



Politeness Phenomena in A Symmetrical Social Relation of The Participants of Heritage Language Cultures of West Sulawesi

Muthmainnah Mursidin¹, Ida Ilmiah Mursidin², Rizka Indahyanti³

¹Universitas Islam Makassar

²IAIN Parepare

³Universitas Islam Makassar

* Corresponding Author. E-mail: 1muthmainnahmursidin.dty@uim-makassar.ac.id

Receive: 12/09/2022

Accepted: 22/09/2022

Published: 01/10/2022

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk membuktikan asumsi dasar tersebut dengan mempelajari fenomena kesantunan budaya bahasa warisan Sulawesi Barat, Indonesia. Penelitian ini bersifat deskriptif kuantitatif dengan menggunakan kerangka teoritis kesantunan model prospektif baru yang dikembangkan oleh penulis yaitu model simetrisitas relasi sosial. Data dikumpulkan dari 3 responden warisan budaya bahasa Sulawesi Barat, Indonesia; Bahasa Mandarin kebanyakan melalui kuesioner. Studi ini menemukan bahwa dalam hubungan sosial simetris para partisipan, analisis data secara jelas menunjukkan pola kesopanan yang khas dan teratur yang diatur oleh usia. Ketika berbicara misalnya dengan lawan bicara yang lebih tua (teman, orang asing, karyawan, dan kerabat), para peserta lebih suka menggunakan variasi yang lebih sopan dan menerapkan 'strategi kesopanan negatif' (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Sebaliknya, ketika berbicara dengan lawan bicara pada usia yang sama (teman dan kerabat), para peserta cenderung menggunakan variasi yang lebih santai dan menerapkan 'strategi kesopanan positif' (ibid, 1987). Peran usia yang begitu penting juga dilambangkan dalam hubungan asimetris para peserta. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa usia telah menjadi variabel sosial paling signifikan dari kekuasaan yang mengatur strategi kesopanan peserta dari budaya bahasa warisan kelompok etnis Sulawesi Barat yang diteliti.

Kata Kunci: *fenomena kesantunan, hubungan sosial yang simetris, budaya bahasa*

INTRODUCTION

Since the launching of Goffman's work in 1967, politeness phenomena have been an endless issue studied by sociolinguist and pragmatists all over the world. Regardless of the different methods they utilize, these researchers commonly share a similar and universal goal, that is they strive to find out a more compactible and universal framework for studying politeness phenomena, as this could vary from culture to culture. Some studies focus on the construction of politeness theories such as, to name only a few, Lakoff (1973, 1977), Brown and Levinson (1987), Leech (1983), Frazer (1990), and Yassi (1996, 2011). Some studies were conducted to aim at investigating cultural-specific context and politeness strategies such as Hill et al (1986), and Yassi (2016b, 2016c, 2016d, 2017a, 2017f, 2018a, and 2018c). Some other works concentrated on the application of existing theories to data from various cultures such as Scollon and Scollon (1983, 1995), Chen (1993, 1996), Garcia (1989), Rhodes (1989), Holmes (1990) and Yassi (ibid) (see also Chen, 2001). It seems to the author that, however, of the works mentioned previously, for exception the works done by Yassi, to the author own knowledge, there have been no studies conducted to investigate comprehensively the role of ages to the speakers' politeness strategies.

The other figure that has laid a scholarly sounded foundation on politeness theory is Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) as their theoretical framework has been the most cited framework throughout the world until today, including the present study and some of the author previous works on politeness. However, some works have empirically refuted its universality, see for instances Scollon and Scollon, 1995; Blum-Kulka and House., 1989; Holtgraves and Yang, 1990, and 1992; and Yassi ((2016b, 2016c, 2016d, 2017a, 2017f, 2018a,

and 2018c). Some other studies claim that Brown and Levinson's framework is Anglo-Saxon-based culture so that it is not fully compatible to Asian cultures, see for examples Wierzbicka, 1985; Matsumoto, 1988, 1989; Gu, 1990, and Yassi (ibid.).

1.1 Research Background

In heritage language cultures of West Sulawesi ethnic groups, ages as an indexical social variable are believed to have a very crucial role in governing the participants' politeness strategy along with other social variables, which exhibit the presence of power in a social interaction, such as social status, education, and gender. Regardless of their social relationship, different or the same ages of the participants will denote a different configuration of politeness strategies. The situation is getting more and more complicated and as such more interesting when the participants hold a higher position and conversing to a much older subordinate. In such an interaction, marked phenomena of politeness strategies sometimes come to exist as both the superiors and the inferiors tend to deviate the unmarked forms due to the different ages. Therefore, in the present study, ages of the interlocutors become the main concern which are categorized into three; older, of the same age, and younger than the participants.

1.2 Objectives

The research discusses the role of ages in governing the participants' politeness strategies of heritage language cultures of West Sulawesi, Indonesia. Moreover, it is also aimed at proposing another prospective model of politeness theoretical framework called 'social relation symmetry model' especially when ages taken into account to the participants' politeness strategy in deferent variety, casual variety, and mixed variety speaking.

2. METHOD

The research is descriptive quantitative in nature utilizing a somewhat newly prospective model of politeness theoretical framework developed by the author. Data were collected from 3 respondents of heritage language culture of West Sulawesi, Indonesia: Mandarese mostly through questionnaires. As a matter of fact, the design of the research had assigned ages to be the independent variables and the patterns or configuration of politeness strategy as the dependent variables. However, due to the limited rooms, only age variable is reported in this research. Ages then are categorized into three; older, of the same ages, and younger than the participants. The analysis of the data was carried by firstly putting the data from the questionnaires in a tabular form and then recapitulate them based on their own categories and finally, analysing the data utilizing the proposed framework by transferring the data from the table into diagrammatic forms to present the overall configuration of the politeness strategies of the research.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Politeness

Politeness theory, proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, centers on the notion of [politeness](#), construed as efforts on redressing the affronts to a person's [self-esteems](#) or effectively claiming positive social values in [social interactions](#). Such self-esteem is referred as the [sociological](#) concept of face (as in "[save face](#)" or "[lose face](#)") to discuss politeness as a response to mitigate or avoid face-threatening acts such as requests or insults. Notable components in the framework of the theory include positive and negative faces, face threatening act (FTA), strategies for doing FTAs

and factors influencing the choices of strategies; each described below.

Among the studies of [politeness](#) in a variety of cultures for many years, [Penelope Brown](#) and [Stephen Levinson](#)'s politeness theory has become very influential.^[9] Though Brown and Levinson proposed their model as [universally](#) applicable,^{[10][3]} their theory has been challenged by other scholars in varied aspects such as its cross-cultural applicability or ways to interpret and conceptualize politeness.

- a. Negative face; the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction – ie to freedom of action and freedom from imposition; the want of every competent adult member that his actions be unimpeded by others.
- b. Positive face; the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that the self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactions; the want of every member (of a society) that his wants be desirable to at least some others (B&L 1978:66-67)
- c. Negative face: looked after with what we call formal politeness.
- d. Positive face: looked after in a less obvious way. It is to do with putting your best foot forward, the desire to be ratified, understood, approved of, liked or admired, whatever that entails in a given society

3.2 Honorifics as a linguistic indexical category of politeness in South Sulawesi cultures

In the culture of ethnic groups of South Sulawesi, honorifics are, among other things, one of linguistic politeness markers which are affixed to verbs, nouns, and adverb. These honorifics are distinctively functional as they denote the configuration of politeness strategy of the participants in a communication. Wikipedia

defines an honorific as a grammatical or morphosyntactic form that encode the relative social status of the participants of the conversation. Distinct from honorific titles, linguistic honorifics convey formality, social distance, politeness, humility, deference, or respect through the choice of an alternate form such as affix, clitic, grammatical case, change in person or number, or an entirely different lexical item (Wikipedia). Furthermore, there are three main types of honorifics, categorized according to the individual whose status is being expressed - **Addressee (or speaker/hearer) - Referent (or speaker/referent) - Bystander (or speaker/bystander)** Addressee honorifics express the social status of the person being spoken to (the hearer), regardless of what is being talked about. For example, Javanese has three different words for "house" depending on the status level of the person spoken to. Referent honorifics express the status of the person being spoken about. In this type of honorific, both the referent (the person being spoken about) and the target (the person whose status is being expressed) of the honorific expression are the same.

3.3 The proposed social relation symmetry model of politeness theoretical framework



As can be seen from the diagram, the social relationship of the participants is divided

into two; a symmetrical social relation and an asymmetrical social relation. In the symmetrical social relation which is labelled as [-P], the line goes into two; talking to friends labelled as [-D] and talking to strangers, labelled as [+D]. Talking to friends comprises three categories; (1) friends of the same ages, labelled as [-D +/-], (2) older friends, labelled as [-D +], and (3) younger friends, labelled as [-D -]. Talking to strangers which is labelled as [+D] generates three categories as well; (1) strangers of the same ages, labelled as [+D +/-], (2) older strangers, labelled as [+D+], and (3) younger strangers [+D-]. In the asymmetrical social relation, which is labelled as [+P], the line goes into two; talking to employers/employees, labelled as [-K], and talking to parents and relatives, labelled as [+K]. Talking to employers/employees comprises four categories; (1) to employers of the same ages or older - unmarked, labelled as [-K +], (2) to younger employers - marked, labelled as [-K -], (3) to employees of the same ages or younger - unmarked, labelled as [-K-], and (4) to older employees – marked, labelled as [-K+]. Talking to parents and relatives falls into four categories; (1) to parents and the likes, labelled as [+K+], (2) to older relatives, labelled as [+K+], (3) to relatives of the same ages, labelled as [+K+/-], and (4) to younger relatives, labelled as [+K-], where [P] stands for power, [D] stands for distance, and [K] stands for kinship. The following is the complete configuration of the framework.

Symmetry of participants' social relation [+/-P]:

1. A symmetrical social relation [-P] 1.1 To friends [-D]

1.1.1 Talking to friends of the same ages,

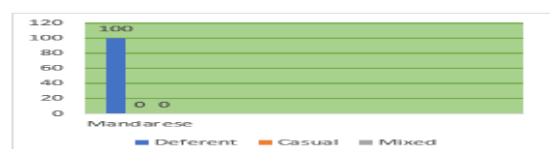


Figure 2b. Talking to older friends [-P-D+]

labelled as [-P-D +/-]

1.1.2 Talking to older friends, labelled as [-P-D +]

1.1.3 Talking to younger friends, labelled as [-P-D -]

1.2 To strangers [+D]

1.2.1 Talking to strangers of the same ages, labelled as [-P+D+/-]

1.2.2 Talking to older strangers, labelled as [-P+D+]

1.2.3 Talking to younger strangers, labelled as [-P+D-]

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Communication in a symmetrical social relation of the participants

The following figures demonstrate the configuration of the participants' politeness strategies when conversing to friends.

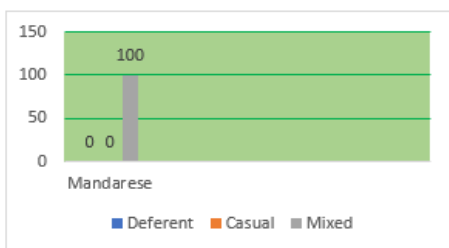


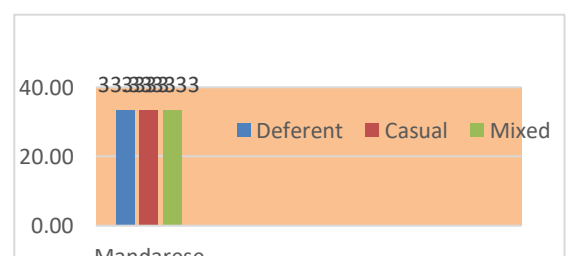
Figure 2a. Talking to friends of the same ages [

Figure

2c. Talking to younger friends [-P-D-]

From the three figures above, the analysis of conversing the participants to friends is labelled as [-P-D], means negative Power and negative Distance indicating that the participants hold a symmetrical and close social relation. As such, the employment of a more casual speech variety has been the unmarked politeness strategy of the participants, aiming at creating a more intimate environment in the interaction. When we take a closer look at the figures

above, however, they demonstrate a dynamic and distinctive pattern of politeness strategies due to the differences of participants' ages. When conversing to friends of the same ages, the participants mostly used a **mixed variety** (Figure 2a). In contrast, **the deferent variety** was dominantly used by the participants when talking to older friends (Figure 2b), it was dominant in almost all participants. When talking to younger friends the participants have different way, **deferent variety, casual variety, and mixed variety** are used (Figure 2c). Moreover, the analysis of the data also denotes a dynamic employment of the three varieties in all observational points. Regardless of its small portion, the employment of deferent and mixed varieties in the interaction between the participants and friends of the same ages is undeniably important. When we take a closer look at Figure 2a and 2b, these varieties even held the most dominant. With the same vein, the mixed variety used along with the deferent one was evenly used in almost all the observational points in the interaction between participants and the older friends. Similarly, the deferent, casual, and mixed varieties occupied almost half of the observational points in the interaction between the participants and the younger friends (Figure 2.c). Such a configuration of politeness strategies is also shown in the interaction between participants and strangers as in the following figures.



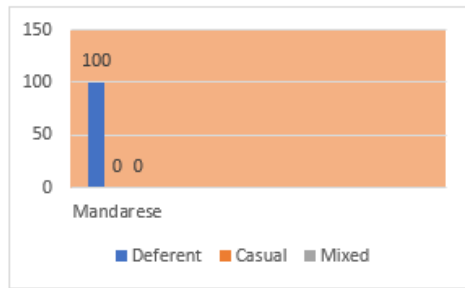


Figure 3a. Talking to older strangers [-P+D+]

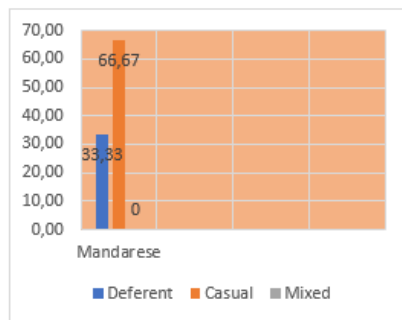


Figure 3b. Talking to younger strangers [-P+D-]

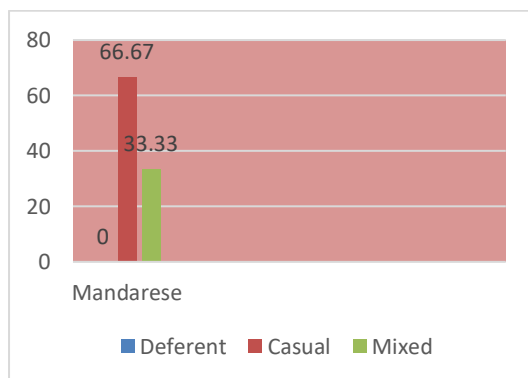


Figure 3a. Talking to strangers of the same ages [-P+D+/-]

The analysis from the figures above, conversing to strangers is labelled as [-P+D], denoting that the participants share a symmetrical social relation but not close enough. As a result, the employment of a more deferent variety has been the unmarked politeness strategy of the participants. However, when we take a closer look at the figures above, they have indicated a more

dynamic configuration of politeness strategy when the interlocutors are strangers. **The deferent variety** become the most dominant politeness strategies found in all observational points when the interlocutors are older strangers (Figure 3a). On the other hand, the most dominant politeness strategy applied **casual variety** by the participants when conversing to both strangers of the younger strangers (Figure 3b) However, regardless of its small portion, the other varieties especially **deferent variety** were still employed by the respondents in this interact

ion. and **casual variety** also dominant in the same age strangers (Figure 3c), it occupied more than half of the observational points. However, the other varieties especially **mixed variety** were still employed by the respondents in this interaction.

4. CONCLUSION

The research concludes that in a symmetrical social relation of the participants, it obviously denoted a regular distinctive pattern of politeness governed by ages. When talking to older interlocutors (friends, strangers, employees, and relatives), the speakers prefer using a more deferent variety and as such resort on applying ‘negative politeness strategy’. In contrast, when talking to interlocutors of the same ages (friends and relatives), the speakers tend to employ a more casual variety and as such resorting on applying ‘positive politeness strategy’. However, when talking to stranger interlocutors of the same ages, they prefer employing a mixed variety, mixing casual and

deferent ones, and likewise when talking to younger friends and strangers. In an asymmetrical social relation of participant, the study has also demonstrated the crucial role of ages to the speakers' politeness strategies. In a similar vein, when talking to a much younger employers, the older employers sometime use a more casual or mixed variety as well. Again, the study has confirmed that ages have been the most significant social variables of power governing the speakers' politeness strategies of the major heritage language cultures of West Sulawesi ethnic groups under study. The reason behind is more likely to be driven by their local indigenous containing cultural values. Paying a respect and behaving politely to all people, especially to older people have been one of their invaluable cultural value that should be obeyed by the community. Otherwise, they will be socially alienated from the community. As such, this local wisdom is transferred from generation to generation as it plays a very crucial part for the community to live in harmony in the society.

REFERENCE

- Brown, P. and Levinson, Stephen C. (1978). 'Universals in Language Use: Politeness Phenomena' In E. Goody. (ed). (1978). Questions and Politeness: Strategies in Social Interaction. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chen, Rong (2001). Self-politeness. *Journal of Pragmatics*. 33(2001) 87-106.
- Deutchmann, Mats. (2003). Apologizing in British English. Umea Universitet
- Garcia, Carmen, 1989. Apologizing in English: Politeness strategies used by native and non-native speakers. *Multilingua* 8: 3-20.
- Goffman, Erving, (1963). Behavior in public places. New York: Free Press.
- Holmes, Janet, (1990). Politeness strategies in New Zealand women's speech. In: Allan Bell and Janet Holmes, eds., *New Zealand ways of speaking English*, 252-276. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Holtgraves, Thomas and Joong-Nam Yang, (1992). Interpersonal underpinnings of request strategies: General principles and differences due to culture and gender. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 62: 24W256.
- Reiter, Rosina Marques. (2004). *Linguistic Politeness in Britain and Uruguay: A Contrastive Study of Request and Apologies*. Philadelphia : John Benyamins Pub. Co.
- Scollon, R and S.B.K. Scollon. (1995). *Intercultural Communication: A Discourse Approach*. Oxford, Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Yassi, A. H. (1996). *Negating and Affirming a Proposition in Makassarese: A Cross-Cultural Communication Study*. Unpublished Master Research Research. Department of Linguistics, The University of Sydney, NSW. Australia.
- Yassi, A.H. (2011b). 'Negating and Affirming a Proposition in Makassarese: Revisiting the Universality of Brown and Levinson Politeness Theory' in F. Rahman (ed) *Kebahasaan, Sastra dan Pendidikan*. Prosiding Seminar Internasional. FIB, Universitas Hasanuddin, Makassar
- Yassi, A.H. (2012). "Teori Sistem Kesantunan Budaya Bahasa Makassar". Prosiding Kongres Internasional Bahasa-Bahasa Daerah Sulawesi Selatan.

Yassi, A. H. (2016a). “Model Kerangka Teori Kesantunan yang Efektif Mengkaji POla Kesantunan Bahasa-Bahasa di Indonesia: Mempertanyakan Keuniversalitasan Kerangka Teori Kesantunan Brown & Levinson”. Prosiding Seminar Antar Bangsa (ASBAM .) ke-5. Hal 19-28

Profil Penulis

Penulis bernama lengkap Muthmainnah Mursidin, S.Pd., M.Pd.. lahir di Ujung Pandang, 23 Januari 1990 merupakan anak ke-lima dari enam bersaudara. Pada tahun 2008 Menempuh Pendidikan Strata Satu di jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Universitas Negeri Makassar dan lulus pada tahun 2012, lalu gelar Magister Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Universitas Negeri Makassar juga diraihnya dengan melanjutkan Pendidikan S2 di jurusan dan universitas yang sama pada tahun 2015. Sejak di perguruan tinggi penulis aktif di beberapa organisasi seperti English Conversation Circle. Penulis juga sebagai dosen tetap di program studi pendidikan bahasa inggris di FKIP Universitas Islam Makassar dari tahun 2015 sampai sekarang.