

# Language Politeness: Pragmatic-Sociocultural Perspective

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**Abstract:** This study is aimed to explain the perspective of language politeness in terms of the sociocultural background of the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program students at the Universitas Islam Riau (UIR). By applying the Phenomenology approach, data was collected through interviews with 44 students about language politeness which was then analyzed by applying the Miles & Huberman's analysis techniques. The results of the study showed that someone is said to be polite when s/he does not offend other people's hearts (the other person) in speaking, speaking in a soft tone, speaking based on contexts; who is the interlocutors, where the conversation takes place, whether in a serious or relaxed atmosphere, what topics are being discussed, and consider the norms in speaking. It can be concluded that the students are polite in speaking based on their respective cultural backgrounds with regard to contexts. The results of this study imply everyone with different cultural backgrounds has different language politeness.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Language is a tool which used by humans to communicate. Humans will not be separated from the process of using language in everyday life. Language plays an important role in life, because language has a role as a messenger from one human to another. In communication, language users must also be able to choose the language used in interacting to avoid conflicts between speakers and recipients. This is related to the choice of language in its using. One aspect of language that is very important is politeness, because politeness can also facilitate interaction among individuals in communication.

The language politeness is reflected in the procedures to communicate through verbal signs or language procedures. Language rules are very important for speech participants to smooth communication. The method of communication concerns the politeness of the speaker in uttering his speech. The more polite in use language, the more someone masters how to communicate with others. Manaf (2010) said that various languages has language politeness, but the way to express politeness is typical for each language. The way to express politeness that is owned by the community

is used as a guideline to speak politely and is also used by the people of the language concerned to assess the politeness of the speech of others. For that, language politeness must be mastered by all levels of society who want to use language in communication, especially people who are involved in the world of education such as students.

As a student, the principle of politeness in language use certainly needs to be considered. When the researcher interviewed several students from different cultural backgrounds, it was found that each person had their own perspective on politeness. A quite flashy perspective is the politeness of the language of Malay, Minang, Javanese, and Batak students. Sometimes politeness in certain tribes is not necessarily polite in other tribes. It can be seen from the contradiction perspectives between Malay, Minang and Javanese students with students from the Batak tribe. For students from the Malay, Minang and Javanese tribes, someone is said to be polite if he starts speaking with small talk with a low tone of voice. On the contrary, for students from the Batak tribe, small talk is not needed in speaking. According to them if you want to convey something to the other person, just speak directly. Likewise in terms of tone of voice, for them the high or low tone of

speech does not become a benchmark of polite or not of language. Based on the data in the field, this research needs to be done to see the various perspectives of politeness of students from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The theory used in this study as a reference is a pragmatic theory especially politeness theory. Geoffrey N Leech, (1993) says that pragmatics is how to use language in communication. Mey (2001) says that pragmatics is the science of language that studies the use of language which is determined by the context of the speech situation in the community and the accommodating and background cultural vehicle. Pragmatics deals with issues that are fundamentally philosophical which have consequences for both theoretical linguistics and language users. Furthermore, Crystal in (Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig, 2012) says that pragmatics is the study of language from the user's point of view, especially the choices they make, the obstacles they face in using language in social interactions and the effect of using language on other participants in communication.

Related to politeness theory (Brown and Levinson, 1987) says that politeness is a language as a speech system that is applied in interactions to maintain self-image both positive and negative face. Maintaining here is that self-image doesn't get threatened, lose face or be humiliated. Correspondingly, Leech (2014) also said that politeness leads to an increase in face, for example in offering, praising, or extending sympathy, especially doing facial enhancement actions (sometimes better described as facial care acting) or not threatening actions. The increase of face means that the speaker does not embarrass the partner with his speech. This can be done by praising, increasing the sympathy of the speaker to the other person when communicating so that there is a harmonious and intimate relationship.

According to Leech (1995) politeness is a strategy used by speakers of a language to obtain various objectives, such as building and maintaining harmonious relationships. In line with the opinion of Leech Mislikhah, (2014) in his article said that politeness is a rule that is determined and agreed by certain communities so that politeness becomes a prerequisite approved by the social behavior. Furthermore, according to (Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2015) politeness of conversation regarding

solidarity, power, familiarity, relationship status between participants, and appreciation. Politeness is also determined by awareness of social habits. In line with Wardhaugh's opinion, (Adriana, 2014) in his article said politeness is a human communication activity that is inseparable from the social and cultural values that develop in society.

The concept of politeness can be formulated in the form of rules which called the principles of politeness. Leech (2014) says there are ten politeness maxims which give a high value to desire of O (Generosity maxim), give a low value to desire of S (tact maxim), give a high value on the quality of O (approbation maxim), give a low value on quality of S (modesty maxim), give a high value to the obligation of S to O (Obligation of S to O maxim), give a low value to the O obligation to S (Obligation of O to S maxim), give a high value to the opinion of O (agreement maxim), give a low value to the opinion of S (opinion-reticence maxim), give a high value to feeling of O (sympathy maxim), give a low value to feeling of S (feeling-reticence maxim). The first maxim is to give a high value to desire of O (Generosity maxim) in this maxim there are two key words that need to be considered, namely to make your own profit as small as possible and make your own losses as much as possible. The second maxim gives a low value to the wishes of S (tact maxim) there are two key words that need to be considered, namely making the losses of others as small as possible and making other people's profits as much as possible. The third maxim gives a high value to the quality of O (approbation maxim), in this maxim there are two key words that need to be considered, namely criticizing others as little as possible and praise others as much as possible. In the fourth place, give a low value to the quality of S (modesty maxim) in this maxim. There are also two key words to note, namely praise yourself as little as possible and criticize yourself as much as possible. The fifth maxim gives a high value to the obligation of S to O (Obligation of S to O maxim) in this maxim if the speaker commits a violation of the opponent's speech so he apologizes and if the opponent does something (helps) the speaker will thanks.

Furthermore, the sixth maxim is to give a low value to the obligation O to S (Obligation of O to S maxim) in this maxim versus the speech is intended to give a response to the speaker when the speaker apologizes and if the opponent says giving a response to the speaker when the speaker thanks. The seventh maxim is to give a high value to the opinion of O (agreement maxim), in this maxim

there are two key words that need to be understood, that is, try to make the agreement between yourself and others as little as possible and try to make as much agreement as possible. Maxim the eighth gives a low value to the opinion of S (opinion-reticence maxim) that is if the speaker expresses his opinion to the opponent of his speech by using propositions such as: which I think, I think, I do not expect, maybe so. Ninth maxim gives a high value to feeling of O (sympathy maxim) in this maxim there are two key words that need to be considered, namely reducing the sense of antipathy between oneself and others to the smallest possible extent and increasing sympathy as much as possible between themselves and others. The tenth maxim gives a low value to the feeling of S (feeling-reticence maxim) that is if the attitude of sympathy of the speaker to the opponent of speech occurs as much as possible and if the speaker in the activity speaks to avoid the imposition directly to the opponent he said.

### 3 RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with phenomenology methods. According to Moleong, (2007) qualitative research is study that is experienced by research subjects such as behavior, perceptions, motivations, actions and others holistically and by way of description in the form of words and language in a special natural context and by utilizing various scientific methods. Furthermore, related to the phenomenology method, Yusuf (2014: 351) says that phenomenology as a form of qualitative research grows and develops in the field of sociology, making the subject matter a phenomenon that appears as the subject of research, but free from the suspicion of researchers' subjectivity.

The data sources in this study were 44 students of the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program at Universitas Islam Riau (UIR). The data in this study are the results of recording interviews conducted of 44 of these students. Data collection techniques are the most strategic steps in research, because the main purpose of the research is to obtain data. To collect these data there are several techniques used in this study, namely: observation techniques, interviews, recordings and field notes.

The analysis technique of data in this study is based on interactive techniques Miles and Huberman (1992) through this model, data analysis

activities are carried out with the following techniques, namely: (1) data analysis is performed at the time of collection and after the data is collected. Then, the data is transcribed from spoken language to written language; (2) the stage of data reduction is the stage which includes identifying, classifying, and coding the politeness of language. The data analysis activity in this study begins with the data reduction stage. At this stage the process of identifying, classifying, sequencing and coding data is carried out. The identification process is carried out on the results of interviews conducted with students; (3) data display includes reduced arrangements. The organized data is presented in tables according to the sub-focus of the problem of study; and (4) conclusions or verification are made on the interpretation of the data after it is presented.

## 4 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Based on interviews conducted of 44 students of the Indonesian Language and Literature Education Program at Universitas Islam Riau (UIR) who came from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds such as: Malay, Minang, Javanese, Batak, Bugis, Banjar and Nias it was found that someone said polite when in speaking does not offend the hearts of others (interlocutors), when speaking in a gentle tone, when speaking attention to the context; (who is the other person, where the conversation takes place, whether in a serious or relaxed atmosphere, what topics are discussed and consider the norms of speaking).

### 4.1 Student perspectives of Malay ethnic background

Based on the data obtained in the field, there were 16 students from the Malay tribe with various perspectives on language politeness. According to them, someone is said to be polite when speaking does not offend the other, if in speaking the person has good language behavior such as hospitality, speech that is delivered softly and smiling, speaking was not in an arrogant, focusing on the other person, pay attention to the context and not interrupt the conversation of others.

First, someone is said to be polite in speaking when s/he does not offend others. According to them, politeness is seen from the extent to which speakers can guard the hearts of interlocutors in speech. Second, if in speaking the person has good language behavior such as hospitality. For Malays,

friendly behavior in language is also one measure of politeness in language. If someone speaks ignorantly to others it shows that the person is impolite. Third, the speech delivered softly and smiling. According to Malays when someone speaks in a soft tone and followed by a smile that indicates the person is polite in language. The smile meaning here is not a cynical smile that shows arrogance.

Fourth, speaking is not in an arrogant and arrogant style. In addition to internal factors such as language, external factors in the form of expressions and expressions can also show language politeness. If someone speaks in a gentle tone but is supported by a style that is arrogant, it still shows someone's impoliteness in language. Fifth, focus on the other person. According to the informant, if someone does not focus on his interlocutor, he can also be categorized as someone who is not polite. For example, when someone speaks and his interlocutor is busy in using a cellphone or busy with other activities then the person is said to be impolite. Sixth, pay attention to the context. A person is said to be polite if he is able to put himself and his language well. When someone speaking must be considered to who is the interlocutor, where he talks, what is the purpose of the conversation and how the tone when he speaks. Seventh, do not interrupt the conversation of others. A person can be said to be polite when does not interrupt the conversation of others. This means that speakers pay attention to ethics in speaking and waiting for their turn to speak without taking the opportunity for others to speak.

#### 4.2 Student perspectives of Minang ethnic background

Based on the data obtained in the field there are 8 students from the Minang tribe. According to them, someone is said to be polite when starting a conversation with small talk, being able to put the conversation in the right context, using words in a low tone, not interrupting the other person and not offending the other person.

First, someone is said to be polite when someone starts a conversation with small talk. For them, someone is said to be polite when starting a conversation with small talk such as asking news and not directly discussing the main issues to be conveyed. Second, should being able to put the conversation in the right context. The context referred here is who the interlocutor, where the conversation take place and when the conversation take place. In the Minang tribe there are four things

that become signs in language, namely *kato mandaki*, *kato manurun*, *kato mandata*, *kato malereang*, these four signs are called *kato nan ampek*. *Kato nan ampek* are terms in the Minang language which means the rules in talking about how someone should talk to others. When to speak softly, when to speak firmly and so on, it is arranged in *kato nan ampek*.

Third, use words in a soft tone. Similarly, people from the Malay tribe, according to people from the Minang also said that using words smoothly is also a characteristic of someone's politeness. When someone uses words with a soft tone that indicates the person is polite. Fourth, do not interrupt the other person. A person can be said to be polite when not cutting the conversation of others. This means that speakers pay attention to ethics in speaking and waiting for their turn to speak without taking the others opportunity to speak. Fourth, do not offend the other person. In accordance with the Malays, they argued that the polite can be seen from the extent to which the speaker can guard the heart of the interlocutors. When the other person is not offended by someone's words, the person is said to be polite.

#### 4.3 Students perspective with Javanese background

Based on the data obtained there are 14 students from the Javanese tribe in the field. According to students from the Javanese tribe, someone is said to be polite when speaking in a low tone, talking to the context, if speaking in a subtle language and responding to other people's conversations, if it does not offend other people, attitude in speaking also affects politeness such as focusing on people who is talking and looking into the other person's eyes, someone is also said to be polite when not arrogant when talking.

First, speak in a low tone. According to them, the tone of speech is important to determine whether or not someone is polite in speaking. The voice tone of the speaker is lower than the interlocutor, the person is considered polite. Otherwise, someone to speak in a high tone for the Javanese signifies impoliteness because the tone of voice is one of the measures of polite speech for the Javanese. Second, talk about the context. Similar to other tribes, for the Javanese, a person is said to be polite if he is able to put his conversation in the right context as to who the other person is talking to, where the conversation takes place, when the conversation takes place.

Third, speaking in a polite language and be able to respond to the others' speaking. According to them, when talking to fellow Javanese, especially when speaking at home, they use fine Javanese language that shows politeness. Furthermore, politeness is also marked by someone's response when others speak. It means that when someone talks to someone else don't ignore the speaker so that it will be considered polite. Fourth, if it does not offend other people's hearts. In accordance with the Malays and Minang, according to them politeness is seen from the extent to which speakers can guard the hearts of the interlocutors. When the other person is not offended by someone's words, the person is said to be polite. Fifth, attitude in speaking also influences politeness such as focusing on the person who is talking and looking into the other person's eyes. According to them, besides language, the attitude at the time of the conversation is also an indicator of politeness such as focusing on the person who is talking and looking into the other person's eyes. Sixth, someone is also said to be polite when does not arrogant in talking. Beside internal factors such as language, external factors in the form of expressions can also show language politeness. If someone speaks in a low tone but is supported by an arrogant, for the Javanese, it still shows someone's impoliteness in speaking.

#### **4.3 Students perspective with Batak background**

Based on the data obtained there are 3 students from the Batak in the field. According to students from the Batak tribe, someone is said to be polite when using ethics and speech rules in communication. According to them, in speaking someone must pay attention to ethics in communicating such as not to offend others, not to cut the conversation of others and pay attention to the context in speaking. One aspect of context is intonation. Even though Bataknese do not take into account the high and low tone of speech, they also keep an eye on who the interlocutor is and when the conversation takes place. For Batak people, the high or low tone does not become a benchmark for the politeness of a person's language.

#### **4.4 Students perspective with Bugis background**

Based on the data obtained in the field, there is 1 student from the Bugis tribe. According to students from the Bugis tribe, someone is said to be polite if

his speech does not offend others and good cooperation is established between speakers and interlocutors. First, it does not offend the other person. It same with the other tribes, according to them polite is seen from the extent to which speakers can guard the hearts of interlocutors. When the other person is not offended by someone's words, the person is said to be polite. Second, there is good cooperation between speakers and interlocutor. Good cooperation is between speakers and interlocutor interrelationships and responses to each other.

#### **4.5 Students perspective with Banjar background**

Based on data obtained in the field, there is 1 student from the Banjar tribe. According to students from the Banjar tribe, someone is said to be polite if the speech does not offend others and pay attention to the context. First, it does not offend the other person. Similar to other tribes, students from the Banjar tribe also say that whether someone is polite or not can be seen from the extent to which the speaker can guard the interlocutor in speech. When the other person is not offended by someone's words, the person is said to be polite. Second, talk about the context. Similar to other tribes, for Banjar people that someone is said to be polite if he is able to put his conversation in the right context as; who the other person is talking to, where the conversation takes place, and when the conversation takes place.

#### **4.6 Students perspective with Nias background**

Based on data obtained in the field, there is 1 student from the Nias tribe. According to students from the Nias tribe that someone is said to be polite in taking care of the context (see who the other person is speaking to, whether it's the same age or older). Similar to other tribes, for Nias people that someone is said to be polite if he is able to put his conversation in the right context as to who the other person is, whether the person is older than himself or the same age, where the conversation take place, and when the conversation take place.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results and findings in this study, it can be concluded that Indonesian Language and Literature Education Study Program FKIP UIR students have different perspectives in language politeness. This is based on their ethnic background and culture. According to students from Malay, a person is said to be polite when speaking does not offend others, if in speaking the person has good language behavior such as hospitality, speech that is conveyed softly and smiles, speaks not in a proud and arrogant style, focus on the interlocutor, pay attention to the context and not cut off others. Not much different from the view of students from the Malay tribe, students from the Minang tribe also looked at the politeness of various things such as someone said to be polite when starting a conversation with small talk, being able to put the conversation in the right context, using words in a low tone, does not cut off the other person and does not offend the other person.

According to students from the Javanese tribe, someone is said to be polite when speaking in a low tone, talking to the context, if speaking in a subtle language and responding to other people's conversations, if it does not offend other people, attitude in speaking also affects politeness such as focusing on people who is talking and looking into the other person's eyes, someone is also said to be polite when not arrogant when talking. Meanwhile, according to students from the Batak ethnic, someone is said to be polite when using ethics and speech rules in communication. According to students who are from the Bugis tribe, someone is said to be polite if his speech does not offend other people and there is good cooperation between speakers and interlocutor. According to students from the Banjar tribe, someone is said to be polite if the speech does not offend others and pay attention to the context. According to students from the Nias tribe, someone is said to be polite in taking care of the context (see who the other person is speaking to, whether it's the same age or older). The results of this study imply that everyone with different

cultural backgrounds has different language politeness.

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