

## **“Please, may I?”: An analysis of request politeness strategy in online student-supervisor interaction**

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**Abstract** - This research examines the various ways in which EFL students and supervisors utilize politeness strategies when making requests in the process of thesis supervision through WhatsApp group communication. The study focuses on how factors such as power dynamics, social distance, and imposition influence the choice of linguistic strategies for making requests. A document study was employed to collect the data. The document was gathered from WhatsApp conversations between 26 students and 5 supervisors and analyzed using Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's situational classification and Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. The findings reveal that students tend to employ more negative politeness strategies, such as questioning, apologies, and expressions of gratitude when making requests to supervisors in order to mitigate potential threats to face. On the other hand, supervisors, due to their higher status positions, tend to use more direct strategies, such as obligations and imperatives, when making requests to students. However, the context also plays a role as supervisors exhibit politeness by using politeness markers in intra-supervisor requests. It concludes that power dynamics, social distance, and imposition ranking significantly influence the selection of politeness strategies, with wider power gaps leading to more negative strategies while familiar relationships foster direct communication. These findings suggest that understanding appropriate politeness strategies can enhance effective communication between students and supervisors and minimize potential miscommunication in cross-cultural academic environments.

**Keywords:** Interaction, Online Communication, Politeness Strategy, Request Strategy, Sociocultural Pragmatics

## 1. Introduction

Communication is a complex process of transferring information (Cosmin-Constantin & Claudia, 2015). In communicating, both speakers and hearers need to consider the context where the communication occurs to obtain the intended goal of the communication (Santoso et al., 2021). In an academic setting where the interaction between students and supervisors takes place, the major goal of the speakers is to successfully convey their intention through certain speech, while the listeners' responsibility is to comprehend it. It may lead to communicative challenges if both speakers and hearers do not have good knowledge of socio-pragmatic communication. From the speakers' perspectives, they must determine the most effective communicative means to accomplish their desired goal.

The communicative objectives of communication occur when individuals are obligated to engage in a courteous dialogue (Wagner et al., 2014), for instance how requests are delivered in an academic context. Certainly, they employ specific tactics to ensure the conversation remains polite and acceptable to others. Politeness principles are typically present in both formal and informal communication settings (Azwan, 2018). The literature emphasizes the significance of language politeness in shaping human interaction and social relationships. Politeness is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a sociocultural and pragmatic aspect of communication that influences interpersonal dynamics (Cosmin-Constantin & Claudia, 2015). Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness offers a comprehensive framework for comprehending the tactics utilized in speech acts, thereby contributing to the achievement of effective and respectful communication. In relation to this, Mahmud (2018), Nodoushan and Allami (2011), and Nodoushan (2016) emphasize the importance of politeness in creating good communication and maintaining one's face. Locher & Watts (2005) then emphasize the importance of polite requests in shaping social interactions and building strong relationships.

The study of politeness strategy in the context of educational settings has been a major concern in English language teaching, providing deep insights into politeness strategies, specifically in academic communication. Research by Algiovan (2022) about virtual communication during supervision revealed that the communication dynamics between supervisors and students were significantly influenced by politeness strategies. Students tended to employ negative politeness strategies such as apologizing, showing gratitude, and self-effacing questions, predominantly used to show respect for the supervisors' authority and minimize potential threats to academic relationships. In the college-classroom interaction context, Mahmud (2019) found out that the students possessed different language expressions to encode their politeness, both positive and negative politeness mostly in the forms of greetings, thanking, addressing terms, apologizing, and fillers. Different religious and cultural aspects of the interlocutors were found to be influential factors in the choice of politeness strategy use. Rahayuningsih et al. (2020) completed the discussion that teachers showed similar strategies. Bald-on record, positive strategies, negative strategies, and off-record politeness forms were mostly observed during the interaction. It was admitted that those strategies were used to show solidarity and maintain a close relationship with the students, to give unambiguous instruction, to minimize coercion to the students, and to give hints. Further analysis of the study also showed that social distance, power, and degree of imposition influence the choice of politeness strategies.

Similar findings also occurred at the secondary level. Positive politeness strategy, negative politeness strategy, and bald-on record strategy were found to be the most frequently dominated by the teachers (Fitriyani & Andriyanti, 2020). Among these three strategies, negative politeness strategies mostly occurred, influenced by some factors such as age, institutional position, power, and social distance between teachers and students. The strategies were mostly performed in giving instruction, encouraging, questioning, requesting, confirming, and addressing. Mulyono et al. (2019) expanded the discussion to see the significant difference in using politeness strategy between teachers and students in WhatsApp texts. Teachers were observed to use bald-on-record, positive politeness, and negative politeness strategies, while students were shown to apply all politeness strategy forms. Imperative forms of bald-on-record strategy were mostly employed by teachers to impose their authority on students. Similar politeness strategies were also observed in virtual classroom setting (Nuramdani et al., 2023) where the strategies were used to engage students' attention and build comfortable situation. These findings suggested that academic communication was not merely an exchange of information only, but rather an ongoing negotiation of social relationship and power dynamics.

In foreign contexts, the different use of politeness strategies was also observed between young and adult learners in private schools (Latrech & Alazzawie, 2023). Young learners tended to be perceived with their positive face, while adults with negative face. They argued that when the face was put into a threatened situation, face-saving acts were more possible. It leads to the understanding that politeness

and face awareness depend on different contexts and are used by teachers to help students be aware of it. Jeanyfer and Tanto (2018) also suggested additional perspectives regarding the importance of understanding communication strategies as the function of power dynamics and social distance. Their research revealed that lower-power individuals, particularly students, tended to employ cautious communication strategies to minimize face-threatening acts by using softer, more direct, and carefully considered expressions. In another context where the politeness strategies were used by people with equal power and close social distance in an online classroom setting via WhatsApp, positive-oriented forms of politeness tended to occur (Zahra et al., 2023). It was because this strategy could reflect their good relationship with the other students. Pang (2022) also investigated the politeness strategies in college teacher-student interaction. Positive politeness strategies were the most frequently used to give clear instructions, make closer relationships with students, show direct expressions, and give hints to get the expected answer. His study signified a good contribution to engaging students in classroom activities, establishing a respectful relationship, and creating an enjoyable classroom atmosphere.

In the context of making requests, various politeness strategies were employed during the classroom interaction. Shahzadi et al. (2021) conducted a study investigating the politeness strategies used by Pakistani and Chinese students in making requests. Both direct and conventional indirect request strategies occurred. Pakistani students tended to use direct strategies, while Chinese preferred conventionally indirect more in their requesting patterns in all situations. Cultural status, level of familiarity with the interlocutors, and diverse contexts were found to be the factors influencing the use of request and politeness strategies. Gunas et al. (2023) explain that classroom interaction has the potential circumstances to influence the use of pragmatic modifiers. They were considered to be the markers to make polite requests and both internal and external modifiers were to achieve the instructional objectives. Alike findings were also under analysis by a study by Darong et al. (2020). It explained that external devices, adjunct to the head act, such as grounder, sweetener, and disarmer, and internal modifiers were used to soften the impact of the requests.

These previous studies consistently emphasize that politeness strategies are not merely linguistic choices, but rather complex mechanisms that reflect social structures, academic power relations, and cultural norms in communication. The strategies are not static; instead, they are dynamic and highly dependent on the specific context of interactions, including factors such as institutional hierarchy, personal closeness, and targeted communicative goals. Compared to these previous studies, most of them extensively concern the politeness strategies that occurred during the interaction between teachers and students, both in the classroom and virtual classroom. However, research specifically examining request politeness strategies has remained limited. Moreover, interactions within the context of thesis supervision have not been widely explored, particularly in higher educational environments. In fact, the thesis supervision process involves a communication situation where there is a power imbalance between students and supervisors which makes politeness strategies in making requests a compelling aspect to explore. Addressing the gaps, this current study intends to analyze students-supervisors' politeness strategies in making requests through written interactions in WhatsApp groups during thesis supervision. By examining the syntactic structures and politeness strategies employed, this study provides insights into how students navigate social and power relationships in online academic communication. Therefore, this study aims to identify and analyze written request politeness strategies between students and supervisors in WhatsApp groups and understand the factors influencing their choice of strategies.

According to the aims, the research questions that would be answered in this study are as follows:

- (a) What types of written request politeness strategies are employed by students and supervisors in WhatsApp interactions during thesis supervision?
- (b) What factors influence the choice of written request politeness strategies in the communication between students and supervisors?

## **2. Method**

This study employed a qualitative methodology to gather related data about request strategies during the supervising process from the subjects under investigation. As qualitative research emphasizes the use of words rather than numerical measurements, the data and analysis in this study were presented descriptively, and conclusions were drawn without making broad generalizations.

Research data were utterances of request by the participants in the form of sentences. The requests were limited in terms of those posted in WhatsApp conversations with 26 students and 5 supervisors during the thesis supervising process. To collect the data, the requested conversations were screenshots. The data were divided into three categories by considering the different levels of PDR that occurred; (1)

by lower-ranking speaker to higher-ranking hearer, (2) by equal speaker and hearer, and (3) by higher-ranking speaker to lower-ranking hearer. In the subsequent phase, the aforementioned data were analyzed in terms of politeness strategies. In addition to this categorization, data identification was also carried out. During this stage, any data that was not included in the initial classification was then sorted into a new category based on their specific attributes or designated codes or names.

The research participants were students of the English Language Education study program of Ganesha University of Education. They were in the seventh semester and were working on their theses under different umbrella research; 6 students were working on a quasi-experimental study, 6 students were in a developmental study, 6 students were in a survey study, and 8 other students were in a descriptive qualitative study. There were 5 supervisors involved. They did the process of theses supervising through WhatsApp groups.

The research questions were addressed by analyzing the classified data. To identify the pragmatic strategies employed in inviting individuals with high power (P+), distant relationship (D+), and strong imposition rank (R+) compared to those with equal or lower power (P-), closer relationship (D-), and high imposition rank (R+), the data was compared to the three request strategies outlined by Nodoushan & Allami (2011) and Nodoushan (2016). The analysis entails the classification of data into distinct categories, enabling the formulation of a working hypothesis based on the findings. It was started by classifying the power and distance relations between the speakers according to the situational classification of power relations by Blum-kulka and Olshtain (1984). Next, the strategies employed by speakers when making requests for favors, things, or information were examined. The language used in these requests, whether they primarily used direct statements or employed modification techniques to cater to the intended audience was discussed. Subsequently, the data were lastly interpreted and described to address the research problem before presenting their conclusion.

### 3. Results and Discussion

This study aims to analyze the politeness strategies used by EFL students in requesting through WhatsApp group communication during the supervising period. The data were divided into three categories proposed by Blum-kulka and Olshtain (1984). However, since the focus of the study was to analyze the written request strategies used during student-lecture interaction, then only two categories were used, namely lower to higher-ranking positions and higher to lower-ranking positions. The data were analyzed by using Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness.

#### 3.1 Request Politeness Strategies in WhatsApp Interaction

##### 3.1.1 Request strategies employed by the lower-ranking speaker to higher-ranking hearer

When it came to power dynamics, a speaker who perceived themselves as having less power than the listener often utilized various strategies, including in written conversation. These strategies were influenced not only by the level of closeness between the speaker and listener but also by the degree of imposition placed on the listener. The findings in this study indicated the employment of a negative politeness strategy when the speakers placed themselves in a subordinate position in relation to the hearers and maintained a significant social distance from them. The speakers with a lower-ranking power status chose to employ various modification methods, both internally and externally, in their speech acts. This was done to reduce the perceived level of imposition and to minimize any threat to the hearers' social standing. The conversation was transcribed in the following excerpts.

#Excerpt 1

Student 1 : *Om Swastyastu Ibu @... dan Ibu @... Mohon maaf mengganggu waktu hari liburanya. Kami mohon ijin bertanya terkait sistematika bab 3 pada proposal penelitiannya. Adapun pertanyaan kami adalah sbb: Terkait dengan rancangan penelitian, kami menghadapi sedikit kebingungan. Pada arahan yang ibu kirimkan tempo hari, disarankan untuk menggunakan case study dan pada bagian metode menggunakan survey. Sementara di proposal besar pada rancangan penelitian tertera mix method. Untuk itu yang mana nggih yang harus kami ikuti? Terima kasih Ibu.*

Supervisor1 : *Karena kalian SI, pakai case study aja ya. Data angka hanya sebatas presentase saja.*

Excerpt 1 was about a conversation between a student as the speaker and a supervisor as the hearer, talking about the research design for the research methodology. It showed that several negative politeness strategies were used by the student. First, using the Indonesian address term “*Ibu*” (Mrs or Madam in English), the student intended to show respect to the supervisor and deference which effectively put the supervisor in a position of power. The phrases “*Mohon maaf mengganggu waktu liburnya*” (“Sorry for disturbing your weekend”), “*Mohon ijin bertanya*” (“Pardon me to question you”), and “*nggih*” (Balinese highest polite word which means “yes”) were the examples of negative politeness strategy – greeting, apologizing, and hedging. These illustrations tended to have a pessimistic tone, as they highlighted the use of internal modifications both in terms of syntax and vocabulary to lessen the impact of a particular primary action and enable an uncoerced reaction. Syntactically, the student tended to use the strategy of questioning - “*untuk itu yang mana nggih yang harus kami ikuti?*” (“which one should I follow?”). Lexically, the downtoner strategy of lexical downgraders – “*Kami mohon ijin bertanya terkait sistematika bab 3 pada proposal penelitiannya*” (“I would like to ask you about systematic writing of chapter 3”) - was employed, putting the high-power position for the supervisor. Furthermore, an external modification also appeared in the statement of “*terima kasih Ibu*” (“Thank you Mam”) with a thank emoticon, expressing gratitude for the response. In relation to power relations, it showed positive politeness that a related response was required from the supervisor.

Another example of the use of negative politeness strategies in talking with the supervisor with a higher power and distance relationship could be seen in Excerpt 2.

#### #Excerpt 2

Student 2 : *Om Swastyastu. Selamat siang bapak @.... Mohon maaf mengganggu waktunya. Ijin konfirmasi bahwasannya kami baru saja selesai bimbingan dengan Bu ... perihal cara analisis data responden kuesioner. Namun, kami memiliki kebingungan dibagian menentukan jumlah siswa yang akan diinterview. Itu jumlah siswanya berapa persen dari jumlah keseluruhan sample nggih Bapak? Agar kami bisa segera menentukan. Suksma Bapak.*

Supervisor3 : *Tidak ada ketentuan berapa persen sebenarnya. Semakin banyak semakin baik.*

Excerpt 2 was also about the conversation between a student and a supervisor, talking about the criteria of research subject sample involvement size. In this Excerpt, the message began with a negative politeness strategy of greeting and apologizing which was followed by the address term “*Bapak*” (“Mr”) to show deference. The student proceeded to give the following situation about her data analysis before asking a question, which was also posed as a negative politeness strategy. The phrase word “*nggih*” (“yes”) strengthened the position of the lower-ranking power owned by the student. In relation to the directness level of request, an explicit performative request strategy with internal modification was employed in the form of a question “*Itu jumlah siswanya berapa persen dari jumlah keseluruhan sample nggih Bapak?*” (“How many percentages of the subject should the sample be?”). This request strategy was externally modified by promising and expressing gratitude. The following sentence “*Agar kami bisa segera menentukan*” (“So we can make a decision”) was an example of external modification in the form of a promise and “*Suksma Bapak*” was the example of showing gratitude. However, these two external modification examples intended to show the duties of the supervisor and the expectations and rights of the student to get a fast response from the supervisor; thus, they were therefore rather positive-oriented strategies. As the response, the phrase “*Semakin banyak semakin baik*” (“larger is better”) tended to be a non-conventionally indirect request strategy from the supervisor that gave strong hints for the student to determine the number of the research sample.

Different strategies were also seen to be employed by the speaker with a lower position but had close social distance from the hearer. The findings showed that such speakers tended to mix the politeness request strategies. The presence of modification was still seen in Excerpt 3.

#### #Excerpt 3



- Supervisor1 : *Supaya bagus datanya. Kalau ngawur penelitian, bisa tidak normal itu hasilnya, akan kelihatan aneh*  
Student 1 : *Atau Wik coba aja cari sekolah lain, seperti SMPN 1 Sukasada, kayaknya sekolahnya tidak terlalu banyak kegiatan*  
Supervisor1 : *Minta nilai siswanya untuk random sampling*  
Student 1 : *Ya ini, kayaknya Kak Eka harus menekankan ini juga sama yang lain karena beberapa ada yang berencana meetingnya dikurangi*

In Excerpt 3, the communication was about a request of the student to the supervisor to inform the research ethics during the research data collection. In this example, the student had a lower position than the supervisor, but the hedging strategy of “*Ya ini*” (“yes, that’s it”) instead of a formal greeting like the two previous examples indicated that the student and the supervisor had a close relationship; in fact, they were relatives. Another proof that they had a close relationship was by addressing themselves using their nicknames instead of “*saya*” (“I”) to refer to the student as the speaker and “*Kak Eka*” (“you”) to refer to the supervisor as the hearer. In the request, several strategies were conveyed and they were rather positive politeness. First, bold on record was shown by directly stating the request for the supervisor to inform the data collection ethics. This strategy was also followed by the statement of the reason (external modification) that other students may cut the meetings of the treatment. It represented the students’ imposition on the supervisor, leading to positive-oriented politeness. The phrase “*kayaknya kak eka harus menekankan ini juga sama yang lain*” (“you should emphasize this matter to the others”) represented an upgraders strategy of internal modification like adverbial intensifier which emphasized the duties of the supervisor; thus, it increased the use of positive politeness.

### 3.1.2 Request strategies used by higher-ranking speakers to lower-ranking hearers

The tendency to speak less formally and unapologetically was more prevalent when individuals in positions of power interacted with those who had less power. This phenomenon was supported by the findings of this study. The majority of the data indicated that individuals with higher power, such as supervisors, tended to adopt a straightforward communication strategy when interacting with individuals with less power, such as students. This approach was employed because they acknowledged that their requests were unlikely to pose a threat to the self-esteem or reputation of the receivers. The following were some examples of requests done by the supervisors in the WhatsApp group communication during the supervising process.

#Excerpt 4

- Supervisor2 : *Yang satu research design adde, yang satu expert judgement. Coba main lebih lama ke perpustakaan. Baca tentang penelitian dnd*

#Excerpt 5

- Supervisor3 : *Tolong lain kali chat lewat group saja ya. Tidak perlu pribadi lagi.*

#Excerpt 6

- Supervisor1 : *Harusnya sudah selesai analisis data ya, karena kalian sudah pasti selesai treatment dalam 2 bulan ini*

#Excerpt 7

- Supervisor5 : *Nanti dikoordinasikan dengan penguji 1 alternatif jadwalnya ya. Kita buat alternatif jadwal dulu, lalu konsulkan pilihan jadwalnya ke penguji 1*

#Excerpt 8

- Supervisor1 : *Tunggu pak gung dulu*

#Excerpt 9

- Supervisor3 : *Kamis malam siap, tapi akan lebih baik kalau sabtu*

#Excerpt 10

Supervisor4 : *Terimakasih sudah menghubungi. Ibu besok full kegiatan ternyata. Ada undangan pengukuhan GB, pelepasan mhs, dan workshop. Bgm kalua hari ini? Jam berapa kalian bisa? Cari tempat yg nyaman sambil ngopi bareng*

#Excerpt 11

Supervisor4 : *Ok Udayana, semoga cepat sembuh ya. Tanya teman2 ttg revision skripsinya ya*

In showing the powerful requests to the students, no specific address form was used. The address form “*kalian*” (“you”) in Excerpt 6 and Excerpt 10 was mostly used to emphasize that the students possessed equal positions in the group, in which the requests were directed to all students. Meanwhile, the form “*kita*” (“we”) in Excerpt 7 was used instead of “you” to emphasize that everybody involved in the discussion should coordinate the alternative schedule for the examination, including reporting the results to the supervisor. In performing the requests several strategies were employed by the supervisors. Most of the requests possessed on-record types of politeness strategy. On-record requests were rather directive, employed to give direct, clear, unambiguous, and concise ways possible. Excerpts 5, 7, 8, 9, and 11 were in the form of imperative directness, representing on record of request politeness strategy to direct the students what they were requested for. More specifically, Excerpts 4 and 6 labored on direct request strategy in the form of an obligation statement, that emphasized an obligation as requested. A conventional indirect request strategy of on-record type was shown in Excerpts 9 and 10. They were used to mitigate the dipositive force of the requests. Although the illocutionary force was indirectly conveyed in the requests, the usage has been fully conventionalized so that it would be read by all students as an appeal. Although they did not seem to convey the illocutionary force directly, the usage has been fully conventionalized in English so that it would be read by all students as requested.

These direct and conventional indirect requests worked with the admission of internal and external modification of the requests. Internally, it was done by downgrading and upgrading the force. Downgrading the force of requests, “*tolong*” (“please”) was used to lexically show a polite marker of the supervisor’s request. Another type of lexical downgrader was the consultive device strategy like in Excerpt 10, in which the request was delivered by asking for the students’ opinions. These two types of lexical downgraders acted to soften the uncoerced response. Another type of internal modification was shown in Excerpts 6 and 11, the commitment upgrader form. The phrase “*coba main lebih lama ke perpustakaan*” (“you should spend more time in the library”) and “*harusnya sudah selesai analisis data ya ....*” (“you should have finished analyzing the data....”) were employed to demand the students’ commitment towards their working progress. Furthermore, three forms of external modification strategy such as grounder, preparatory, and expressing gratitude were used. Excerpts 6, 7, and 11 showed how the grounder worked in the requests, Excerpts 4, 9, and 10 showed preparatory form, and Excerpt 10 showed gratitude expression. Among the three, gratitude expression was the only form of showing positive politeness. These external modification strategies occurred before the requests to lessen the force of the requests, making them more likely to be acted upon by the students; thus, internal and external modification strategies were acted to be negative-oriented politeness.

### 3.2 Factors Influencing the Choice of Request Politeness Strategies

Based on the findings in this study, several critical factors were identified to significantly influence the choice of request politeness strategies during student-supervisor interaction through WhatsApp. The factors were categorized into three main dimensions: power dynamics, social distance, and imposition ranking.

Power dynamics was recognized as one of the most influencing factors in determining politeness strategies employed by both students and supervisors. The unequal power relationship between students and supervisors created distinct patterns in their communication strategies. The findings of this study revealed that students, who occupied lower power positions, consistently employed negative politeness strategies such as questioning, apologizing, and expressing gratitude. It has been observed in Excerpts 1 and 2, in which students used expressions like “*mohon maaf mengganggu waktunya*” (sorry to disturb you), “*mohon ijin bertanya*” (may I ask), as well as the use of “*nggih*” (yes: a respectful affirmation in Balinese) as forms of deference. They delivered their requests carefully to acknowledge and respect the supervisors’ authority. Conversely, the supervisors, due to their higher status, tended to employ direct

strategies such as imperative and statement of obligation while interacting with the students. As observed in Excerpt 4 to 11, the choice of addressing terms such as “*Ibu*” (Ms./Madam) and “*Bapak*” (Sir) by the students emphasized their recognition of the supervisors’ authority which strengthened the power differential. It led to more direct and concise communication from the supervisors, who felt less compelled to mitigate face-threatening acts when making requests to students.

Social distance was also identified as another significant factor that influenced the choice of request politeness strategies. In student-supervisor formal interaction with greater social distance, the students used more elaborative negative politeness strategy, including formal greeting, extensive hedging, and polite language as observed in Excerpts 1 and 2. The use of the greeting “*Om Swastyastu*” (a kind of Balinese greeting, that means peace) followed by a format address like “*Ibu*” atau “*Bapak*” indicated an acknowledgment of greater social distance. In contrast, when the students had a closer relationship with the supervisors, as in Excerpt 3 where the student and the supervisor were relatives, the communication pattern could significantly change. They may use less formal language, including the use of direct addresses like “*Kak Eka*” (an address for older sister) instead of “*Ibu*” and more positive politeness strategies. The use of the address “*Wik*” (a nickname) and a more direct communication style in Excerpt 3 indicated that social distance could reduce the need for using formal politeness. The level of formality in the communication context also affected the perception of social distance, that a more formal setting increased power distance. It explained why, in cases of close relationships, the students adjusted their language to be more formal in group settings involving multiple participants, such as WhatsApp groups that included several students and supervisors.

The level of imposition ranking represented in making requests also affected the employed strategies. The findings of this study showed that requests involving a higher level of imposition prompted the students to employ more elaborative politeness strategies. As in Excerpt 1, the student did not only use formal greetings and apologizes for interruption, but also delivered complete context before finally posing her requests regarding research methods. She also ended the request with an expression of gratitude, showing full awareness of the burden being placed on the supervisor. The requests that required more time, effort, and resources from the supervisors encouraged the students to use negative politeness strategies more extensively. As in Excerpt 2, the students provided complete context regarding their previous supervision and explicitly acknowledged their confusion. It showed an understanding that they were asking the supervisor to invest both time and mental effort which revealed an interesting pattern in which the students balanced the need for clarity with appropriate politeness markers. It reflected a desire to receive a timely response while still maintaining respect for the supervisors’ authority.

Apart from these three main factors, cultural and linguistic background were also identified to affect the choice. The use of specific cultural expressions like “*nggih*” (Balinese polite affirmation) and “*Suksma*” (Balinese greeting form) in excerpts showed how cultural background influenced politeness manifestation. The expression of “*Om Swastyastu*” as a greeting in Excerpts 1 and 2 also indicated the interference of Balinese culture in academic interaction. These findings emphasized the impact of cultural aspects in politeness strategy use. The findings also directed the level of varied pragmatic competency among the students in navigating complex power dynamics during supervision. Several students even demonstrated more sophisticated hedging and face-saving strategies, as in Excerpt 1, including a range of internal and external modification strategies, while others exhibited more direct patterns as shown in Excerpt 3.

These findings suggested that the choice of request politeness strategies was not arbitrary but systematically influenced by interrelated factors. When power differences were greater (between students and supervisors with no relativity), social distance was greater (in a formal context), and the level of imposition was higher (requests requiring more resources), more elaborated negative politeness strategies were employed, especially by those in lower power positions. Conversely, when power distance remained while social relationships were closer (as in family relationships), the use of positive politeness strategies and more direct communication became more common. This complex interaction has supported the theoretical framework of Brown and Levinson while highlighting the context-specific nature of politeness in academic supervision.

Based on these findings, it could be inferred that individuals do not always choose the most polite or indirect approach due to a variety of factors. The three sociological factors (power, social distance, and imposition ranking) played a critical role in determining the level of politeness used by speakers towards their audience. These findings were in line with other previous studies that also found the existence of an unequal power dynamic between students and supervisors. Supervisors had complete authority over every aspect of the learning process and were dominant in communication, including turn-taking, directness, and word choice when interacting with students (Algiovann, 2022; Mulyono et al.,



2019). However, these two previous studies provided additional insights by emphasizing more complex strategy variations based on personal relationships and communication contexts. On one hand, individuals with power tended to employ negative strategies to protect their reputation and avoid causing face-threatening situations (Jeanyfer & Tanto, 2018). Individuals with lower power positions, on the other hand, tended to adopt more polite request strategies to minimize any possibility of imposition (Jeanyfer & Tanto, 2018). It aligned with the findings by Wangia and Otonde (2020) that the level of formality has a direct impact on the power distance. When a context was more formal, power distance increased. In contrast, when in an informal setting, power distance decreased. This could be seen in interactions between supervisors and students who had family relationships. For example, in Excerpt 3, students were allowed to call their supervisor "sister" because the supervisor was their older cousin, while the supervisor called them by their first name. However, in formal settings such as interactions in WhatsApp groups involving many people, students changed their addresses to "bu" or "ms". It showed that students understood and adhered to varying levels of politeness in formal and informal settings, examining the various ways in which power dynamics impacted the flow of interactions between students and supervisors (Nuramdani et al., 2023). It was also reinforced by the findings of Kurniatillah et al. (2022) that specific interaction patterns could create effective interaction dynamics, which mirrored the power-based communication patterns observed in the present study, where individuals with higher status positions employed more direct communication strategies.

In line with the social distance in politeness, the findings of this study suggested that students' socioeconomic status and cultural background may become crucial considerations in applying the politeness norms. The expressions of gratitude, apology, and greetings indicated students' efforts in choosing more polite language as a way to maintain their cultural awareness and pragmatic meaning. These findings may align with research by previous studies that the understanding of culture and pragmatic meaning interpretation may relate to cultural values, power dynamics, social interaction, and communicative competence. Elmianvari and Kheirabadi (2013) supported these findings through the explanation that the awareness of this understanding influenced how individuals chose, used, and interpreted politeness. It was strengthened by Algiovani (2022) that the difference in politeness usage within cultures brought an impact on communication forms, social dynamics, and linguistic features of a language. It meant that the study of politeness strategy could be a beneficial learning source for students during their language learning with the hope of enhancing their multicultural competence and facilitating more effective interaction among each other (Fitriyani & Andriyanti, 2020). Certainly, the findings were also in line with research by Koohzad et al. (2019) that it was the potential to decrease miscommunication and disharmony caused by diverse cultures. Extending this understanding, research by Lestari and Andiansyah (2024) demonstrated that language was used naturally and automatically, particularly when referring to Indonesian acronyms and names which reflected the need for communication flexibility in digital contexts. Their research supported this present study regarding how linguistic choices were influenced by power dynamics and cultural context, especially in online environments where additional communication challenges have existed compared to face-to-face interactions.

This study also suggested that people with higher power ranks tended to employ directness strategies in the requests since it was considered to be the most effective and polite way to make the intention clearer and minimize the request impact. It is in accordance with the research by Chintawidy and Sartini (2022) that the knowledge of politeness may influence people to use direct forms of politeness in the requests and minimize coercion by reducing the acts that threaten someone's face; it leads them to adapt in different social contexts and to use appropriate strategies. It is also clearly assumed that the use of efficient direct requests to mitigate the impact of imposition could be employed through internal and external modification of the acts. Such modifications were rather negatively oriented politeness to decrease the risk for the face (Xiaoning, 2017). This explanation clarified that the use of directness in the requests highlighted politeness by emphasizing self-confidence, clarity, and appreciation, as well as pointed out the recognition of others and the decision-making authority (Jamal, 2022).

However, this study suggested reconsidering the use of direct request strategies which may not be always appropriate and polite in certain contexts. In this study, positive politeness strategies were frequently used when supervisors provided feedback to students or clarified their misunderstandings. These findings were aligned with other previous studies such as Fitriyani and Andriyanti (2020), Karimnia and Khodashenas (2017), Selgas (2022), Zahra et al. (2023), and Zekarwati et al. (2022). Unconventional indirect strategies may be a better choice to show politeness and mitigate coercion (Selgas, 2022). When dealing with errors, supervisors had various options, such as providing implicit guidance (Karimnia & Khodashenas, 2017). This indirect approach to expressing disagreement contributed to students' positive attitudes so that it was in line with positive politeness strategies (Fitriyani

& Andriyanti, 2020). In Excerpt 5 and Excerpt 4, both the supervisor and the student tended to use modal verbs in the acts to show their politeness and formality in the requests. They indirectly delivered the requests to give the opportunity for better interpretation, thus, minimizing the coerced impacts of the requests. This was in line with Zahra et al. (2023) who emphasized the function of modality to lighten the hearers' burden and maintain the positive relationship, as well as to highlight the pragmatic meaning without further requests. These dynamics were further complicated by factors identified in the research of Zesarwati et al. (2022) which highlighted how supervisor involvement, technical constraints (e.g. internet connectivity), and psychological elements (e.g. motivation and concentration) affected communication strategies. It proved that such politeness strategies were influenced by factors of social context, the relationship of the speakers and hearers, and cultural norms in the communication.

Based on the findings and discussion of this study, it provides comprehensive implications, particularly for further research. Considering the tendency of students to use negative politeness strategies while the supervisors predominantly employ direct strategies, this study suggests a power asymmetry that influences language choice in academic interaction. It highlights the need for further research to investigate how the differences in cultural backgrounds, gender, or academic disciplines may influence the use of politeness strategies in online communication. Furthermore, because of the influence of communication contexts on strategy variation use, this study highlights the need to broaden the scope by examining other forms of academic interaction such as classroom discussion, face-to-face consultations, or formal written communication like email. Longitudinal or experimental approaches could also offer deeper insights into how politeness strategies evolve as student-supervisor relationships develop.

#### 4. Conclusion

This research explores the use of politeness strategies in making requests by EFL students and their supervisors in group discussions on WhatsApp during the thesis supervision process. The data showed that supervisors and students tended to use request strategies. The choice of the strategies was influenced by different levels of politeness depending on their power dynamics. When students make requests to their supervisors, they use negative politeness tactics such as greetings, apologies, hesitations, and questions to show respect. Whether supervisors or students, they use internal and external language modifications to minimize potential harm to the supervisor's social image. In contrast, when supervisors make requests of students, they use more authoritative language, such as obligations and orders. This is done to reduce threats to a person's self-image. Despite this, some internal and external modifications were still made. In conclusion, elements such as power, social closeness, and coercion influence the choice of politeness strategies. A larger power gap causes speakers to increase their level of gentleness through the use of negative politeness strategies to avoid losing face.

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