

# Politeness in an Exam Situation: A Linguistic Analysis of Student-Teacher Interaction

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This study aims to examine the interaction among students and a teacher during exam session.

Teacher-student communication has biggest influence on their relation and overall performance of both parties, thus the purpose is to analyze the communication reactions during exam situations by performing linguistic analysis.

Data in this regard have been collected through a voice recorder to record all conversation being presented in the exam hall.

The research is useful to understand various communication factors such as communication misunderstanding, politeness and reaction in a real time exam environment.

The outcomes of this study are beneficial to understand how teachers and students develop communication in natural context for a better control and management of student-teacher communication

# Introduction

A good educational environment entails proper communication between students and teachers which should not be overlooked, whether it is in classroom or in exam hall (Büşra and Ali, 2016).

The response of the communicators is highly dependent on the information that they receive (Sierpinska, 2005). It is an all rounded process associated with sequential behaviour that is in line with the action and reaction of the parties in a communicative situation; that is, the receiver and the source of information (Sür, 2015).

The instructor's communication in a classroom setting is influential to student motivation. It also shapes their attitudes towards the teacher. In addition, it influences their perception the course in general and the exam situation in particular.

However, an exam situation is pretty different than normal classroom communication, exam situation consists on lots of pressure on students and teachers over there are only to monitor their fair attempt of exam.

Giles & Williams, (1992) stated that a Teacher may use different forms of communication during an exam. This may entail the use of informal words that are synonymous with college students. Giles & Williams, further explained that there is also no offence in using jargon-laden language that exemplifies the need for good performance in an exam to make students conduct exam in fairly.

In similar context, Christine Grove, (2016) affirmed that numerous studies have discovered that a large number of students exhibit a very high levels of anxiety during an examination. Such students record dismal performance. This group of students perceive exam situation as being a form of a dreaded threat. This explains their overly emotional responses that affect their ability to pay attention to the task that awaits them. Sadly, this is a difficult situation for a teacher as they have to manage anxiety and other behaviour problems among their students in an examination setting.

Although, teachers ought to be extremely supportive to create a conducive examination environment for their students. Such a teacher emphasizes on good behaviour besides motivation among their students. Unfortunately, there is still a crop of students who tend to create commotion in an examination environment. More often than not, such students are deemed as being cheats (FredsonSoares, 2015).

Laura McInerney, (2013) also brought forward experience of one teacher in an examination hall. She says that watching students reveals instances of panic even after many years of tireless efforts to teach them. She described the experience as being heart-breaking. Sometimes, they look at the teacher with sympathetic eyes seeking for revelation over whether their answers are right but the teacher cannot really do anything about the situation.



Hence, considering above studies we can say that students and teachers' communication during exams is worth to examine to see how supportive and polite teachers react towards the students' actions, frequent questions and indiscipline. Numerous studies have been found examining students and teachers' communication in classrooms concerning different subjects but none of the study has been focused on students and teachers' communication during an exam situation. Therefore, this study would make a significant contribution in understanding communication development among both parties in such anxiety-bound contexts. It will also shed light on our understanding of how language is instrumental in establishing a calm and comfortable situation for the students and helping them achieve better results academically.

# Methodology

A descriptive – qualitative research technique has been chosen to conduct such study. A micro-discourse analysis approach was preferred for this study because it enables one to observe various attributes of communication. Discourse is a term that refers to means of assimilating and integrating various language actions to come up with a universally recognized social identity (Gee, 2005).

Discourse analysis have been used by many authors particularly to examine teacher-student interaction. Michael Andrew (2010) utilized discourse analysis to analyze teacher-student interactions. He considered video recordings from eight third graders. Marcus and Heinz Steinbring (2009) also employed discourse analysis to conduct an investigation of various forms of mathematical interactions in a number of social settings. Sheila et. al., (2015) conducted analyses of the most common discourses in a classroom setting.

This extract is chosen among six different extracts that describes the politeness during mid-term examination. This particular extract was chosen because it presents the degree of politeness between a university lecturer and senior students in evening classes. There are many factors that affect students' behavior in how to talk and respect teachers inside classrooms such as, age, background, and gender.

# Participants

The focal participant has been chosen using purposeful sampling among the lecturers of the Cihan University, Erbil, where the researchers already have access to the site. The interaction extract is taken from an exam hall at one of the departments of the university.

The interaction is between a full-time lecturer and student A, student B, and student C (4th year students / evening classes). The instructor is about 40-45 years old while the students' age are about 33-40 years old. The participants are from different cultures and cities but they can use Arabic language.

# Data Collection Process

A recorder device was used in order to record naturally occurring talk among teacher and students. A similar technique has been used by Rodney Beaulieu (2016) took a week's recording of a third grade session to instruct new teachers for some certification course. They came up with critical data for a community that was investigating classroom discourse.

In this study, the aim is to examine the politeness strategies used by the teachers and how the politeness affects the student's compliance during exam situation. The data has been collected with a recording device at one of the departments of Cihan University, Erbil, Iraq.

Authors have been given access to the exam of room of intermediate accounting course. It was a mid-term exam and class was consists of 18 students. The examinations start at 5:00 pm and finishes at 7:00 pm. The process was commenced on April 25th 2019 and lasted for 10 days. The recordings were made following the permission of the department head and the consent of the lecturer. The recording session was last for 50 minutes according the exam duration.

Later, the entire conversation has been interpreted and transformed in a text format which is presented below.



# Data Analysis

Politeness is known as a universal practical application that describes individual's good manners and cultural background. Leech: 1993 defines it as conflict avoidance strategy that can be measure by degree of efforts put into the conflict avoidance situation, stability, and considerate behaviour establishment towards others. Politeness strategy can help to convey the speech in a best possible polite way. Exam hall is a place of the interaction environment between students and a teacher which must be polite enough. Zhang, (2009) stated that during exams students will not just imitate teacher's behaviour but also react similarly. Therefore, in regards of creating a good interaction environment during the exams, teachers must stick to polite behavior in any case.

# Results and Discussion

As observed by the author, most of the students were in their fourth year of study and supposed to be well aware of the examination rules and policies. However, after analysing line 10 to 18, it can be seen that even after in their fourth year a crop of students did not bring their IDs, even though they asked the teacher if they can use the red pen which is strictly forbidden. At the beginning some students were standing outside busy reviewing their notes just before few minutes of their exam. Although, the teacher politely request them to come inn but they showed a persistent behaviour and even requested to bring their notes inside for further revision. This made teacher to use hard tone in order to make them follow the rules.

The mentioned extract above highlights 25 major points that has been noticed and taken into account for further analysis here. However, examining from line 1 to line 9, it has been seen that the lecturer has used “Please” word many times in his speech while describing the exam rules to students and trying his best implement exam rules fairly. The reason of repeating the word “Please” in his speech is back to teacher’s cultural background and ethics.

From line 16 to 22, some students were asked to get permission letter from the head of department as they did not have their students ID cards, but rather than following the teacher's instructions, some of them disobeyed him. For example, Student C said he had his driving license (line 19) while student A (Line 23) completely refused to go out and follow the order. While to Student C, the teacher also explained that he cannot use his driving license as he is a student. Here Student C probably was finding a way of avoiding getting the letter as the lecturer suggested, even though he knew would not be accepted, to show his ID card as a pass for the entrance to the exam. But the lecturer patiently explained that this would not tell him his connection with the university, which is suggested in this case by the student ID card.

As observed, the reason behind teacher's behaviour would make the students feel bitter towards another authoritative figure and not him. He is supposed to be the authority but by mentioning these rules, he is implying that he is there to apply them and these are not his rules. This may be one strategy that he is using to avoid conflict with the students and can be considered as a politeness strategy.

Another point that can be discussed is that the teacher was using formal Arabic language in delivering the examination rules and instruction. From the author's point of view, this might be related to Kurdish and Arabic contexts that give more values to the academic titles and statues. For instance, people with high academic degrees or in empower positions in the society tend to be more formal and to behave more academically.

Thank you