A Corpus-Based Study on Politeness Used by L1 Thai EFL Learners

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Abstract

This research aimed to identify politeness super-strategies, the strategies under each category of super-strategy, and common lexical patterns in each strategy when performed by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners in English conversation. It attempted to use the corpus-based approach to examine the pattern of how L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners use politeness in English conversation and, on the other hand, to examine the existing problems with L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners' use of politeness super-strategies based on the findings. In total, 30 L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners were involved in this research. A learner corpus was built to investigate the use of politeness super-strategies and the frequencies of lexical patterns. The findings illustrated that L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners tended toward using the *negative politeness* super-strategy, while no *off record* super-strategy was found. Moreover, L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners used a limited number of politeness strategies under the super-strategy categories identified in this research, with a limited selection of lexical patterns in each strategy. The findings reveal that L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners adopt only a small range of politeness strategies, thereby resulting in a discrepancy in the performance of politeness in English conversation.

Keywords: Politeness, Super-strategy, Corpus, L1 Thai EFL learners, Lexical patterns

1. Introduction

As identified by previous research, pragmatic competence is as significant as grammatical competence in oral communication (Canale, 1983). It is thus important to examine the pragmatic competence of EFL learners in English interactions. Studied by various researchers (Leech, 2005; Watts, 2003), politeness has been treated as substantial to the investigation of

pragmatics and pragmatic competence (Bousfield, 2008), revealing its significant role in interactions among interactants. Indeed, some researchers believe politeness is an indispensable component of each utterance in an interaction (Leech, 1983). Hence, politeness is considered a pragmatic component significantly important to maintaining positive interpersonal relationships between interactants (Grundy, 2008), owing to its universality from the pragmatic perspective; therefore, it is worth studying its usage to confirm the pragmatic competence of EFL learners.

Different approaches to studying politeness exist, one of which, from the diachronic perspective, was innovated from Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle (henceforth CP), that is, implicature, interpreted as the common expectations in interactions that can be observed by all members (Bousfield, 2008). Watts (2003) likewise pointed out that by following a Gricean maxim-based approach, politeness utterances in interactions are expected to reach mutual cooperation between the interactants. This infers that politeness yields to Grice's (1975) CP, and it possesses a universal role in interactions. To study politeness systematically, theories on the issue of politeness ensued accordingly, where the theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle (henceforth PP) both played important roles in and substantially influenced subsequent research (Ambele & Bonnsuk, 2018; Chiravate, 2011; Pathanasin & Eschstruth, 2022) on politeness, despite the deficiencies of both theories in explaining all issues related to politeness.

In studies on politeness, two major focuses have been identified so far. The first is on constructing a theoretical framework to identify how a group of members sharing the same language and the same culture engage in politeness in different situational contexts (Gu, 1990; Ide, 1993; Leech, 1983; Spencer-Oatey, 2000). One of the most influential theories of politeness is Brown and Levinson's (1987) face-threatening acts (henceforth FTAs), which is also well-known as the five super-strategies to protect both the speaker's and the hearer's face from the speaker's utterance. The second focus is on identifying how native or non-native English speakers engage in politeness in interactions, from which comparative studies also emerged examining the various uses of politeness between native and non-native English speakers (Kreutel, 2007).

As far as we found, studies on the politeness strategies used by EFL learners worldwide have been insufficient to evince how EFL learners engage in politeness in English conversation, as have the few studies on the use of politeness by L1 Thai EFL learners. In this sense, this research was intended to analyze how L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners engage in politeness—subsuming both the use of the strategies and the frequently used lexical patterns—by using a corpus-based approach to understand this issue comprehensively.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Issue of Defining Politeness

It must be noted before defining politeness from the viewpoint of either sociolinguistics or pragmatic linguistics that a common understanding of politeness has not yet been agreed upon thus far (Fraser, 1990; Watts, 2003). This accounts for the different linguistic paradigms

purported in a variety of interactive styles (Eelen, 2001).

The study of politeness emerged from the social norm approach, where the actual use of politeness in utterances was generally influenced by social norms in the English-speaking world (Fraser, 1990). This concept of politeness was later elaborated as first-order politeness or politeness$_1$ (Eelen, 2001; Watts, 1992). However, the concept of politeness$_1$ is generally not included in the linguistic research because no theoretical framework can conceptualize laypersons' use of politeness$_1$ in different social interactions. Hence, a technical concept of politeness for linguistic research was adopted subsequently, known as second-order politeness or politeness$_2$ (Eelen, 2001). In contrast to politeness$_1$, researchers identified a core in politeness behavior, and they constructed a theoretical framework for politeness$_2$ from the linguistic perspective for the study of politeness. For example, Leech (2014) identified that politeness is principle-governed when compared to grammar, which is rule-governed, indicating that interactants yield to express polite implicatures through certain principles to meet the politeness beliefs among all members. Thus, Leech (1983) proposed PP as complementary to Grice's (1975) CP as the theoretical framework for the linguistic study of politeness.

Similar to the proposition of Leech (1983), Brown and Levinson (1987) distinguish politeness$_2$ from politeness$_1$ by clarifying the concept of politeness behavior as the essence of the concept of face. Apart from a social norm that laypersons in a community must follow, Brown and Levinson (1987) believed that interactants, when they observe a social norm, aim to focus on their own self-worth and self-image, resulting in maintaining face as a norm and as an individual. It can be interpreted as the dualism of face, wherein the individual intends to maintain the external face (Locher, 2004; O'Driscoll, 1996) associated with the social norm or the line others assume a person has taken (Goffman, 1967), and they intend to retain the internal face bestowed from within the individual (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Hence, this research proposes definitions of both politeness$_1$ and politeness$_2$ based on the theory from Brown and Levinson (1987). Politeness$_1$ is the behavior of a layperson when interacting with others by observing the social norms shared by all interactants, while politeness$_2$ is the behavior interactants seek to communicate to others in the minimum of face-threat. It is worth mentioning here that, due to the insufficiently clear definitions from previous research on politeness, both definitions given above can only be interpreted as references that originated from Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory on politeness, the face concept, and FTAs.

2.2 FTAs by Brown and Levinson (1987)

This study used Brown and Levinson's (1987) FTAs as the theoretical framework to identify the use of politeness super-strategies in each category by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners. This is because, although several theories on politeness have been proposed, few have been elaborated clearly enough to confirm the actual use of politeness strategies by interactants (Leech, 2014). These theories (Gu, 1990; Janney & Arndt, 1992) present a conceptualization of politeness rather than a detailed model. For instance, there exists the framework on politeness, i.e., PP, proposed by Leech (1983), but the framework may not be

ample enough to be used for a comprehensive interpretation of the politeness strategies used by interactants from the linguistic viewpoint.

It is therefore clear that there are few options for a practical framework to study politeness. Besides Leech's (1983) PP model, the most well-known model of politeness is the FTAs proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). As stated earlier, the theory identifies face as the core of understanding the politeness in which interactants engage in communication. To be polite in an interaction, five politeness super-strategies with detailed sub-strategies were proposed, known as FTAs, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.
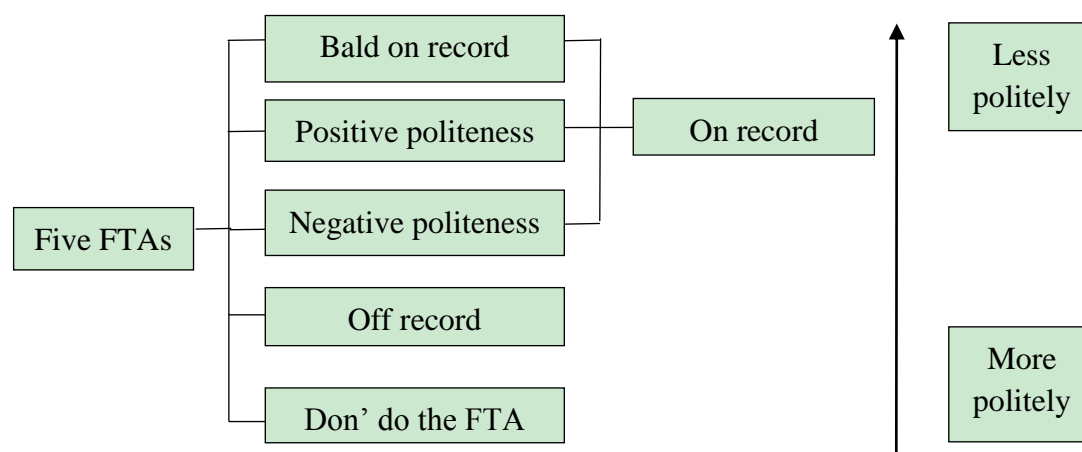
Figure 1. Five FTAs Adapted from Brown and Levinson (1987)

It should be noted first that each FTA is presented in utterances with different linguistic components, leading to the different face-threat levels, from the lowest (*don't do the FTA*) to the highest (*bald on record*). As illustrated by Brown and Levinson (1987), with repeated explanations of the FTAs from previous research (Leech, 2014; Watts, 2003), the interactants may use different FTAs in different situational contexts in which the choice of FTAs is also associated with power, social distance, and imposition (Pathanasin & Eschstruth, 2022). It is stated that the usual situation for choosing the first super-strategy *bald on record* is an emergency, or the elements associated with politeness, i.e., power, social distance, and imposition, are not prioritized by all interactants. It is thus conceivable that this type of super-strategy poses a high risk of face-threatening to the hearer. Subsequently, the *positive politeness* and *negative politeness* super-strategies, compared to *bald on record*, diminish face-threatening in distinctive ways. While for the *positive politeness* super-strategy, the speaker attempts to acknowledge the identity of the hearer, treating them as a common member of the interaction by illustrating common interests, admiration, and so forth to seek intimacy, the *negative politeness* super-strategy is understood as the speaker trying to minimize the imposition toward the space or the freedom of the hearer by using mitigators, indirectness, and so forth. In total, 15 strategies under the category of the *positive politeness* super-strategy and 10 under the category of the *negative politeness* super-strategy were illustrated by Brown and Levinson (1987). The *off record* super-strategy occurs, as opposed to *bald on record*, when a speaker utters using indirectness, ambiguity, or vagueness to avoid face-threatening. The 15 strategies under this category were identified by Brown and

Levinson (1987). Finally, the fifth super-strategy, *don't do the FTA*, illustrates that the speaker avoids offending the hearer's face. Keeping silent and changing topics are commonly used as strategies to avoid doing the FTA (Bousfield, 2008). It should be noted concerning the FTAs that the interpretation of which strategy the speaker uses must be analyzed based on the linguistic performance of the speaker, i.e., the choice of lexical and turn-taking patterns.

We cannot avoid the fact that criticisms of the FTAs have been emerging to date (Gu, 1990; Watts, 2003), where the main controversial issue is whether face, as a dualism concept, is prevalent in all cultures. However, as Leech (2014) stated, no one has produced a better theoretical framework yet, as far as we know. Besides, this is not an issue in this research because this research confirms the politeness super-strategies used by Thai EFL learners in English conversations, indicating the concept of face in the English-speaking world. Moreover, due to their use being studied worldwide (Ambele & Bonnsuk, 2018; Chiravate, 2011; Pathanasin & Eschstruth, 2022), strategies used by different interactants have been analyzed properly. Hence, this research adopts Brown and Levinson's (1987) FTAs to study the politeness super-strategies used by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners.

2.3 Previous Studies on Politeness Internationally

Politeness has been studied worldwide (Agustina, 2021; Ghyasi & Salimi, 2019; Mahmud, 2021; Mokhtari, 2015; Pourshahian, 2019; Silalahi, 2018) in recent years. Both Agustina (2021) and Pourshahian (2019) examined the use of FTAs by different genders. Agustina (2021) conducted a classroom-based empirical study to observe the use of politeness strategies among three male teachers and three female teachers in a university, whereas Pourshahian (2019) examined the different uses of FTAs in the genre of refusal with 50 male students and 50 female students. Having recorded the data in the classroom, Agustina (2021) found that teachers, having more power than students, managed better during face-saving acts. Male teachers used more face-threatening utterances than female teachers, while teachers with more teaching experience used more face-threatening utterances than teachers with less teaching experience, who used more face-saving utterances. It was generally concluded that female university teachers were more polite than male university teachers in classroom conversations. By applying the discourse completion test (henceforth DTC), Pourshahian (2019) found that among university students, females expressed refusal more politely and indirectly than males. While female university students tended to explain in great detail when they refused the hearer, male university students tended to be more direct without a full explanation. Hence, a conclusion can be drawn from the two studies above that there seems a difference in expressing politeness between the genders, where females are more polite than males.

Similar to Pourshahian (2019), Mahmud (2019) and Silalahi (2018) examined the use of FTAs by university EFL students. Using recorded presentations by EFL learners in the classroom, Mahmud (2019) aimed to examine the use of politeness strategies by 50 EFL students in an English literature program, having found that different expressions were used to encode politeness in the classroom, where both positive and negative politeness strategies were performed. Silalahi's (2018) study used the DTC to confirm the politeness strategies

used by non-native English university students, and it found that non-native English university students performed FTAs properly in general as much as the participants who shared the same social norm.

Ghyai and Salimi (2019) intended to seek the predictability of using the politeness strategy based on social class in first and second languages (Persian and English, respectively), and they found that in both Persian and English, positive and negative politeness strategies were mostly used, whereas *off record* and *don't do the FTA* were hard to find. In addition, the most influential social class factor was educational background, while the least influential was behavior.

Apart from the studies focusing on non-native English speakers, Mokhtari (2015) conducted a comparative study on FTAs in refusals between native Persian speakers and native English speakers using the DCT. The result illustrated that both native Persian speakers and native English speakers used indirectness more than directness when refusing, although the indirect utterances used by native Persian speakers were greater in number than those used by native English speakers.

A review of studies of politeness across the world shows that they tend to focus on the use of politeness strategies by non-native English speakers or EFL learners in English communications. However, problems of the previous studies are found twofold. For one thing, seldom studies regarded the politeness super-strategies as an entity to examine how EFL learners used them. Instead, we found that studies mainly focused on one factor in the issue of politeness, e.g., the refusals, the requests, therefore resulting in a deficiency in full comprehension of the use of the politeness super-strategies from a whole picture. For another, the focus in the previous research was not given much to the EFL learners at different English proficiency levels. It is thus comprehensible that the problems of using the politeness super-strategies were not elaborated sufficiently and clearly.

2.4 Previous Studies on Politeness in Thailand

Several studies on politeness were also focused on L1 Thai speakers in recent years (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2018; Boonsuk & Ambele, 2019; Chiravate, 2011; Etae, Krish & Hussin, 2017; Pathanasin & Eschstruth, 2022; Pattrawut, 2014). Ambele and Boonsuk (2018) examined different situational face-threatening contexts that may lead Thai EFL learners to use silence as an FTA in a multicultural university context. After the observation, it was found that Thai EFL learners tended to use silence as an FTA strategy when they had proficiency problems, they were hurt by the interactants, or they observed an unexpected negative mood change in the hearer.

Another study by Boonsuk and Ambele (2019) aimed to identify the English refusal strategies performed by Thai EFL learners, and using the DCT, the research confirmed one of the general results from other studies: that EFL learners tend to use both direct and indirect refusal strategies. However, Thai EFL learners did not use the clarification scheme and adjuncts to refusals as refusal strategies. Meanwhile, two refusal strategies, giving advice or an explanation and lack of empathy, were found to be performed most often by Thai EFL

learners.

Etae, Krish, and Hussin (2017) and Pathanasin and Eschstruth (2022) investigated the use of politeness strategies by Thai EFL learners on online platforms. Etae, Krish, and Hussin (2017) collected data from online classes to observe how Thai EFL learners engaged in politeness strategies with lecturers. They found that due to the English-speaking environment of online English classes, Thai EFL learners tended to perform politeness strategies from western cultural dimensions rather than Thai cultural dimensions. The result indicated that Thai EFL learners, in an English-speaking environment, began integrating Thai-western politeness strategies, leading to a hybrid intercultural politeness environment. Compared to Etae, Krish, and Hussin (2017), Pathanasin and Eschstruth (2022) collected online conversations between Thai EFL learners and lecturers from a messaging application to examine Thai EFL learners' politeness. They found that emoticons, as a special communicative method on the messaging application, were used as a redressive strategy to mitigate face-threatening.

In addition to the studies mentioned above, both Chiravate (2011) and Pattrawut (2014) conducted comparative studies between Thai EFL learners and native English speakers from different angles. Chiravate (2011) focused on the politeness performances of Thai EFL learners in requests, where the research asked Thai EFL participants to choose the politeness strategies they would most likely perform in 12 given contexts. The results showed that Thai EFL learners used fewer politeness strategies in contrast to native English speakers, where a larger gap was identified between Thai EFL learners having a low proficiency and native English speakers than between high-proficiency Thai EFL learners and native English speakers. The study indicated that the L1 Thai language might have a significant impact on these differences. In contrast to examining the politeness strategies used in requests, Pattrawut (2014) compared the use of politeness strategies in multiple disagreements between Thai EFL learners and native English speakers. The study collected data on student–lecturer classroom-based communications and found that Thai EFL learners engaged in fewer disagreements during turn-taking, while native English speakers engaged in disagreements at a much higher rate. At the multiple-disagreement level, Thai EFL learners, similar to native English speakers, tended to use on record politeness strategies in the first disagreement performance, whereas, unlike native English speakers who continued intriguing the multiple disagreement, Thai EFL learners turned to the use of more redressive strategies to mitigate disagreements.

As shown, some studies have focused on the performance of politeness by Thai EFL learners. However, problems are revealed once scrutinizing these relevant studies. In one regard, the data collected in the previous research was not natural interactive data free from distortion by the interruptions of the observers or researchers (Etae, Krish & Hussin, 2017; Chiravate, 2011). It is agreed that politeness naturally occurs in oral communication (Leech, 2014). Conversely, some data collected in the previous research may not be considered spoken data produced by Thai EFL learners (Ambele & Bonnsuk, 2018). Apart from the concerns with the data, including the elaboration of the use of politeness strategies by Thai EFL learners in the previous research, the linguistic patterns frequently used in the performance of politeness strategies have seldom been addressed, resulting in a discrepancy in the understanding of how

Thai EFL learners use politeness strategies in English communications and the patterns to which they tend toward. Meanwhile, previous research seldom focused on EFL learners sharing the same English level when assessing the use of politeness. In addition, little quantitative analysis was conducted on politeness to examine it more comprehensively.

Under these circumstances, this research attempted to use the natural occurring spoken data to elicit the use of the politeness super-strategies and the corresponding linguistic patterns by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners through both the quantitative and the qualitative analysis. Hence, this research first aimed to identify the politeness strategies used by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners by breaking down each category of the politeness super-strategies. It then examined whether L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners tended toward certain politeness strategies. It finally identified the lexical patterns in each sub-category of the politeness super-strategies commonly used by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners. By using the corpus-based approach, this research provides a systematic investigation of how L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners perform politeness in English interactions. The research questions are as follows:

1. What politeness strategies are used by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners in English conversation?

2. Do L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners tend toward a certain politeness super-strategy?

3. What are the lexical patterns frequently used in each politeness super-strategy by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners?

3. Methodology

3.1 Population and Participants

This research focused on Thai EFL learners whose native or first language is Thai and who were mainly raised in Thailand up to the undergraduate level. Because previous research, both internationally and in Thailand, seldom examined the politeness performance of intermediate-level EFL learners, this became the research focus herein.

In total, 30 participants from a public university in Bangkok were involved in this research. To confirm their intermediate English proficiency, the participants who volunteered for participation in this research presented their scores from the TOEIC, IELTS, TOEFL iBT, or TETET. To meet the standard as an intermediate-level EFL learner based on the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001), TOEIC scores should be between 550 and 940, IELTS scores between 4.0 and 6.5, TOEFL iBT scores between 42 and 94, and TETET levels between 3.5 and 5.5.

3.2 Research Design

The spoken data collected in this research were from daily English conversations in group discussions. In total, 10 groups were involved in this research, and each group had three participants. Each group discussion lasted around 15 minutes and was limited by a topic, such

as travel experiences and critical ideas about high technology. To ensure the participants only spoke English, the researcher informed them before the group discussion that their spoken data would be recorded for the study, as well as required by the ethics review committee. However, the specific objectives of this study were not provided to the participants before recording each group discussion to avoid influencing the natural data as much as possible. Each group was randomly given two topics, so 30 minutes of spoken data in total per group was collected in this research. The researcher used CLAN (MacWhinney, 2000) to transcribe the spoken data into written form in CHAT format for the data analysis.

Based on the objectives of this research, an eclectic approach using both quantitative and qualitative methods was used for the analysis. Following the aforementioned process, the corpus for analyzing the politeness strategies used by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners was built, named the Thai Intermediate-Level EFL Learners' Politeness Corpus (henceforth TILPC). AntConc (MacOS version) was used to provide the descriptive data and the concordances for both the quantitative and qualitative analyses.

To answer the first research question concerning the politeness strategies used by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners in English conversations, the theoretical framework of FTAs proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) was used to guide the analysis. To answer the second research question of whether L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners tend toward a certain politeness super-strategy, a Chi-square test run by SPSS was used to examine significant differences. To answer the third research question concerning the lexical patterns frequently used in each politeness super-strategy by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners, AntConc (Anthony, 2022) was used to provide the concordances for the investigation of the lexical patterns frequently used by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners.

The concept of lexical patterns used in this research must be explained here, as it includes collocations and clusters. As defined by Hoey (1991), collocations are the co-occurrences of a word that appears with a greater than random probability in one context. In contrast, clusters are recurrent strings of uninterrupted word forms, such as *you do not* (Scott, 1999). Because no supposition was given concerning which lexical patterns relate to politeness, this research attempted to seek any of the lexical patterns mentioned above. Meanwhile, to control the length of a lexical pattern, this research chose to examine three-word lexical patterns.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Politeness Strategies Used by L1 Thai Intermediate-Level EFL Learners

The TILPC contains 59,606 tokens in total. It should be noted here that during each group discussion, the Thai language was used, but this was not factored into the final tokens.

To answer the first research question concerning the politeness strategies used by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners in English conversation, the responses from each participant at each moment in the conversation were examined based on the FTAs by Brown and Levinson (1987), both super-strategies, and the strategies under each of them. Table 1 illustrates the information of the FTAs used by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners in English conversation.

Table 1. FTAs used by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners in English conversation

FTAs	*Bald on record*		*Positive politeness*		*Negative politeness*		*Off record*		*Don't do the FTA*	
	22	20.2%	10	9.2%	75	68.8%	0	0%	2	1.8%
	Sub-strategies under each super-strategy									
L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners	Respond directly to the prior utterance 22 (20.2%)		Give (or ask for) reasons 6 (5.5%)		Be conventionally indirect 29 (26.6%)		No use of off record 0 (0%)		Keep silent 2 (1.8%)	
					Question, hedge 15 (13.8%)					
					Apologize 12 (11.0%)					
			Avoid disagreement 4 (3.7%)		Minimize imposition 8 (7.3%)					
					Impersonalize S and H 5 (4.6%)					
					Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting the hearer 3 (2.8%)					
					State the FTA as a general rule 3 (2.8%)					

In the TILPC, 109 instances of FTA use were found. As Table 1 shows, the *negative politeness* super-strategy was used most by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners, with 75 instances (68.8%) found in the corpus. Subsequently, the *bald on record* and *positive*

politeness super-strategies were identified in 22 instances (20.2%) and 10 instances (9.2%), respectively. Two instances (1.8%) were identified as incorporating the super-strategy *don't do the FTA*. It was interesting to find that the *off record* super-strategy was not used in the TILPC. However, an explanation must be given for this finding, as ambiguity exists in FTA identification (Bousfield, 2008), so there might be a subjective interpretation of the identification of FTAs in this research. The instances of ambiguity will be discussed further in the answer to the third research question.

In detail, based on the FTA framework (Brown & Levinson, 1987), seven of 10 negative sub-strategies were found in the TILPC, where the strategy of being conventionally indirect (29 instances at 26.2%) was used most often. In contrast, only two of 15 positive sub-strategies were performed by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners.

Compared to the results in Pathanasin and Eschstruth (2022), the finding of this research is in line with the result that the *off record* super-strategy was rarely used by Thai EFL learners. However, *bald on record* was found to be used most by Pathanasin and Eschstruth (2022), whereas the *negative politeness* super-strategy was found to be used most in this research. These differences may be related to the varied data collected in both studies.

To answer the second research question concerning whether L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners tend toward certain politeness super-strategies, one sample Chi-square test was used to examine whether L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners used each super-strategy equally in a normal distribution, as illustrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Result of Chi-square Test

Test Statistics	
	strategy
Chi-Square	119.000[a]
df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 27.3.

Based on Table 2, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in the use of each politeness super-strategy by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners. In combination with the observed frequency shared in Table 1, it is clear that the *negative politeness* super-strategy was performed at the highest frequency, as well as at a much higher frequency than *bald on record*, which was the second-highest super-strategy performed by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners, indicating they prefer to use the *negative politeness* super-strategy in English conversations when the social power and social distance are similar.

4.2 Lexical Patterns Frequently Used by L1 Thai Intermediate-Level EFL Learners

To answer the third research question concerning the lexical patterns frequently used in each politeness super-strategy by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners, the lexical patterns used in the TILPC were retrieved first by using concordances in AntConc. It must be mentioned here that the lexical patterns identified by only one instance in the corpus were excluded from the result owing to their infrequent use by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners.

Table 3 illustrates the lexical patterns commonly used by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners in each strategy under the *negative politeness* super-strategy, based on which the lexical pattern most frequently used by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners was "may I ask," with 11 instances identified, in the "be conventionally indirect" strategy, followed by another two lexical patterns that were also used at a relatively high frequency: "is it ok" in the strategy "be conventionally indirect" and "can I maybe" in the strategy "question with hedge," both with seven instances found in THE TILPC.

Table 3. Lexical patterns in positive politeness super-strategy used by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners

Strategies in the negative politeness super-strategy	Lexical patterns	Observed frequencies
Be conventionally indirect	May I ask	11
	Is it ok	7
	May I know	4
	Can I ask	2
	Can I know	2
	I may not	2
Question, hedge	Can I maybe	7
	Is it possible	4
	Can I ask	2
Apologize	I'm sorry to	4
	Sorry to ask	4
	Oh I'm sorry	2
	Oh sorry but	2
Minimize imposition	Just want to	3

	Ehh just want	3
	Only want to	2
impersonalize	You do that	2
Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting the hearer	No problem	2
State the FTA as a general rule	University students will	2

In detail, in the strategy "be conventionally indirect," it is noticeable that five of six lexical patterns are in a question format, beginning with "can" the most, followed by "may." Interestingly, neither "could" nor "would" was found in the TILPC. The two excerpts below present uses of "may I ask" and "is it ok" extracted from the TILPC.

> P03: I went to the city center (.) and (.) see the [/] the building .
>
> P02: the building with [/] with (.) the [/] the photo ?
>
> P03: the photo ?
>
> P03: may I ask what [/] what photo you say ?
>
> P02: oh (.) the flower in it .

Excerpt 1

> P08: my mom just sent me (.) there .
>
> P06: oh (.) <does it> [//] (.) is it ok (.) for you to stay long ?
>
> P08: yeah (.) I was there (.) two [/] two and half hour ?

Excerpt 2

It is relatively easy to identify this strategy due to its notion that the speaker uses contextual preconditions instead of marking utterances explicitly. In this way, the speaker tries not to impede the hearer to minimize potential face-threatening. It is thus conceivable that in excerpt 1, the speaker P03 inserted "may I ask" to avoid potentially annoying P02 by asking to what photo P02 was referring in the prior utterance. Similar to the situation in excerpt 1, the speaker P06 in excerpt 2 uttered a question starting with "is it ok" to reduce the probability of impeding the hearer. Meanwhile, excerpt 3 illustrates the use of "can I maybe" in the strategy "question with hedge."

> P10: <this is> [/] this is the [/] the whole (.) plan .
>
> P10: here .
>
> P13: ok .
>
> P13: can I (.) maybe (.) change something (..) in it ?

Excerpt 3

It is interesting that L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners combined the question starting "can I" with the hedge "maybe" to ask for permission, give suggestions, or make a request. Neither "could" nor "would" was found in this strategy.

The finding that the *negative politeness* super-strategy was used most is similar to the findings of previous research (Pattrawut, 2014; Srisuruk, 2011), revealing that Thai EFL learners tend not to impede the space of the hearer and tend to avoid the probability of threatening the hearer's face. It was suggested, as some previous research mentioned (Etae, Krish & Hussin, 2017; Pattrawut, 2014), that this phenomenon may be influenced by the Thai culture, in which politeness is inherent. This enables us to explain the finding in this research that strategies, i.e., "be conventionally indirect," "question with hedge," and "apologize," were used at high frequencies.

In contrast to the similar findings discussed above, it must be pointed out that this research found that L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners seemed to have a limited use of certain lexical items or and few lexical patterns were found in the previous research to make the utterances more polite, e.g., "could," "would," "really sorry," and "could it be possible." Moreover, L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners only used a limited range of negative sub-strategies. As Table 3 shows, most of the negative sub-strategies were only used in two to four instances in the TILPC, and no discrepancies in other sub-strategies were found in the TILPC.

Table 4. Lexical patterns in bald on record used by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners

	Lexical patterns	*Observed frequencies*
Bald on record	Don't do that	7
	Don't do it	5
	I want to	4
	I wanna	2
	You should not	2
	You shouldn't	2

Table 4 illustrates the lexical patterns used most often by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners in each strategy under the *bald on record* super-strategy. It was suggested (Brown & Levinson, 1987) that the speaker directly produces utterances with little to no effort to engage in FTAs. In this research, six lexical patterns were identified, with the lexical pattern "don't do that" having the highest frequency, used generally when the speaker attempted to advise the hearer not to do something, as shown in excerpt 4 below.

P18: (.) it's very huge (.) very [/] very big .

P21: yes (.) and I go there also to see .

P21: I try to go (..) [/] go top .

P19: oh (.) don't do that .

P19: danger [/] danger it's (.) .

Excerpt 4

The interactants in the excerpt above were discussing a certain modern architecture in a western country, to the top of which some adventurers attempted to travel to attract the world's attention. P19 uttered the marker "oh" first to show their emotion in the moment after P21 stated they also tried to reach the top before. Then, P19 directly expressed their attitude by uttering "don't do that" without any redressive intention. Following this utterance, P19 added a more direct explanation for the prior utterance with the word "danger," revealing P19's direct stance toward P21's prior utterance.

It is interesting to note that four of six lexical patterns found in the TILPC are meant to give suggestions to the prior speaker without any redressive intentions. This may account for the condition in which the interactants know each other, as in the same power and social distance (Bousfield, 2008).

Table 5 illustrates the lexical patterns frequently used by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners in each strategy under the *positive politeness* super-strategy.

Table 5. Lexical patterns in positive politeness super-strategy used by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners

Strategies in the positive politeness super-strategy	Lexical patterns	Observed frequencies
Give (or ask for) reasons	Ehh/ehmm because it	4
	I think because	2
Avoid disagreement	It may be	2

Similar to the findings in some previous research (Pattrawut, 2014), L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners performed the *positive politeness* super-strategy, but not as often as the *negative politeness* super-strategy. This research only found two types of strategies belonging to the *positive politeness* super-strategy used by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners. As is shown in Table 5, L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners mainly used "because" when giving reasons and modifiers, i.e., "may/might," to avoid disagreement. A note concerning giving reasons that must be addressed here is that this research did not count the utterances that directly answer a prior question in the strategy give (or ask for) reasons. This is because in following the understanding and interpretation of Brown and Levinson (1987) and the relevant previous research (Culpeper, 2013) to identify this strategy, there should be at least another utterance co-occurring with the given reasons to

transform reason into a factor of the *positive politeness* strategy to avoid face-threatening, as the excerpt shows below.

> P26: then (.) how's he ?
>
> P25: ehh (.) he's ok (.) yeah .
>
> P25: ehmm (..) because it was <not so> [//] no serious .

Excerpt 5

As shown, the prior utterance "he's ok" was produced before a reason was given, where the speaker attempted to explain the prior utterance to meet the hearer's desire of knowing the situation of the person who they were referring to at that moment in this conversation. The most frequently used lexical pattern "ehh/ehmm because it" contains the filler "ehh" or "ehmm," which is commonly found in spoken language. This research counted it to reflect the natural spoken data.

For the super-strategy *don't do the FTA* as stated earlier, two instances of remaining silent were found in this research, identified as the super-strategy *don't do the FTA*. To identify this strategy, there must be an unusual or longer pause between two utterances, wherein no interactant tries to produce a new utterance. However, the issue regarding remaining silent is that new utterances will be produced after an unusual or longer pause, where another FTA may be used, which some previous research refers to as mixing FTAs simultaneously in conversation (Bousfield, 2008).

Interestingly, if we follow the theory of mixed FTAs, the two instances can be identified as using two FTAs, as in the excerpts below.

> P09: so there's (.) no way (.) I can (.) do .
>
> P09: you all have (.) any idea ?
>
> <18s with no utterance>
>
> P12: emm (.) can I ask (..) can everyone share money ?

Excerpt 6

In the excerpt above, an 18-second silence appeared after the question from P09, where none of the interactants made any recognizably English utterances. This silence functioned to ease the tension from the previous utterances that P09 produced. It is therefore considered that this 18-second silence is related to the super-strategy *don't do the FTA*. However, it must have been noticed by the interactants that the conversation was not finished. Under this circumstance, P12 uttered a question beginning with the lexical pattern "can I ask" to continue the prior topic, using the strategy "be conventionally indirect."

Compared to the findings in Ambele and Boonsuk (2018), both instances in which silence was used as an FTA to avoid face-threatening can be interpreted as an unexpected negative mood change in the hearer. As shown in Excerpt 6, while discussing the issue of poverty in

his hometown, P09 was in a mood that could be interpreted as depressed or upset, and this might have been construed as why the other interactants maintained a long silence afterwards.

5. Conclusion

Overall, through the findings and discussion above, conclusions can be drawn about the performance of politeness by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners in English conversations in which they used the *negative politeness* super-strategy at the highest frequency, followed by the *bald on record* super-strategy. By scrutinizing the strategies under each super-strategy, this research found that the types of strategies under the *negative politeness* super-strategy were used more variedly by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners than those under other types of super-strategies, where the strategy "be conventionally indirect" was used the most.

In the meantime, the findings of this research reveal the problems with the politeness performances of L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners. First, as the quantitative analysis suggested, it seems L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners tended toward using only the *negative politeness* super-strategy to avoid face-threatening, whereas not much focus was given to the other super-strategies, whereby a deficiency in using FTAs was observed from the findings, especially the *off record* super-strategy and *don't do the FTA* super-strategy. Given that using these two super-strategies is considered more polite than the other three super-strategies (Brown and Levinson, 1987), a discrepancy can be observed among L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners in their performance of politeness in English conversation, thereby resulting in a discrepancy in pragmatic competence in oral communication. Second, a detailed analysis of each strategy under each super-strategy with frequently used lexical patterns in each strategy revealed that L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners only used a limited number of strategies and lexical patterns, i.e., "be conventionally indirect" and "question with hedge," but they frequently used lexical patterns beginning with "can" and "may," leading to a deficiency in the performance of politeness by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners in English conversation.

Two limitations in this research and relevant recommendations for the future are discussed here. In one regard, the spoken data in this research was categorized as daily English conversations produced by L1 Thai intermediate-level EFL learners, where the variables that influenced the performance of politeness, i.e., power, social distance, and imposition, were naturally controlled inherently. These variables must be discussed further concerning whether there are huge differences among interactants who will be involved in further studies on politeness. Another limitation is the English proficiency of the participants involved in this research. Future research may investigate participants at different English proficiency levels with the aim of identifying the different uses of politeness in interactions.

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