

VIETNAMESE EFL LEARNERS' USE OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH CLASSROOMS AT DONG NAI TECHNOLOGY UNIVERSITY

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GENERAL INFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

Politeness strategies serve to not only construct, sustain, and cultivate positive relationships but also to portray the speaker's social face and social behavior. Moreover, they signify the position and knowledge of the speaker in society. Ultimately, their overarching goal is to enhance the relationship between the speaker and the listener, fostering mutual respect in all communication scenarios. The aim of this paper is to measure the politeness strategies in request-making of Dong Nai Technology University students who are majors in English language to assess their perception of how to express politeness. The research employed a mixed-methods approach, enabling a thorough exploration of the politeness strategies used by the students majoring in English to make requests for their lecturers and classmates. The results show that most of them are aware of politeness strategies in request-making, and they use them rather well in real situations, but they can not use a variety of utterances and distinguish some differences between functions and their meaning due to a lack of language competence.

1. INTRODUCTION

The role of politeness strategies in communication is significant. The politeness strategies serve to not only construct, sustain, and cultivate positive relationships but also to portray the speaker's social face and social behavior. Moreover, they signify the position and knowledge of the speaker in society. Ultimately, their overarching goal is to enhance the relationship between the speaker and the listener, fostering mutual respect in all communication scenarios (Brown and Levinson, 1978; Austin, J. L. 1975).

It's clear that politeness strategies manifest the speaker's social face. However, they have two distinct perspectives: positive face and negative face. Positive face reflects genuine courtesy and fairness from what is inside of the speaker, while negative face signifies behaviors focused on the speaker's hidden interests, goals, or intentions. These expressions are often observed through the speaker's actions such as the speaker suggests the hearer to make choices, make them feel constrained, lose their autonomy,

respectfulness and/or benefits (Fairclough, N. 1989, Okta, D. O. F. 2023).

Politeness is often measured through the principles of tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy (Leech, 1983). Each maxim leads to positive values between the speaker and the listener. They reflect the knowledge and beliefs of the speaker through their speech acts. Therefore, in the process of the second language acquisition, it can be seen that Vietnamese learners often practice English skills through vocabulary, sentence patterns, dialogues, reading comprehension, short stories, writing letters, etc., and they apply them in daily communication with others. However, it must be emphasized that politeness strategies are not often directly taught but rather implied to learners because classroom lessons typically help learners understand and apply language at the surface structures level rather than the deep structures, so learners must independently develop and cultivate these politeness values (Leech, 1983).

In addition, politeness strategies possess both personal and cultural perspectives (Leech, 1983), so depending on contexts, power relations, and thoughts, he/she can assess the value of politeness differently. In the same utterance, it may be considered impolite when spoken at one moment but polite when uttered at another, even when neither the speaker nor the listener has changed.

From the arguments of Austin, J. L. (1975); Brown and Levinson (1978); Leech, (1983); Fairclough, N. (1989); Okta, D. O. F. (2023), the aim of this paper is to measure the politeness strategies in request-making of Dong Nai Technology University students who are majors in English language to assess their perception of how to express politeness. When they use spoken English, are they aware of its politeness? Through students' surveys in

request making, the research relies on evidence of politeness positioned in the nature of language and culture, contexts, and power relations to provide a clear picture of students' awareness of politeness strategies at what level. Consequently, the study recommends teaching and learning methods that focus on the deep structures of the English language to help students apply these practical and pragmatical values when acquiring English Language.

Based on the review of the relevant literature, it is evident that students' politeness strategies significantly influence communicative efficiency. Therefore, this study aims to address the following research questions:

1. How do the students commonly employ politeness strategies in their request making?
2. Are there any different meanings and functions of the different forms when they are used? If yes, what are they?
3. Is there a relationship between the politeness strategies and the student-related factors?

Referring to the theories of politeness strategies, six hypotheses were developed for the third research question:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between students' communicative efficiency (CE) and the use of politeness strategies (PS).

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between students' perspective of politeness strategies (PPS) and the use of politeness strategies (PS).

H3: There is a significant positive relationship between students' positive face (PF) and the use of politeness strategies (PS).

H4: There is a significant positive relationship between students' language

competence (LC) and the use of politeness strategies (PS).

H5: There is a significant positive relationship between students' power relations (PR) and the politeness strategies (PS).

H6: There is a significant positive relationship between students' politeness strategies (PS) and the use of politeness strategies (UPS).

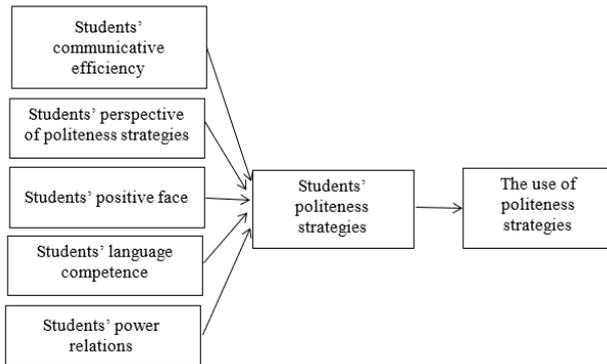


Figure 1. The hypothesis of the research question 3 of the paper

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research design

In this paper, a correlation study was employed, a common approach used to investigate the associations between existing variables, as outlined by Fraenkel et al. (2012). Furthermore, the research design chosen was an explanatory design, specifically selected for its ability to explore a particular research question thoroughly. This design facilitated the delivery of a conclusive and well-defined answer to the research inquiry, as elaborated by Cresswell (2012). In addition, the research selected the semi-structured interview to explore qualitative fields in the use of politeness strategies.

2.2. Setting and participants

The data for the present study was obtained from a diverse sample of Dong Nai Technology University. In line with the recommendation of Fraenkel et al. (2012), a cluster random sampling approach, employing the fishbowl technique, was employed to

randomly select one class from the freshmen to senior students of the Foreign Language Faculty. The sample size of 90 participants out of 1000 English-majored students was calculated using Cochran's (1977) formula for continuous data.

The demographic characteristics of the 90 respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic profiles of the respondents (n=90).

Gender	Frequency (n=90)	Percentage (%)
Male	37	41.1
Female	53	58.9
Total	90	100

Academic Year	Frequency (n=90)	Percentage (%)
First Year	25	27.8
Second Year	25	27.8
Third Year	20	22.2
Fourth Year	20	22.2
Total	90	100

2.3. Corpus used in this paper

The paper employs request utterances and sentences from the textbooks of Mosaic Speaking, Writing 1, 2, and Skills for success 1, 2 in politeness strategies. We utilize techniques such as word substitution and sentence structures to change the level of politeness. The article also use the situations within the pedagogical environment where the students interact with the instructors and with their classmates to observe and analyze the language usage habits of the students.

2.4. Data Collection Instruments

2.4.1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in the study comprised 4 situations, designed to delve into the participants' viewpoints on a range of politeness strategies. Each situation was evaluated using a 5-point Likert scale spanning from 'never' to 'always' to measure the frequency of use. Situation 1 was assembled into 11 items that the students can use to make a request when they don't understand what the teacher said in classroom. Situation 2 presented 10 expressions that the students can request their teachers for lesson guidance through email. Situation 3 outlined 4 ways of expressions that the students need an extension for a course assignment. Situation 4 provided 6 expressions that the students use to suggest their classmates for a help.

2.4.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

Twelfth participants were chosen to partake in semi-structured interviews, aimed at gaining a more profound understanding of politeness strategies. With the Fishbowl technique, the study divided the participants into two groups: an inner circle and an outer circle. In each the inner circle with four participants, often referred to as the fishbowl, they actively engage in discussion about politeness request-makings said in 4 survey situations, while two participants in each the outer circle assume a listening role and take notes. These activities enabled a more in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives compared to using only the questionnaire. The discussion guide was specifically crafted to mirror the four categories defined in the questionnaire, ensuring alignment between the two tools. The content validity of the discussion guide was maintained by aligning it with the research goals and politeness theories. Its primary goal was to investigate students' use with various recognized politeness strategies. Construct validity was ensured through the coherence between the discussion guide and the

questionnaire categories. The reliability was maintained by consistently using the same discussion guide with all participants. The incorporation of mixed methods, including both a questionnaire and interviews, was employed to cross-verify the data, thereby strengthening the study's validity and reliability.

2.5. Data Analysis

In this study, the data analysis employed a mixed-methods approach, enabling a thorough exploration of the politeness strategies employed by students majoring in English. This method involved the independent analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, followed by the synthesis of findings to offer a comprehensive insight into the research objectives. The study conducted an analysis of quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire using Smart PLS 4 and Excel. This analysis yielded an in-depth understanding of the politeness strategies employed in communication related to making requests.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. How do the students commonly employ politeness strategies in their request making?

Situation 1: In classroom, when you don't understand what the teacher said which utterance do you often use to ask him/her?

Table 2. The results of the situation 1

No.	Utterances	Frequency of use (N=90)				
		Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
1	I didn't quite understand what you were saying. Could you please go over it again?	25 (27.7 %)	20 (22.2 %)	22 (24.4 %)	15 (16.6 %)	8 (8.8 %)
2	Get to the point, will you please?	27 (30.0 %)	22 (24.4 %)	16 (17.7 %)	16 (17.7 %)	9 (10.0 %)

3	I don't get it. What are you talking about?	30 (33.3 %)	22 (24.4 %)	21 (23.3 %)	13 (14.4 %)	4 (4.4 %)
4	What's your point?	11 (12.2 %)	11 (12.2 %)	15 (16.6 %)	21 (23.3 %)	22 (24.4 %)
5	What are you trying to say?	28 (31.1 %)	22 (24.4 %)	20 (22.2 %)	13 (14.4 %)	7 (7.7 %)
	Mean (Direct strategies)	24.2 (26.8 %)	19.4 (21.5 %)	18.8 (20.8 %)	15.6 (17.3 %)	10.0 (11.1 %)
6	Excuse me, but I didn't quite catch the point. Can you go over it again?	9 (10 %)	9 (10 %)	14 (15.5 %)	28 (31.1 %)	30 (33.3 %)
7	I'm sorry, I didn't understand the point you were making. Could you possibly say it again, please?	7 (7.7 %)	10 (11.1 %)	15 (16.6 %)	29 (32.2 %)	29 (32.2 %)
8	I don't quite understand what you are trying to get at.	24 (26.6 %)	19 (21.1 %)	20 (22.2 %)	17 (18.8 %)	10 (11.1 %)
9	I'm sorry I didn't catch what you were saying. The class is noisy.	7 (7.7 %)	19 (21.1 %)	13 (14.4 %)	23 (25.5 %)	28 (31.1 %)
10	Sorry I dozed off just now and missed your point.	29 (32.1 %)	24 (26.6 %)	17 (18.8 %)	13 (14.4 %)	7 (7.7 %)
11	Pardon me, but this is such a new field to me that I don't think I can sort out the central idea of the lecture by myself.	26 (28.8 %)	25 (27.7 %)	24 (26.6 %)	10 (11.1 %)	5 (5.6 %)
	Mean (Indirect strategies)	20.5 (22.7 %)	18.3 (20.3 %)	18.1 (20.1 %)	18.3 (20.3 %)	9.6 (10.6 %)

In situation 1, the results showed that it is infrequently for students to employ direct request strategies with their instructors. The mean from 'often' to 'always' of use is 28.4%. However, the utterance 'What's your point?' is often utilized by the students during classroom learning with 47.7%. It can be seen that the

students often use indirect ways make requests with their teachers. The percentages of 'often' and 'always use' of the expressions 'I'm sorry, I didn't understand the point you were making. Could you possibly say it again, please?'; 'Excuse me, but I didn't quite catch the point. Can you go over it again?'" reach 64.4%; and 'I'm sorry I didn't catch what you were saying. The class is noisy' is 56.6%. Also, if we take a look at the total mean of the polite expressions from 'often' to 'always' answers, we see that 30.9% of the students use indirect ways.

Situation 2: Out of class, the student do request responses from professors via messages for their essay. Which requests do you often use?

Table 3. The results of the situation 2

No.	Utterances	Frequency of use (N=90)				
		Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
1	Your thoughts on this?	30 (33.3 %)	30 (33.3 %)	20 (22.2 %)	6 (7.5 %)	4 (4.4 %)
2	I do need to get your feedback on this.	28 (31.1 %)	20 (22.2 %)	15 (16.6 %)	13 (14.4 %)	10 (11.1 %)
3	I need your advice.	15 (16.6 %)	15 (16.6 %)	30 (33.3 %)	15 (16.6 %)	15 (16.6 %)
4	Please help me.	12 (11.1 %)	12 (11.1 %)	13 (14.4 %)	21 (23.3 %)	22 (24.4 %)
5	Here is my essay. Please help me to check it.	7 (7.7 %)	13 (14.4 %)	20 (22.2 %)	22 (24.4 %)	28 (31.1 %)
	Mean (Direct strategies)	18.4 (20.4 %)	18 (20 %)	19.6 (21.7 %)	15.4 (17.1 %)	15.8 (17.5 %)
6	I'm looking forward to any feedback you can provide.	8 (8.8 %)	8 (8.8 %)	16 (17.7 %)	30 (33.3 %)	28 (31.1 %)

7	Please notify me, hopefully before the weekend is over, on what I should do.	29 (32.2%)	29 (32.2%)	17 (18.8%)	7 (7.7%)	8 (8.8%)
8	If possible, please review the draft and reply me through e-mail tonight or early next morning.	24 (26.6%)	20 (22.2%)	21 (23.3%)	15 (16.6%)	10 (11.1%)
9	I sent my essay for you to put your comments on last Friday. Up to today, I do not receive any from you.	23 (25.5%)	28 (31.1%)	15 (16.6%)	12 (11.1%)	12 (11.1%)
10	I would like to know the results of final exam so please let me know as soon as possible.	14 (15.5%)	14 (15.5%)	18 (20%)	30 (33.3%)	24 (26.6%)
	Mean (Indirect strategies)	19.6 (21.7%)	19.8 (22%)	17.4 (19.3%)	18.8 (20.3%)	16.4 (18.2%)

In situation 2, in writing a request letter, the students rarely use direct request strategies (measured 'often' and 'always' answers) with a mean of 34.6%. Meanwhile, the indirect forms of expressions are accounted for 38.5%. Among direct utterances, utterance '*Here is my essay. Please help me to check it.*' is the most frequently used at 55.6%. The indirect utterance '*I'm looking forward to any feedback you can provide.*' stands at 64.4%, and utterance '*I would like to know the results of final exam so please let me know as soon as possible.*' at 59.9%.

Table 4. The results of the situation 3

Situation 3: You need to ask your teacher a extension for a course assignment because

you have to be late for the deadline. Which requests do you often use to ask your teacher?

Table 4. The results of the situation 3

No.	Utterances	Frequency of use (N=90)				
		Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
1	I need more time for the assignment. Can I have an extension?	10 (11.1%)	25 (27.7%)	25 (27.7%)	15 (16.6%)	15 (16.6%)
2	Can I get an extension on the assignment? It's tough.	13 (14.4%)	17 (18.8%)	19 (21.1%)	20 (22.2%)	21 (23.3%)
3	I have some difficulties with the assignment. Is it possible to have an extension to complete it?	5 (5.5%)	5 (5.5%)	18 (20%)	30 (33.3%)	32 (35.5%)
4	Could I get an extension on the assignment? It's tough.	5 (5.5%)	15 (16.6%)	20 (22.2%)	23 (25.5%)	27 (30%)
	Mean	8.3 (9.1%)	15.5 (17.2%)	20.5 (22.7%)	22 (24.4%)	23.8 (26.4%)

The survey results indicate that students tend to use indirect polite expressions more frequently than direct ones. Specifically, on average (measured 'often' and 'always' answers), 58% of students use this strategy, with the utterance '*I have some difficulties with the assignment. Is it possible to have an extension to complete it?*' is the most commonly used, reaching 68.8%. Following closely is the utterance '*Could I get an extension on the assignment? It's tough.*' with a utilization rate of 55.5%.

Situation 3: You missed your English class yesterday, and you need notes from a classmate. Which requests do you often use?

Table 5. The results of the situation 4

No.	Utterances	Frequency of use (N=90)				
		Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
1	Can you share the note with me?	11	15	20	25	19
		(11.1)	(27.7)	(27.7)	(16.6)	(16.6)
		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
2	Can you send me your notes?	9	12	15	30	24
		(14.4)	(18.8)	(21.1)	(22.2)	(23.3)
		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
3	Could you share the note with me?	10	25	25	15	15
		(5.5)	(5.5)	(20.0)	(33.3)	(35.5)
		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
4	Give me your notes, please!	10	15	15	30	20
		(5.5)	(5.5)	(22.2)	(25.5)	(30.0)
		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
5	Do you mind lending me your notes?	6	20	21	22	21
		(5.5)	(5.5)	(22.2)	(25.5)	(30.0)
		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
6	Would you mind lending me your notes?	11	11	20	33	15
		(5.5)	(5.5)	(22.2)	(25.5)	(30.0)
		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Mean		9.5	16.3	19.3	25.8	19
		(10.5)	(18.1)	(21.4)	(28.7)	(21.1)
		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)

In the situation 4, when making requests with their classmates, the students often use the expressions from 3 to 6. Especially, the expression *'Could you share the note with me?'* is the most frequently used (measured 'often' and 'always' answers), reaching 68.8% while *'Do you mind lending me your notes?'* and *'Would you mind lending me your notes?'* are continuously chosen 55.5%.

3.2. Are there any different meanings and functions of the different forms when they are used? If yes, what are they?

After discussion of two groups about politeness strategies from situation 1 to 4, the findings show that the students' perceptions about politeness strategies are nearly similar. Most of them believe that politeness strategies are crucial in communication among people. Therefore, they often focus on indirect ways of expressions when they make requests, namely to their lecturers in and out of class. For instance, when communicating with their teachers, they often use the utterances *'I'm sorry, I didn't understand the point you were making.'*; *'Could you possibly say it again, please?'*; *'Excuse me, but I didn't quite catch the point. Can you go over it again?'*. However, when discussing the utterance *'What's your point?'*, they have different views whether it is polite or impolite expression to make request to their teachers. They argue that this is an easy and common utterance and it is not actually impolite because they said they often see native speakers use it frequently.

Besides, when using past tense for indirect utterances considered polite ways, they discuss stronger and stronger. Almost all of them think that only if they use modal verbs like 'could' replace 'can' or 'might' replace 'may', the utterance will be the politeness strategies. For example, *'Could I get an extension on the assignment? It's tough.'* is more polite than *'Can I get an extension on the assignment? It's tough.'* However, when using *'Do you mind lending me your notes?'* and *'Would you mind lending me your notes?'*, which one is more polite? Most of them agree that *'Would you mind lending me your notes?'* is more polite than *'Do you mind lending me your notes?'*, but they don't know how to explain why.

Last but not least, how politeness is in the utterance ‘*Sorry I dozed off just now and missed your point.*’ Most of them admit that it is not a polite way when talking with their teachers because it is used in the simple past tense and sleeping during class is impolite, so the students should not make any suggestion.

3.3. Is there a relationship between these politeness strategies and students’ factors?

Table 6. Path coefficients

Correlation	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
CE -> PS	0.133	0.109	0.102	1.303	0.008
LC -> PS	0.159	0.214	0.138	1.152	0.002
PF -> PS	0.253	0.252	0.175	1.445	0.048
PPS -> PS	0.185	0.342	0.148	1.250	0.039
PR -> PS	0.365	0.328	0.184	1.983	0.048
PS -> UPS	0.400	0.418	0.111	3.603	0.000

Take a look at table 3.5, the results explained that all of the factors have a positive relationship with P values < 0.05. However, Sample mean (M) showed that each of the factors has an impact level to another differently. Especially, (H6) The students’ politeness strategies (PS) impact directly and strongly on the use of politeness strategies (UPS) with M = 0.400. Next, (H2) the students’ perspective of politeness strategies (PPS) impact on the use of politeness strategies (PS) with M = 0.342. Then, (H5) the students’ power relations (PR) impact on the politeness strategies (PS) with M = 0.328.

Besides, (H3) the students’ positive face (PF) impacts on the use of politeness strategies (PS) with M = 0.252. Also, (H4) the students’ language competence (LC) impacts on the use of politeness strategies (PS) with M = 0.214. Finally, (H1) the students’ communicative efficiency (CE) impacts on the use of politeness strategies (PS) with M = 0.109.

The following is the correlation coefficient between these factors of politeness strategies.

Figure 2. The correlation coefficient

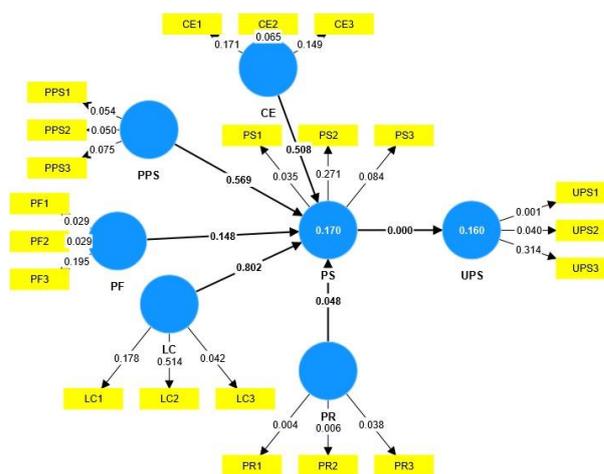


Fig. 2 shows the relationship of the politeness strategies and the use of politeness strategies. We see that the politeness strategies has a positive statistically significant relationship with the use of politeness strategies.

From some main findings, the paper goes to the discussion as follows:

The students know how politeness strategies have means in their life as well as communication. Through the table 3.5, it’s strongly expressed by what they used in their daily life with their teachers and classmates. Also, they recognize that the power relation and social face have a positive impact on what they said. It means that they have completely

have right and/or polite attitudes towards their teachers and classmates in communicating, namely in request-making. In addition, the students know how to communicate well with their lecturers and classmates. They know how to use indirect ways to make requests so that the hearer feel good about them. For example, in the situation 3, they use *'I have some difficulties with the assignment. Is it possible to have an extension to complete it?'* for requesting their lecturers. This expression is considered a polite way. However, the results show that the students' language competence may not have enough for different and high expressions because they often use and select easy, common requests. It means that if they use limited number of politeness expressions, they are considered lack of language and linguistic competence. Sometimes they can not distinguish between functions of the different forms and their meaning.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper is designed to measure the politeness strategies of the English-majored students to discover their perception of how to express politeness strategies through their performance in making requests to their teachers and classmates. The results of four situations show that most of them are aware of politeness strategies in request-making and they use them rather well in these real situations, but they can not use a variety of utterances and distinguish some differences between functions and their meaning due to lack of language competence. Therefore, it is important to recognize that the degree of politeness usually varies from context to context and person to person in communication, and in order to have successful expressions, the students should be provided enough knowledge and language inputs through frequent practice and

interaction to help them express themselves clearly about politeness strategies so that they can apply these values in their real communication. Also, it is hoped that using effective polite request strategies will help make the teacher-student relationships better and the teaching and learning more enjoyable.

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HỌC VIÊN EFL NGƯỜI VIỆT SỬ DỤNG CHIẾN LƯỢC LỊCH SỰ TRONG LỚP TIẾNG ANH TẠI TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC CÔNG NGHỆ ĐỒNG NAI

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THÔNG TIN CHUNG

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TỪ KHOÁ

Tiếng Anh giao tiếp;

Bộ mặt xã hội của người nói;

Chiến lược lịch sự;

Yêu cầu đưa ra;

Người học EFL Việt Nam.

TÓM TẮT

Chiến lược lịch sự không chỉ nhằm mục đích xây dựng, duy trì và nuôi dưỡng các mối quan hệ tích cực mà còn khắc họa thể diện và hành vi xã hội của người nói. Ngoài ra, nó còn biểu thị vị thế và kiến thức của người nói trong xã hội. Cuối cùng, mục tiêu quan trọng nhất của nó là nâng cao mối quan hệ giữa người nói và người nghe, thúc đẩy sự tôn trọng lẫn nhau trong mọi tình huống giao tiếp. Mục đích của bài viết này là đo lường chiến lược lịch sự trong câu yêu cầu của sinh viên Trường Đại học Công nghệ Đồng Nai chuyên ngành Ngôn ngữ Anh nhằm đánh giá nhận thức của họ thông qua cách thể hiện cách biểu đạt lịch sự. Nghiên cứu sử dụng phương pháp định tính và định lượng nhằm khám phá và hiểu cận kề các chiến lược lịch sự mà sinh viên sử dụng để đưa ra lời yêu cầu đối với giảng viên và bạn học. Kết quả cho thấy hầu hết sinh viên đều nhận thức được các chiến lược lịch sự trong câu yêu cầu và sử dụng chúng khá tốt trong các tình huống thực tế, tuy nhiên do thiếu năng lực ngôn ngữ nên sinh viên chưa thể sử dụng đa dạng các cách biểu đạt và đôi lúc chưa phân biệt được sự khác biệt giữa chức năng và ý nghĩa của những phát ngôn.