

# PRAGMATIC COMPARISON ON JAVANESE AND WESTERN POLITENESS IN CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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## Abstract

*This paper is about theoretical research on politeness between Javanese and Western cultures. Politeness, as a universal phenomenon in society, is a reflection of specific cultural values, which can be observed in all languages and cultures. The way of expression that can be used in cross cultural background that can give best effect of communication. This paper attempts to make a comparative study of politeness behavior between Javanese and Western on linguistic behaviors such as addressing and refusing. Due to different beliefs and values, and different cultural backgrounds, these cultural differences of politeness are great importance in cross-cultural communication.*

**Keywords:** *pragmatic comparison, politeness, cross-cultural communication*

## INTRODUCTION

In the development of globalization, cross cultural communication has been more important part in people's life. It becomes important about how to communicate properly and politely with people in different cultural backgrounds. This paper concerns to politeness principle in cross cultural communication between Javanese and Western and to help communicators avoid to get failure of politeness and to make realization of cross cultural communication successfully. In term to speak polite with other people from different cultural backgrounds, politeness is best expressed as the practical application of good manners or etiquette. Therefore, what is considered polite in one culture can sometimes be quite rude or impolite in another cultural context. Regarding with cross cultural communication, politeness also helps to maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships, and reduces conflicts and misunderstandings.

This paper attempts to make a comparative study of politeness behaviour between Javanese and Western on linguistic behaviour that dealing to communication, such as; addressing and refusing. Regarding with politeness, Javanese and Western have different face work strategies. Javanese politeness is related to Javanese behaviour that recognized as *sopan* and *santun*. In this term, according to Wijayanto (2013: 34) Javanese uphold good self-image (*santun*) and maintain or enhance feelings and self-worth (*sopan*). While, Steward (2002) stated that Western tend to exercise face-saving strategies through negative politeness: preserving individual freedom from imposition by others and respect individual privacy. Due to the differences, what is appropriate in Javanese communication could differ from that in English and vice versa.

This paper is concern to explore efficient means to teach students to use English in the polite way in order to communicate effectively and efficiently. Therefore, in comunication between two different languages and cultural background misunderstanding will not occur. This paper also will review the concept of face and politeness in different cultures. Thus, the effect of face will influence the way of people communicate each other in their community.

The concept of politeness in Western is related to face theory of Brown and Levinson and the politeness principle of Leech. Brown and Levinson's concept of face is based on the definition given by Goffman. According to Goffman's theory, face is sacred and inviolable to every single person and it is the most basic and can not be neglected to every communicator Gao (1997 in Zhu & Bao, 2010: 849). The concept proposed by Brown and Levinson is more concrete. They believe that each rational member of society has his own face and they divide face into two groups according to individual need: negative face and positive face. *Negative face*—"the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction i.e. freedom of action and freedom from imposition", while *positive face*—"the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants" (1987, p.61).

In communication, in one side, we need to interact with the other person involved or pay close attention to him. At the same time, we need to show our

attention. The interaction aspect is positive face. Positive face usually indicates to listen to the other's speech with respect and show an interest in it, in order to make it clear that the two communicators have something in common. On the other side, we should protect certain independence and express that we respect their independent demand to the other side. The independent aspect of politeness is recognized as negative face. As Zhu & Bao (2010: 849) stated that the key in the negative face implementation is not to impose a certain idea to others, in order to make the counterparts enjoy enough freedom and independence. In real life, the most communicative acts are face-threatening acts. Sometimes we may express our disagreement to others, complain or blame on others' work or sometimes we utter some impolite words or taboos. These all belong to face-threatening acts. The acts like command or request will threat negative face. If the other side of a conversation acts follows the speaker's command or request, the hearer's freedom of action is interrupted under the speaker's imposition. In order to avoid the threat degree to faces and maintain the communication going on favorably, the speaker must do certain efforts for protecting both his and the hearer's faces. It is distinguished as politeness. The British linguist Leech had listed six politeness principles according to the English culture (Leech, 1983):

- (1) *Tact Maxim: try to minimize cost to other or maximize benefit to other;*
- (2) *Generosity Maxim: try to minimize benefit to self or maximize cost to self;*
- (3) *Approbation Maxim: try to minimize dispraise of other or maximize praise of other;*
- (4) *Modesty Maxim: try to minimize praise of self or maximize dispraise of self;*
- (5) *Agreement Maxim: try to minimize disagreement between self and other or maximize agreement between self and other;*
- (6) *Sympathy Maxim: try to minimize antipathy between self and other or maximize sympathy between self and other.*

Geertz (1961) stated Javanese politeness is built on the feeling of *isin* (shame) by which polite conduct is introduced to Javanese children by making them to feel ashamed about what other people may think when they cannot show proper behaviour. Outside their family, all social relationships are threatened by *isin* and only

in the family circle do they feel relaxed completely (Suseno, 1997). To minimize *isin* in wider social contexts, Javanese people establish a strict formal etiquette (*tata krama*) which will secure and protect them against the feeling of *isin* when they perform it accordingly (Suseno, 1997). To feel and show *isin* is the basis of the Javanese characteristics that proposed as *sopan* and *santun* (politeness). To uphold *santun* means to fulfill one's intentions and public expectations for one to obey the guidelines of behaviour that include in Javanese *tata krama* (etiquette) so that someone will not bring shame to oneself and others in their society. As Wijayanto (2013: 35) following Geertz (1969) stated that *tata krama* represents both cultural norms and language use. As for the former *santun* commonly includes the manners of how to do or behave and body or physical attitudes, while the latter concerns language etiquette. As a public orientation, *santun* is to show one's quality of 'Javaneseness' that is to act in accordance with the Javanese characters, some of which include (1) *Andhap-asor* (self-deprecation) that is not showing that one's desires, value, opinions, and abilities are greater or more important than those of other people (2) *Lembah manab*: modesty in deeds (3) *Grapyak*: friendly or amiable and warm (4) *Alus*: refined conduct or behavior which emphasizes self-control (5) *Empapapan*: understanding when, where and how one is appropriate. Meanwhile as a private or self orientation, *santun* lacks similarities to Brown and Levinson's negative face: the freedom from imposition, but rather the maintenance of someone's awareness to show propriety in manners and behavior according to *tata krama* (etiquette) which could secure one from negative evaluation by the society. As Kartomihardjo (1981 in Wijayanto 2013: 36) stated that someone's lack of polite behavior is regarded as someone who is not Javanese yet (*durung jawa*) and suffering from a lack of teaching (*kurang ajar*) which will bring shame. Thus, to maintain someone's face through *santun* means to avoid oneself from being shameful by obeying *tata krama*.

As the teaching of *tata krama* is the responsibility of someone's immediate family members, teachers, and institutions, maintaining *santun* also indirectly means preserving the reputation of others in their society. Meanwhile in terms of linguistic behavior *santun* means to act in accordance with the Javanese *unggah-ungguhing basa*

(linguistic etiquette) which generally involves obeying the rules of using language levels or styles, the manners of using language verbal and non-verbal. In addition to *santun*, Javanese develop strategies to regulate their behavior so as to preserve good interpersonal relationships proposed in this paper as *sopan*. Unlike *santun* however, *sopan* is aimed mostly at attending to other people's welfare including maintaining their *rasa* (feelings) and respecting their *aji* (self-worth). As for linguistic behavior, to perform *sopan* one has to obey the Javanese *unggah-ungguhing basa* (linguistic etiquette). According to Geertz (1961) in Wijayanto (2013: 36) respecting one's own and other people's feelings is essential in every interpersonal relationship and it depends on their emotional equilibrium. The Javanese inner behavior which controls one's own want or desire so as to preserve other's feelings or to mitigate threats on other's feelings is known as *ngemong rasa*, derived from *ngemong* (to look after or maintain) and *rasa* (feelings). Through *ngemong rasa*, Javanese interpersonal or social interactions are commonly felt and conducted with *rasa* (Suseno, 1997). Through this, every conduct is weighed carefully to avoid from making others hurt and insulted (*lara ati*), angry (*nesu* or *duka*), dislike (*gething*), disappointed (*gela* or *cunvo*).

As offending the feelings of others is the most serious offence in Javanese (Geertz, 1961), everything that can stir up negative emotional reactions tend to be concealed or repressed (Suseno, 1997). In Javanese, speakers are required to use appropriate words and phrase the words to avoid offending other's feelings. *Ngemong rasa* also satisfies or enhances other's feelings in which one will use a good language to comfort others that showing sympathy, empathy, and sensibility. Further, in Javanese sympathy attitude is also recognized as *tepa slira*, it is an attitude that deals with tolerance which emphasizes the importance of maintaining other's feelings (Gunarwan, 2001). *Tepa* (to model or measure) and *slira* (body/one's body) idiomatically means: 'treat others as you want others to treat you, and don't treat others in the ways you don't want others to treat you'. As Kartomihardjo (1981) in Wijayanto (2010: 36) defined that the underlying philosophical concept of the expression is that if one treats others properly, in return they will treat one properly too, but if one is improper, one will not be treated properly. In the language use, this has been formulated by Gunarwan (2001, p. 176) as the *Tepa-slira* maxim:

(1) *Don't use inappropriate languages you don't want others to use inappropriate language to you*

(2) *Use an appropriate language as you want others to use appropriate language with you*

The use of Javanese language reflects the reality that Javanese social relationships are greatly

influenced by the differences in socio-political and economic power, where different power means different application of language styles and address terms to acknowledge an individual's self-worth (*aji*). According to Wijayanto (2010: 37) Javanese language can be divided into three speech levels: *Krama* (high level), *Madya* (middle level) and *Ngoko* (low level). Each level indicates the attitude of a speaker toward an addressee and conveys different social status.

Sukarno (2010: 62) defined *kerama* is addressed to interlocutors of higher status to assert respect and deference. *Madya* is commonly spoken to those of lower status to show mutual deference and it is addressed to strangers or unfamiliar interlocutors to maintain social distance in a polite way. *Ngoko* is spoken to a lower status and it is used by collocutors of equal status to show equality or familiarity. In addition to using honorific language, it depends on the use of titles and/or kin address terms which are commonly classified according to the levels of generation or seniority in the stratifications: grandparents, parents, siblings, children, and grandchildren.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The methods used in this study is comparative and contrastive analysis by collecting data from a number of expert regarding their opinions about the comparison and the differences in the connotation of politeness, the focus or choice of politeness principle, and the way of expression of politeness. Data were collected from books, journals, and opinions published online by experts who have very depth understanding in terms of politeness between Javanese and Western. Upon collecting data, the author makes categorization of the different status relationships (lower, equal, and higher status) and two aspects of expressing politeness (addressing and refusal strategies). After completing the data analysis, the writer made a general

summary on the differences way of expression politeness between Javanese and Western.

## DISCUSSION

In any society or group all around the world, people's behavior is restricted by politeness and maintained by face. In Javanese society, the politeness principle is restricted by *tata krama* (etiquette) and it is different from that in Western culture. The differences are various. To be more concrete, the differences are exemplified in the connotation of politeness, the focus or choice of politeness principle, and the way of expression of politeness.

### A. *The Connotation Differences between Chinese Politeness and Western Politeness*

In Javanese society, the politeness principle is different from that of Western cultures. Javanese politeness principle puts emphasis on distinction. This is the mark of grade differences. This mark is reflected in the aspect of showing social rank relationship. In modern society, it is also used to reflect and maintain the class distinction. This kind of politeness principle is not preferred in Western cultures. The interpersonal relationship of the westerners is based on a parallel relation. At the same time, in Western society, people pursue self-realization and individual struggle, and pay much attention to individual power and individual privacy. Westerners emphasize doing their own business and showing their talent individually. While in Javanese, they tend to respect others and consider other's feeling in doing something. From this point, Javanese politeness and Western' politeness are different.

### B. *The Differences on the Selection of Politeness Principle*

The tact maxim is the most important in Leech's politeness principle. It is the principle which is often used in interpersonal communication, constituting the core of politeness principle in Western culture. In Western society, personal interest, individual power and privacy are all believed sacred and inviolable. However, from the point of view of Javanese tradition, respecting one's own and other people's

feelings is essential in every interpersonal relationship. People have to control one's own want or desire so as to preserve other's feelings or to mitigate threats on other's feelings. Thus, it reduce from making others hurt, angry, dislike, and disappointed. In Javanese culture, satisfies or enhances other's feelings is regarding with politeness principle of Javanese; *Tepa-sliira*.

Further, *tepa-sliira* maxim involving the teaching of tolerance which emphasize the importance of maintaining other's feelings. In this term *tepa sliira* is related to symphaty. Thus, in Javanese culture, the respectfulness principle is the politeness phenomenon with strong Javanese cultural characteristics. Javanese tend to respect oneself to show their symphaty. In all cultures, symphaty is regarded as the performance of politeness. The symphaty maxim is also included in Leech's politeness principle, but there are differences in degree of following the principle between Javanese and Westerners. Javanese tend to maximize sympathy between self and others but Westerners commonly ignored others' feelings. For example, to show inability, Westerners tend to decline an invitation to interlocutors in short form by saying "I cant' come", while Javanese tend to decline an invitation by maintaining and considering other's feeling by saying "*Dalem mboten saget dugi dateng acara syukuran bapak mbenjang Minggu*" (I won't able to go to your party next Sunday) (Wijayanto, 2013, p.38). In this term, Javanese use polite expression to decline the invitation to show their symphaty, whether Westerners try to express what they felt without considering other's feeling although it refers to impolite expression.

### ***C. The Differences in the Way of Expressing Politeness between Javanese and Western***

Politeness is the universal phenomenon in all social groups. But every ethnic group has its particular principles or standards. People from different cultural backgrounds will express politeness in different ways. This paper tries to explain it through the following two aspects:

#### ***1. Addressing***



In Western, people are usually addressed according to the gender: Mr. (for adult males), Mrs. (for married women), Miss (for unmarried women), Ms. (for women whose marital status is unknown) such as:

- *I am sorry **Mr**, maybe I can't go to your party*

but sometimes Western people use *sir* and *ma'am* for a position title (i.e. boss) to address a collocutor of higher status. Indeed, *sir*, *ma'am*, and *madam* in English are usually limited to interlocutors who are either unknown or very high status. While, Javanese kin terms are applied as social identifications specifically for non-family relationship by which they are placed in their social rankings or stratifications. Reflecting this, Javanese frequently used kin address terms of *bapak/pak* (father) and *ibu/bu* (mother) such as:

- *Nggih, matur nuwun **pak**. (Yes, thank you sir)*
- *Ngapunten **bu** kulo wonten rapat ning kampung (I am sorry ma'am I am going to attend a meeting in my village).*

Javanese are more complicated than those in Western. In Javanese, kin address terms within same generation such as *mbak* or *jeng* (older sister), *dik* (younger sister) and *mas* or *kangmas* (older brother) and *adhi* (younger brother) are used by Javanese to address a collocutor of lower status for showing mutual deference such as:

- *Ora usah **mas**, gampang iki. (No older brother, it's easy to do)*
- *Wis **mbak** ra popo, matur nuwun. (Don't worry older sister; I am fine, thank you)*

While in Western, they only use *sister* and *brother* to address people within same generation. Such as:

- *Thanks **brother**, but I won't bother you.*

In Javanese, children usually use *pa'le* (younger uncle) and *pa'dhe* (older uncle), *bu'le* (younger aunt) and *bu'dhe* (older aunt) to address adults and has family relationships. Such as:

- *Klambine bu'le takgawa menyang penjahit* (younger aunt's clothes were taken to a tailor by me)
- *Pa'dhe ketoke wis munggah kaji nalika sasi Dzulkaidah wingi* (older uncle seems to have raised to hajj in the last Dzulkaidah).

There are no equivalent addresses in English because they commonly tend to use *uncle* and *aunt* for terms of family relationships. Such as:

- *My aunt is going to go to Mecca next year.*

## 2. *Refusal Strategies*

In Javanese, to express inability to accept an invitation Javanese commonly elaborate this semantic formula so as to avoid negative feeling such as anger, irritation, displeasure, and strong disapproval or rejection intrinsically carried by its short forms. Wordy inability implies politeness, or at least the speakers do not intend to express the negative feeling. For example declining an invitation to collocutors of higher status, some Javanese commonly use verbose inability.

- *Dinten minggu kulo mboten saget dugi dateng syukuran panjenengan.* (Next Sunday I won't be able to come to your party).
- *Kulo mbok menawi mboten saget dumugi dateng acara panjenengan.* (I possibly won't be able go to your party)

This kind of expression strategy commonly occurred in the Javanese discourse to express politeness. While, in Western, people used short forms of inability to decline an invitation to interlocutors of the three status levels (equal, lower, and higher), for example:

- *I can't come*
- *I can't go there*

For Javanese, refusing strikes both the speakers and the addressees. It causes upset and discomfort for the speakers and disappointment to the persons being refused. To anticipate this, Javanese tend to make refusals looks harmonious

eventhough inwardly both participants may feel otherwise. Javanese tend to use polite refusals to an offer of help, for example:

- *Mboten pak, mboten onten nopo-nopo.* (No sir, I have no problem).
- *Mboten wonten nopo pak. Maturnuwun, niki sampun biasa rade ngadat.* (I have no problem sir, thank you, it often stalls)

While Western people tend to emphasize their optimism or confidence to solve the problem, for example:

- *I'm sure I'll get it to work soon.*

In this term, Western tend to use more assertive expression in order to make others free from any obligation to help and to show their ability and certainty in solving the problem.

Regarding to refusals, Javanese and Western use different politeness strategies. Javanese commonly initiate refusals with an apology. For example:

- *Sori tenan lho.* (really sorry).
- *Sori banget yo.* (very sorry)

While, Western people commonly expressed regret to initiate refusals to an invitation, for example:

- *Unfortunately, I have other engagement.*

In this term, Western people make an invitation for the benefit of the invitee but in Javanese, it is often for the interest of both the invitees and the inviters. Intensifying the degree of apology means that Javanese intended to redress the threats on the addressee whose invitation was refused. While in Western, people are more autonomous and free to do what they want, where declining an invitation, offer, and suggestion is not normally a face-threatening act, or at least it is not as face threatening as it is in the Javanese context.

## CONCLUSION

Politeness is what people of different cultural backgrounds all try to observe and maintain. As a final conclusion of this paper that it is true that every country has different cultural background in the way they communicate, whether it is polite or not. It is important to be different. In this term, politeness indicates different meanings in different culture. Thus, the Javanese politeness and Western politeness are put forward respectively on the basis of Javanese language cultural characteristics and the English language cultural characteristics. They cover many aspects of principles, and will be different from each other due to the different cultures. The politeness principle of Javanese and Western is both restricted by their own culture. In cross-cultural communication, people should do their best to use the correct politeness principle, avoid the cultural conflict and get the best effect of communication.

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