

Linguistic Politeness Issues in Child-Parent Communication: A Pragmatic Study Based on Leech's Framework

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Abstract. This study investigates linguistic politeness issues in communication between children aged 6–12 years and their parents in Ngarap-ngarap Village, Wonogiri, employing Geoffrey Leech's pragmatic framework. Using a qualitative approach, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and observations of 12 families to identify forms of politeness, causes of violations, and their impacts on family relationships. Findings indicate that children predominantly use *boso kromo inggil*, reflecting Javanese cultural norms, but violations occur due to peer influence, adolescent emotions, and digital media exposure, particularly breaching the maxims of approbation and agreement. Politeness fosters emotional closeness and family harmony, whereas violations cause temporary emotional tension. Linguistic factors (diction, speech acts), social factors (peer influence, Javanese culture), and technology shape these issues. The study underscores the need for linguistic politeness education integrating *unggah-ungguh* and digital literacy to strengthen family bonds and preserve cultural values.

Keywords: child-parent interaction; family communication; javanese culture; leech's pragmatics; linguistic politeness

Introduction

Language reflects the cultural depth and intellectual richness of a society. As Santoso (2020) notes, "language mirrors a nation's identity and character." Linguistic politeness, deeply rooted in Indonesia's diverse cultural values, is integral to social interactions, particularly between children and parents (Rahman et al., 2022). However, globalization and societal changes have led to a decline in linguistic politeness, especially among younger generations (Rahardi, 2021). This phenomenon is concerning amid rapid socio-cultural transformations (Suryadi, 2021). Linguistic politeness, as defined by linguists and sociolinguists, extends beyond polite or formal language use (Sifianou, 2019). It embodies social and emotional intelligence, reflecting adherence to cultural norms, ethics, and values (Watts, 2020). Leech (2014) emphasizes that politeness principles—such as the maxims of tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy—are crucial in child-parent communication to maintain harmony and prevent conflict. These maxims foster respectful communication, strengthen emotional bonds, and promote mutual respect.

In Indonesian society, linguistic politeness is complex, intertwined with local cultural values like respect, etiquette, and *unggah-ungguh*, which dictate how children communicate with elders (Kusno et al., 2022). Politeness encompasses not only word choice and intonation but also non-verbal elements like gestures, facial expressions, and posture, forming a cohesive communication system. However, Kusno et al. (2022) highlight a concerning decline in linguistic politeness among youth, driven by rapid advancements in information and communication technology. Social media, messaging apps, and digital platforms have created informal communication spaces that often disregard conventional politeness norms. Young people, immersed in digital environments, adopt casual, abbreviated language, marked by acronyms and informal online discourse, which

deviates from standard linguistic norms.

This degradation is exacerbated by contemporary social dynamics. Economic pressures reducing parental time for teaching politeness, combined with education systems prioritizing academic achievement over character development, hinder the transmission of politeness values (Syahrani, 2018; Saleh, 2017). Consequently, many children lack an adequate understanding of politeness in communication, particularly with parents and elders. In a broader context, linguistic politeness issues reflect Indonesia's ongoing socio-cultural transformation from traditional to modern lifestyles (Pranowo, 2014). As a cornerstone of Indonesian cultural values, politeness faces increasing challenges amid modernization.

Preliminary observations conducted over three months (October–December 2024) in 12 families in Ngarap-ngarap Village revealed patterns of declining politeness in child-parent interactions (children aged 6–12 years). Common issues included harsh language, inappropriate intonation, and dismissive attitudes toward parents. For instance, phrases like “who cares” or “wait a sec!” spoken in a raised tone without eye contact were observed, violating Leech's maxims of approbation and agreement. These issues are worsened by media and digital content that often model impolite communication (Rahardi, 2018). Television programs, movies, and social media content popular among youth normalize coarse language, shaping misguided perceptions of acceptable communication standards.

If this decline persists, it could undermine cultural values and social harmony in Ngarap-ngarap Village, straining family relationships and threatening broader social cohesion. Linguistic politeness is not merely a linguistic issue but an indicator of eroding moral values. Ineffective communication hinders the social and emotional development of youth, affecting their interactions across contexts. This study is urgent, aiming to identify factors influencing the decline in politeness through Leech's politeness maxims and to explore underlying socio-cultural dynam.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach to describe and analyze linguistic politeness issues in communication between children aged 6–12 years and their parents in Ngarap-ngarap Village, Wonogiri, Central Java. Qualitative methods were chosen for their ability to provide in-depth insights into communication phenomena based on participants' experiences (Creswell, 2017). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and observations. Semi-structured interviews balanced flexibility and focus in exploring politeness forms, violation causes, and impacts on family relationships (Moleong, 2012). Interviews were conducted with parents, while participatory and non-participatory observations documented verbal (diction, intonation) and non-verbal (facial expressions, gestures) communication patterns in child-parent interactions.

Participants included primary and supporting informants. Primary informants were 15 parents from Ngarap-ngarap Village, selected via purposive sampling based on criteria: (1) having children aged 6–12 years, (2) residing in Ngarap-ngarap Village, and (3) willing to participate in interviews and observations. Supporting informants were children aged 6–12 years from the same families, observed to understand their communication patterns. Child criteria included: (1) active daily communication with parents and (2) immersion in Javanese culture emphasizing unggah-ungguh. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's model (Sugiyono, 2019), involving: (1) data reduction, filtering interview and observation results to select relevant politeness data; (2) data presentation, organizing reduced data into narratives and tables for clarity; and (3) conclusion drawing, linking findings to research questions, Leech's (1983) politeness theory, and Javanese cultural norms. Analysis included meaning interpretation, cross-finding comparisons, and triangulation of interview and observation data to ensure validity.

Result and Discussion

Forms of Linguistic Politeness Issues

The study in Ngarap-ngarap Village, Grobogan, revealed that children aged 6–12 years predominantly use boso kromo inggil when communicating with parents, reflecting Javanese unggah-ungguh values. Polite expressions like “I request your help” (OT 2) or “thank you” (OT 7) demonstrate respect, aligning with Leech’s (1983) maxim of approbation. Observations noted children using low intonation and polite phrases, such as “May I play outside, Mom?” (OT 6), reflecting the maxim of generosity. Politeness was more consistent in formal settings, such as requesting permission or speaking with older parents (OT 3, OT 4), but often limited to home or family events, indicating situational influences. Violations of politeness occurred during emotional states, such as frustration or sulking. Phrases like “what’s that?” (OT 5), “why so complicated?” (OT 9), or “who cares” (OT 10), spoken in high tones, breached Leech’s maxims of approbation and agreement. Yule (1996) suggests these violations stem from children’s limited pragmatic competence in selecting appropriate diction and speech acts. Violations were more frequent when children interacted with siblings or peers, carrying over into parent communication, particularly among 9–12-year-olds influenced by slang from peers or social media, such as “just chill” (OT 8).

Politeness levels varied by age. Children aged 6–8 years were more compliant with boso kromo inggil due to ongoing learning of cultural norms from parents and schools (OT 1, OT 12). Conversely, 9–12-year-olds violated politeness more often due to external influences like peers or social media, using phrases like “not my level” (OT 10). Social context also mattered; children showed greater politeness with grandparents, using phrases like “I beg your pardon” (OT 3), compared to informal peer interactions where they used language deemed impolite in Javanese culture. Peer environments and social media influenced politeness forms. Children interacting frequently with peers outside home adopted coarse language, such as “crazy, bro!” (OT 4) or “not important!” (OT 9), conflicting with unggah-ungguh norms. Social media content, like TikTok videos, introduced slang like “not my level” (OT 10), adopted in daily communication. However, consistent parental education, such as teaching “speak politely” (OT 7) or “use gentle words” (OT 1, OT 5), helped maintain politeness. Children under strict parental supervision violated politeness less frequently (OT 5, OT 8).

Politeness contributed to family harmony. Using boso kromo inggil fostered mutual respect, as reported by OT 1 (“it feels more harmonious”). Violations, such as defiant attitudes or phrases like “whatever, I’m done!” (OT 6), caused temporary emotional tension, described as “irritating” (OT 3, OT 9). Parents responded with gentle advice, like “speak nicely, okay?” (OT 6), reflecting Javanese rukun principles and Leech’s maxim of sympathy. Long-term, politeness supported respectful and empathetic character development (Kohlberg, 1984), while repeated impoliteness risked disrupting family relationships if uncorrected.

Causes of Linguistic Politeness Issues

Limited pragmatic competence was a primary cause of politeness violations. Children struggled to select context-appropriate diction and speech acts. For example, saying “hurry up!” (OT 11) in a harsh tone to parents violated Leech’s maxim of tact (1983). Yule (1996) notes that children at this age are still learning speech act implications, often using directive language that threatens the listener’s negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Violations were more common when children were upset or rushed, reflecting poor emotional control in communication. Peer influence significantly contributed to violations. Children mimicked informal or coarse peer language, such as “bro, chill” (OT 4) or “not important!” (OT 9), conflicting with unggah-ungguh norms. Erikson (1968) suggests peer pressure to fit in leads children to disregard politeness. Children playing unsupervised outside (OT 5, OT 8) were more likely to use slang deemed impolite in Javanese culture, particularly 9–12-year-olds seeking social identity beyond family.

Parental education shaped politeness. Parents consistently teaching boso kromo inggil, such as reminding children to “speak softly” (OT 3) or “say thank you” (OT 7), reduced violations. OT 7 reported their child used polite expressions more after regular reminders. However, busy or inconsistent parents left children vulnerable to external influences (OT 2, OT 8). Families with open communication and strict supervision had more polite children (OT 12).

Social media platforms like WhatsApp and TikTok introduced informal language conflicting with unggah-ungguh. Children adopted phrases like “whatever” or “yolo” (OT 7) from online content, deemed impolite in Javanese culture. Crystal (2006) notes that digital media accelerates slang spread, weakening boso kromo inggil use. For instance, a child (OT 10) used “not my level” after watching TikTok, eliciting negative parental reactions. However, social media could be used positively, such as family WhatsApp groups to reinforce politeness (OT 2). Javanese cultural norms like unggah-ungguh were taught at home and school, but modernization weakened their application. Koentjaraningrat (1985) notes that globalization promotes egalitarian communication conflicting with Javanese language hierarchy. Children exposed to modern values through school, peers, and media used casual phrases like “whatever, I’m done!” (OT 6). Yet, families strongly instilling unggah-ungguh maintained boso kromo inggil in formal settings (OT 1, OT 12), highlighting tensions between tradition and modernization.

Impacts of Linguistic Politeness Issues on Family Relationships

Politeness strengthened family relationships through respectful communication. Using boso kromo inggil, such as “pardon me” or “thank you” (OT 1, OT 7), created a harmonious atmosphere. Galvin et al. (2019) note that polite communication enhances family cohesion by fostering emotional closeness. Children using polite language, as reported by OT 8 (“it feels closer to parents”), had stronger parental bonds. Polite families also exhibited lower conflict levels. Violations, such as coarse phrases like “don’t interfere!” (OT 9) or defiant attitudes (OT 4), caused temporary emotional tension. Such language offended parents, disrupting family harmony. Olson et al. (1983) warn that repeated violations without correction weaken family bonds. However, parents often responded with gentle advice, like “speak nicely, okay?” (OT 6), reflecting Javanese rukun principles and Leech’s maxim of sympathy, mitigating negative impacts.

Politeness supported respectful and empathetic character development. Kohlberg (1984) suggests polite communication fosters strong social morality. Children consistently using boso kromo inggil (OT 2, OT 7) showed better social skills, like listening and respecting others. Repeated impoliteness, such as coarse language (OT 5, OT 9), risked hindering empathy and social skills, particularly in formal settings. Javanese approaches, like family musyawarah, effectively addressed violations. Parents held regular discussions to teach unggah-ungguh and correct behavior (OT 3, OT 12), supporting Leech’s maxim of sympathy by understanding children’s emotions while guiding them toward polite communication. OT 5 reported that musyawarah reduced coarse language use. This approach strengthened children’s responsibility toward family norms, enhancing harmony and social cohesion.

The main challenge in maintaining politeness was external influences like peers and social media, promoting informal language. However, strengthened parental and school education offered long-term solutions. School programs teaching unggah-ungguh, like Javanese culture lessons (OT 8), helped children value politeness. Parental digital literacy education, such as controlling social media exposure (OT 2), reduced slang influence. These approaches ensured Javanese cultural values remained relevant amid modernization, supporting family harmony and children’s social development.

Discussion

Linguistic Politeness in Javanese Cultural Context

The study in Ngarap-ngarap Village highlights that children’s linguistic politeness reflects Javanese unggah-ungguh values, as noted by Koentjaraningrat (1985). Using boso kromo inggil, like “I request your help” (OT 2) and “thank you” (OT 7), aligns with Leech’s (1983) maxims of approbation and generosity, emphasizing respect and minimizing listener discomfort. Politeness strengthens family harmony, aligning with Javanese rukun principles (Kusno et al., 2022). However, violations like “what’s that?” (OT 5) or “why so complicated?” (OT 9) indicate challenges in maintaining unggah-ungguh amid modernization, reflecting tensions between tradition and contemporary dynamics (Rahardi, 2021).

Influence of Technology and Social Media

Social media platforms like WhatsApp and TikTok significantly shape children's communication patterns. Exposure to digital content introduces slang like "whatever" (OT 7) or "not my level" (OT 10), conflicting with unggah-ungguh and weakening boso kromo inggil use. Crystal (2006) notes that digital media accelerates informal language spread, often misaligned with local politeness norms. Children accessing social media without supervision (OT 3, OT 10) adopted impolite phrases, eliciting negative parental reactions. However, social media can be leveraged positively, such as through family WhatsApp groups to reinforce politeness (OT 2), highlighting technology's educational potential if managed well (Suryadi, 2021).

Role of Family Education

Family education is critical in instilling linguistic politeness. Parents consistently teaching boso kromo inggil, like reminding children to "speak softly" (OT 3) or "say thank you" (OT 7), fostered polite behavior, aligning with Galvin et al.'s (2019) findings on polite communication's role in family cohesion. Families with open communication and strict supervision (OT 12) had more polite children than those with limited interaction (OT 2, OT 8). However, busy or inconsistent parents left children vulnerable to external influences, as noted by Syahrani (2018).

Peer Influence

Peers significantly contribute to politeness violations, particularly among 9–12-year-olds. Children mimicked informal or coarse language like "crazy, bro!" (OT 4) or "not important!" (OT 9) to fit into social groups, as explained by Erikson (1968). Unsupervised children (OT 5, OT 8) were more likely to disregard unggah-ungguh, conflicting with Leech's maxims of approbation and agreement. Limited pragmatic competence, such as inappropriate diction (Yule, 1996), exacerbated violations in parent communication.

Strengths and Challenges of Linguistic Politeness

Politeness strengthens family relationships and fosters respectful, empathetic character, as per Kohlberg (1984). Using boso kromo inggil creates a rukun atmosphere (OT 1, OT 8) and supports social morality development. However, external influences like peers and social media promote informal language (Rahardi, 2018). Family musyawarah (OT 3, OT 12) and school Javanese culture lessons (OT 8) effectively address these challenges, supporting family harmony and cultural preservation.

Collaborative Communication Patterns

Politeness reflects collaborative communication between children and parents. Using boso kromo inggil engages children in family communication, fostering collective responsibility (Suhendra & Pratiwi, 2024). Gentle parental advice, like "speak nicely, okay?" (OT 6), supports Leech's maxim of sympathy, enhancing harmonious communication. Family musyawarah (OT 12) facilitates open dialogue, enabling mutual influence in maintaining politeness, aligned with Javanese rukun values.

Communication Culture Based on Unggah-ungguh

Using boso kromo inggil shapes a distinct communication culture in Ngarap-ngarap Village, strengthening family social identity (Julia et al., 2022). Politeness facilitates decision-making and conflict resolution through musyawarah (OT 12), maintaining harmony and communication effectiveness. However, modernization introduces egalitarian communication, weakening Javanese language hierarchy (Koentjaraningrat, 1985). Politeness education integrating unggah-ungguh and digital literacy (OT 2, OT 8) ensures cultural relevance amid social change, supporting family cohesion and children's social development.

Conclusion

This study reveals that linguistic politeness in communication between children aged 6–12 years and their parents in Ngarap-ngarap Village, Grobogan, reflects Javanese *unggah-ungguh* values, with *boso kromo inggil* use like "I request your help" and "thank you" aligning with Leech's (1983) maxims of approbation and

generosity. Violations, driven by limited pragmatic competence, peer influence, social media exposure, and inconsistent parental education, often breach the maxims of approbation and agreement. Phrases like “don’t interfere!” or “who cares” cause temporary emotional tension, while politeness fosters harmony and family cohesion. Family *musyawarah* and *unggab-unggub* teaching in schools effectively address violations, though modernization poses challenges through egalitarian communication styles. Politeness education integrating *unggab-unggub* and digital literacy is essential to preserve Javanese cultural values and support children’s social development.

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