



## TYPES OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES AND DEGREES OF POLITENESS PERFORMED BY ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS IN REQUESTING FOR HELP

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### Abstract:

In social interaction, people need to pay attention to the face of others to maintain relationships and avoid losing their faces. To do this, people should use politeness strategies in communication. This study aims to investigate which type of politeness strategies are mostly used and the level of politeness shown by English major students in the High Quality Program in requesting help. This study is based on the theory of Brown and Levinson (1987). Based on the analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaire, negative politeness strategies were applied the most. This also performs a high degree of politeness. It shows that students majoring in English studies (High Quality Program) had an awareness of using politeness strategies in requesting help.

**Keywords:** politeness, politeness strategies, request for help, face-threatening action

### 1. Introduction

Language plays an extremely important role as a means of conveying messages, expressing opinions, and providing information to others. A person must know how to make his speech well, in order to make the conversation go smoothly, whether it is not his mother tongue or not. On the other hand, it is not uncommon for communications to gradually fall into a deadlock due to differences in mutuality - culture or confusion in communication between speakers and listeners.

Reality has shown that politeness is not absolute and is always bound to each different era, culture, and belief. Politeness is not just for an individual, an ethnicity, or

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any religion; but a whole system covering social conventions and norms formed and perfected undergoing human accretion and expansion throughout the territories. Throughout the development history of behavioral linguistics, people have constantly innovated and refined the 'approaches' addressing each other to be as plausible as possible from resorting to pronouns, titles, names, age, and gender, to other terms, etc. While simultaneously intertwining with the politeness conceptions having to do with issues of power, status, solidarity, occupation, and social identification (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2014, p. 263 - 273). Thomas (1995, 150) stated that "*Politeness was a real-world goal (Politeness interpreted as a real desire to be pleasant to others or as the underlying motivation for an individual's linguistic behavior)*". For as much as foreign language learners, those who must have communication skills not only in language competence but also in their sociocultural, interactive, and strategic competencies (Celce-Murcia, 2007).

In the case of making requests, speakers think about how to get help from other(s). They consider getting the right words as possible, and formally express their ideas without threatening other faces. Which means they have already decided what kind of strategy is the most ideal for their speech (Holmes, 1995, 296-297). In this situation, the politeness strategy is taken in as a communication strategy to minimize the potential threat in the interaction as well as get rid of causing feelings of shame or discomfort for the listeners. It was the act of using politeness strategies to avoid facing threats for both speakers and listeners and maintain their self-esteem and respect (Brown & Levinson, 1967). Therefore, utilizing politeness strategies to deal with face threats is exceedingly crucial aiming to contribute in terms of successful social interaction, particularly in requesting help.

Our team studied and figured out many theories and scientific papers associated with this issue. This facilitated the process of setting up the questionnaire and conducting a survey of politeness strategies in requesting help situations of the third-year majoring in English studies High Quality Program. The purpose of the study would be to reflect on the extent to which politeness strategies were manipulated by third-year majoring in English studies High Quality Program under requesting help circumstances. The research also illustrated correlations between the interactions of the surveyed participants with regard to their use of politeness strategies and their degree of politeness. From the above survey results, our team could make the most crucial arguments, as well as propose suitable ideas for improving the quality of communication in foreign language students in particular and other Can Tho University students in general. Based on the explanation stated above, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What type(s) of politeness strategies frequently were used by students majoring in English studies High Quality Program is requesting?
- 2) Which degree of politeness was performed by students majoring in English studies High Quality Program is requesting?

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Definition of politeness

Zhou Ling and Zhang Shaojie (2018) indicated that politeness meant following a set of long-established standards of behavior. Politeness was also a tool that reflects good upbringing and mutual respect in social relationships, especially not interrupting conversations, listening carefully, and avoiding teasing, and insulting people. Therefore, according to Brown and Levinson's theory (2000), the importance of using politeness was a way to help connect people to closer social interaction as "*a prerequisite for communication between people*". Lakoff (1973) proposed that politeness could be divided into positive and negative verbal politeness, and both forms of politeness are used to increase awareness in life and social communication.

According to Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1978), the politeness 'positive' strategy was used to satisfy the speakers' need for approval and belonging; on the contrary, the politeness 'negative' strategy was used to express respect and apology for not approval belonging to the speakers to the listeners through an understatement. Both Brown and Levinson (1987) and Thomas (1995) also showed that politeness was an important and necessary strategy for speakers to use in promoting or maintaining harmonious relationships with listeners by softening the imposition on the listeners through indirect speech also created politeness in communication in daily life.

Juliane Behm (2008) focused on that when communicating with others, they must use a linguist's face because it is seen as a public image of everyone. Not only that, but politeness was also considered a common phenomenon in human linguistics (Harada, 1996). Indeed, according to Brown and Levinson's theory (1987), the face was a prime example of politeness because it is said that both the speakers and the listeners were said to be interested in the image they aspire to present when communicating with others. Furthermore, Brown and Levinson (1987) mentioned that the basic face of people would be divided into two common types of face: "*positive face*" and "*negative face*" when they communicate with others. In Brown and Levinson's face-saving view (2013), the authors only focused on politeness strategies because no utterance can be inherently interpreted as polite or impolite. Therefore, any assessment of polite or impolite verbal interaction must be performed with regard to "*the context of social practice*". Last but not least, based on Brown and Levinson's theory (1987) also mentioned how to make use of the "*politeness strategies*" by describing "*the expressions used during the negotiation of face in social interaction*".

### 2.2 Politeness strategies

Politeness strategies are utilized by interlocutors to reduce the effects of face threats. To Watts, (2003, 182), politeness strategies or constructs were 'language expressions' used to show politeness. Native speakers use different structures to show politeness. According to Watts (2003), some examples are structures called 'hedges' such as 'sort of,' 'kind of,' 'rather', and politeness markers 'please'.

According to Dufon (2008), fewer politeness strategies were observed in the interactions with English speakers as a second language compared with interactions with English speakers as a mother language. Kasper and Rose (2001) believed that foreign language learners use fewer politeness strategies and grammar knowledge because of the use of appropriate sentence structures and with the fact that required control over language processing might lack time.

There are different classifications of politeness strategies suggested by Holmes (2000), politeness strategies are divided into two groups: 'hedge' to reduce the imposition of a statement and to strengthen the power of words. Other classifications of Brown and Levinson (1987), Crystal and Davy (1975), and Edmondson (1977) are similar to those of Holmes. However, the most popular classification that is widely cited is the one proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). Brown & Levinson (1987) provided four politeness strategies containing positive, negative, and bald on record and off record and they are used in interactions to reduce friction in talks. Brown (1970) ascertained that these strategies are used to formulate messages in order to save the listener's face when face-threatening acts (FTAs) are desired or are unavoidable. Bald on record is applied in conversation in which an act is stated clearly, concisely, and directly. This is the least polite strategy as it involves stating something without caring about the hearer's face. A positive politeness strategy seeks to minimize the threat to the listener's positive face and make the listener feel good about him/her. A negative politeness strategy is a way of avoidance and it presumes that the speaker will impose on the listener. Off record, the strategy uses indirect language and removes the speaker from the potential to be imposed on the hearer.

Bald-on record is a direct, clear, and concise way of speaking. This includes speaking with urgency, focusing on getting to the point but paying little or no attention to preserving the face of the listeners.

Positive strategies are often used in groups of friends or where people know each other well. This is a way of saying that still maintains the face of others but expresses it in a friendly and close way. This includes caring for the listener; contaminating; increasing interest in listeners; using identification marks in the group; avoiding disagreement; having jokes, promising; giving, or asking why.

Negative strategies are defined as "*the second highest degree of expressing politeness*". This is the way to perform the most respectful attitude and pay attention to the face of the interlocutors the most. This includes speaking indirectly by using conventional sentence patterns; questioning; minimizing the imposition on others; padding apologetic words before requesting, etc.

Off-record uses indirect language. This is the highest behavior and is also known as 'insinuation' to give suggestions so that listeners can understand the ideas and wishes. In this case, the listeners have to deduce what the speaker has just mentioned. This includes expressing hints, vaguely speaking, or jokes.

## 2.3 Request

A request is considered an inevitable social act in human communication and has developed into one of the most investigated speech acts in both theoretical and empirical studies on politeness (Prodanovic, 2014). Requesting or “*a demand made by a requester asking a favor of another person*” (Nelson et al., 2002) is one of the speech acts to communicate and it is ruled-governed (Searle, 1969). According to Brasdefer (2005), a request commenced the negotiation of face while having a conversation in which the requester (the speaker) demands the requestee (the hearer) to do some actions that will benefit the requester while the requestee may suffer some loss.

According to Flöck (2016), the actions of request for help, begging, ordering, or commanding are classified based on whether they are used for non-same-power communicators. Henceforth, the request is supposed to be taken by those with the same social status in the interaction, especially in requesting help. However, Blum-Kulka (1989) indicated that the act of begging, ordering, and commanding are subtypes of requests.

### 2.3.1 Request - Face-threatening act

Brown and Levinson (1987) suggested that when we interact socially, the nature of some actions threatens the face or public image of others or ourselves. These actions are called face-threatening acts (FTAs). Requests, threats, compliments, criticisms, and apologies are examples of “*face-threatening acts*”. When requesting, the speaker is to some extent trying to control the listener (Trosborg, 1995). The listener is forced to perform the action whether it is wanted by the listener or not. Thus, making a request is a face-threatening act because it interferes with the listener's freedom of decision (Harada, 1996). Similarly, requesting help is also a FTA because it requires the requestee to do an action in order to help the requester.

Nevertheless, each act does not have a standard amount of face-threat, rather the degree is mitigated or aggravated by three factors (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 79). The first factor is the social distance between the speaker and the hearer - the closer the relationship, the lesser the potential face threat of a communicative act between them. The second one is the power or status of the hearer compared to the speaker - the more power the hearer has over the speaker, the higher the threat level is. The third factor is the rank or degree of imposition (cost to negative and positive face) inherent in a certain act - the more the action involves imposition, the more it threatens the face of one or both participants.

Requests are face-threatening and imposing. In order to reduce face-threats and increase success when making requests, we need to use politeness strategies (Brown and Levinson 1978, 1987). Similarly, Chiravate (2012) stated that the act of requesting involves the use of politeness strategies.

### **2.3.2. Politeness strategies in the requesting situation**

The issue of showing politeness in communication has been noticed for research towards the goal of cultivating politeness in communication for students. education and intercultural communication. There is some research related to using politeness strategies, especially in request situations.

Tanaka and Kawade (1982) formulated the distance-politeness (DP) hypothesis. The hypothesis asserts that social and psychological status influence the use of politeness strategies in requests. The DP hypothesis is predicted as follows: The more polite the requester is, the more distant their relationship with the respondent is. In contrast, the requester will use a less polite strategy if the relationship between the requester and the requested person is close.

Moreover, requesting speech acts are commonly performed by empowering linguistic devices (sentence moods, passive voices, and conditional sentences) and making different levels of directness that show different personal and interpersonal relations.

Another study by Rose (2000) concentrated on the generation of requests in an EFL setting. Rose looked into the demands made by Cantonese-speaking primary school kids who had varying degrees of English competence. It was discovered that conventional indirectness occurred frequently. Bald-on-record strategy was preferred in the lowest proficiency group.

Unlikely, Umar (2004) compared the request techniques of advanced Arab English learners to British native English speakers. It was discovered that when making requests to persons of equivalent or greater social status, the two groups used comparable methods, namely off-record strategies. When the requests were made to persons of lower ranks, the Arabian used more bald-on-record request strategies than the British.

As the goal of politeness in requests is to avoid or mitigate the previously mentioned FTAs, politeness can alter the level of the directness of the request and thus minimize imposition. If a speaker disregards the hearer's position, the request will be considered poorly performed. Therefore, it is beneficial to use some degree of politeness in communication.

Thereby, one also reduces the distance between interlocutors, referred to as positive politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Al-Gahtani & Alkahtani, 2012). Furthermore, to avoid conflict, a speaker might also adopt politeness strategies (Terkourafi, 2011), while employing requests, which might be more necessary when the request is of high imposition on the recipient (Sifianou, 2012).

## **3. Methods**

### **3.1 Participants**

The research is aimed at third-year students majoring in English Studies - High-Quality Program at a university in Vietnam. A survey of 100 samples of third-year English major students - High-Quality Program was conducted. However, only 87 responses were

successfully collected. The aim of choosing the third-year students is that they need to prepare for taking the internship. Therefore, this study is very essential to help students cultivate good attitudes and avoid making mistakes at the internship place.

### **3.2 Methods**

This study was quantitative research. Wherein, the main approach was a descriptive method of data collected by the questionnaire along with referring from many other research papers. Surakhmad (1994, p. 139) affirmed that the descriptive method made use of collecting, classifying, analyzing data, interpreting techniques, and finally drawing conclusions as a whole. In particular, the collected data would be descriptive statistics based on students' decisions on which types of strategies to use while making requests.

### **3.3. Data collection tool**

The study identified the categorical questionnaire, utilizing Brown and Levinson's theory (1987) as the primary framework. The questionnaire was designed to collect data from the participants. It consists of 2 main parts:

Part (1): Identification of personal information

Part (2): Prompts for request situations in which options correspond to four politeness strategies based on Brown and Levinson's theory (1987). 12 requests for help were created aiming at two different groups of interlocutors: students-students, and students - teachers as arranged below:

#### **Group (I): students - students**

(4) Your laptop runs out of battery. You want to borrow your classmate's laptop, but he/she is using it. What would you say?

(5) You need your close friend to help you with the grammar exercises. What would you say?

(6) You want to borrow your classmate's notebook to copy the lesson from the previous class because you missed that class. What would you say?

(7) It is raining heavily and the classroom window is opening, so you feel very cold. You want your friend to close the window. What would you say?

(8) When you miss information about class activities in a class meeting, it would be helpful to ask for your class monitor's support. In this situation, what would you say?

(9) You are having breakfast at the cafeteria. While preparing to pay for your meal, you realize that you forgot to take your wallet. By chance, you see your close classmate walking into the cafeteria. What would you say?

#### **Group (II): students - teachers**

(1) You're going to talk with a distinguished professor to discuss your research project. After the talk, if you want to borrow a book from the professor for the weekend, what would you say?

(2) You wonder whether you should find a job right after graduation or study postgraduate. You would like to turn to the teacher for advice. What would you say?

(3) You need to present a topic but your laptop can't connect to the screen. You want to borrow your professor's laptop to present. What would you say?

(10) You expect your teacher will spend his/her time strengthening your key knowledge for the final semester exam. What would you say?

(11) You are wondering whether to do an essay or a thesis next semester. You want to ask for advice on this issue from your teacher. What would you say?

(12) You are in the exam room. While you are doing your test, your pen is running out of ink and it is the only pen you have. You need to borrow another pen from your teacher to complete the paper on time. What would you say?

Step 1: Conducting material references, and information collection relying on scientific research papers, articles in international journals, etc.

Step 2: Enquiring carefully into the details, theories, and experiments found in the previous studies. Referring to the instructor's suggestions in drafting the questionnaire. Distilling the necessary content and information and uniting the ideas to get ready the process of tabulating the list of situations and corresponding options.

Step 3: Making a questionnaire by Google Form Support Application, taking in 2 latent factors attached to 12 observed situations (adjusting the observed situation to match reality); along with corresponding options sorted by degree of politeness strategies formulated in studies of strategic grading systems by Brown and Levinson (1987).

### **3.4. Data analytics tool**

After completing surveying and collecting data utilizing the Google Form support tool, the research group continued the process of sifting and summarizing collected data to prepare for the statistical and analysis stage of the Excel software. It allowed using the Descriptive Statistics tool in the data analysis Add-in to survey a data sample set of 87 experiments. We implemented descriptive statistical methods and analyzed data using Excel application software after the process of collecting and synthesizing information.

The research progress underwent via each specific stage, from entering the sample of 87 experiments, checking out each variation and value corresponding to each object, to doing statistical manipulations, comparing and contrasting the results to determine the percentage and frequency of using politeness strategies in requesting help situations.

### **3.5. Process**

This research was conducted following five stages, namely:

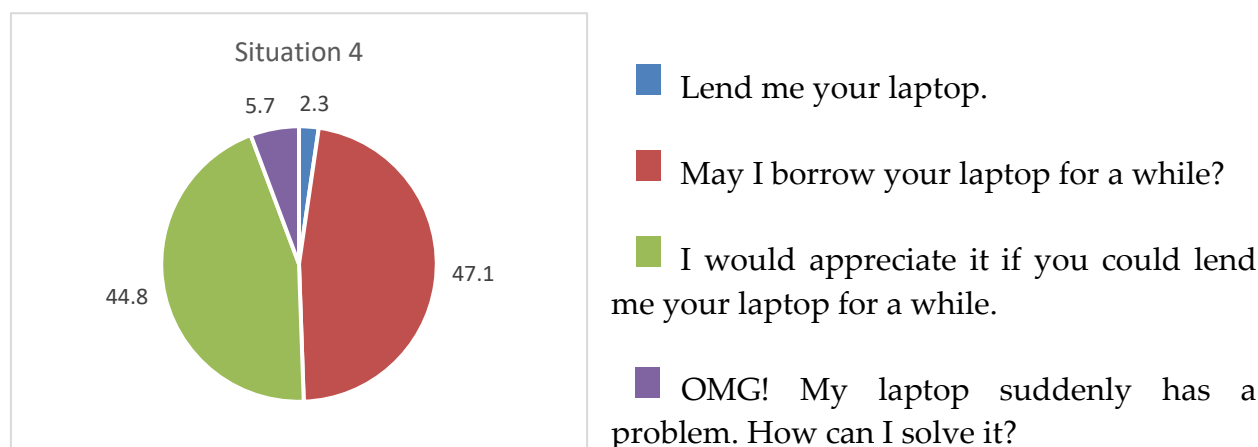
- 1) Researching and summarizing related articles and studies. Scanning and selecting the necessary information for the questionnaire construction.
- 2) Comprehending the theory of politeness strategies, identifying politeness strategies based on the face-threatening acts concept (FTAs); annotating the hierarchy of politeness strategies according to Brown and Levinson (1987).



- 3) Designing the questionnaire consisted of 12 different request situations including 6 simulated situations requesting teachers and the remaining 6 situations from peers. In each situation, there were four randomly arranged options that corresponded to the four basic politeness strategies, namely (1) off-record strategy, (2) negative strategy, (3) positive strategy, (4) bald-on record strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987).
- 4) Collecting and analyzing data using Google Forms and Excel.
- 5) Writing a report about which types of politeness strategies and degrees of politeness are performed by students majoring in English studies (High Quality Program).

#### 4. Results

The results collected from the questionnaire showed that among 6 situations (*Appendix 2*), a large number of participants used negative strategies (55.2%).

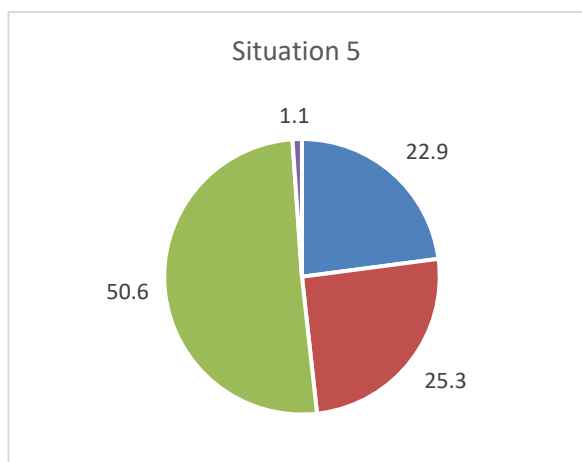


Specifically, in situation 4 in the questionnaire, if the participants' laptops ran out of battery and the participants wanted to borrow a classmate's laptop. However, a classmate was using it. There were four choices for participants to use, representing four specific strategies, namely:

- a) Lend me your laptop.
- b) May I borrow your laptop for a while?
- c) I would appreciate it if you could lend me your laptop for a while.
- d) OMG! My laptop suddenly has a problem. How can I solve it?

We found that the most chosen strategy in situation 4 was the positive strategy, starting with "May I borrow your laptop for a while?", accounting for 47.1% of the total. The second highest percentage was for the negative strategy, which is "I would appreciate it if you could...", with 44.8%. In contrast, the bald-on record "Lend me your laptop" and off-record strategies "OMG! My laptop suddenly has a problem. How can I solve it?" consisted of 2.3% and 5.7% respectively.

It shows that the participants had a moderate level of politeness with friends, not too formal or informal.

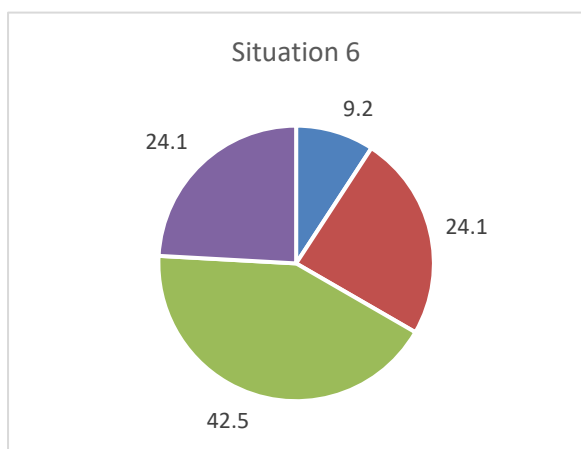


- Help me to do these exercises.
- Can you instruct me to do these exercises?
- You are good at grammar, could you please help me to do it?
- The exercises are difficult to understand.

Regarding situation 5, the participants needed help from a close friend to do the grammar exercises. There were also four options to use, namely:

- a) Help me to do these exercises.
- b) Can you instruct me to do these exercises?
- c) You are good at grammar, could you please help me to do it?
- d) The exercises are difficult to understand.

The data demonstrated that a negative politeness strategy was mostly used, beginning with *"You are good at grammar, could you please help me to do it?"*, (50.6%), followed by a positive strategy *"Can you instruct me to do these exercises?"* and bald-on record strategy *"Help me to do these exercises."* (25.3% & 22.9% respectively). The least used strategy was off-record strategy *"The exercises are difficult to understand."* with 1.1%. The preference to use a negative politeness strategy means that participants have a high level of politeness when requesting grammar exercises, even if it's a close friend.



- Lend me your notebook to copy the lesson.
- Can you lend me your notebook?
- I would appreciate it if you could lend me a notebook to copy the lessons.
- I missed the previous class, if only someone could lend me a notebook to study again.

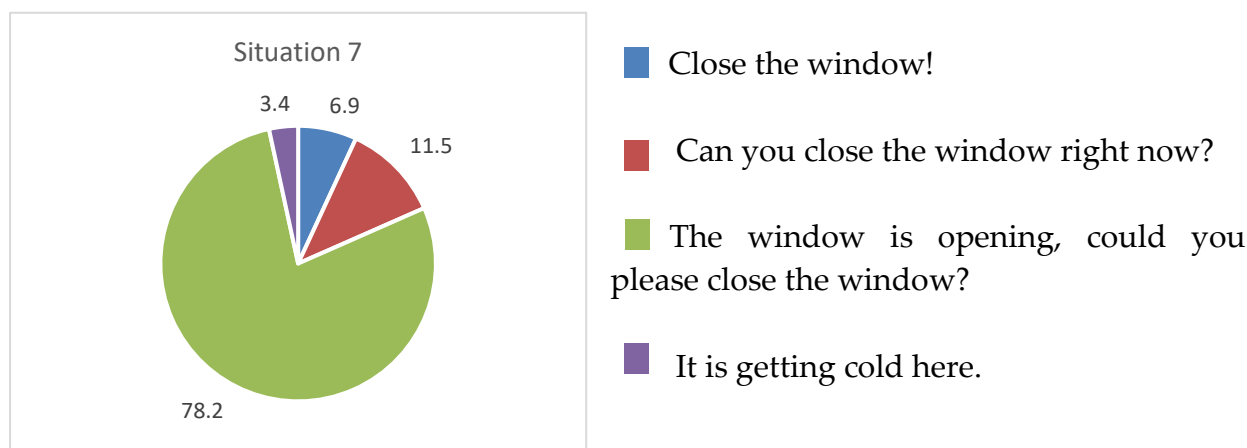
In situation 6, the requesters wanted to borrow their friend's notebook, there were four options:

- a) Lend me your notebook to copy the lesson.

- b) Can you lend me your notebook?
- c) I would appreciate it if you could lend me a notebook to copy the lessons.
- d) I missed the previous class, if only someone could lend me a notebook to study again.

The results revealed that the negative strategy *"I would appreciate it if you could lend me the notebook to copy the lessons."* consisted of the highest percentage (42.5%). The positive strategy *"Can you lend me your notebook?"* and off-record strategy *"I missed the previous class, if only someone could lend me a copy to study again."* accounted for the same portion (24.1%). Next, the percentage of bald-on record strategies *"Lend me your notebook to copy the lesson."* were 9.2%.

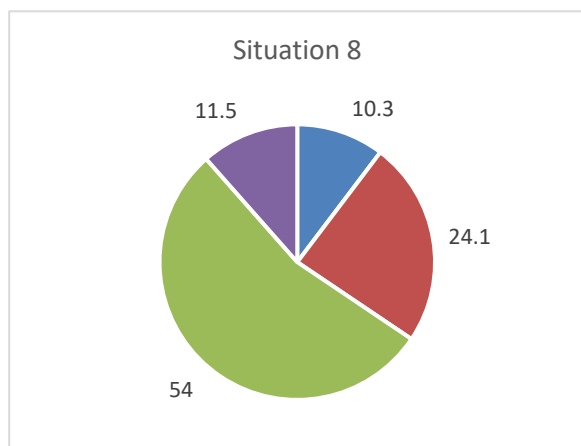
In this situation, the degree of showing politeness of participants when interacting with their friends can be said to be also high since the most used strategy was a negative strategy.



In situation 7, the requesters wanted their classmates to close the window for them because the requesters felt cold. The four options to choose from were:

- a) Close the window!
- b) Can you close the window right now?
- c) The window is opening, could you please close the window?
- d) It is getting cold here.

The results collected from situation 7 showed that the most chosen strategy is the negative strategy, which is *"The window is opening, could you please close the window?"*, accounting for 78.2% of the total. The second highest percentage was for the positive strategy, which is *"Can you close the window right now?"*, with 11.5%. In contrast, the bald-on record *"Close the window!"* and off-record strategy *"It is getting cold here."* consisted of 6.9% and 3.4% respectively.



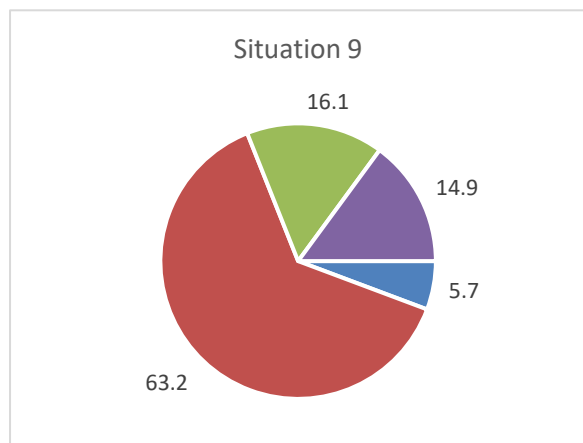
- Repeat the information.
- Could you say again about the information?
- I'm so sorry to bother you but I wonder if you could do me a favor...
- Why is there so much information? I feel chaotic.

In situation 8, the participants wanted to know the information about class activities that they have missed, so they wanted to ask a favor from their class monitor, there were four options to choose from to make a request:

- a) Repeat the information.
- b) Could you say again about the information?
- c) I'm so sorry to bother you but I wonder if you could do me a favor...
- d) Why is there so much information? I feel chaotic.

The results collected from the participants' answers showed that in terms of peer relationships, most of the participants used the negative strategy, followed by the positive strategy, which started with "I wonder if you...", "Could you...?" respectively. It was used more often (54.0% and 24.1% respectively) than other strategies. Regarding the number of participants preferring to use the off-record strategy ("Why is there so much information? I feel chaotic", it accounted for 11.5%. However, different from those who used the aforementioned strategies, the figure exhibited the least preference for the use of the bald-on-record strategy (10.3%), which means that the requester just said "Repeat the information", being much over 5 times lower than the preference of using negative strategy.

The degree of politeness that participants showed with class monitors (who have a position in class) was also high since the most used strategy was a negative strategy.



- Lend some money now.
- Hey, buddy! Get change for a quarter?
- I am terribly sorry to bother you, but would you mind lending me some money for the breakfast, I promise to give it back as soon as possible.
- Really bad! My wallet is gone. I don't know what to do.

In situation 9, the requesters wanted to borrow some money from their close classmates because they forgot to bring their wallets, there were four options to choose:

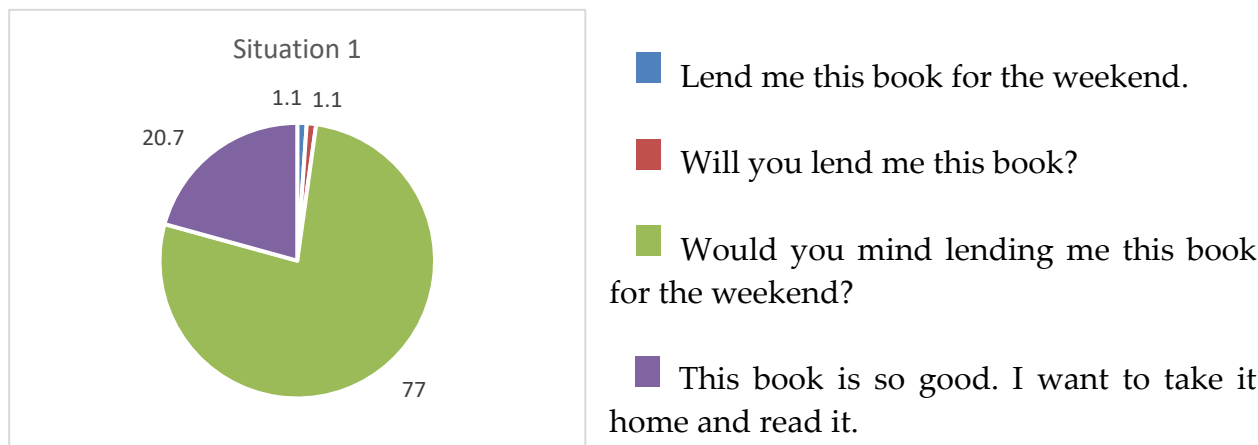
- a) Lend some money now.
- b) Hey, buddy! Get change for a quarter?
- c) I am terribly sorry to bother you, but would you mind lending me some money for the breakfast, I promise to give it back as soon as possible.
- d) Really bad! My wallet is gone. I don't know what to do.

It was obvious that the negative strategy (by saying “Hey, buddy! Get change for a quarter?...” was most frequently used by the participants (63.2%), followed by the positive strategy ‘would you mind...’ at 16.1% and off-record strategy ‘Really bad! My wallet is gone. I don’t know what to do.’ at 14.9%. However, the figures demonstrated the different rate of use of bald-on-record strategy (5.7%) (by saying “Lend me some money now”)

The degree of showing politeness when requesting with their classmate in this situation was also similar to all of the previously mentioned situations, which was high.

#### 4.2 Interactions between students and teachers

Regarding the interactions between students and teachers, there was a similar pattern to the relationship between the survey participants and their peers, in which the figure for using a negative strategy accounted for 58.2% of the total. It was also by far the highest percentage among the rest strategies.



Specifically, in situation 1 in the questionnaire, the participants wanted to borrow a book from the professor for the weekend after a discussion about a research project.

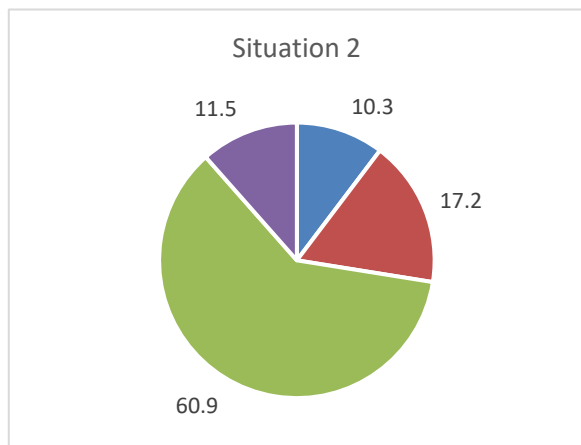
The four options for making a request are as follows:

- a) Lend me this book for the weekend.
- b) Will you lend me this book?
- c) Would you mind lending me this book for the weekend?
- d) This book is so good. I want to take it home and read it.

We found that most participants used a negative strategy “Would you mind...?”, with 77.0%, followed by the off-record strategy (20.7%), in which the participants said that he or they wanted to take it home and read it. The use of bald-on-record (“Lend me

this book for the weekend”) and positive strategy (“*Will you...?*”) both came in at 1.1%, being the strategies that were the least chosen among the rest.

In this situation, the degree of showing politeness of participants with a professor who has a higher position was high since the most used strategy was a negative strategy.

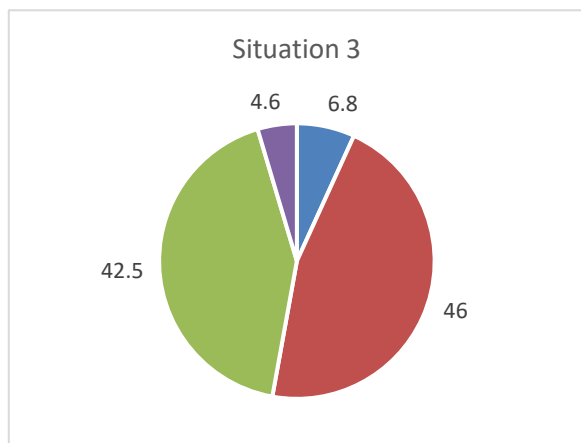


- Give me some advice on this issue.
- Will you give me some advice on this issue?
- Would you mind offering me some advice on this issue?
- I am wondering about my future job; I wish someone could help me.

Similarly, in situation 2, the participants wanted to turn to the teacher for advice whether they should find a job after graduation or study postgraduate. The four choices were as follows:

- a) Give me some advice on this issue.
- b) Will you give me some advice on this issue?
- c) Would you mind offering me some advice on this issue?
- d) I am wondering about my future job; I wish someone could help me.

There were 60.9% of participants who most frequently used the negative strategy (“*Would you mind...?*”). However, the figures showed rates of use of positive strategy (“*Will you...?*”), at 17.2%. The use of off-record (which means the participants did not go straight into the issues) came in at 11.5%. Information collected from the participants’ answers shows that bald-on-record strategy (the imperative) (by saying “Give me some advice on this issue”) was not the most frequently employed, being at a record low 10.3%).

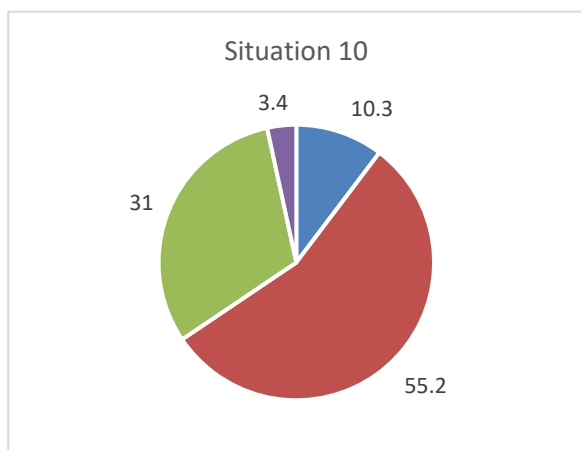


- Lend me your laptop.
- May I borrow your laptop for my presentation?
- Could you possibly lend me your laptop to present?
- OMG! My laptop suddenly has a problem. How can I solve it?

In situation 3, the participants wanted to borrow their professor's laptop to present as their laptop could not connect to the screen. There were four options to say:

- a) Lend me your laptop.
- b) May I borrow your laptop for my presentation?
- c) Could you possibly lend me your laptop to present?
- d) OMG! My laptop suddenly has a problem. How can I solve it?

It was found that the most chosen strategy is the positive strategy, which is "May I borrow your laptop for my presentation?", accounting for 46% of the total. The second highest percentage is for the negative strategy, which is "Could you possibly lend me your laptop to present?", with 42.5%. The bald-on record "Lend me your laptop." and off-record "OMG! My laptop suddenly has a problem. How can I solve it!" strategies consist of 6.8% and 4.6% respectively.



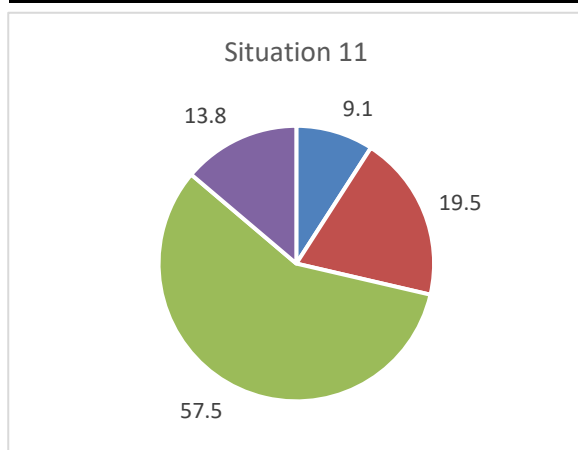
- Clarify it to me in detail, fine?
- Can you show me handy methods to improve these all once more?
- Excuse me, Ma'am, this is a little bit of trouble, but could you please revise the fundamental contents for the upcoming exam?
- Such crazy! How can I review for this examination?

In situation 10, the participants expected their teacher to spend his/her time strengthening key knowledge for the final exam. The four options were as follows:

- a) Clarify it to me in detail, fine?
- b) Can you show me handy methods to improve these all once more?
- c) Excuse me, Ma'am, this is a little bit of trouble, but could you please revise the fundamental contents for the upcoming exam?
- d) Such crazy! How can I review for this examination?

We found that the highest chosen strategy is the positive strategy, "Can you show me handy methods to improve these all once more?", accounting for 55.2% of the total. The second highest percentage is for the negative strategy, which is "Excuse me, Ma'am, this is a little bit of trouble, but could you please revise the fundamental contents for the upcoming exam?", with 31%. In contrast, the bald-on record "Clarify it to me in detail, fine?" and the off-record strategy "Such crazy! How can I review for this examination?" consist of 10.3% and 3.4% respectively.

The degree of showing politeness of participants with teachers was moderate in this situation since the most used strategy was a positive strategy, ranked 2nd based on the aforementioned theory of Brown and Levinson (1987).

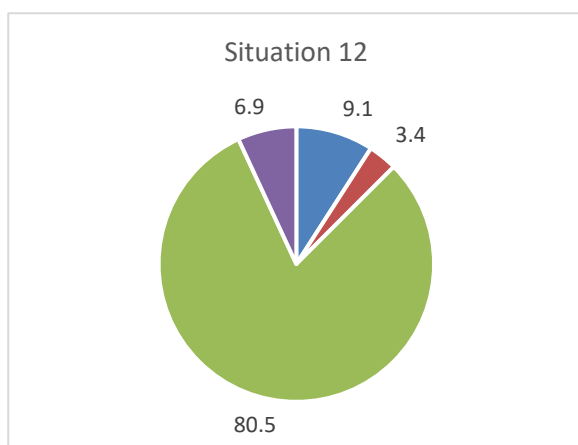


- Give me some advice on this issue
- Will you give me some advice on this issue?
- I would appreciate it if you could give some advice on this issue
- I am wondering whether I should do an essay or a thesis. I wish someone could help me.

In situation 11, the participants were wondering whether to do an essay or a thesis next semester. They wanted to ask for advice on this issue from their teacher. The four choices were as follows:

- a) Give me some advice on this issue
- b) Will you give me some advice on this issue?
- c) I would appreciate it if you could give some advice on this issue
- d) I am wondering whether I should do an essay or a thesis. I wish someone could help me.

It was found that the negative strategy *"I would appreciate it if you could give some advice on this issue."* took the highest percentage (57.5%). The positive strategy *"Will you give me some advice on this issue?"* and the off-record strategy *"I am wondering whether I should do an essay or a thesis, I wish someone could help me."* accounted for 19.5% and 13.8% respectively. And the percentage of bald-on-record strategies *"Give me some advice on this issue."* were 9.1%.



- Give me the pen!
- Can you lend me a pen?
- Would you mind if I borrow your pen for just a moment?
- My pen is running out of ink, but I don't have another pen to write with right now.

In situation 12, the participants were in the exam room. While they were doing their test, their pen was running out of ink and it was the only pen they had. They needed



to borrow another pen from their teacher to complete the paper on time. The four options were as follows:

- a) Give me the pen!
- b) Can you lend me a pen?
- c) Would you mind if I borrow your pen for just a moment?
- d) My pen is running out of ink, but I don't have another pen to write with right now.

We found that most participants used a negative strategy among the 6 situations in the relationship between students and teachers. The negative strategy was “*Would you mind if I borrow your pen for just a moment?*”, accounting for 80.5% of the total. The percentage for the off-record strategy “*My pen is running out of ink, but I don't have another pen to write, right now.*”, was 6.9%. In contrast, the bald-on record “*Give me the pen!*” consisted of 9.1%. In terms of the positive strategy “*Can you lend me a pen?*”, 3.4% of participants chose this strategy to make requests.

Obviously, the degree of showing politeness of participants with teachers can be said to be also high since the most used strategy was a negative strategy, ranked 2nd based on the aforementioned theory of Brown and Levinson (1987).

## 5. Discussions

After analyzing the data according to the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987), this study reveals that the majority of students majoring in English studies chose the same politeness strategy to make requests. The results of the questionnaire were used to answer the two research questions:

- 1) What are the politeness strategies mostly used by students majoring in English studies High Quality Program in requesting?
- 2) Which degree of politeness is performed by students majoring in English studies High Quality Program in requesting?

### 5.1 Politeness strategies mostly used by students majoring in English studies - High Quality Program - in making requests for help

According to the DP hypothesis (Tanaka and Kawade, 1982), the requester will choose a less polite strategy if the requester-requestee relationship is both socially and psychologically intimate, which is proved to be true in the interaction between students and students. As demonstrated in that relationship, more than half of the participants in situations 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 chose the negative strategy when requesting help (i.e. *Could you...* or *Can you...*). It means that there were 5 out of 6 situations that most people used a negative strategy. No matter whether the relationship between the participants and their close friends is psychologically intimate or not, they still mostly used a negative strategy. The positive strategy is the second most used strategy in the relationship between students-students, out of a total of 6 situations, in which some requests may start with the following pattern “*May I...?*”.

The participants also decided to exploit the negative politeness strategy in most request situations in the interaction between students and teachers. In 4/6 situations (1, 2, 11, 12) (i.e. *Would you mind...?* or *I would appreciate it if you could...*). The figure for the use of negative strategy accounted for 66,7%; followed by the positive strategy (i.e. *May I...?*) which was the second preference strategy in the remaining situations (3, 4), consisting of 33,3%. Shortly, the positive strategy is also the strategy that was used by most of the participants after the negative strategy.

The results show that the politeness strategy that students used mostly when making requests for help is the negative strategy when interacting with peers, and with teachers.

There is also another prediction from the DP hypothesis (Tanaka and Kawade, 1982). Taking that prediction into consideration, the aforementioned point was likely consistent with the hypothesis that "*choosing politeness strategy is more influenced by the psychological closeness of a requester's and a requestee's connection than by their social distance*" (Tanaka and Kawade, 1982).

## **5.2 Politeness degrees performed by students majoring in English studies**

The politeness strategies used in making a request from the present study were: (1) off-record strategy, (2) negative strategy, (3) positive strategy, (4) bald-on record strategy; based on the theory of politeness of Brown and Levinson (1987) from the most polite to the least polite respectively.

In the proposed situations requesting help, in both groups of interaction between students - students and students-teachers, the politeness strategy that was used the most was the negative strategy. Based on the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987), the negative strategy ranked second on the scale of the politeness degree. This indicated that students majoring in English studies performed a high degree of politeness when requesting help.

There was a similarity in the degree of politeness and politeness strategies used in interactions between peers and students-teachers. It could be because students regarded the negative strategy as suitable for both objects, or the relationship between them was socially intimate although it is obvious that the age and social status of teachers are higher than those of students.

On one hand, diverse cultures have different values and standards, which influence politeness requirements and lead to the variation of politeness performance in different social contexts. In Western culture, it is considered normal and acceptable for a young person to make requests in order to get help from an older person with negative politeness strategies. That could be because young people want to have positive interactions with older persons which helps lower young people's anxiety about engaging and interacting with older people. This makes such relationships appear more common and acceptable.

On another hand, from the perspective of Vietnamese communication and behavior culture, it is not polite enough to make requests for help to older people when

young people use some of the most used strategies shown in this research, namely negative strategy, and positive strategy. In the context of Vietnamese culture, respecting older people in general and teachers, in particular, is a long-standing precious tradition of the Vietnamese people. In fact, there is a correlation between the degree of politeness in speech and human morality and personality. This strategy was the most polite strategy, following the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987). Having said that, regarding Vietnamese culture, the use of a negative politeness strategy like the aforementioned patterns to make requests could be considered not acceptable and even rude, which might make teachers have a bad view and discomfort while receiving such requests from those students. Therefore, the results showed that students majoring in English studies (High-Quality Program) had unsuitably used politeness strategies with teachers in the context of using English to communicate in a learning context in Vietnam.

Since young people in both Western countries and Vietnam prefer a high degree of friendliness with friends to lessen such shyness. As a result, it will shorten the social distance between them. The ways of using negative politeness strategies of students majoring in English Studies (high-quality program) with their classmates can be said to be acceptable whether the level of intimacy between the two is close or distant. Nevertheless, if the participants want to reduce social distance as much as possible, using such politeness strategies makes the conversation become too formal, causing discomfort and embarrassment to the listener.

In terms of the interactions between students and people who have higher social status, specifically teachers and professors, the social distance is higher and therefore the face threats are higher (Brown and Levinson (1987). In order to reduce the face-threats and save others' faces, students should choose a strategy that performs a higher degree of politeness while communicating with teachers. That shows how students respect their teachers. Meanwhile, students should utilize an appropriate strategy, specifically a positive strategy to maintain friendliness with friends. Shortly, students should choose a proper politeness strategy to use, depending on whom they communicate with and what situation they are in. It will be considered inappropriate behavior if they both use the same strategy for both friends and teachers in Vietnam.

## 6. Conclusions

The study on politeness strategies employed by students majoring in English Studies (High Quality Program) shows that the negative strategy was mostly used in requests for help in the educational environment among peers and in interactions between students and their teachers. Negative strategies were by far the most frequent strategy encountered. Other strategies are not often used when requesting help. That means students had a favor of using negative strategies regardless of social distance. It can be implied that students appreciated and respected others' faces when using negative strategies to show the highest degree of politeness. When choosing negative strategies,

students avoided a direct request or command so that the hearers did not feel being imposed.

In general, students have the same tendency to use negative strategies when communicating between classmates and lecturers. Also, it is the second highest degree of politeness based on the politeness theory of Brown and Levison. That means students were afraid of threatening the face or public image of others which is called 'FTAs'. In Vietnamese culture, politeness is an important standard to evaluate the personality of one person so using negative politeness strategies is highly appreciated and implemented to show respect to others. One special element in Vietnamese culture is that there is a difference in communication depending on social distance. It is considered to perform more politeness when communicating particularly in the situation of requesting help from those who have an upper status like supervisors, or teachers than communicating with peers or friends. In contrast, in the context of the English language, it can be accepted that students are encouraged to apply negative strategies to behave politely and avoid imposing the hearer regardless of social status.

Positive politeness strategies are intended to avoid imposing by highlighting friendliness. In other words, this is a way of saying that still maintains the face of others but expresses it in a friendly and close way. As a result, it would be more appropriate to put the positive strategies into practice among peers and classmates to appropriate the Vietnamese culture.

Politeness is important for successful communication. Today, students who desire to be global citizens should equip themselves with politeness strategies to achieve efficiency and ingenuity in communication.

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### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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## Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Types of Politeness Strategies and Degrees of Politeness Performed by English Major Students in Requesting for Help

### Part 1: Personal Information

1. **Your full name:**
  
2. **Gender:**
  - Male
  - Female
  - Other
  
3. **Are you majoring in English Studies - High Quality Program?**
  - Yes
  - No
  
4. **What cohort are you in?**
  - C44
  - C45
  - C46
  
5. **Which class are you in?**
  - M01
  - M02
  - M03
  - M04
  
6. **How do you evaluate your English proficiency?**
  - Beginner (A1)
  - Intermediate (B1)
  - Upper Intermediate (B2)
  - Advanced (C1)
  - Proficient (C2)
  - Other

### Part 2: Situations

1. **You're going to talk with a distinguished professor to discuss your research project. After the talk, you want to borrow a book from the professor for the weekend, what would you say?**
  - This book is so good. I want to take it home and read it.
  - Lend me this book for the weekend.
  - Will you lend me this book?
  - Would you mind lending me this book for the weekend?
  
2. **You wonder whether you should find a job right after graduation or study postgraduate. You would like to turn to the teacher for the advice. What would you say?**
  - I am wondering about the future job, I wish someone could help me.
  - Give me some advice on this issue.
  - Will you give me some advice on this issue?

- Would you mind offering me some advice on this issue?
- 3. **You need to present a topic but your laptop can't connect to the screen. You want to borrow your professor's laptop to present. What would you say?**
  - OMG! My laptop suddenly has a problem. How can I solve it!
  - Lend me your laptop.
  - May I borrow your laptop for my presentation?
  - Could you possibly lend me your laptop to present?
- 4. **Your laptop runs out of battery. You want to borrow your classmate's laptop, but he/she is using it. What would you say?**
  - OMG! My laptop suddenly has a problem. How can I solve it?
  - Lend me your laptop.
  - May I borrow your laptop for a while?
  - I would appreciate it if you could lend me your laptop for a while.
- 5. **You need your close friend to help you with the grammar exercises. What would you say?**
  - The exercises are difficult to understand.
  - Help me to do these exercises.
  - Can you instruct me to do these exercises?
  - You are good at grammar, could you please help me to do it?
- 6. **You want to borrow your classmate's notebook to copy the lesson of the previous class because you missed that class. What would you say?**
  - I missed the previous class, if only someone could lend me a notebook to study again
  - Lend me your notebook to copy the lesson.
  - I would appreciate it if you could lend me the notebook to copy the lessons.
  - Can you lend me your notebook?
- 7. **It is raining heavily and the classroom window is opening, so you feel very cold. You want your friend to close the window. What would you say?**
  - It is getting cold here.
  - Close the window!
  - Can you close the window right now?
  - The window is opening, could you please close the window?
- 8. **When you miss information about class activities in a class meeting, it would be helpful to ask for your class monitor's support. In this situation, what would you say?**
  - Why is there so much information? I feel chaotic.
  - Repeat the information.
  - Could you say again about the information.
  - I'm so sorry to bother you but I wonder if you could do me a favor.
- 9. **You are having breakfast at the cafeteria. While preparing to pay for your meal, you realize that you forgot to take your wallet. By chance, you see your close classmate walking into the cafeteria. What would you say?**
  - Really bad! My wallet is gone. I don't know what to do.
  - Lend some money now.
  - I am terribly sorry to bother you, but would you mind lending me some money for the breakfast, I promise to give it back as soon as possible.
  - Hey, buddy! Get change for a quarter?



- 10. You expect your teacher will spend his/her time strengthening your key knowledge for the final semester exam. What would you say?**
- Such crazy! How can I review for this examination?
  - Clarify it to me in detail, fine?
  - Can you show me handy methods to better these all once more?
  - Excuse me, Ma'am, this is a little bit of trouble, but could you please revise the fundamental contents for the upcoming exam?
- 11. You are wondering whether to do an essay or a thesis next semester. You want to ask for advice on this issue from your teacher. What would you say?**
- I am wondering whether I should do an essay or a thesis, I wish someone could help me.
  - Give me some advice on this issue
  - Will you give me some advice on this issue?
  - I would appreciate it if you could give some advice on this issue
- 12. You are in the exam room. While you are doing your test, your pen is running out of ink and it is the only pen you have. You need to borrow another pen from your teacher to complete the paper on time. What would you say?**
- My pen is running out of ink, but I don't have another pen to write, right now.
  - Give me the pen!
  - Can you lend me a pen?
  - Would you mind if I borrow your pen for just a moment?

**Appendix 2: Statistics of Mostly Used Strategies**

<b>Situation 4</b>		
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Lend me your laptop	2	2.3
May I borrow your laptop for a while?	41	47.1
I would appreciate if you could lend me your laptop for a while	39	44.8
OMG! My laptop suddenly has a problem. How can I solve it?	5	5.7
Total	87	100.0

<b>Situation 5</b>		
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Help me to do these exercises.	20	22.9
Can you instruct me to do these exercises?	22	25.3
You are good at grammar, could you please help me to do it?	44	50.6
The exercises are difficult to understand.	1	1.1
Total	87	100.0

<b>Situation 6</b>		
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Lend me your notebook to copy the lesson.	8	9.2
Can you lend me your notebook?	21	24.1
I would appreciate it if you could copy the notebook.	37	42.5
I missed the previous class, if only someone could lend me a copy to study again.	21	24.1
Total	87	100.0

<b>Situation 7</b>		
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Close the window!	6	6.9
Can you close the window right now?	10	11.5
The window is opening, could you please close the window?	68	78.2
It is getting cold here.	3	3.4
Total	87	100.0

<b>Situation 8</b>		
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Repeat the information.	9	10.3
Could you say again about the information?	21	24.1
I'm so sorry to bother you but I wonder if you could do me a favor...	47	54.0
Why is there so much information? I feel chaotic. (loud sufficient sound and clear voice)	10	11.5
Total	87	100.0

<b>Situation 9</b>		
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Lend some money now.	5	5.7
Hey, buddy! Get change for a quarter?	55	63.2
I am terribly sorry to bother you, but would you mind lending me some money for breakfast? I promise to give it back as soon as possible.	14	16.1
Really bad! My wallet is gone. I don't know what to do.	13	14.9
Total	87	100.0

<b>Situation 1</b>		
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Lend me this book for the weekend.	1	1.1
Will you lend me this book?	1	1.1
Would you mind lending me this book for the weekend?	67	77.0
This book is so good. I want to take it home and read it.	18	20.7
Total	87	100.0

<b>Situation 2</b>		
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Give me some advice on this issue.	9	10.3
Will you give me some advice on this issue?	15	17.2
Would you mind offering me some advice on this issue?	53	60.9
I am wondering about the future job, I wish anyone could help me.	10	11.5
Total	87	100.0

<b>Situation 3</b>		
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Lend me your laptop.	5	6.8
May I borrow your laptop for my presentation?	40	46.0
Could you possibly lend me your laptop to present?	37	42.5
OMG! My laptop suddenly has a problem. How can I solve it!	4	4.6
Total	87	100.0

<b>Situation 10</b>		
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Can you show me handy methods to better these all once more?	48	55.2
Excuse me, Ma'am, this is a little bit of trouble, but could you please revise the fundamental contents for the upcoming exam?	27	31.0
Such crazy! How can I review for this examination?	3	3.4
Clarify it to me in detail, fine?	9	10.3
Total	87	100.0

<b>Situation 11</b>		
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Give me some advice on this issue.	8	9.1
Will you give me some advice on this issue?	17	19.5
I would appreciate if you could give some advice on this issue.	50	57.5
I am wondering whether I should do an essay or a thesis, I wish anyone could help me.	12	13.8
Total	87	100.0

<b>Situation 12</b>		
	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Give me the pen!	8	9.1
Can you lend me a pen?	3	3.4
Would you mind if I borrow your pen for just a moment?	70	80.5
My pen is running out of ink, but I don't have another pen to write, right now.	6	6.9
Total	87	100.0

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