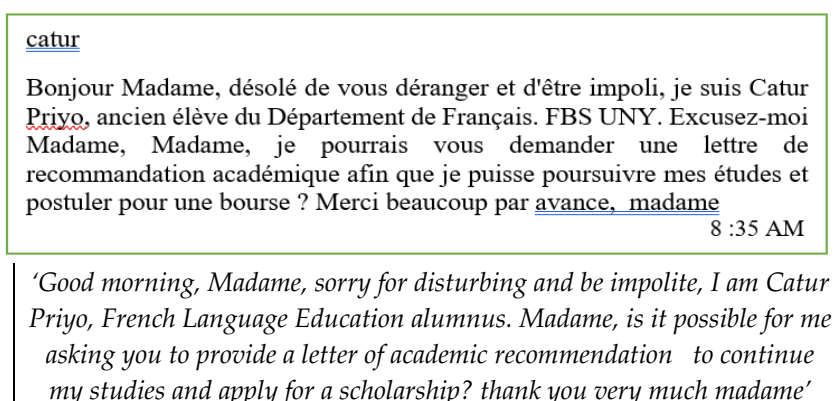


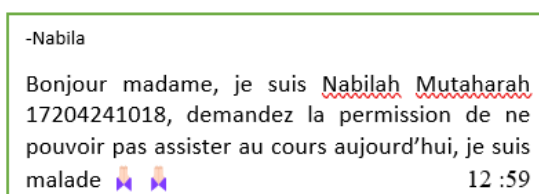
Figure 3. Data 2

The statement above was written by an alumni who wanted to ask the lecturer's willingness to provide recommendations to him so he could continue his studies and apply for a scholarship.

Based on the utterances in the data (WhatsApp) above, it can be seen that the student has used polite forms of speech. This can be seen in the use of the greeting 'Bonjour Madame' (good morning, madam) at the beginning of the speech. Furthermore, the use of the word 'sorry' as a form of 'humble' so that the speech partner (lecturer) does not feel disturbed by the WhatsApp sent by the speaker (student) during the lecturer's

working hours. Next is an utterance to ask the speech partner's willingness to do something (provide recommendations to speakers). The use of 'thank you' is also found in the utterance via WhatsApp above, as a form of respect for the good done by the speech partner (lecturer) for the speaker (student). Thus, the students' WhatsApp speech act above fulfills the courtesy of speaking students to lecturers.

In the following data there are things that need to be considered, namely the absence of speech as a closing to end an utterance in the rules of language courtesy.



*'Good morning Mrs, I am Nabilah Mutaharah  
17204241018, ask the permission not to be able to  
attend class today, I am sick'*

**Figure 4.** Student message

Language politeness can be seen in the student's speech above. This can be seen in the use of the fatigue function of language in the form of greeting 'Bonjour' and 'Madame'. to open the speech. The student introduce herself by saying her name and adding the student's number (Nabilah Mutaharah 17204241018). This is a form of language politeness. Furthermore, the use of the phrase 'demandez la permission' (ask for permission) as a form of 'humble'. The student also gave the reason for her absence from class, because she was sick (de ne pouvoir pas assister au

cour aujourd'hui, je suis malade). The utterance 'demandez la permission' in the context above is also a form of a student's request to the lecturer to give her permission. However, the speech above does not end with a closing remark, for example by saying thank you for the permission given by the lecturer. This shows that speech acts at the level of linguistic politeness still need to be a concern in learning activities.

Another example of data follows which is a pragmatic implementation of language politeness.

*Assalamu'alaikum wr wr, bonjour madame.*

*Je suis Irwan, j'ai reçu des informations pour le titre de ma deuxième thèse qui a été approuvée et j'ai obtenu un directeur de recherche, j'ai également rempli ma soumission de problème de recherche à SIBIMTA. Pour l'approbation de l'enseignant encadrant, sera-t-il informé ultérieurement via le web SIBIMTA*

*Merci beaucoup madame*

*'Assalamu'alaikum Wr Wr, good morning Mam.*

*I am Irwan, I have received information for the title of my second thesis that has been approved and I have obtained a supervisor, I have also filled out a problem submission at SIBIMTA. For the approval of the supervising lecturer, will it be informed later via the SIBIMTA web?*

*Merci beaucoup madame'*

**Figure 5.** Data 3

The student speech above was sent via WhatsApp. Language politeness can be seen in the form of greeting: 'Assalamu'alaikum wr wr, bonjour madame'. Students introduce themselves by name. Students also use indirect speech acts with interrogative sentences marked using the question word 'what'. Gaigner and Mills (2016) explain that indirectness can be used as a politeness strategy in the speech act of asking (information). The word 'Madame' used by students in the speech above also shows respect for the speech partner (lecturer). However, there is a word that students above should not use when speaking with lecturers,

namely the word in the abbreviation form: 'dospem' (supervisor). The use of the word 'dospem' when used for fellow students shows familiarity, but for lecturers the word 'dospem' looks as if students consider lecturers the same/equal to students. Contextually and culturally, the relationship between lecturers and students does not show social distance between speakers (students) and speech partners (lecturers). Thus, students do not consider the maxim of honor (respect) which recommends always respecting someone according to their position in society. The choice of words above seems too relaxed if students use it to

lecturers. In the principle of language politeness, that the speaker must pay attention to the position of the interlocutor has not yet appeared.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Language politeness is an integral part of communication that reflects the socio-cultural values of a society. This has implications for the speech participants to convey their communicative messages according to the norms of societal decency. Speech participants can communicate with their interlocutors fluently, can use language expressions that are appropriate to the purpose and situation at hand and ensure that relations with the interlocutor are maintained properly.

Linguistic politeness is something that must attract attention in learning French as an effort to help students, so that they can use it in communication.

Pragmatics in language politeness is something that needs attention in learning French as a foreign language as an effort to help students, so they can use it in communication. As explained by Li (2010) and Leech (2014) that learners must have pragmatic competence to be able to understand and communicate meaningfully and understand concepts correctly in the use of the foreign language they are learning. Thus, teaching and learning a second language is not enough to be oriented only towards mastering the grammatical system (lexicogrammar) and semantic competence but needs to be polished sufficiently towards pragmatic competence and socio-cultural awareness related to it, which must be mastered by learners if they want to use a foreign language. culturally learned appropriately and politely. Mastery of politeness strategies in French must be part of the competencies that must be achieved in learning because they will need it every time, they actually use the language in interactions.

In French language learning activities, it is important to raise students' awareness of the importance of the context of situations in communication and to identify cultural expressions or sayings that are not in

accordance with conventional ethics or values. also stated this in his research article. regarding "Polite Requestive Strategies in Emails: An Investigation of Pragmatic Competence of Chinese EFL Learners" that pragma linguistic competence must be developed in classroom teaching. to grow and improve students' socio pragmatic knowledge so that they master the socio-cultural norms that appear in the realization of politeness speech acts. Students are trained so that they have the competence to respond well to a speech addressed to them, not only in terms of linguistic content but also in terms of the response time spoken. Students must learn to provide responses that are appropriate and acceptable in social (Maryam, 2018). This is in line with the explanation of the politeness model by Brown and Levinson (1987) which describes three scales that determine the level of politeness in an utterance. The three scales referred to are determined contextually, socially, and culturally which completely cover the following scales: (1) Rating scale of social distance between speakers and speech partners (social distance between speaker and hearer), (2) Rating scale of social status between speakers and speech partners (the speaker and hearer relative power), (3) The degree of imposition associated with the required expenditure of goods of services.

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