

Politeness Strategies in Buginese Language: A Sociolinguistic Analysis in Sinjai Regency

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Abstract:

This study examines politeness strategies in the Buginese language as used by the Bugis community of Sinjai Regency, South Sulawesi, from a sociolinguistic perspective. Politeness is a central aspect of communication that reflects both cultural values and social relationships among speech participants, yet the specific linguistic forms through which the Bugis Sinjai community expresses politeness, and the social factors shaping their use, have not been comprehensively documented. This study aims to describe the forms of politeness strategies used by the Bugis community in Sinjai Regency and to identify the linguistic forms and characteristics that mark politeness in their everyday communication. A qualitative descriptive method was used, with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation involving indigenous community members and community leaders as primary informants, supplemented by library research. The findings show that politeness in Bugis Sinjai speech is realized through four pragmatic maxims, namely the maxims of policy, generosity, acceptance, and humility, and through four politeness strategies following Brown and Levinson's framework: bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record politeness. At the morphological and syntactic levels, politeness is marked by proclitic and enclitic pronouns, honorific vocabulary, and indirect sentence structures, all of which realize the cultural value of *siri'* through its subvalues of *sipatangngari*, *sipakaraja*, and *sipakatau*. These findings show that politeness in Bugis Sinjai communication is inseparable from cultural values and is shaped by the social status and relationship between speech participants.

Keywords: politeness strategy; Buginese language; sociolinguistics

INTRODUCTION

Language is a basic human need, functioning not only as a tool for communication but also as a mirror of culture and politeness (Kurniawati, 2012). Politeness behavior is closely tied to the culture and language of an ethnic group: language reflects culture, while culture in turn provides the values and principles that guide interaction within a speech

community (Noviola, 2012). This relationship is clearly visible in the Buginese community of Sinjai Regency, South Sulawesi Province, where politeness in communication both expresses and sustains local cultural identity.

Politeness has been widely studied as a central concept in pragmatics and sociolinguistics. Halliday and Hasan (2010) treat ethics

and etiquette in language as closely related notions grounded in rationality and face, distinguishing between a positive face, tied to a person's self-image and desire for approval, and a negative face, tied to the desire for autonomy. Brown and Levinson (2014), building on Goffman's (1967) concept of face, extend this framework into a systematic politeness theory comprising maxims, a politeness scale, and strategies ranging from direct (bald-on-record) speech to indirect (off-record) speech, while Wardhaugh (2001) emphasizes that politeness in language reflects solidarity, power, intimacy, and the status of relationships between speech participants.

Despite this substantial theoretical foundation, the concrete linguistic forms through which politeness is realized in specific regional languages of Indonesia remain unevenly documented. In the Bugis community of Sinjai Regency, language politeness has reportedly been declining in the current era of openness and reformation, with deviations from politeness principles observed particularly among adolescents communicating with older, more senior interlocutors. However, the specific pragmatic maxims, morphological and syntactic markers, and politeness strategies underlying Bugis Sinjai speech have not been systematically described.

This study addresses that gap by examining everyday Bugis Sinjai speech through the combined lens of

Gricean conversational maxims and Brown and Levinson's (2014) politeness strategies, identifying the specific morphological, syntactic, and lexical markers through which politeness is realized. In doing so, it connects established pragmatic theory to the local cultural value of *siri'*, operationalized through the subvalues of *sipatangngari*, *sipakaraja*, and *sipakatau* (Mattulada, 2013), which together define appropriate, respectful communication within Buginese culture.

This study aims to describe the forms of politeness strategies used by the Bugis community in Sinjai Regency and to describe the linguistic forms and characteristics that mark politeness in their language. Its contribution lies in documenting how a globally established pragmatic framework manifests in a specific regional language, providing a basis for strengthening local wisdom, cultural identity, and character education grounded in Buginese politeness values.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design, treating the researcher as the primary instrument and adapting data collection to naturally occurring communicative situations, with particular attention to the language characteristics of the Bugis Sinjai community in everyday interaction. The research was conducted over one month in Sinjai Timur Subdistrict, Sinjai Regency. Primary data were obtained directly in the

field through observation, documentation, and interviews with indigenous community members and community leaders, while secondary data were obtained through library research on politeness culture and sociolinguistics, using both direct and indirect quotation of relevant scholarly sources. Field data collection combined observation, defined as the intentional and systematic study of communicative phenomena and events, with interviews, in which informants' spoken responses were recorded to elicit fuller descriptions of local politeness culture, and documentation, used to corroborate interview and observation data through relevant written sources and photographic records. Data analysis followed a qualitative procedure consisting of data reduction, namely selecting, focusing, and transforming raw field data such as narrative transcriptions into an analyzable form, followed by the presentation of organized data and the drawing of conclusions once patterns in the data became clear.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of Bugis Sinjai speech data shows that politeness is realized at the pragmatic level through four conversational maxims, at the morphological and syntactic levels through specific markers of pronoun and vocabulary choice, and at the strategic level through variation according to the social distance and status of the speech participants. Each of these dimensions is discussed below with representative excerpts of naturally occurring Bugis Sinjai speech, presented with an

interlinear gloss and a free English translation.

Pragmatic Maxims of Politeness

In relation to pragmatics, four maxims recur in Bugis Sinjai speech: the maxim of policy, the maxim of generosity, the maxim of acceptance, and the maxim of humility. The maxim of policy requires speakers to maximize benefit to others; it is illustrated by a request for permission to send a child's school fee, phrased with the hedge hedding *mua* ('is it possible...?'), a formulation that softens what is functionally a request for help into an interrogative, thereby realizing a negative politeness strategy. The response likewise avoids a blunt affirmative, replacing the casual *iyo* with the more measured *iyē* to avoid appearing presumptuous.

The maxim of generosity is illustrated by an expressive speech act of gratitude, in which a speaker thanks an interlocutor for guiding a nephew toward becoming a teacher. The response uses the lexeme *iyē* together with the enclitic pronoun *-ki* and the kinship term *anaureta* ('your nephew'), both of which function as politeness markers signaling cooperative, appreciative engagement rather than self-focused speech. The maxim of acceptance, which requires minimizing benefit to oneself, appears in a formal invitation to a family religious ceremony, marked by the lexemes *iyē*, *idi-mi*, and the enclitic pronoun *-ki* attached to the verb *u-elora(ki)* ('I invite you'), all of which realize the cultural value of *sipakalebbi*, or mutual glorification.

The maxim of humility requires

speakers to maximize sympathy for, and minimize antipathy toward, the interlocutor. It appears in an exchange where a compliment about a child's intelligence is met with a self-deprecating response minimizing the achievement as coincidental and unremarkable. This pattern, in which praise is actively deflected rather than accepted, reflects a high degree of linguistic politeness consistent with Leech's (2014) view of pragmatics as a means of managing social relations, and parallels Achmad's (2012) finding that politeness across languages tends to share universal formulas realized through specific morphemes, particles, vocabulary, and kinesic behavior.

Morphological and Syntactic Markers of Politeness

At the morphological level, politeness in Bugis Sinjai is marked by a systematic contrast between the proclitic and enclitic pronoun *ta-* / *-ta*, which conveys politeness, and its unmarked counterpart *mu-* / *-mu*, which does not. In a directive concerning the return of a kept item, the form beginning with *ta-* softens the imperative by incorporating a politeness pronoun, whereas the equivalent utterance built with the ordinary pronoun conveys the same propositional content but without the mitigating effect, and is perceived as more direct and less respectful. The same opposition recurs with the enclitic pair *-ki*, which marks respect, and *-ko*, which does not, confirming that this morphological contrast functions systematically as a politeness marker across different directive speech acts rather than being limited to a single expression.

At the syntactic and lexical levels, politeness is additionally marked by dedicated courtesy vocabulary. The particle *iyē* ('yes') realizes the cultural value of *mappasikaraja*, or mutual respect, and is used specifically to acknowledge or agree with an older or more respected interlocutor, in contrast with the plainer *iyō*, which is reserved for peers or younger interlocutors and is judged less polite. Similarly, the particle *tābē* ('excuse me') together with *taddampengengā* ('forgive me') realizes the same value of mutual glorification in requests; an otherwise identical request formulated without these particles is interpreted as asymmetrical, implying that the speaker holds more power relative to the addressee. Honorific address terms such as *puang*, *petta*, *daeng*, and *ndi* function similarly: even between interlocutors who do not know one another, the use of *puang* as a general respectful address realizes the values of *sipakaraja* and *sipakatau*, indicating that honorific address in Bugis Sinjai is not restricted to hierarchical relationships but operates as a default marker of civility.

Politeness Strategies across Social Distance and Status

Beyond individual lexical and morphological markers, the choice of politeness strategy varies systematically with the social relationship between speech participants. In an exchange between siblings of different birth order, the elder sibling uses a comparatively casual, less formal greeting pattern, such as the enclitic *-ko*, while the younger sibling consistently selects the more

polite -ki and the particle iyye. Despite the closeness of the kinship relationship, this asymmetry indicates that seniority, not merely intimacy, shapes the choice of politeness strategy, with junior participants tending to maintain more formal patterns of address regardless of how familiar the relationship is.

A comparable asymmetry emerges in interactions marked by an explicit status difference, such as between a household helper and a socially senior addressee referred to with the honorific *karaeng*. The lower-status participant consistently uses indirect, formal sentence constructions realizing an off-record politeness strategy, together with courtesy lexemes such as *tabe* and *taddampengenga*, whereas the higher-status participant responds using direct, unmitigated sentences consistent with a bald-on-record strategy. This distribution supports Brown and Levinson's (2014) prediction that bald-on-record strategies are more available to speakers with greater relative power, while speakers with comparatively lower status rely on indirectness and honorific vocabulary to counterbalance the power asymmetry and to realize the value of *mapakalebbi*, or glorifying one's interlocutor.

Taken together, these findings indicate that Bugis Sinjai politeness operates simultaneously at several linguistic levels: pragmatically, through Grice's cooperative maxims realized as the locally specific maxims of policy, generosity, acceptance, and humility; morphologically and syntactically, through systematic pronoun and lexical contrasts; and strategically, through the selection of bald-on-record, positive,

negative, or off-record politeness depending on social distance, status, and situation. Rather than being violations of a single cooperative principle, the indirect and mitigated forms observed throughout the data reflect speakers' awareness of these social variables, consistent with Leech's (2014) characterization of pragmatics as a resource for managing communicative relationships rather than a fixed set of rules.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to describe the forms of politeness strategies used by the Bugis community in Sinjai Regency and the linguistic forms and characteristics that mark politeness in their language. The findings show that Bugis Sinjai politeness reflects the realization of the cultural value of *siri'* as a central organizing value, from which the community derives variation in speech as a politeness strategy shaped by the status of speech participants and the communicative situation. In terms of linguistic formulas, politeness is expressed through proclitic and enclitic pronouns such as *ta/-ta* versus *mu/-mu* and *-ki* versus *-ko*, dedicated courtesy vocabulary such as *tabe* and *taddampengenga*, and honorific address terms such as *puang*, *iye*, *daeng*, *ndi*, *sappo*, and *amure*, alongside indirect sentence structures that realize the cultural meaning values of *sipatangngari*, *sipakaraja*, and *sipakalebbi*.

At the pragmatic level, politeness in Bugis Sinjai speech is organized around four maxims, namely the maxims of

policy, generosity, acceptance, and humility, and around four politeness strategies following Brown and Levinson's framework, namely bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record politeness, all of which realize the cultural value of *siri'*. Together, these findings carry implications for language awareness, solidarity, polite linguistic behavior or etiquette, and language ethics within the Bugis community of Sinjai Regency, and point to the value of documenting comparable politeness systems in other Buginese-speaking areas as a basis for strengthening local wisdom and character education.

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