

## Politeness in student-lecturer WhatsApp messages: A study of English greetings

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### ABSTRACT

*WhatsApp* is an option for communicating in the current era, regardless people's background. In the world of education, for instance, both students and lecturers also use this application for teaching and learning activities. Unfortunately, not many students communicate with this media properly so the messages sent to their lecturers tend to be impolite, especially when the messages are sent in English. One indicator of this is the absence of greetings in the message. None of the previous research has discussed the specific element(s) of a message that becomes the gap of this research. This research aims to find out what greetings students usually use when sending English messages to lecturers and how important greetings are in sending a text message. This quantitative research involved 60 lecturers who teach in English Department or teach English subjects throughout Indonesia who filled out questionnaires and expressed their opinions on several English text messages sent by students. The result shows that there are several types of greetings used by students, such as "Assalamualaikum", "Hello", "Good morning/Good afternoon /Good evening", and also "Excuse me..." Furthermore, 53,3% respondents agree that greetings are one of the most important aspects in sending a message politely.



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## I. INTRODUCTION

Politeness has many variables because one culture and another have their own standards in terms of politeness. However, we all do agree that politeness takes a big deal in an interaction (Ryabova, 2015). As a place that shapes behavior and politeness, university plays an important role in educating its students. Universities are places where many cultures mix in the same place. One student and another student can have very different cultures because they come from different regions that distinguish one to another (Habók et al., 2021). Therefore, politeness is different between one culture and another.

Likewise, with lecturers, not only do their cultures differ, but there are also ages and hierarchies that students must also pay attention to when communicating with them. Not to mention, the language used in this communication is not their mother tongue or national language, but a foreign language- English. This also supports the fact that communication skill in both spoken or written will highly affect students' future in a work field (Ong et al., 2022).

One of the most famous communication tools in Indonesia right now is an application called *WhatsApp* (WA). Since the era of Covid-19, most students and teachers/lecturers communicate by using *WhatsApp*. It is because the application eases both students and lecturers in the teaching and learning process, especially in distributing the materials (Afnibar & Fajhriani, 2020). Few Indonesian students know that communication in written expression using a language that is different from their mother tongue needs more attention. This, of course, makes politeness variables in sending English messages via *WhatsApp* even more complex (Rahmi, 2020). Not to mention many students face grammatical issues in using the language since English is a foreign language to Indonesians and very few Indonesians learn the language when they were younger (Fiktorius, 2020; Maftukhin, 2023; Phyo et al., 2024; Taye & Mengesha, 2024; Zhang & Zhang, 2023).

Regardless the communication tools, communicating with lecturers still require etiquette so that the goal can be achieved. In communication, a very important thing to pay attention to is language politeness (Elkholy & Ahsani, 2023). When communicating, cultural order must be taken into account, not just expressing the ideas (Yuliyawati, 2020). Cultural elements that apply in society must be used as language references. The use of language that is polite or courteous, smooth, kind, and always respectful to the person you are speaking with will be reflected in language politeness. Language politeness plays an important role in everyone's language competence (Mahmud, 2019). If someone always speaks good language and always maintains polite language, that person will have a very good personality. A person has a bad personality, one of which can be caused by the person always using impolite and rude language.

Several leading universities in Indonesia even put up banners in every corner of the building regarding how to send messages to their lecturers. Gadjah Mada University (UGM), for example, also educates its students regarding this matter. At UGM, nine etiquettes are determined, namely: time, language, introducing you, greetings, words of request, necessity, not using pronouns, good behavior, and thank you. One of the important things that must be included in the message sent is a greeting. Wartoyo (2019) said that violations of student politeness ethics, one of which can be seen from not starting a greeting when students send text messages. This shows that the greeting is the first thing that will be seen and determine whether the message is polite or not. For Indonesians, saying hello is very important in communicating, both verbally and in writing. Saying hello is a form of appreciation or respect for the person you are talking to when communicating, but at the same time it can show closeness between the sender and recipient of the message. Talking further about written

communication, social media is very popular these days. Many people use applications like *WhatsApp* to communicate with each other.

In Indonesian, greetings to lecturers usually tend to be stiffer. However, in English, greetings to start a message to lecturers can be more varied because the academic hierarchy in Indonesia seems to be more pronounced compared to English-speaking countries. The following are several examples of student WAs to their lecturers using English.

Table 1. Examples of students' messages to lecturers

Message	Information
	<p><i>Good morning/Good afternoon/Good evening</i> are direct translations of <i>Good morning/Good afternoon/Good evening</i> in Indonesian. This greeting is very safe and can be used because it does not involve religious or racial background.</p>
	<p><i>Hello</i>, or <i>Hi</i> are normal greetings to use when sending messages in English. Leech (2014) said that these words do not show politeness in communication. Likewise, in the context of Indonesian society. Some lecturers in Indonesia are not very comfortable when their students use this word.</p>
	<p><i>Assalamualaikum</i> is a greeting that is very commonly used by Indonesian students to their lecturers. Not only Muslim students, non-Muslim students also often use this greeting if they find out that their lecturer is a Muslim.</p>
	<p>This student could be too happy or in a hurry to send the message. We can see that he immediately greeted his lecturer without the slightest greeting. This may be deemed inappropriate considering that as a lecturer and student, there must be certain boundaries no matter how close the two of them get along.</p>
	<p>Almost the same as the previous message, this message also does not contain a greeting.</p>

From the data above, we know that greetings, as the first thing that is seen, will greatly influence the impression of whether a message is polite or not. Greetings in short messages are the same as the greetings we say when visiting someone's house. A message that doesn't have a greeting can be like entering someone's house without permission. Previous research regarding procedures for sending short messages via WA media has been carried out before. However, these studies discuss in general how to send good and polite messages. Apart from that, the procedure for sending good messages in English is also not widely implemented.

The following is an explanation of some of the research that has been carried out regarding this topic. One of them is research from Wartoyo (2019) entitled "Ethics of Student and Lecturer Communication in the Academic Perspective of Revolution 4.0". Wartoyo said that the aim of the writing was to analyze research in academic circles regarding the communication ethics of students and lecturers in the academic perspective of revolution 4.0, and also the relationship between lecturers and students in the concept of facilitating the teaching and learning process and guidance. The research method is qualitative with a phenomenological approach on campus. The main informants were two students who were working on a thesis or thesis and one lecturer who had a thesis or thesis guidance relationship with the students. The research results concluded that communication in the 4.0 revolution experienced significant changes in behavior and language which gave rise to a culture that was often incompatible with academic identity which prioritizes ethics and courtesy. Do not get caught up in hoax news in both the political and social fields, in the academic world there needs to be regulations and examples in communicating between lecturers and students, so that the concept of education, identity and character of the Indonesian nation is maintained with good manners and prioritizes the values of the nation's philosophy. As the next generation in facing the millennial era, academics do not get caught up in the negative side of digitalization in the academic world.

Not only research from Wartoyo, other research discussing procedures for communicating using WA media was also written by Yuliyawati (2020). She wrote an article entitled "Student Language Politeness in *WhatsApp* Messages to Lecturers". This research discusses communication between lecturers and students in general via WA. Writing messages from students addressed to lecturers via WA is alleged to sometimes use impolite language. For this reason, an "Investigation of Politeness in Student Messages Addressed to Lecturers via *WhatsApp*" was carried out.

The aim of the research conducted by Yuliyawati was to investigate and assess the politeness contained in the messages conveyed by students to lecturers via WA. The research method used is a descriptive method using research data consisting of WA from 71 Bandung State Polytechnic students with 446 utterances. By referring to politeness/manners for students who want to contact lecturers via cell phones or mobile phones determined by UI and UGM, it is known that in general, students' WA language politeness scores are in the range of 51% -75%. This means that in the messages sent by students to lecturers via WA there are 5 to 6 politeness criteria: consideration of time (delivery time does not interfere with rest or worship), greetings,

apologies, disclosure of name and department/study program, use of polite language, and thanks. Thus, students' WA messages addressed to lecturers fulfill the politeness ethics as stipulated by UI and UGM.

The next research is an article by Tri Rina Budiwati (2017) entitled "Student Language Politeness in Interacting with Lecturers at Ahmad Dahlan University: Pragmatic Analysis". This research will describe the forms of politeness in students' language, compliance with and deviation from the principles of politeness, and the function of politeness in students' language in interacting with lecturers at Ahmad Dahlan University. The primary data in this research are recorded conversations (screenshots) in Indonesian and English between students and lecturers in real time writing via social media *WhatsApp* (WA) and Line Chat. With a pragmatic approach, this research was analyzed using the pragmatic equivalent method. The research results show that from 35 data on student and lecturer conversations on the two (2) social media, it can be seen that students' written communication to lecturers on social media tends to be informal and seems relaxed with signs: the use of many abbreviations and informal terms. Apart from that, the forms of politeness used by UAD students in social media are Positive Faces and Negative Faces; there is compliance and deviation from several maxims, such as the Maxim of Wisdom, the Maxim of Generosity, the Maxim of Acceptance, the Maxim of Approval, and the Maxim of Sympathy; There are politeness functions in language, such as Representative Function, Directive Function, Expressive Function and Commissive Function.

From the three studies above, we know that research regarding the use of greetings in short messages using English has not been discussed much before. Previously, research only discussed the elements contained in short messages, without focusing on just one variable and not in English. Apart from that, previous studies usually discuss in general terms politeness or strategies in sending messages. For this reason, the novelty of this research is very clear and this research can complement previous research. There needs to be a detailed discussion regarding what is important in sending messages, especially in using English as well as a detailed explanation of these parts. In this research, the researchers focused on one part of sending a message, namely greetings and the importance of the existence of greetings in a message.

For this reason, this research focuses on one way or component of sending good and correct messages in English to lecturers using WA media. The aim of this research is to find out what greetings students usually use when sending messages to lecturers in English and how important greetings are in sending a short message. This research comes with two (2) research questions namely what greetings do students usually use when sending messages to their lecturers in English? And does the absence of greetings cause a lack of politeness?

### **Written communication**

Communicating in writing is not as easy as speaking. (Loureiro et al., 2020) said that sometimes students will feel uncomfortable when using written expressions because written

language is considered complex and mistakes often occur when practicing it. The error in question is usually related to the meaning of the word. This is because in written communication, differences in diction and punctuation can also result in differences in meaning. Toba et al. (2019) said that word choice must be taken into consideration to convey effective communication.

In Linguistics, these things are included in the discussion of Semantics. Semantics is a branch of linguistics that discusses the true meaning of a language (Alzahrani, 2022). Semantics is also defined as the meaning or meaning of a language, and the science that studies the meaning or significance of a language (Surono, 2011). Furthermore, he explains that there are three kinds of meaning that can be analyzed using a semantic approach, namely:

1. Lexical Meaning: The meaning or sense that can be directly seen in the dictionary as the basic meaning.
2. Grammatical Meaning: Meaning that can be recognized due to grammatical processes, such as affixes, inflections and derivations.
3. Contextual Meaning: Meaning that can be known based on the context of an utterance.

Parker & Riley (2001) also states that semantics is a branch of linguistics that discusses the meaning of a language, where this meaning includes the meaning of words, phrases or sentences. In his book, Parker gives an example of the word "hide" which is synonymous with the word "conceal".

### **The Use of Diction**

Keraf (2010) explains that there are three main conclusions regarding diction. First, diction includes understanding the words used to convey an idea, how to form the right groupings of words or use the right word expressions, and the appropriate language style to use in certain situations. Second, diction is the ability to correctly distinguish the nuances of meaning of the ideas to be conveyed, and the ability to find a form that suits the situation and the taste values of the listening group. Third, vocabulary mastery influences the use of correct and appropriate diction.

Furthermore, Soedjito & Saryono (2011) argue that there are things that need to be considered when using diction both in writing and orally. In using diction, these things are conditions that must be met. There are five conditions for using diction, namely (1) standard - correct words are words that follow morphological rules and use standard language varieties. This is something that really needs to be paid attention to when students send messages to their lecturers. Moreover, in the cultural context in Indonesia, where we have to use standard and formal language when communicating with a teacher or lecturer who is actually highly valued, not only because of the age difference but also because of their services. Fabian (2019) also said that diction that we choose can be really influenced by our cultural background.

Conditions number two until 5 are explained further. Number (2) is called precision - careful words are words in context that are neither more nor less, not ambiguous, and are idiomatic.

Ambiguous meaning also enters into this language - namely diction that does not give rise to multiple interpretations. Apart from that, idiomatic meanings also tend to confuse the interlocutor because the meaning of idioms, if related to culture, can be quite difficult to understand. The third (3) is named accuracy. It is the right word is a word that can express an idea accurately and can be recognized based on its distribution or collocation with the words on the right or left. Crossley (2020) added that someone needs to have adequate lexical knowledge to produce an appropriate word in a certain context/situation. Number (4) is commonality -common words are words whose use is accepted by the general public. Diction errors that also often occur are the use of words or abbreviations that are not generally accepted, such as the example mentioned previously. And finally, number (5) is called compatibility, which is a harmonious word is a word that has a semantic relationship with other words in a certain context.

### **Greetings**

Basically, greetings do not only reflect a form of respect when communicating. As fellow human beings, we can show sympathy when we say hello in communication activities. This feeling of sympathy can be shown at the beginning when opening a conversation or at the end when ending it. Leech (2014) states that based on the maxim of sympathy, a prayer or good hope can be used to start or end a dialogue. Flores-Salgado & Castineira-Benitez (2018) supports Leech argument by saying that greeting is showing solidarity between one people to another.

Leech further said that a prayer or hope in a greeting has different structural forms. For example, formal form of greetings such as "Good morning, good afternoon, good evening, and others, which in their initial structure are in the form of "God give you good evening, I wish you a good day ", "Goodbye" which comes from "God be with you/ye", and etc. Forms of greeting such as "Hi" and "Bye" are considered not very polite when spoken in formal communication in English because they are felt to be very relaxed or casual.

### **Texting Lecturers**

A website that often writes articles about education called *Proper Way of Sending A Message to Your Teacher | Helpline PH* (2020) explains that there are at least five (5) steps when we want to send a message to a teacher or lecturer.

1. Start with a greeting  
Open the message with a greeting as a form of respect or sympathy, as stated by Leech (2014).
2. Introduce self  
Lecturers or teachers are not telephone books that store all student numbers. So that information can be conveyed well, we have to make sure that they know which student and from which class is asking.

3. Convey the purpose of sending the message  
What we want to convey must also be clear so that teachers/lecturers know whether our message is urgent or not and must be answered immediately.
4. Write down the contents of the message/clarification  
This is an elaboration of content number three (3), namely that we explain briefly but clearly the content of our message. This could also be a point of clarification.
5. Close with a thank you  
To show humility, thanks are also needed here. However, we can also say thank you after the teacher or lecturer answers the questions or messages sent. Don't just read or look at the lecturer's reply message.

## **II. METHOD**

This research is quantitative research. The researchers distributed questionnaires as reference material regarding what and how messages are considered polite by lecturers and students. The questionnaire will contain several short messages in English with a variety of greetings in them and later the lecturer will be some open ended asked to give an opinion on whether the message is polite, quite polite, less polite, or impolite. The questionnaire was concluded to find out the lecturers' opinions regarding these messages and their reasons for determining whether a message is polite or not. The researchers also concluded whether the lecturers who filled out the questionnaire focused on the importance of greetings or not when students communicate via *WhatsApp*.

The researchers limited the data and respondents used in this research. In the questionnaire the researchers distributed only new messages or not follow-up messages on certain topics and are not a series of messages. 10 messages from students in Yogyakarta province were analyzed. The researchers did not pick Yogyakarta without any reasons. Yogyakarta was chosen because this province is well known for being an education city; hence the students come from the various regions in Indonesia and overseas (Iqbal, 2021). The data were taken from the students of Universitas Ahmad Dahlan (UAD), Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (UMY), and Universitas Sanata Dharma (USD). These three universities are well known to have attracted many students to study there and the number of students is always stable every year. The lecturers who answered the questionnaire were also limited to lecturers who teach English courses or teach with English as the primary language, and not limited to the lecturers from the departments of English Education or English Literature.

Questionnaires are distributed via *WhatsApp* groups such as the English teacher group, the English for Specific Purpose Teachers Community, and so on. These groups' members are English lecturers and from various university in Indonesia to ensure the diversity. The researchers also sent the questionnaire link via private message to several lecturers who met the criteria but were not members of these groups.



### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

60 lecturers from various universities in Indonesia have answered the questionnaire given by the researchers with the following results:

Table 2. Distribution of respondents

Gender	Amount
Man	18.3%
Woman	81.7%

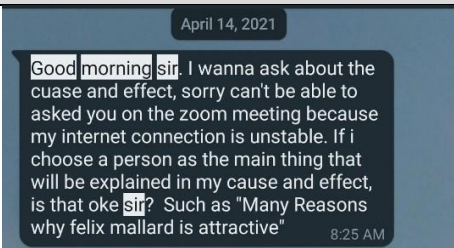
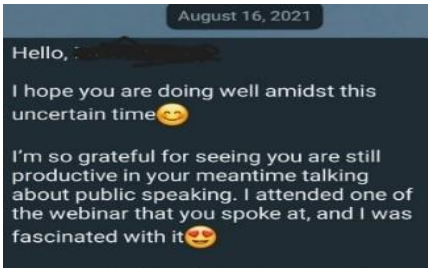
The number of female respondents in this study was higher than male respondents. It can be seen that more than half of the respondents were women (49 people).

Table 3. Age of respondents

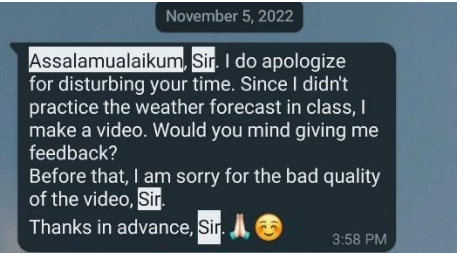
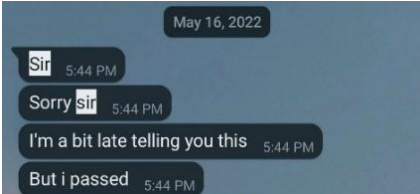
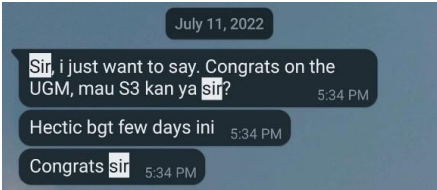
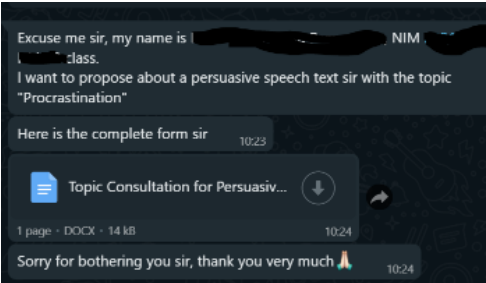
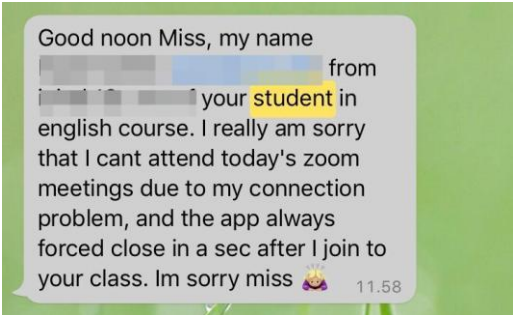
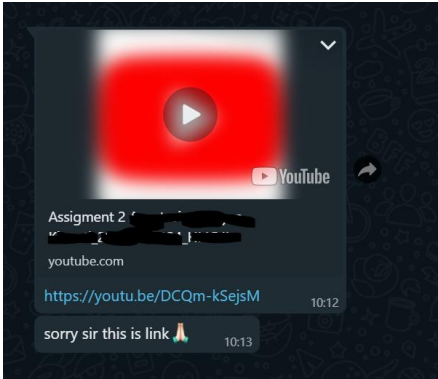
Respondents' Age	Amount
25-35 Years	53.3%
35-45 Years	41.7%
45-55 Years	3.3%
55-65 Years	1.7%

The lecturers who participated in this research were very diverse in age. However, we can see from the table above that the majority of respondents (25 people) are still young, namely in the age range of 25-35 years. There is 1 lecturer aged 55-65 years. The objects of this research vary greatly, but at the end of this research, we will see that the majority of respondents have relatively the same answers.

Table 4. Answers from the Questionnaire

No.	Students' Messages	Polite	Quite Polite	Less Polite	Not Polite
1.		13.3%	60%	21.7%	5%
2.		71.7%	21.7%	6.7%	0%

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3.		70%	23.3%	6.7%	0%
4.		11.7%	21.7%	43.3%	23.3%
5.		6.7%	20%	53%	20%
6.		60%	30%	8.3%	1.7%
7.		51.7%	45%	0%	3.3%
8.		3.3%	6.7%	51.7%	38.3%

9.		3.3%	13.3%	51.7%	31.7%
10.		5%	13.3%	23.3%	58.3%

This research aims to find out the types of greetings that students convey to their lecturers when sending messages in English and the consequences of not having a greeting in a message sent to the lecturer. The table above explains what respondents think about 10 messages from students to their lecturers. It can be seen from the percentages in the table that the answers to each message vary greatly. However, we can see one of the dominant results, namely that the message will be considered polite or polite enough if there is a greeting at the beginning of the message and will be considered impolite or even impolite if the message does not begin with a greeting. The questions from the text above are also supported by an open question, namely "Based on the answers you have chosen, what are your reasons for determining the politeness choice for each message above?" whose answers provide an explanation of why each respondent made their choice on one particular politeness criterion. Two (2) questions in the problem formulation will be explained based on the data obtained as follows:

### Types of greetings used by students in English

In sending their messages, we can see that students use several variations. In data 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7, for example, greetings such as " *Assalamualaikum* " which are often used by the majority of Indonesian people can also be seen in one of these messages. This greeting feels very general because it is usually used by a message sender to a message recipient who has the same religious background (Islam). Apart from that, there are also greetings like " *Hello* " which sounds more relaxed. Holmes & Wilson (2022) argue that the greeting " *Hello* " is usually used to people as a conversation starter. It is also the same as greetings like " *Good morning* " and " *Good noon (afternoon)* " which is a greeting often used by native English speakers. These greetings can indeed be used with anyone, including lecturers, although according to Leech

(2014) there is a more complete structure to these greetings which is currently experiencing contraction. In message number six (6), there is a slightly different greeting. The greeting uttered in message number 6 is more like asking for permission or an anticipation made by students if the message might be felt to disturb the lecturer. The greeting he wrote in the message was "*Excuse me...*". Greetings like those written in number 6 are not very acceptable in the English cultural context. Leech (2014) explains that to start and end a greeting, usually the sender of the message will show sympathy by giving hope, as shown by messages number 1, 2, 3, and 7. Greetings such as "*Excuse me...*" usually used in the context of verbal or oral communication in Indonesian, for example when someone wants to visit or visit someone else's house. From this, we know that a person's cultural influence is very large in using a second or foreign language.

### **The Consequences of Not Having a Greeting in a Message**

Even though each respondent had varying answers regarding the questionnaire distributed, there are several things that we can conclude regarding the second problem formulation. The first is that in determining politeness standards, some respondents believe that a message sent to a lecturer must follow a certain order, as stated in the previous theoretical framework. Several respondents answered that there should be greetings, self-introductions, and what is no less important is the use of Standard English, not *slang language*. In this case, diction is also very important to pay attention to, as stated by Keraf (2010) who said that diction is the selection of the appropriate language style in a particular situation. When some of the things mentioned are not present, most respondents believe that the message is impolite or even impolite. Many respondents mentioned *greetings* as the first word, which means that greetings are very important in students' *WhatsApp messages* to their lecturers.

Some other respondents believe that close relationships also influence the standards of politeness perceived by lecturers. The existence of differences in customs and *power relations* also greatly determines this standard of politeness. What this respondent conveyed is in line with the theory held by Brown and Levinson. Brown & Levinson (1988) said that one of the politeness strategies used in kinship or intimate relationships is *the Bald on Strategy* (No Strategy). With this strategy, the speaker does not make any effort to minimize the threat to the image of the interlocutor or to reduce the consequences of the FTA. A strategy like this will affect the person you are saying to feel surprised, embarrassed and uncomfortable. This strategy is often used by speakers and interlocutors who know each other well, for example between friends or between family members. This can be seen in messages number 4 and 5 where it seems as if the student and lecturer have a friendship or *power relationship* that is not very strong.

Apart from that, the cultural differences that are very visible are in message number 10. From the number that sent the message, we can see that the sender of the message is not an Indonesian citizen. So, saying hello or even calling the lecturer as "*Sir/Mam*" / "*Mr/Mrs*" is not

mandatory. The majority of respondents said that this message was less polite (23.3%) or even impolite (53.3%). For this reason, from the explanation above, it can be concluded that the structure in sending messages will greatly influence the lecturer's opinion regarding whether or not a student is polite in sending messages. Greetings, in this case, are a very vital element of these elements.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

In the end, from this research we can conclude that there are various ways for students to start a message in English that they will send to their lecturer. Many students apparently use greetings as a way of opening their dialogue with lecturers in written *WhatsApp messages*. Greetings, as a form of respect, sympathy and familiarity, have many types. Some of them are based on data, namely "*Assalamualaikum*", "*Hello*", "*Good morning/Good afternoon (Good noon)/Good evening* ", and also "*Excuse me...* ". From the data above, many respondents agree that greeting is one of the most important aspects that must be in a message so that the message can be said to be polite. As Indonesians, the culture or habits of lecturers are very influential in determining the politeness of a message, for example messages sent without greetings because in Indonesian culture, greetings really represent a person's ethics. Like the theory from Leech (2014) which emphasizes that greetings are also a form of someone's sympathy when sending a message.

The researchers hope that this research can become reference material for students to carry out written communication politely and effectively with their lecturers and can become reference material for other research on similar topics. Further/other research on this topic could discuss other aspects of sending messages to lecturers in English and their position in politeness standards. Apart from that, data can be taken by direct interviews with lecturers who receive messages from their students in English.

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