



การใช้กลวิธีความสุภาพในการแสดงความไม่เห็นด้วยในผู้เรียนชาวไทย
ที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศในบริบทสถานที่ทำงาน

USE OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES DURING DISAGREEMENTS AMONG
THAI EFL LEARNERS IN WORKPLACE CONTEXTS

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บทคัดย่อ

การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อสำรวจการใช้กลวิธีความสุภาพในการแสดงความไม่เห็นด้วยในผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศในบริบทสถานที่ทำงาน เครื่องมือที่ใช้เก็บข้อมูล คือ แบบทดสอบความสามารถทางวจนปฏิบัติศาสตร์ (Discourse Completion Task หรือ DCT) โดยเก็บข้อมูลจากผู้เรียนชาวไทยที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศจำนวน 40 คน ซึ่งกลุ่มตัวอย่างนี้เป็นพนักงานบริษัทที่ทำงานในประเทศไทย ข้อมูลที่ได้ถูกนำมาวิเคราะห์และเปรียบเทียบกับข้อมูลซึ่งใช้เป็นฐานที่ได้จากชาวต่างชาติเจ้าของภาษาจำนวน 10 คน ผลการศึกษาพบว่า ในการแสดงความไม่เห็นด้วย ผู้เรียนชาวไทยที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศใช้กลวิธีความสุภาพน้อยกว่าชาวต่างชาติเจ้าของภาษาเล็กน้อย และมีแนวโน้มที่จะเลือกใช้ลักษณะอันไม่พึงประสงค์ ในการกล่าวแสดงความไม่เห็นด้วย นอกจากนี้ ผู้เรียนชาวไทยที่ใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศยังมีแนวโน้มที่จะใช้กลวิธีความสุภาพกับหัวหน้างานมากกว่าเพื่อนร่วมงาน และในการแสดงความไม่เห็นด้วยกับหัวหน้างาน ผู้เรียนมีแนวโน้มที่จะใช้กลวิธีความสุภาพในการสนทนาตัวต่อตัวมากกว่าการสนทนาในที่ประชุมซึ่งมีเพื่อนร่วมงานคนอื่นอยู่ด้วย การศึกษานี้ชี้ให้เห็นว่าในการสอนหรือฝึกอบรมภาษาอังกฤษในสถานที่ทำงาน ควรจะให้ความสำคัญในการสอนกลวิธีความสุภาพ ลักษณะอันไม่พึงประสงค์ และวัจนกรรมที่แสดงความไม่เห็นด้วย

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to investigate the use of politeness strategies in disagreements among learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in workplace contexts. The research instrument used was Discourse Completion Task (DCT). The data was collected from 40 Thai EFL learners who were employees in companies in Thailand. The data was analyzed and compared to baseline data from 10 native speakers of English. The findings revealed that Thai EFL learners use politeness strategies slightly less than native speakers and tend to choose undesirable features to voice their disagreements. Additionally, they tend to use more politeness strategies to disagree with their boss than with colleagues. Further, when disagreeing with their boss, they also tend to employ more politeness strategies in one-on-one conversations than in meetings with the presence of other colleagues. Teaching implications from the study indicate that politeness strategies, undesirable features, and speech act of disagreement should be emphasized in English language training in the workplace.

คำสำคัญ: ความไม่เห็นด้วย/กลวิธีความสุภาพ/ผู้เรียนภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษาต่างประเทศ/บริบทสถานที่ทำงาน

Keywords: DISAGREEMENT/POLITENESS STRATEGIES/EFL LEARNERS/WORKPLACE CONTEXTS

Introduction

Disagreement normally arises in everyday life communication. It happens that we disagree with what our interlocutors say. Sometimes we yield to other people's opinions to avoid hurting their feelings, but if we keep avoiding disagreement, we may lose our stance and let our communication goal slip away. Austin (1962: 12) had indicated that "to say something is to do something", and people communicate with intention to perform an act. It can be said if we say something in disagreement, we are doing things as opposed to our interlocutors' opinions or desires. Since disagreement is seen as a reason for discomfort (García, 1989), people may perceive disagreement as an unfavorable act in conversation. It is also defined as "the communication of an opinion or belief contrary to the view expressed by a previous speaker" (Edstrom, 2004: 1505). Therefore, disagreement utterance can be seen as unwanted because it is in contrast with what the hearer has believed or thought.

To say things contradicting other people's opinions can be called face-threatening acts or FTA (Brown and Levinson, 1987). According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) face theory, there are two aspects of humans' face or psychological need: a positive face which can be seen in humans' love to be involved and recognized, and a negative face which can be seen in their love to be free in their own action. When disagreement is uttered, the face of the hearer can be damaged by the speech that is in opposition to his or her opinion.

Normally, when communicating, people "maintain each other's face" (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 61) or take into consideration one another's "public self-image" (Brown and Levinson, 1987:61) to avoid face-threatening acts. However, disagreeing with someone may be quite different from maintaining their public self-image. Disagreement is more likely to damage the positive face of the hearer, since it "usually questions the recipient's competence or even truthfulness and thus damage his or her self-image" (Kreutel, 2007: 3). Therefore, in conversation, agreement tends to be more desirable. Nonetheless, it is impossible to always agree with others when inside one is not thinking

the same way. In reality, people cannot agree with everything all the time, but when disagreement is uttered, it is supposed to be accompanied with strategies to soften the utterances.

Politeness strategies are, therefore, in need when wanting to express disagreement. However, it is not easy to disagree with someone politely even in one's own first language. It is even harder when a non-native speaker has to disagree in second or foreign language. English native speakers seem to have advantage over EFL learners in this respect, since they can intuitively disagree politely when they want (Kreutel, 2007). In addition, non-native speakers tend to lack politeness strategies in their disagreeing utterances and use impolite expressions instead (Kreutel, 2007). For example, in a situation when a teacher says a paper was not handed in on time, some ESL learners answered with utterances considered to be in impolite manner which are "What the hell?" and "Are you crazy?" (Kreutel, 2007). These disagreement expressions are inappropriate to be used with a professor. The speakers may be considered bad-mannered and, consequently, their arguments with regard to the matter discussed in the conversation can be rejected.

Especially in workplace situations where disagreement normally occurs, the lack of politeness strategies in disagreements of the EFL users may lead to even more serious problems and can turn out to be obstacles and failure in their career. When working toward the best interest of the company or customers, it is normal that colleagues see advantages and disadvantages differently. Avoiding disagreement can possibly bring loss to the company. Finding ways to disagree politely is not easy for EFL learners, since learners may be undecided and not accustomed to what to say to soften the counter opinion. An example can be seen in the study on politeness strategies used to disagree in the workplace by Nakajima (1997). In the situation where Japanese employees found out that their boss' new plan was clearly wrong, many of them chose to give only a hint by responding "I will bring the previous file which was the same type of plan" and "I tried this plan. I will bring the file now". This can be construed that the respondents could not achieve in acting professionally in the workplace, since it might be better if they could save time by responding directly, discussing, and working on proposing a new plan instead of redoing the unsuccessful plan. The lack of politeness strategies to disagree in this case may cause a waste of time and perhaps money to the company. It is, therefore, interesting to investigate, under the Thai context, to see how Thai EFL learners or Thai employees using English as a foreign language in the workplace vary their politeness strategies when they utter disagreement expressions.

Objective

The objective of this study was to investigate the use of politeness strategies in disagreements among Thai EFL learners in workplace contexts.

Research Methodology

Population and participants

Forty Thai EFL learners and 10 native speakers of English participated in this study. Both groups consisted of adults who were employees of companies in Thailand. The Thai EFL learners' English proficiency was in intermediate to advanced level. They were enrolled in English courses provided by their employers or at their own expenses, starting in 2011 or 2012. Among the group of native speakers, 6 were from the United States of America, 3 from the United Kingdom, and 1 from Australia.

Research Instrument

The research instrument for the current study was Discourse Completion Test, or currently called Discourse Completion Task (DCT). DCT is a paper-based data collection material which includes hypothetical situations for the participants to respond to. At the end of each given situation in a DCT, a prompt or a conversation turn which belongs to a previous speaker is provided to which participants are asked to respond imagining they are in that particular situation (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1993). Participants are asked to write responses that they would say in the DCT.

Table 1 Workplace contexts of the 12 situations in the DCT

Contexts	Situation No.
Equal status (colleague) – light	1. Disagreeing on choosing a hotel for an event
	5. Disagreeing on working on Saturdays
	9. Disagreeing on choosing location for staff outing
Equal status (colleague) – serious	2. Disagreeing on selecting promotional campaign
	6. Disagreeing on acquiring office equipment
	10. Disagreeing on using mobile phones in workplace
Higher status (boss) – light	3. Disagreeing on hiring a new employee
	7. Disagreeing on means to send Season's Greetings
	11. Disagreeing on promoting an employee
Higher status (boss) – serious	4. Disagreeing on choosing subcontracting company
	8. Disagreeing on buying furniture for office redecoration
	12. Disagreeing on means to send leave request

Table 1 shows the contexts of 12 hypothetical situations in the DCT that are likely to happen in the workplace, 6 of which the participants had to disagree with a person of equal status (colleague) and 6 to a person of higher status (boss). In each interlocutor that the participants had to respond to, 3 were light situations in which the participants were in one-on-one conversations with the interlocutor, and 3 were serious situations in which the participants were in meeting rooms with the interlocutor along with other co-workers. The one-on-one conversations were labeled "light situations" because in these circumstances, there were only the speaker and the

hearer, and the participants were likely to try to save the positive face of only the hearer by softening their disagreement FTAs in order to make the hearer feel that his/her opinions were accepted. On the other hand, the interactions in meeting rooms were labeled “serious situations” because the participants were expected to express their disagreements to the hearer in front of other people in the meeting rooms who were paying attention to the conversation. Hence, in these circumstances, the participants, or the speakers, were supposed to save both the positive face of the hearer and their own in the presence of other meeting attendants. In these serious situations, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), the speaker can harm his/her own positive face by doing “self-contradicting” act by performing an action that is contrast to his/her desire. Thus, in disagreeing, the speaker can try to save his/her own face by trying to stand his/her ground and not surrendering to the previous speaker (hearer)’s opposite opinion. All of the situations in the DCT were aimed at discussions toward the benefits of the workplace.

Data collection

The DCT for this survey study was randomly distributed by hand and email to the 40 Thai EFL learners who were employees in companies in Thailand and had been taking English courses starting in 2011 or 2012. It was also randomly distributed via email to the 10 native speakers. The data collection took place in April 2012.

Data analysis

The data were analyzed in two steps. First, following Kreutel’s (2007) study, responses that expressed agreement instead of disagreement were discarded. Responses that the participants opted out (“message abandonment”) were also discarded since a disagreement speech act did not occur in this case. The second step was to analyze the quantitative and qualitative data of the disagreement responses based on the desirable and undesirable features adapted from Kreutel’s (2007) study. Each pragmatics token or thought group that occurs in each response was coded and counted to determine the total numbers of pragmatics token that indicate desirable and undesirable features.

The desirable features are politeness strategies or mitigational devices that are preferred in voicing disagreements in order to make them sound more polite. Each pragmatics token in the data was coded according to Kreutel’s following desirable features.

The first desirable feature is token agreement in which the speaker starts out their disagreeing expression as if they agreed and then voicing their opposite opinions afterward. Examples of token agreement in Kreutel’s (2007) study are: “I thought the same thing, but...”; “It’s alright/okay, but...”; “I like your idea, but...”; “That sounds good/like a nice idea, but...” The following is an example of token agreement (in italics) from the current study.

Situation 1 Opposite opinion to colleague in one-on-one conversation on choosing a

hotel for an event

NNS: Well, *I agree*

that it’s convenient, but I think it would be easier to hold it at our

conference room. It's cost-saving and...it's easier for us to prepare for the event.

Therefore, *I agree that it's convenient, but I think it would be easier to hold it at our conference room* is coded as "token agreement" and counted as 1 item of pragmatics token (which indicates token agreement).

The second desirable feature is hedge which softens or delays the disagreement FTAs. Hedges include modal verbs such as *may, might, could* and *would* (Brown and Levinson, 1987), and hesitating or pausing (Pomerantz, 1984; Locher, 2004). Examples of hedges found in Kreutel's (2007) study are: *I think/I thought, maybe, I'm (pretty) sure, and well*. Below is an example of hedge (in italics) from the current study.

Situation 6 Opposite opinion to colleague in the meeting on acquiring photocopy machine

NNS: *I think* rent a new one will bring us more convenience and save cost per year with free maintenance.

In the above response, *I think* is coded as "hedge" and counted as 1 item of pragmatics token that represents hedge.

The third desirable feature is request for clarification in which the speaker asks the previous speaker to clarify his/her statement in order to buy time or delay his/her disagreement speech act. In Kreutel's (2007) findings, samples of requests for clarification are "Really?" and "Are you sure?" Below is an example of request for clarification from the current study (in italics). The below response is counted as 1 item of pragmatics token which represents request for clarification.

Situation 12 Opposite opinion to boss in the meeting on means to send leave request

NNS: *Why do you think that sending a leave request by email would cause confusion?*

The fourth desirable feature is explanation in which the speaker chooses to give reasons to support his/her opposite opinions instead of directly confronting the hearer with disagreement expressions. Below are examples of explanations from the current study (in italics). In this sample response, *the cost is lower if calculated on a yearly basis* and *the maintenance is free of charge* are coded as explanation and counted as 2 items of pragmatics token (that indicate explanation.)

Situation 6 Opposite opinion to colleague in the meeting on acquiring photocopy machine

NNS: I think it's better to rent the new one because *the cost is lower if calculated on a yearly basis*, and *the maintenance is free of charge*.

The fifth desirable feature is expression of regret in which the speaker utters in his/her disagreement expression to avoid conflict and show respect toward the previous speaker. The term that is commonly used is *I'm*

sorry (Kreutel, 2007). In this study, *I'm sorry* is coded as expression of regret and counted as 1 item of pragmatics token that expresses regret. The following is an example from the current study.

Situation 3 Opposite opinion to boss in one-on-one conversation on hiring a new employee

NNS: Well, *I'm sorry* but I have seen her CV before. Are you sure that she will not change her mind too short with our company again?

The sixth desirable feature is positive remark. Positive remark makes the hearer feel that his/her opinion is accepted or appreciated, and, hence, mitigates the threat of the disagreement FTAs. Below is an example of positive remark in the current study (in italics). In this response, *That would be so cool!* is coded as positive remark and counted as 1 item of pragmatics token that represents this feature.

Situation 9 Opposite opinion to colleague in one-on-one conversation on choosing location for staff outing

NS: *That would be so cool!* But we can only go by bus, I think Bangkok is the more practical place.

The last desirable feature is suggestion. Suggestion helps soften the disagreement FTAs by solving or concealing the opposite opinion. Below is an example of suggestion found in the current study (in italics). This response is counted as 1 item of pragmatics token that represents suggestion.

Situation 8 Opposite opinion to boss in the meeting on buying furniture for office redecoration

NS: *What do you think about only changing the furniture that is in bad condition?*

The undesirable features are dispreferred devices that the speaker uses to voice disagreement, and they make disagreement expressions sound harsh or impolite. The undesirable features that each pragmatics token in the current study was coded were 1) *I disagree/I don't agree*, 2) *No*, and 3) exclamation of indignation. Since *I disagree* and *I don't agree* represent the same intention of speaker, in this study, they are combined into one undesirable feature as in 1). Thus, each pragmatics token that includes either *I disagree* or *I don't agree* is coded as *I disagree/I don't agree* and counted as 1 item. Likewise, each *No* is counted as 1 item of pragmatics token that represents *No*. The last undesirable feature is exclamation of indignation in which the speaker responds to the previous speaker's opposite opinion with a sudden cry or remark of anger that shows displeasure or annoyance. Examples of exclamations of indignation are "What?"; "Oh my god!"; "What the hell!"; "Bullshit!" (Kreutel, 2007). Therefore, "What the hell!" is coded as exclamation of indignation and counted as 1 item of pragmatics token that represents the feature.

In addition, blunt statement of the opposite (Kreutel, 2007) in which the speaker directly responses with his/her contrast opinions to the previous speaker's opposite point of view, does not contain a feature identifying desirable or undesirable device, so, in this study, it was not calculated to determine the total numbers of pragmatics token that represent desirable or undesirable features used in the participants' disagreement responses. However, since blunt statement of the opposite is considered impolite (Kreutel, 2007), in the analysis to determine the numbers of pragmatics token that the participants used at the beginning of their responses, it was included to show how the participants started their disagreement expressions. Therefore, blunt statement of the opposite was counted only to investigate how participants started their disagreement responses, but not to examine the pragmatics token items that represent desirable and undesirable features.

In this second step of data analysis, the numbers of pragmatics token that represent desirable and undesirable features found among the Thai EFL learners were examined and compared (in percentage) to those of the native speakers. They were also examined and compared (in percentage) among the four workplace contexts: light situations with colleague, serious situations with colleague, light situations with boss, and serious situations with boss, and also compared to the native speakers'.

Results

According to the 479 out of 480 responses (12 situations times 40 participants) that indicated disagreement given by the Thai EFL learners or non-native speakers (NNS), it was found that the participants produced a total of 1,397 items of pragmatics token that represent desirable features, namely, token agreement, hedges, requests for clarification, explanations, expressions of regret, positive remarks, and suggestions, and undesirable features, namely, /disagree/I don't agree, No, and exclamation of indignation. Besides, the 10 native speaker participants gave 110 out of 120 responses (12 situations times 10 participants) that voiced disagreement, and consequently it was found that they produced a total of 422 items of pragmatics token that represent the aforementioned desirable and undesirable features.

Figure 1 Distribution of pragmatics token representing desirable and undesirable features of all 12 situations

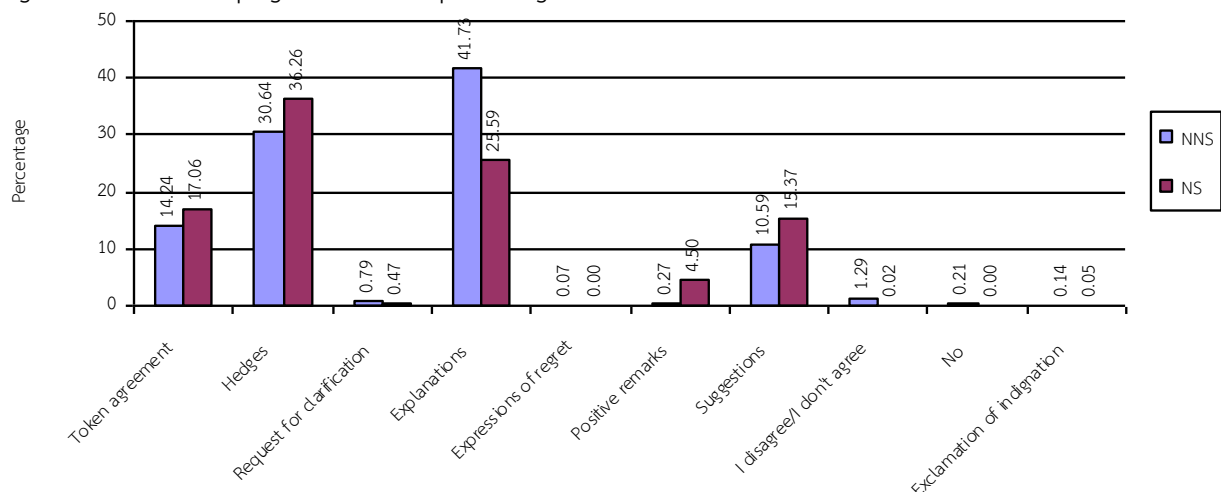


Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of pragmatics token that represents desirable and undesirable features of all of the 12 situations. It was found that among the non-native speakers' group, the most frequently used mitigating or desirable feature was explanations, with hedges being second, and token agreement being third. For the native speakers' group, the most frequently used desirable feature was hedges, with explanations being second, and token agreement being third. In the distribution of pragmatics token that represent impolite, undesirable features among the non-native speakers, the most frequently found feature was *I disagree/ I don't agree*. The second most frequently found undesirable feature was *No*, and the third was exclamation of indignation. Whereas in the native speakers' group, exclamation of indignation was most frequently used, the second being *I disagree/ I don't agree*. None of the native speakers uttered *No* to voice their disagreements.

Table 2 Overall distribution of pragmatics token representing desirable and undesirable features in 4 workplace contexts

Context	Desirable features		Undesirable features	
	NNS	NS	NNS	NS
Equal status (colleague) – light	97.81%	98.35%	2.19%	1.66%
Equal status (colleague) – serious	98.13%	100%	1.87%	0%
Higher status (boss) – light	98.96%	100%	1.04%	0%
Higher status (boss) – serious	98.46%	99.05%	1.54%	0.95%
All four contexts	98.35%	99.29%	1.65%	0.71%

Table 2 shows the overall distribution of the pragmatics token that represents polite or desirable features and undesirable features occurring in each of the 4 workplace contexts. In the first context of the light situations in which the participants had to disagree with colleague in one-on-one conversation, the non-native speakers employed desirable features slightly less frequently than the native speakers. They also used desirable features less frequently than the native speakers in the second context of the serious situations in which the participants had to disagree with colleague in the meeting. Interestingly, 100% of the native speakers employed desirable features in this context and also in the third context of the light situations in which the participants had to disagree with boss in one-on-one conversation. In the third context, the non-native speakers employed desirable features less frequently than the native speakers. In the last context of the serious situations in which the participants had to disagree with boss in the meeting, the native speakers also used desirable features slightly more frequently than the non-native speakers.

Table 2 also indicates the overall distribution of the pragmatics token that represents desirable and undesirable features of the disagreement responses in the 12 situations (4 contexts) by the participants. It was found that the non-native speakers employed desirable features slightly less frequently than the native speakers by 0.94%.

Also, they employed undesirable features slightly more than the native speakers by 0.94%. However, these numbers are too small to indicate a significant difference.

Figure 2 Distribution of pragmatics token representing desirable and undesirable features as well as blunt statements of the opposite at the beginning of disagreement responses in all 12 situations

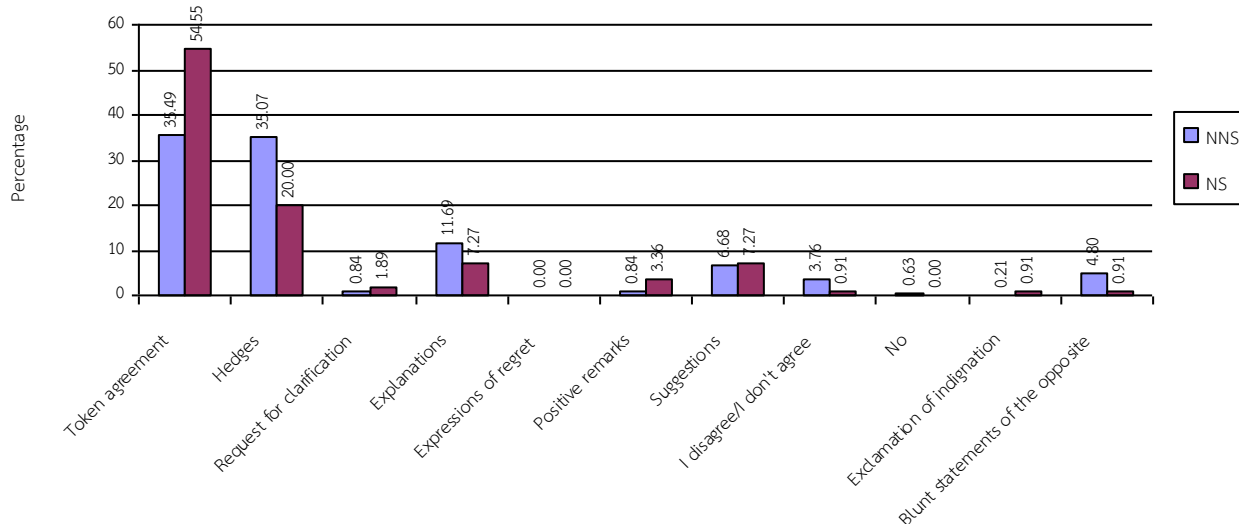


Figure 2 shows the distribution of pragmatics token representing desirable and undesirable features as well as blunt statements produced at the beginning of disagreement responses in all 12 situations. The findings indicated that the non-native speakers' mostly started their disagreement responses with token agreement, hedges, explanations, and suggestions, respectively. Similarly for the native speakers' group, the most frequently used desirable feature to start disagreement responses was token agreement, with hedges being second, and explanations and suggestions being third. It is obvious that the non-native speakers used token agreement to start their disagreements less frequently than the native speakers and used hedges more frequently. Interestingly, none of the participants started their disagreement responses with expression of regret. In the distribution of pragmatics token that represents impolite, undesirable features, at the beginning of the responses, the non-native speakers most frequently used *I disagree/ don't agree* and *No*, respectively. They also used blunt statements of the opposite relatively more than the two mentioned undesirable features. The non-native speakers were likely to start their disagreement expressions with impolite, undesirable features more frequently than the native speakers.

Discussion

This study was aimed to investigate the use of politeness strategies in disagreements among Thai EFL learners in workplace contexts. The findings respond to the objective of the study in four following aspects.

First of all, in the aspect of the distribution of the use of pragmatics token or thought group that represents politeness strategies (desirable features) at the beginning of Thai EFL learners' disagreement responses, the findings indicated that Thai EFL learners mostly start their disagreement responses with token agreement, hedges, explanations,

and suggestions, respectively, and similarly, native speakers also most frequently use token agreement to start their disagreement responses, with hedges being second, and explanations and suggestions being third. Remarkably, none of the participants started their disagreement responses with expression of regret. It may be summed that Thai EFL learners tend to frequently use the same desirable features as native speakers to start their disagreement responses. However, it was found that Thai EFL learners use *I disagree/I don't agree* and *No*, respectively, more than native speakers to start their disagreements.

The findings in this study also interestingly showed that Thai EFL learners tend to use blunt statements of the opposite to start off their disagreeing utterances relatively more frequently than native speakers. Blunt statement of the opposite or blunt opposite occurs every time that “lacking of initial mitigation” occurs. The following are examples of blunt opposites (in italics) occurring in “lacking of initial mitigation” by both groups of participants from the current study.

Situation 6 Opposite opinion to colleague in the meeting on acquiring office equipment

Pattern 1: Blunt opposite + mitigation

NS: *Hiring is better* because you get free maintenance.

Situation 9 Opposite opinion to colleague in one-on-one conversation on choosing
location for staff outing

Pattern 2: No + blunt opposite + mitigation

NNS: No. *We cannot go to Chiang Mai* because company allows transportation by
bus only, so we should go a place near Bangkok instead.

It can be concluded that Thai EFL learners are likely to start off their disagreements with impolite devices more frequently than native speakers. When disagreeing, they tend to perform face threatening acts or FTAs (Brown and Levinson, 1987) by starting their statements of contradicting opinions with impolite features or blunt statements of the opposite, and these FTAs harm the positive face of the hearer by rejecting or not accepting their point of view.

Secondly, in the aspect of the overall distribution of pragmatics token that represent politeness strategies (desirable features) and undesirable features by Thai EFL learners, the findings reveal that, when disagreeing in workplace contexts, Thai EFL learners tend to use desirable features slightly less than English native speakers and employ undesirable features slightly more than the native speakers. The study shows that Thai EFL learners employ all undesirable features investigated in the current study which are *I disagree/I don't agree*, *No*, and exclamation of indignation while native speakers use only *I disagree/I don't agree* and exclamation of indignation, and at a lower frequency.

One possible conclusion is that Thai EFL learners are unlikely to have advantage over English native speakers in using politeness strategies to voice their disagreements in workplace contexts. This finding is in line with Kreutel's (2007) study, but the difference of the frequency of the use of politeness strategies between Thai EFL learners and native

speakers in the current study is not significant like that in Kreutel's study. The finding also supports García (1989)'s study of "stylistic devices or linguistics choices" in disagreeing and requesting that the non-native speakers' responses were found more impolite than those of the native speakers when disagreeing.

Thirdly, in the aspect of the distribution of pragmatics token which represents desirable and undesirable features used by Thai EFL learners in workplace contexts, it was found that Thai EFL learners mostly use explanations, hedges, and token agreement respectively, to politely express their disagreements; whereas, native speakers mostly use hedges, explanations, and token agreement respectively.

This can be concluded that most of the time in workplace contexts, Thai EFL learners tend to make their disagreement expressions sound more polite by using explanations in order to lessen the threat of the disagreement FTAs. Unlike native speakers who mostly use hedges, Thai EFL learners are more likely to explain to voice their disagreements in the workplace. The findings indicate that the disagreement responses by the Thai EFL learners contain the majority (41.73%) of pragmatics token items that represent explanation. This finding is similar to García (1989)'s in which non-native speakers tend to give reasons most frequently to express their disagreements. It can be said that Thai EFL learners politely disagree with co-workers by explaining because they would like to act professionally in their career by demonstrating their opposite opinions with reason. The findings of the distribution of desirable features in the current study are not similar to Kreutel's (2007) in which she found that the three most frequently used desirable features are the same among non-native speakers and native speakers.

In the distribution of pragmatics token that represents impolite, undesirable features used among Thai EFL learners, *I disagree/I don't agree* was most frequently used. This feature was found used by Thai EFL learners in all of the four contexts: with colleague in one-on-one conversation; with colleague in the meeting; with boss in one-on-one conversation; and with boss in the meeting. Unlike among native speakers, this feature was used only in the context with colleague in one-on-one conversation.

Thai EFL learners also employ the undesirable features of *No* and exclamation of indignation to express their disagreements. On the other hand, native speakers do not utter *No* to state their opposite opinions. However, they slightly use *I disagree/I don't agree* and exclamation of indignation to voice disagreements.

It was also found that in disagreeing, Thai EFL learners lack initial mitigations considerably more than native speakers. It can be concluded that when disagreeing in workplace contexts, Thai EFL learners are likely to impolitely express their opposed opinions mostly by saying *I disagree* or *I don't agree*. They also tend to voice their disagreements impolitely with blunt statements of the opposite opinions without starting their utterances with mitigation.

The last aspect concerns the distribution of pragmatics token that represents desirable and undesirable features found used by Thai EFL learners in the 4 workplace contexts: 1) with colleague in one-on-one conversation, 2) with colleague in the meeting, 3) with boss in one-on-one conversation, and 4) with boss in the meeting. It was discovered that,

to disagree with colleague in one-on-one conversation, Thai EFL learners employ desirable features slightly less frequently than native speakers and use undesirable features slightly more frequently than native speakers. Interestingly in this context, it was found that */disagree/ don't agree* is used by both Thai EFL learners and native speakers to voice disagreements to their colleagues.

In the second context that Thai EFL learners have to disagree with colleague in serious situations such as in meeting, i.e. with the presence of other colleagues, they tend to voice their disagreements with less desirable features than the native speakers. Interestingly, it was found that one hundred percent of the native speakers' disagreement responses employ desirable features in this context while Thai EFL learners still use undesirable features, namely, */disagree/ don't agree* and exclamation of indignation.

Also, in the third context of the light situations in which the participants have to disagree with boss in one-on-one conversation, one hundred percent of the native speakers' responses contain desirable features while Thai EFL learners use less desirable features. Even disagreeing with boss, Thai EFL learners in this context still tend to impolitely use */disagree/ don't agree* feature. It is also noteworthy that expression of regret only occurs in this context and is used only by Thai EFL learners.

It is clear that in the second and third contexts, native speakers tend to be able to use politeness strategies to voice their disagreements all the time, unlike Thai EFL learners.

In the last context in which Thai EFL learners have to disagree with boss in the meeting, it was also found that they use desirable features slightly less frequently than native speakers and use undesirable features slightly more frequently than native speakers. Interestingly, when having to disagree with boss in front of other colleagues, Thai EFL learners still use */disagree/ don't agree* to voice their disagreements.

Related to one of Brown and Levinson's (1987) sociological factors which is power status, the findings suggest that Thai EFL learners tend to be more polite in disagreeing with people of higher status (boss) than with people of equal status (colleague). The findings are similar to the previous study by Behnam and Niroomand (2011) in which EFL learners employ more politeness strategies in disagreeing to higher power people than to people of equal and lower power. Therefore, when expressing disagreement, Thai EFL learners are likely to pay attention to the power status of their interlocutors and employ politeness strategies accordingly.

In addition, when disagreeing with people of higher status, Thai EFL learners in the workplace also tend to employ politeness strategies in one-on-one conversation slightly more than in the meeting with the presence of other colleagues. Following Holmes and Stubbe's (2003) claim that workplace talk is likely to be similar or different according to the actual contexts that the conversation takes place, the distribution of politeness strategies by Thai EFL learners tend to be slightly different in the four workplace contexts. Among Thai EFL learners in the first three contexts, the frequency of the use of desirable features slightly increases respectively. However, it slightly drops in the last context in which Thai EFL

learners have to disagree with boss in the meeting. The reason behind this could be that in business meetings, Thai EFL learners not only try to save the face of their boss by disagreeing politely, but also try to save their own face in front of other colleagues present at the meeting by not appearing to be too polite. Hence, they seem to use lesser politeness strategies in disagreements in order to show the public that they are standing their ground and not succumbing to the higher power.

Teaching Implications

The findings in the current study suggest the following implications for language classroom or language training for Thai EFL learners in the workplace.

First of all, from the fact that the Thai EFL learners in the study employed more impolite or undesirable features than the native speakers, it shows that they are unlikely to always be polite when expressing opposed opinions to their co-workers in English. Especially when they have to voice their disagreements to their native English-speaking colleagues, they may sound impolite and lose their ground. Politeness strategies, or in this case, desirable features, for disagreement should be added to the course design of English language training to enable EFL learners to disagree politely when they want to.

Secondly, more attention should be paid to the undesirable features mostly used by the Thai EFL learners in the current study. It should be emphasized in English language training that *I don't agree*, *I disagree*, and *No* are not desirable to the hearer, and that by using these undesirable features, EFL learners are likely to humiliate their interlocutors by harming their face. In the case of the lack of initial mitigation, Thai EFL learners should be exposed to the fact that in order to speak politely, they should be taught how to start their disagreement expressions with mitigating devices instead of putting them at the end after their contrastive opinions.

Lastly, in order for workplace talk to create team and preserve the workplace enterprise (Fletcher, 1999), instruction of speech act of disagreement should be included in English language training in the workplace or for English course for working adults. It is essential for people in the workplace to communicate professionally in order to maintain the good teamwork and to protect the benefits of the organization. Therefore, it is important that they know how to disagree politely to maintain the good relationship with co-workers and to achieve their communication goal which is for the benefits of the workplace.

Recommendations for Further Study

For data to be more authentic in the context of workplace, a further study of the use of politeness strategies in disagreements should be conducted by means of tape recording of real situations such as in meetings or everyday discussions. Moreover, there will be a wider range of information if qualitative data like random interview or forced group interview is carried out. Additionally, apart from power status, it would also be interesting to examine the use of politeness

strategies with regard to the other two of Brown and Levinson's (1987) sociological factors which are social distance and ranking of imposition.

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