

## Positive Politeness Used in the Interviews Conducted by Desi Anwar to Dewi Soekarno and Bill Gates

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## ABSTRACT

Interview is a popular means of gathering information in our society. However, there is little research on cross-cultural interviews which has been conducted. This research is a descriptive qualitative study which aims to examine Desi Anwar's choice of positive politeness strategies in relation to her interviewees' cultural backgrounds, i.e., Dewi Soekarno (Japanese) and Bill Gates (American). The interviews are transcribed and coded based on the positive politeness strategies used and the cultures of Japanese and American communication styles. The instrument used in analyzing the data is Excel Matrix. Findings show that the interview with Dewi Soekarno (Japanese interviewee) contains more positive politeness strategies than the interview with Bill Gates (American interviewee). The positive politeness strategies used in the interview with Dewi Soekarno are Exaggeration, Repetition, Including Both S and H, and also Compliments. This result is contradictory to Japanese and American communication styles, which Japanese do not prefer positive politeness; while Americans do. This study will shade some light on positive politeness used in cross-cultural interviews involving Japanese and American interviewees. Since both interviewees in this research are from different genders, it would be satisfactory if future research includes this aspect into consideration.

**Keywords:** *Pragmatics; Politeness Strategies; Japanese Culture; American Culture*

## INTRODUCTION

Interview is one means of gathering information that is popular among the society. The flow of an interview highly depends on how well the interviewer brings the conversation and adjusts it to the interests of both sides. Cross-cultural interviews can sometimes be seen as a challenge. Careful attention should be made into the use of politeness strategies that suit the culture of the interviewee since inappropriate politeness strategies might lead to misunderstanding.

Previous studies have been conducted to examine politeness strategies in interviews. (Rabab'Ah et al., 2019) found that Oprah Winfrey and her Caucasian guests used more positive politeness than Oprah Winfrey and her African-American guests. (Kurniawan, 2015) also found that positive politeness is preferred to negative politeness by Desi Anwar and Mark Rutte in Mark Rutte's interview with Desi Anwar.

Although previous studies have examined politeness strategies used in interviews, little is known about the relation between these politeness strategies and the interviewees' cultural backgrounds, especially Japanese and American cultural backgrounds. This is the gap that is fulfilled by this study. This study aims to examine Desi Anwar's choice of positive politeness strategies in relation to her interviewees'

cultural backgrounds, i.e. Dewi Soekarno (Japanese) and Bill Gates (American). The two research questions are:

- a. What positive politeness strategies are used by Desi Anwar in her interviews with Dewi Soekarno and Bill Gates?
- b. Is Desi Anwar's choice of positive politeness strategies related to Japanese and American cultures as the interviewees' cultural backgrounds?

This study will give new insight to people whose daily duties involve cross-cultural interviews, so that they can adjust the politeness strategies in the interviews to suit the interviewee's cultural backgrounds.

According to (Brown & Levinson, 2006) acts that threaten one's positive and negative faces can be made softer through positive politeness and negative politeness. Below is the further explanation:

## 1. Positive Politeness

Positive politeness is conducted to save the hearer's positive face. As stated by (Brown & Levinson, 2006) positive face is the want of an individual that his want be desirable for others. Some acts might threaten one's positive face. Positive politeness is used to soften this threat. According to (Kurniawan, 2015) positive politeness is not only used to minimize Face Threatening Acts, but it is also used to show closeness between the speaker and the hearer. (Ani Septyaningsih, 2007) also states that the function of positive politeness is not only for minimizing Face Threatening Acts, but also to be the tool used by the speaker to get closer to the hearer. Below are some strategies that can be used to show positive politeness:

### a. Claim common ground

Claiming common ground is a way to soften an FTA by approving one's positive face. There are sub-strategies possible to conduct this:

#### 1) notice hearer's wants/goods/etc

Here, S can show that they notice H's wants or goods or remarkable changes to show their politeness. For example:

*Wow, you cut your hair! By the way, could you lend me your car?*

Here, S has the intention to borrow H's car. The preceding utterance softens it. By showing the acknowledgment that H has cut their hair, H will tend to feel appreciated. According to (S, 2016), compliment is another example of this. It is in line with (Wardhaugh, R. & Fuller, 2015), who stated that compliments, which are aimed to show appreciation, are a form of positive politeness strategies.

#### 2) Exaggeration

Giving exaggeration will create the sense of big appreciation for H. The example is shown below:

*What a fantastic pool you have!*

The main message conveyed is that H has a nice pool. The addition of 'Wh-word' gives emphasis on the extraordinary side of the pool. This will tend to give a sense of approval to H.

### 3) Intensifying interest

I went to the store and **guess what?**

'Guess what' here is used to enhance the interest conveyed in the utterance.

### 4) In-group marker

A sense of acceptance will be most likely felt when one is considered to be a part of a group. This can be done by giving markers that show that S and H are together in one common group. The example is show below:

*Hey bro!*

By adding the word 'bro', H will feel that they and S are close and belong to the same community. This will tend to make H feel accepted and appreciated.

### 5) Seek agreement

There are two methods to seek agreement which are safe topic and repetition. The examples are shown below:

Safe topic:

*A: I had a flat tire!*

*B: Ah! Your car is a brand-new model!*

By addressing a safe topic, H saves S's positive face since the safe topic is most likely to increase S's self-image.

Repetition:

*A: I watched Twilight last night. It was great!*

*B: Twilight!*

By giving the repetition, S shows approval and appreciation toward the topic raised by H. According to (S, 2016) , giving emphatic phrases, such as "yes" and "uh-uh", can also be done to show agreement.

### 6) Avoid disagreement

Avoiding disagreement can be done by implicitly stating a disapproval. The example can be found below:

*A: You work at ABC company*

*B: Oh, that's where I used to work*

In the example above, B implicitly states that they no longer work at ABC anymore. Instead of stating it directly which might offend H, S gives the information that they used to work at ABC, which means they do not work at ABC anymore.

### b. Convey that S and H are cooperators

Positive politeness can be done by showing that S and H are cooperating each other, by concerning for H's wants, as found in the example below:

*I know you don't like Italian food, but this restaurant serves delicious lasagna.*

Here, S states their utterance by stating their understanding of H's state, i.e. not liking Italian food. It approves H's desire to be understood.

### c. Fulfill H's want for X

This politeness can be done by S, by giving gifts to H. The gifts can be in the form of psychological gifts, such as sympathy and understanding or physical gifts such as goods. The example is shown below:

*I'm happy that you finally sold the house.*

Here, S fulfills H's desire to be approved. S shows that they agree with what H has done, i.e. selling the house. This way, H will feel that their decision is appreciated and approved.

### d. Include both S and H

This can be done by adding *we* or *let's*, as shown below:

*Let's have a sit here.*

Here, S involves H in the said event which makes H feel accepted.

## 2. Negative Politeness

Negative politeness is done to reduce the sense of limiting one's freedom. There are some strategies that can be done, as shown below:

### a. Be indirect conventionally:

Here, S adds some elements to soften the freedom limitation given, as shown below:

*Could you please close the window?*

'Close the window' is extremely direct and it tends to fully limit H's freedom. The addition of 'could you please' reduces the degree of directness.

### b. Not presume/assume:

Avoiding the assumption that H will do what is said in the FTA can reduce the sense of limiting freedom in the S's utterance. The example is shown below:

*I'm pretty sure you need to do this.*

The word 'pretty' lessens the degree of certainty in the S's utterance. It leads to the reduction of threat directing to one's freedom.

### c. Not force H/be pessimistic:

Not forcing H to do what S wants is another way to do negative politeness. Here, negative statements, followed by question tags, are commonly used in the utterances, as shown below:

*You couldn't lend me your money, could you?*

The negative modal (couldn't) shows that S does not expect H to lend the money. It reduces the sense of forcing H to do what S wishes.

**d. Minimize imposition:**

Reducing the level of imposition is effective in doing negative politeness. One example is shown below:

*I just want to ask you to go to the store.*

The addition of the word 'just' implies that S is not demanding something crucial. It lessens the degree of imposition.

**f. Apologize:**

Giving apologies is an effective way to do negative politeness, as shown below:

*I'm sorry to bother you but I need your help.*

'I'm sorry to bother you' is used to soften the fact that S is limiting H's freedom by asking for help.

**g. generalize the FTA as a general rule:**

This strategy is mostly done in public spaces to avoid personal delivery of a message, as shown below:

*Passengers, please check your belonging.*

The word 'you' will be too personal and less polite. The hearers of the message are generalized as 'passengers'.

**3. Politeness Strategies among Japanese and Americans**

Since this study aims to examine the positive politeness strategies used in the interviews of Dewi Soekarno and Bill Gates, who come from Japan and the U.S, respectively, a literature study regarding Japanese and American cultures in communication style has been conducted. According to (Yuka, 2009), Japanese people rarely use positive politeness in communication, instead, Japanese communication style uses more negative politeness. According to (Yuka, 2009), this fact is contradictory to the style of people living in English speaking countries, especially in the U.S, where positive politeness has a key role in developing good interpersonal relationships.

One kind of positive politeness strategies commonly used in communication is compliments. According to (Barnlund, D. C., & Araki, 1985) Americans appear to give more compliments, while Japanese seem to give fewer compliments. Their study show that Americans give and receive more compliments than Japanese.

Moreover, according to (Barnlund, D. C., & Araki, 1985), Japanese perceive most favorable comments as flattery, while Americans perceive favorable comments mostly as compliments.

The two studies mentioned above show that Japanese do not prefer positive politeness in communication, while Americans treat positive politeness as an important part of communication.

## METHOD

This study uses two interviews as the source of data. One is the interview of Dewi Soekarno by Desi Anwar. The second is the interview of Bill Gates, by the same interviewer, Desi Anwar. These two interviews are chosen since they are conducted by the same interviewer, Desi Anwar, but with different interviewees who come from different cultural backgrounds. Dewi Soekarno is a Japanese; while Bill Gates is an American citizen. The interviewer, Desi Anwar, is neither a Japanese, nor an American; she is an Indonesian journalist. These cultural differences in the interviews are expected to show the different politeness strategies used in cross-cultural interviews. Each interview lasts for 30 minutes.

The first step in analyzing the data is watch the whole interviews. Then, each interview is transcribed. The utterances that show positive politeness are then labeled to find out what positive politeness strategies are used in the interviews. The next step is to relate the positive politeness strategies in each interview to the cultural background of each interviewee to see the appropriateness of the politeness strategies addressed.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As has been mentioned in the Introduction, this study aims to examine Desi Anwar's choice of positive politeness strategies in relation to her interviewees' cultural backgrounds, i.e., Dewi Soekarno (Japanese) and Bill Gates (American). Findings show that there are more positive politeness strategies given to Dewi Soekarno than Bill Gates in Desi Anwar's interviews. These findings contradict the previous theory which states that Japan is a 'negative politeness' society which favors negative politeness strategies over positive politeness strategies. As stated by (Kitao, 1987) Japanese have the tendency to use negative politeness over positive politeness. On the other hand, (Kitao, 1987) also stated that Americans have the tendency to favor positive politeness over negative politeness. It can be concluded that in interviewing Dewi Soekarno and Bill Gates, Desi Anwar is supposed to give more positive politeness to Bill Gates (American) than Dewi Soekarno (Japanese). However, the findings of this study show the opposite. This shows that this study has brought new knowledge to the field of Pragmatics. Since both interviews are conducted to interviewees with different genders, it is suggested that future work include this aspect into consideration, in which the current study has not included due to time limitation.

Below is the further discussion on the findings:

### Interview 1 (Desi Anwar and Dewi Soekarno)

#### 1. Politeness Strategies used in the Interview

From the interview between Desi Anwar and Dewi Soekarno, it can be seen that Desi Anwar gives several positive politeness strategies, it is in the form of exaggeration, repetition, including both S and H, and compliments, during the interview. Below are the data gathered:

#### Exaggeration

Utterances
<b>1. Desi:</b> Bu Dewi, it's <i>so</i> lovely to see you here.
<b>2. Desi:</b> You have <i>such</i> a beautiful garden

In the utterances above, the words 'so' and 'such' exaggerate the message conveyed in each utterance. They are used to level up the sense of appreciation addressed to the interviewee.

#### Seeking Agreement: Repetition

Utterances
<b>1. Desi:</b> So, do you come often to Jakarta?
<b>Dewi:</b> Once or twice a year, every year
<b>Desi:</b> <i>So, once or twice a year, every year</i>
<b>2. Dewi:</b> Sometimes recent affair, ...
<b>Desi:</b> <i>Current affairs, issue</i>
<b>3. Dewi:</b> You are on top of dolphin
<b>Desi:</b> <i>dolphin?</i>
<b>4. Dewi:</b> I standing in the dolphin
<b>Desi:</b> <i>You stand!</i>
<b>5. Dewi:</b> I manage to do it in two days
<b>Desi:</b> <i>in two days</i>
<b>6. Dewi:</b> I have myself 15 dogs
<b>Desi:</b> <i>15 dogs!</i>

In the utterances above, the interviewer repeats the utterance of the interviewee to show attention. It is a form of politeness strategies given to show the interviewee that her saying is receiving full attention from the interviewer.

#### Including both S and H

Utterances
<b>1. Desi:</b> <i>Let's</i> just stop here for a moment
<b>2. Desi:</b> <i>Let's</i> take a look at the film later

In the utterances above, it can be seen that the interviewer uses the word 'Let's' to show politeness. 'Let us' is used to show that the interviewer acknowledges the

presence and the importance of the interviewee; therefore, she intends to do an activity together with the interviewee.

### Compliments

Utterances
<b>1. Desi:</b> You have <i>such a beautiful garden</i>
<b>2. Desi:</b> You always <i>look so lovely and charming.</i>
<b>3. Desi:</b> This is <i>a comfy house</i>

The utterances show that the interviewer gives compliments to show politeness. Here, the interviewee will most likely feel that her desire is acknowledged and approved. The politeness given here could improve the interviewee's self-image.

### Interview 2 (Desi Anwar and Bill Gates)

The interview between Desi Anwar and Bill Gates contains some examples of positive politeness given by the interviewer. Below are the data:

#### Compliment

Utterance
<b>1. Desi:</b> Minister said it's a historic event.

Here, the interviewer implicitly delivers a compliment to the interviewee that the event conducted by the interviewee is extremely extraordinary, making it an event to be noted in Indonesian history.

### Seeking Agreement: Emphatic Phrases

Utterances
<b>1. Bill:</b> ... to make sure these problems are solved <b>Desi:</b> <i>uh-uh</i> and the Indonesian government...
<b>2. Bill:</b> For the rest of my life <b>Desi:</b> <i>uh-uh</i>
<b>3. Bill:</b> get there much faster <b>Desi:</b> <i>uh-uh</i>
<b>4. Bill:</b> It always helps us <b>Desi:</b> <i>Ya</i>

**5. Bill:** the better the government did,  
the easier our job is  
**Desi:** *okay*

From the above utterances, it can be seen that the interviewer gives many emphatic phrases to deliver a sense of agreeing with what the interviewee is saying. This way, the interviewee will most likely feel that his want is accepted and approved, leading to the saving of his positive face.

## 2. Cultural Relations

During the 30-minute interview between Desi Anwar and Dewi Soekarno (Japanese interviewee), Desi Anwar produces 13 utterances containing **positive politeness**, with 5 strategies containing **compliments** (3 of them contain explicit compliments, and 2 contain exaggeration which also imply compliments).

For the second interview between Desi Anwar and Bill Gates (American interviewee), during a 30-minute interview, Desi Anwar produces only **6positive politeness strategies**, with only **1 compliment** among them.

It can be seen that Desi Anwar gives more positive politeness strategies to Dewi Soekarno (Japanese interviewee) than to Bill Gates (American interviewee). Therefore, it can be said that Desi Anwar's choice of positive politeness strategies in her interview with Dewi Soekarno and Bill Gates is not influenced by the interviewees' cultural backgrounds. It is because Desi Anwar gives more positive politeness strategies to her Japanese interviewee than to her American one, in which American culture values positive politeness more than Japanese culture.

From the way Japanese treat positive politeness, especially compliments, it can be said that the use of these 13 positive politeness is inappropriate. As Japanese language is the language of negative politeness instead of positive politeness, giving too much positive politeness will be most likely to be regarded negatively. This might result in the interviewee's thinking that the interviewer is flattering her.

In relation to American culture of politeness strategies, these numbers are seen as small numbers since Americans perceive favorable comments positively (as compliments not flattery). Moreover, positive politeness is a significant element in American communication style.

## CONCLUSION

From the two interviews analyzed, it can be seen that Desi Anwar's choice of positive politeness in the two interviews is not related to the interviewees' cultural backgrounds since she gives more positive politeness during the interview with Dewi Soekarno (Japanese), compared to her interview with Bill Gates (American). This positive politeness includes Exaggeration, Repetition, Including Both S and H, and also Compliments. These findings are contradictory with previous research which

states that negative politeness is more favored by Japanese than positive politeness; while Americans favor positive politeness over negative politeness.

To be more specific, in terms of compliments, Desi also gives more compliments to Dewi Soekarno than to Bill Gates. With regard to Japanese and American cultures in communication, these findings are seen to be un preferred. Since positive politeness, especially compliments, is not preferred by Japanese, the interview with Dewi Soekarno is expected to contain fewer positive politeness strategies. On the other hand, since Americans highly value positive politeness in communication, the interview with Bill Gates is expected to contain more positive politeness.

Through its findings which contradict previous studies' results, the current study has brought a new perspective to the field of Pragmatics, especially the use of politeness strategies in interviews. It is suggested that future studies examine more on the relationship between politeness strategies and genders to find out whether the interviewees' genders may influence the choice of politeness strategies made by Desi Anwar.

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