

Formal Language Use in Conversations among Second- Semester Students at English Education Study Program of Universitas Nias

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the use of formal language in conversations among college students semester II at English education study program of Universitas Nias. This research used comprehensive qualitative method. Data were taken from video conversations to evaluate how students apply formal language in formal situations. The results show that students begin to use formal language with respect and professionalism through the use of standard vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and correct grammar. The study also highlights the factors that influence the use of formal language, as well as the importance of practice and feedback in developing formal speaking skills and preparing students for future professional environments. By emphasizing formal language practice and providing constructive feedback, teaching can help students build competence and confidence in a variety of communication contexts.

Key words

Conversation, English education, Formal language

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INTRODUCTION

Mastering formal language is a critical aspect of language learning, particularly in an English education study program. Formal language refers to the use of grammatically correct structures, complex sentence formations, and adherence to standard conventions of vocabulary and grammar. This style of communication is essential in contexts that demand a high level of politeness and professionalism, such as academic presentations, official meetings, and formal writing.

Formal language is a cornerstone of effective communication in academic settings. College students, who are refining their understanding and application of formal language, are often required to engage in discussions, presentations, and debates where formal language is not only preferred but necessary. Ilham (2019) noted that speaking is an activity to produce language to communicate within a group or society, showcasing one's language competence. This highlights the importance of articulating thoughts in a structured and coherent manner, a major component of formal language.

The use of formal language extends beyond the classroom into professional environments. During internships, job interviews, or workplace interactions, the ability to communicate formally can significantly impact one's success. For college students, developing this skill early on prepares them for future professional scenarios, enabling them to present ideas logically, respond to questions thoughtfully, and engage in meaningful dialogue with peers and professionals.

Formal language use also demands cultural sensitivity. Different cultures have varying expectations regarding formal communication, and understanding these nuances is part of the learning curve for students. Practicing formal language helps students navigate cultural contexts, ensuring respectful and appropriate communication. This cultural competency is essential for those aspiring to work in diverse and multicultural environments.

Transitioning from informal to formal language can be challenging. It requires consistent practice and a conscious effort to adhere to the norms and conventions of formal communication. Second-semester English education students often undergo various exercises and assignments designed to improve their formal speaking skills. These activities provide necessary practice, building the confidence needed to engage in formal conversations effectively. Feedback from instructors and peers plays a crucial role in this development, helping students identify areas for improvement and strive for higher language standards.

This study focuses on second-semester students in the English language education program at Nias University. These students are in the early stages of developing more complex language skills, making this an opportune time to examine their formal language use. The English education program aims to produce graduates who are competent in teaching English, where formal language skills are crucial for effective and professional teaching. Additionally, Nias University's unique cultural and linguistic context offers valuable insights into students' formal language use.

The ability to use formal language effectively is a significant indicator of linguistic and cognitive competence. This study aims to explore the dynamics of formal language use among second-semester students at Nias University, providing relevant recommendations to enhance English language education. By emphasizing the importance of formal language and offering ample practice and feedback opportunities, educators can help students build the competence and confidence needed to excel in various communicative contexts.

Literature Review

1. Definition of Speaking

Speaking is a fundamental aspect of human communication and is a very important skill in language learning. Various experts have provided definitions and perspectives on what is meant by speaking and its significance. According to Putra (2017) speaking is also a medium through which much language is learned, including English. In the other hand, according to Altun & Hussein (2022) in Riswan (2022), speaking is the ability to speak fluently and presupposes not only knowledge of language features, but also the ability to process information and language. Speaking is the way of presenting information to tell a story, describing something, giving a set of instruction, making comparison and those that are evaluate, giving explanation, making a justification, predicting, coming to a decision and making interview. Riswan (2022) also stated that speaking is the process of transferring, conveying, transmitting or responding the information to others. To speak is not merely uttering a sequence of words in their correct pronunciation. One is said to be a good speaker provided he manages to deliver what is in his mind well and to make his audience understand him/her. This implies that speaking includes the articulation of words and the successful conveyance of ideas. Expanding on this, Al- Jarf (2012) in Hakim (2019) says that speaking is an oral ability to achieve pragmatic goals through interactive discourse with other speakers of the same language. Speaking is a form of communication to interact with people orally. In speaking people are expected to be able to communicate their ideas, feelings, and opinions. The goal is for participants to create a comfortable social interaction and communicate well. Speaking includes supporting competencies such as grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, and the content of the speaking itself (Pratiwi, Suryani, & Suarnajaya, 2020 in Nuridzdzati & Akhiriyah, 2023).

In addition, speaking serves as the primary means of expressing ideas, feelings, and opinions. In a variety of contexts, ranging from casual conversations to formal presentations, speaking allows individuals to share thoughts and engage in meaningful exchanges. This ability to communicate orally is essential for creating comfortable social interactions and building relationships. Effective speaking skills allow one to navigate different social situations, resolve conflicts, and collaborate with others. The importance of speaking lies in its ability to foster relationships and understanding between people. In conclusion, speaking is a multifaceted skill that is

more than just pronunciation and word production. It involves the ability to articulate thoughts clearly and engage in interactive discourse to achieve communication goals. As noted by Putra (2017) and Al-Jarf (2012) in Hakim (2019), speaking is essential for language learning and social interaction, allowing individuals to express themselves and connect with others effectively. Developing strong speaking skills is essential for successful communication and fostering positive relationships in both personal and professional contexts.

2. Formal Language

Formal language, as defined by Govindaraj (2012) in Muslimawati (2022) defined formal language as combined symbols that were categorized by rules of construction. The rules were developed to structure the grammatical language to construct formal language. Formal language is used in contexts where clarity, precision, and professionalism are essential. It ensures that communication is clear and understood by all parties involved. The characteristics of formal language according to Nasucha, et al (2009) in Rabiah (2016), namely: (1) using grammatical elements explicitly and consistently; (2) using affixes completely; (3) using official pronouns; (4) using standard words; (5) using refined spelling; and (6) avoiding regional elements. These characteristics form the foundation of formal language, which distinguishes it from informal language that often lacks rigor and precision. Formal language ensures that communication is not only clear but also professional and respectful.

Formal language can be identified through several key features. First, it uses standardized and precise vocabulary. Words such as "use", "initiate", and "ask" are commonly used in formal contexts to convey clarity and specificity. Second, formal language often uses complex sentence structures. Sentences are generally longer and incorporate a variety of conjunctions and structures, thus increasing the richness and depth of communication. For example, a formal request may be phrased with the sentence, "I would appreciate it if you could submit the assignment on time," which highlights the complexity and politeness of the language. In addition, formal language follows standardized and correct grammar rules, avoiding grammatical errors such as improper verbs, incomplete sentences, and incorrect prepositions. An example would be, "The students were discussing the importance of effective communication skills." Additionally, formal language maintains an objective and professional tone, ensuring that communication remains unbiased and respectful. This can be seen in statements such as, "In my opinion, the new teaching method is more effective." Finally, formal language uses formal and polite wording, which is essential for showing respect to the other person. A common example is, "I would like to request an extension of time for my assignment." These features collectively ensure that formal language remains an important tool in professional and academic settings.

3. Formal Conversation

Formal conversation is an interactive and spontaneous form of communication between two or more people. The purpose of formal conversations can be very diverse and include exchanging information, expressing emotions, building relationships, or simply enjoying social interaction by using politeness word. According to Anisah (2018) Conversation is an oral language activity or event between two or more speakers who provide information to each other and maintain a good relationship.

There are four types of conversations:

- 1) *Debate* is a competitive, two-way conversation. The goal is to win an argument or convince someone, such as the other participant or third-party observers.

For example:

A: "I believe that climate change is primarily caused by human activities, and we need to implement strict environmental regulations to combat it."

B: " I am afraid but I disagree about your statement. I think the evidence for human-caused climate change is not conclusive, and imposing strict regulations would harm our economy more than it would help the environment."

- 2) *Dialogue* is a cooperative, two-way conversation. The goal is for participants to exchange information and build relationships with one another.

For example:

A: "I've noticed that you always bring your own lunch. Do you have any favorite recipes?"

B: "Yes, I love making quinoa salad with fresh vegetables. It's healthy and easy to prepare. How about you? Do you have a favorite dish?"

- 3) *Discourse* is a cooperative, one-way conversation. The goal to deliver information from the speaker/writer to the listeners/readers.

For example:

Speaker: "Good evening, everyone. Today, I am going to talk about the impact of technology on modern education. Over the past decade, technology has revolutionized the way we teach and learn, providing access to vast amounts of information and new educational tools."

- 4) *Diatribes* is a competitive, one-way conversation. The goal is to express emotions, browbeat those that disagree with you, and/or inspires those that share the same perspective.

For example:

Speaker: "It's outrageous how people still deny climate change despite overwhelming scientific evidence! These deniers are not just ignorant; they are actively harming our planet and future generations. It's time we stand up and call out their negligence!"

4. Factors of formal language use

The use of formal language is influenced by various important factors that affect the effectiveness and accuracy of communication. Its Factors are the need to maintain politeness, express respect for the interlocutor, or uphold professionalism greatly influence the choice of language style. Communication contexts includes academic conferences, business meetings, or official ceremonies, demand the use of more formal language to show seriousness and professionalism, in contrast to casual situations such as family gatherings or social events where informal language is more likely to be used. The purpose of the conversation, whether to inform, convince, request or negotiate, also determines the level of formality used. Cultural norms and social expectations play an important role, especially in cultures with a strong social hierarchy structure where formal language is used to show respect. Inter-speaker relationships, such as interactions with superiors or elders, usually require formal language, while conversations with peers or family are more casual.

The educational and professional background of individuals, especially those working in professions that value precision and professionalism such as law and medicine, tend to use formal language more often. The medium of communication, both spoken and written, affects the level of formality, with written communication such as official documents and emails requiring higher formality. The characteristics of the audience, such as their expectations and status, also influence the speaker's choice of language to ensure clarity and respect. Individuals' personal preferences and habits in communication as well as legal and institutional requirements in certain contexts such as legal proceedings and academic submissions also play an important role in the use of formal language. By understanding all these factors, one can customize the use of formal language according to the situation and needs, ensuring effective and appropriate communication in a variety of social and professional environments.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a comprehensive qualitative method to understand the nuances and complexities of formal language use among college students at English study program in their conversation. According to Ezer et al. (2021), qualitative research involves examining certain cases and events in depth in their natural environments using qualitative data collection tools, following a qualitative process to understand the perceptions and experiences of individuals. According to Bogdan & Biklen (2007) in Wahab & Iskandar (2020) also say that a qualitative research is a study aimed at describing and analyzing phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts of people, individually or in groups. With this approach, researchers can capture the dynamics of complex social interactions and gain richer insights into how students use formal language. For example, analyzing videos of students' conversations can reveal how they adjust their use of formal language in academic versus informal situations, as well as how they respond to feedback from lecturers and peers. This method involved collecting and analyzing non-numerical data,

namely by observing videos of conversations, to get a sense of what formal language is used in different contexts. Those were reasons of choosing qualitative method in this study.

According to Milles and Huberman in Wandu (2013), the stages of data processing are data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In this study, data were collected through video observations of conversations made by second semester students in the English Education study program at Nias University. Observations were made to capture the use of formal language in various conversational contexts. In addition to observation, interviews were also conducted with students to understand the reasons behind the use of formal language in their conversations. These interviews helped to explore students' perceptions and experiences related to communication ethics and the use of formal language. After the data was collected, the next step was data reduction. Data reduction involves the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the rough data that emerges from field notes. In the context of this study, data reduction involved coding conversations from videos and interviews to identify patterns of formal language use. For example, coding was done to determine whether formal language was used at the beginning, middle, or end of the conversation, as well as the context in which formal language was used.

Data presentation is the next step where the reduced data is organized in such a way that it allows conclusions to be drawn. Data from this study can be presented in the form of tables, matrices, or narratives that describe the patterns of formal language use by students. For example, a table showing the number of students who use formal language at the beginning, middle, and end of the conversation, as well as direct quotes from the conversation to provide a clearer context. The final stage is conclusion drawing and verification. Initial conclusions may still be tentative and need to be verified with further data or through triangulation. In this study, the conclusions drawn could include students' understanding of the importance of formal language in academic contexts, the factors that influence formal language use, as well as the implications of these findings for language teaching and training. For example, the finding that most students use formal language only at the beginning of a conversation could lead to recommendations to increase awareness and consistency of formal language use throughout academic interactions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Result of Observation

Based on the observation got from the formal conversation done by the college student's semester II at English education study program of Universitas Nias. So, for patterns as follows:

a) Used of formal language at the beginning of a conversation

From the data obtained on formal language conversations conducted by 30 college students semester II at English Education study program of Universitas Nias,

it was found that there were 4 students who used formal language only at the beginning of the conversation. The sentences that they often use are as follows:

Conversation Part 1 "Asking Permission"

MPZ : *Excuse me, Miss. Good morning.*

AG : *Good morning, what can I do for you?*

MPZ : *I'm sorry for coming late to the classroom.*

From the data above, the researcher found that students tend to use formal language in formal situations, such as asking permission to the teacher in the classroom. However, this use of formal language tends to be limited to the beginning of the conversation only, and then changes to be more informal or direct. This observation shows a pattern of language use that indicates students' understanding of the importance of starting conversations politely and formally, especially in contexts that require respect for authority such as in the classroom. However, after the initial request, they may feel more comfortable or rushed, resulting in less formal language use. This finding can serve as a basis to further educate students on the importance of consistency in the use of formal language, not only at the beginning of a conversation but also throughout interactions in formal situations. Thus, they can develop better communication skills that are appropriate for social and academic contexts.

b) Use of formal language in the beginning to middle of the conversation

From the data obtained on formal language conversations conducted by 30 college students semester II at English Education study program of Universitas Nias, it was found that there were 14 students who used formal language from the beginning to the middle of the conversation. The sentences they often use are as follows:

Conversation Part 2 "Asking Permission"

MW : *"Excuse me, Miss."*

MSZ : *"Yes, come in and please sit down."*

MW : *"I would like to consult about my project, Miss."*

MSZ : *"Let me check it for you."*

MW : *"Here it is, Miss."*

From the data above, the researcher found that students tend to use formal language consistently from the beginning to the middle of the conversation in formal situations, such as asking permission to teachers, registering as new students, or consulting about academic projects. This consistent use of formal language shows a good understanding of the importance of polite communication etiquette in formal interactions. This observation shows that university students have a high awareness of the importance of maintaining formality in conversations involving authority or academic situations. They understand that the use of formal language is not only important at the beginning of a conversation but should also be maintained until the interaction is over, to show respect and professionalism.

c) Use of formal language at the end of a conversation

From the data obtained on formal language conversations conducted by 30 college student's semester II at English Education study program of Universitas Nias, it was found that there were 2 students who used formal language only at the end of the conversation. The sentences they often use are as follows:

Conversation Part 3 "Giving Opinion"

ERL : "In my opinion"

FSH : "Thank you for your opinion, Miss."

From the data above, the researcher found that some students tend to adopt formal language only at the end of the conversation. In this case, these students use formal language when giving opinions and when accepting the opinions of others, especially in the context of classroom discussions or presentations. This use of formal language at the end of a conversation shows that students realize the importance of showing respect and politeness especially when ending an interaction, even though they may have started the conversation with more informal language.

d) Use of formal language throughout the conversation

From the data obtained on formal language conversations conducted by 30 college student's semester II at English Education study program of Universitas Nias, there were 10 students who used formal language during the conversation. The sentences they often use are as follows:

Conversation Part 4 "Asking Permission"

APL : "Excuse me, Miss."

PTW : "Yes, what can I do for you?"

APL : "May I go out for a moment?"

PTW : "Yes, please."

APL : "Thank you, Miss."

From the data obtained in the formal language conversation above, there are students who consistently used formal language during the conversation. They used formal language in situations such as asking permission to leave, consulting about assignments, registering as new students, and apologizing for lateness. Frequently used sentences included permission requests such as "Excuse me, Miss," as well as polite expressions of thanks and apologies. This consistent use of formal language reflects students' awareness of the importance of maintaining politeness and professionalism in academic contexts. It shows that students understand the norms of formal communication and strive to maintain them throughout the conversation, which is an important skill in academic and professional settings.

2. The Result of Interview

Based on the results of interviewed with students who conducted formal conversations, various factors of formal language used were found as well as reasons related to the use of formal language in various parts of the conversation. The following is a detailed explanation of the reasons behind the use of different formal languages.

- a) **Context of Formality**
Students use formal language in situations that require respect for authority, such as communicating with lecturers or in academic environments that demand professionalism. In these contexts, the use of formal language is the norm to follow to show respect and seriousness. Situations such as consultations with lecturers, presentations, or requests for permission in class are some examples where formal language is often used.
- b) **Understanding of Communication Ethics**
The used of formal language reflects students' understanding of the importance of communication ethics. They realize that starting a conversation politely and formally is a sign of respect for the party being spoken to, especially in interactions with lecturers or in other formal situations. Good communication ethics require them to show respect through the language they use, which in turn can affect the other party's perception of their seriousness and professionalism.
- c) **Convenience and Urgency**
After starting a conversation with formal language, some students switch to informal language because they feel more comfortable or because the situation is urgent. They feel that having opened the conversation politely, they can be more relaxed in their speech. This comfort often comes when students feel that the interaction no longer requires a high level of formality after the main point has been made. In addition, an urgent situation or a rush to achieve the goal of the conversation can also lead to a switch to informal language.
- d) **Consistency in Communicating**
Students who used formal language consistently throughout the conversation show a high awareness of the importance of maintaining politeness and professionalism. They strive to maintain formality in their communication to show continued respect. This consistency reflects their efforts to maintain a good self-image and demonstrates a commitment to proper communication ethics. Such students felt that maintaining formality throughout the conversation helped maintain a professional atmosphere and supported effective and polite interactions.

In interviewed with some of the students involved in the conversation, they gave various reasons for using formal language in various stages of the conversation. The following are the results of the interviews:

- a) **Using Formal Language Only at the Beginning of the Conversation**
Students who used formal language only at the beginning of the conversation revealed that they felt the need to show respect when starting an interaction with the lecturer. They argue that starting the conversation with words like “Excuse me, Miss” or “Good morning, Miss” is a way to show good etiquette and respect for the lecturer's authority. According to them, this is important to create a positive first impression and show that they respect the lecturer's authority.

However, after the initial request, they felt more comfortable talking informally as the situation was more relaxed and the lecturer seemed more open and friendly. They also added that the rush in certain situations made them switch to more direct and less formal language after the initial request. According to them, in some cases, maintaining formality throughout the conversation felt redundant and unnecessary if the situation had already turned more familiar.

- b) **Using of Formal Language from the Beginning to the Middle of the Conversation**
Students who used formal language from the beginning to the middle of the conversation explained that they did so to ensure that all their requests and explanations were taken seriously by the lecturer. According to them, maintaining formality until mid-conversation helps create a more professional atmosphere and supports constructive academic discussions. They felt that the consistent use of formal language helped maintain focus and respect throughout the interaction and helped clarify their purpose in the conversation. They added that by maintaining formality, they also felt more confident and structured in conveying their ideas. They believe that formality provides a clear and organized framework for communication, which is especially important in academic discussions and project consultations.
- c) **Using of Formal Language Only at the End of Conversation**
Students who used formal language only at the end of the conversation said that they did so to emphasize respect and courtesy, especially when giving opinions or receiving feedback from the lecturer. According to them, ending a conversation with formal language is a good way to leave a positive impression and show appreciation for the interaction that has taken place. They felt that formal language at the end of a conversation was a polite sign of closure, showing that they appreciated the time and attention given by the lecturer. They also emphasized that in presentation or class discussion situations, ending with formal language helps to strengthen their arguments and gives the impression that they are serious and professional. According to them, a formal closing is important to affirm the values they want to convey and show that they respect the communication process.
- d) **Using of Formal Language Throughout the Conversation**
Students who used formal language throughout the conversation stated that they did so because they felt it was the best way to show consistent professionalism and respect for the lecturer. They argued that maintaining formality throughout the conversation helps maintain a serious and respectful academic atmosphere. They added that by using formal language consistently, they were trying to show that they valued each academic interaction and considered it important. They also mentioned that the constant use of formal language is a reflection of the practice and habits they have built up to deal with future professional situations. They believe that by maintaining formality, they can build

a good reputation and demonstrate a commitment to high professional ethics and standards.

From these interviews, it appears that the reasons for students' use of formal language are influenced by a variety of factors, including their understanding of communication etiquette, personal convenience, and attempts to show professionalism and respect in various academic situations. Students understand that the use of formal language is an important part of polite and professional interactions, and they try to adjust its use according to the context and purpose of the conversation. These results show that students have a high awareness of the importance of formal language in academic and professional communication, as well as the ability to contextually adjust its use. Students strive to show respect and professionalism in their communication, either by maintaining formality throughout the conversation, using formal language only at the beginning or end of the conversation, or switching to informality according to situational needs. This awareness shows that they value and understand the importance of good communication etiquette in building positive and productive relationships in an academic setting.

CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the use of formal language in conversations among second-semester students in the English Education Study Program at Universitas Nias. The findings of the study revealed several key patterns in students' use of formal language: Some students used formal language only at the beginning of a conversation to show respect when initiating interaction. Others maintained formal language from the beginning to the middle of the conversation, ensuring that their requests and explanations were taken seriously. A few students adopted formal language only at the end of the conversation, especially when giving opinions or receiving feedback, to emphasize respect and courtesy. A significant portion of students consistently used formal language throughout the conversation, demonstrating a high awareness of the importance of maintaining professionalism and respect. For example, students often started conversations with phrases like "Excuse me, Miss," and concluded with formal expressions such as "Thank you for your opinion, Miss." These patterns indicate students' understanding of the significance of formal language in academic settings and their attempts to adhere to communication ethics.

Unexpectedly, the study found that comfort and urgency influenced some students to switch from formal to informal language mid-conversation. Additionally, challenges included the variability in students' adherence to formality based on personal convenience and the context of the interaction. The study had limitations, such as its focus on a single university and a specific group of students, which may not be representative of other contexts. Future research could explore formal language use across different academic levels and institutions to gain a broader understanding of this

phenomenon. Practically, the findings suggest the need for curriculum development to emphasize the importance of consistent formal language use in academic settings. Teaching strategies could include role-playing and formal conversation practice to help students develop better communication skills.

Overall, this study contributes significantly to the field of English education, particularly within the context of Nias University. It highlights the importance of formal language in fostering respectful and professional interactions and offers valuable insights for improving language education practices.

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