

## **POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN JAVANESE INDIRECT OFFER USED BY PROSTITUTES IN SURABAYA**

*Suswanto Ismadi Megah*  
Megah76@yahoo.co.id

### **ABSTRACT**

*Politeness becomes important in speech when what is about to be said has the potential to threaten the Hearer's face. Often in communication it is necessary to say something that would threaten the other person's face. In other words, Face Threatening Acts (FTA) are committed when the speech behavior is going to potentially fail to meet the Hearer's positive or negative face needs. Doing FTA is a normal speech behavior and is not seen as a problem in itself. The problem arises when the FTA fails to be executed appropriately in order to mitigate potential problems that could result from doing the FTA. Prostitutes are considered as marginalized people, and then women as sub group tend to speak more politely. There are many subordinate groups which have their own set of communication rules, apart from the universal rules. There are different levels of required politeness and different ways of being polite, but all people have the need to be appreciated and protected, which Brown and Levinson call face needs. This study found interesting features in the way the subjects manipulate and manage their interactions in order to get their intended message across employed six positive and seven negative politeness strategies.*

**Key words:** *FTA, Indirectness, Positive and Negative politeness.*

### **1. Introduction**

Communication involves two or more people coding and encoding messages to each other through the medium of language. Thus, a language has a lot of contribution for human beings in expressing their desire, mood, feeling, and need. In addition, language also functions as an instrument of social interaction. Most Javanese tend to use indirect utterances in Javanese culture. Thus, indirect speech is considered as politeness and common used in daily habit. Suseno (1984) in his book entitle Javanese etiquette explains indirect speech is one of the Javanese politeness features, and Suseno (1984) and

Hildred Geertz (1961) both agree that there are two principles which motivate Javanese people to avoid being direct. Those principles are *rukun* (harmony) and *hormat* (respect).

Many people would think that because of the nature of their business and their uneducated backgrounds, prostitutes would use crude and impolite language when soliciting for clients. In addition, many people also assume that prostitutes because of the nature of their work use impolite utterance to communicate. Koentjoro's longitudinal study (2004) observes that there is such degree of politeness in prostitutes talk.

The concept of face primarily emerged from Goffman's original work (1967). Goffman's main concern is with 'social interaction' and focused specifically on explaining someone's behaviour during talk in action where the conduct of the individual behaviour is part reflective of the society or social order.

This is supported by Scollon and Scollon when they state that 'any communication is a risk to face (2001:44); it is a risk to one's own face; at the same time it is a risk to the other person's'. We should be careful to keep others' face. In addition, Laver and Trudgill (1979) equate 'face' to the affective state and identity profile of the speaker and the hearer should take care in interpreting face which is offered to her/him by the speaker. Brown and Levinson went further to distinguish face into two types: positive face and negative face (1987:61).

In ordinary language use, 'politeness' refers to proper social conduct and tactful consideration of others. The term 'polite' in English is derived from late medieval Latin *politus* which means 'smooth', or accomplish. Hence polite can be categorized with 'polished', 'refined' and so on when it refers to people. According to *The Oxford Dictionary of Etymology*, in the seventeenth century, a polite person was 'one of refined courteous manners'. Although the term does not provide us with any direct clues as to its historical connections, its definition associates it with the social conduct of the upper classes.

Ehlich (1992) explains that courteous manner refers to the behaviour practiced by the socially high class in western societies such as those shown by the western feudal knights and the secular upper classes, which started to distinguish themselves from other groups based on these courteous values. These values were applied in the courts to lead success in winning honours, which later spread into wider social classes. Reiter (2000:2) adds that "during the renaissance period the concept of

*courtoisie* starts becoming associated with that of *civilité*".

However, Elis states that "politeness, as a technical term in linguistic pragmatics, refers to a broader, substantially more democratic concept (2007:15). It refers to ways in which linguistic action is carried out in a social cultural setting". According to Reiter "politeness is not something human beings are born with but something which is acquired through a process of socialization" (2000:1). Thus, politeness is not derived innately, but is constructed through social and historical processes. An example of non-communicative politeness is the simple act of a younger person offering an elderly person his own seat. An example in the Javanese culture is a younger person should bow slightly when walking in front of the elders and when the elder is giving advice, the younger person should not look directly at elder's face as this is interpreted as the younger's challenging the elder which is considered impolite in Javanese culture.

Brown and Levinson (1987) propose the Universal Politeness theory as an improvement of the ideas from the Grice's and Leech's Maxim and Fraser's rules of Conversational Contract. Reiter states the Universal Politeness theory is based on conversational practices of various ethnic communities (2000:11). Findings of their study, involving three unrelated and quite different languages, English, Tamil and Tzeltal provided evidence that each of these languages demonstrate similarities in the way the speakers apply strategies to show politeness. This is used in rational communication. Brown and Levinson then refer to a Model Person (MP) who is seen as a fluent speaker of a natural language as the properties of rationality. Brown and Levinson state "model person (MP) consists in is a wilful fluent speaker of a natural language, further endowed with two special properties-rationality and face" (1987:58). Jamaliah states "postulate a model person (MP), a fluent speaker

with the power of making conscious decision and deliberate choice of action (1995:26). Brown and Levinson state that MP has two special properties –rationality and face (1987:63). The face can be defined into two kinds of ‘face-wants’, namely positive and negative face. To reduce acts which threaten face, Brown and Levinson propose strategies, known as face threatening acts (FTAs).

- a. Baldly on record
- b. Positive politeness
- c. Negative politeness
- d. Off record
- e. Do not do the FTA

Of the five strategies, only two which are used to keep face safe, and to avoid the risk of the loss of ‘face’ in Javanese positive and negative politeness. Therefore, each speaker should use appropriate strategies which are able to lessen the FTAs.

### 1.1 Positive Politeness

Positive politeness is redress directed to the addressee’s positive face. His wants (or the actions/acquisitions/values resulting from them) should be thought of as desirable (Brown,1987:70). The positive face is to show rationality that everybody wants their face preserved, and everybody wants to be appreciated. Thus the hearer needs to respect or face want from the speaker. Brown and Levinson (1987) explain that the 15 strategies they propose fit directly into the three groups of positive politeness strategies described above.

- (i) Strategy 1: Notice, attend to H (his interest, wants, needs, goods)
- (ii) Strategy 2: Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)
- (iii) Strategy 3: Intensity interest to H
- (iv) Strategy 4: Use in-group identity markers
- (v) Strategy 5: Seek agreement
- (vi) Strategy 6: Avoid disagreement
- (vii) Strategy 7: Presuppose/raise/assert common ground.

- (viii) Strategy 8: Joke
- (ix) Strategy 9: Asserts or presupposes S’s knowledge of and concern for H’s wants
- (x) Strategy 10: Offer, promise
- (xi) Strategy 11: Be optimistic
- (xii) Strategy 12: Include both S and H in the activity.
- (xiii) Strategy 13: Give (or ask for) reasons
- (xiv) Strategy 14: Assume or assert reciprocity
- (xv) Strategy 15: Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)

### 1.2 Negative Politeness

Negative politeness is basically to save H’s positive face. Hence H’s face wants to be forced or impeded to do something or disturbed. There are ten negative politeness strategies.

- (i) Strategy 1: Be conventionally indirect
- (ii) Strategy 2: Question, hedge
- (iii) Strategy 3: Be pessimistic
- (iv) Strategy 4: Minimize the imposition, Rx
- (v) Strategy 5: Give deference
- (vi) Strategy 6: Apologize
- (vii) Strategy 7: Impersonalize S and H
- (viii) Strategy 8: State the FTA as a general rule
- (ix) Strategy 9: Nominalize
- (x) Strategy 10: Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H

Indirectness is one the Javanese politeness features in communication. C. Geertz (1965-208) and Suseno (1984:44) state that a polite Javanese generally speak indirectly. In addition, Gunarwan reports his research that the Javanese tend to speak more indirectly compared the Bataks who tend to speak more directly (1997:1). In the Javanese culture, indirectness to show politeness is mainly conveyed in conversation. Suseno (1984) and Geertz(1961) both agree that there are two principles which motivate Javanese people to avoid being direct. Those principles are *rukun* (harmony) and *hormat* (respect).

Indirectness of the Javanese can be found as in the following principles:

a) The First principle: *Rukun*

The First principle of *rukun* (harmony) refers to the Javanese's attitude of living with other different ethnic groups in a society. According to Suseno (1984) *Rukun* means a harmonious situation, quiet and peaceful, without conflict, or unity for the purpose of mutual support. Harmony also indicates a behavioral manner or characteristic. This can be taken to be a guideline on how to behave in a harmonious life, to eliminate signs of tension in the society or among individuals of different backgrounds so that the social relationship can be well maintained always.

Suseno (1984) emphasizes that the ability of indirectly expressing undesired things, unwelcome news, warnings, and demands is one thing that a Javanese values most.

b) The second principle : *hormat*

The second principle is *hormat* (respect). This principle plays an important role in maintaining a good relationship with others in a society. This principle of respect expects that every person should have a polite attitude in order to be able to posit himself in another's position when interacting with him either verbally or non-verbally. This principle of respect may help to diminish social hierarchy present in the hierarchy within the social relationships in a society. Hierarchy is important as it helps an individual to know his/her own place in society in order to keep in mind of how to behave correctly. Suseno uses this concept to describe an ideal society in which each individual accepts their personal responsibility and fulfils his /her duty. If this concept is applied in real life the whole elements of the society will live harmoniously.

To offer something is to impose the addressee, therefore Brown and Levinson state that "an offer where S insists that H may im-

pose on S's negative face (1987:99). This offer may threaten the hearer's negative face because the hearer will be obliged to do something. At the same time, Hencer (1979 in Koyama) states act threatens the speaker's own face by committing them to doing what is offered should the hearer accept the offer. In Malay, Asmah Haji Omar states that an offer is meant exclusively for the hearer whereas an invitation is inclusive, i.e. it is meant to include both S and H (1993, in Raja Rozina 2004: 144). In some cultures the offer may be perceived differently. In Chinese culture, Hua et al. state that when a speaker offers something, he will show his sincerity by repeating the offer again and again until the addressee accepts (2000:99). This is quite different in other cultures where an offer can be assumed as a debt.

## 2. Research Method

This study uses qualitative approach and employs the Brown and Levinson (1987) theory on politeness as its theoretical framework and for the analysis of the data obtained. The Brown and Levinson Politeness Theory originated from Goffman's (1955; 1967) work on politeness which has at its core the concept of 'face'. Brown and Levinson (1987) went on to specify a universal set of strategies under the two types of politeness: The subjects of this study consist of 25 prostitutes working at a brothel in Surabaya. Participant observation, recording, interview and field notes are used in collecting the data.

## 3. Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study are to analyze the positive and negative politeness strategies employed by the subjects in making their offer to potential clients. As such the data consists of a series of recorded dialogue between the subject and their potential clients which were transcribed orthographically.

### 3.1 Positive politeness

Analysis of the data revealed that positive politeness strategies are used in the conversation between the subjects and the clients especially when they are negotiating on the price. In particular, the subjects in this study had employed six of the fifteen positive politeness strategies: strategies 4, 5, 6, 12, 13, and 14. These six strategies are presented below with examples from the data to illustrate their usage in context.

#### Strategy 4: Use in-group identity markers

In-group identity markers are used to foster solidarity between speakers. Should he/she feel unthreatened by the other person or feel that they share some similarities or some sense of solidarity the speaker may use one of these in-group identity markers such as shared honorific terms or address forms. In terms of address forms, it was observed that the subjects used *mas* or *pak* (*sir* in English) to address the potential client to show that they are of the same ethnicity (Javanese). *Cak* and *kang* are other forms of address which are commonly used in the Surabaya dialect to address people from the lower status level or low payment workers such as porters, *becak* drivers, and the uneducated. However, the subjects in this study were not observed to have made use of these forms throughout the data.

#### Extract 1

(11) S7 : *Yo wis mas ayo istirahat... [smile].*

**Translation** : Yes already come on take a rest

#### Strategy 5: Seek agreement

Strategy 5 involves the speaker agreeing with the hearer. This agreement can be conveyed by using 'yes' or the repetition of some words. *Yo* or *iyo* have the same meaning in

Javanese, as *ya* or *iya* do in standard Indonesian.

#### Extract 2

(11) Subject 2: *Yo wis mas ayo istirahat... [smile].*

**Translation** : Yes already come on take a rest

In extract 2, subject 2 conceded her agreement to the potential clients' bargaining with *Ya*, *Iyo* and *Iya*. The function of *ya* and *iya* in conversations in Indonesian is, "grow naturally out of its literal meaning" and has a basic meaning as 'an agreement'.

#### Strategy 6: Avoid disagreement

This strategy is used to avoid disagreement with the speaker, hence the hearer responds to the speaker's preceding utterance with 'yes, but...'. Extract 3 illustrates how the subjects used similar strategies incorporated with influences from the Javanese culture to soften or avoid disagreements with the clients.

#### Extract 3

(13) Subject 1: *[smile] // ra po po.*

**Translation** : [smile] // it's okay.

As can be seen in extract 3, Subject 1 says *ra po po* (*it's okay*) to hide her disappointment in losing a client as they could not come to an agreement on the deal. It is common in Javanese culture to say *ra po po* as a polite form of expressing no offence taken but the reality is to hide the disappointment which resulted from the disagreement.

#### Strategy 12: Include both Speaker and Hearer in the activity

In the use of an inclusive 'we' form, speaker really means 'you' or 'me', he can call upon

the cooperative assumptions and thereby redress FTAs.” In extract 4, S6 (9) invites the potential client to enter her premises, but in actuality, she is suggesting they both retreat inside together with the use of the word ‘*mlebu*’.

#### Extract 4

(9) Subject 6 : *Mlebu mas*.

**Translation** : Come in, sir. (i.e. *Let us go in together*)

#### Strategy 13: Give (or ask for) reasons

The idea that between the speaker and the hearer, share a mutual understanding each other, means that the speaker wants the hearer understand what the speaker wants. This is illustrated in extract 5 where S1 is observed to explain to the potential client that she cannot lower her price any further because the room is already costing her Rp 70,000.

#### Extract 5

(11) S1 : //...*Ra iso mas kamare wae patang poloh /...( hemm).. kanggo aku piro?*

**Translation** : // {I} can't do that, sir (or that's not possible, sir) the room itself is costly seventy {thousands Rupiah}....then how much will be left for me?

By using strategy 13, S1 is able to explain the situation to the potential client and maintain some degree of politeness, while saving the client's face as well as her own.

#### Strategy 14: Assume or assert reciprocity

By pointing to the reciprocal right (or habit) of doing FTAs to each other, S may soften his FTA by negating the debt aspect and/or the face-threatening aspect of speech acts such as criticism and complaints.

#### Extract 6

(13) S2 : *Rong jam yo patang poloh.*

**Translation** : Two hours, yes for forty (thousand Rupiahs)

In extract 6, instead of refusing the client's offer of Rp. 40,000.00 outright, S2 (13) reciprocates with what she can offer for that amount of money, which is two hours of service.

### 3.1 Negative Politeness

As stated in the previous chapters, negative politeness is aimed at preserving the face value of the interlocutors, especially that of the addressee.

There are seven strategies of negative politeness of the ten postulated by Brown and Levinson (1987) that can be observed in talk-in-action. However, through the analysis of the data of this study, only six of these strategies were in used. These strategies are: Strategy 1: Be conventionally indirect; Strategy 2: Question, hedge; Strategy 4: Minimize the imposition, Rx; Strategy 5: Give deference; Strategy 6 Apologize; Strategy 7: Impersonalize S and H; and Strategy 8: State the FTA as a general rule. Each of these strategies will be discussed in detail in the following subsections.

#### Strategy 1: Be conventionally indirect

This strategy involves giving the opposite want of the speaker to the hearer and the want is conventionally to use speech acts indirectly.

#### Subject 7

(7)S11 : *Gak masuk dikamar dulu..? [smile]*

**Translation** : Are (you) not coming in {the room} first.....? [smile]

S11 in extract 7 invites the client to come into their rooms. This is seen as an example

illustrating S11's conventionally indirect orders to the clients.

### Strategy 2: Question, hedge

This strategy uses a question with 'hedging'. A hedge can be a particle, a word, or a phrase to give an indication that membership is partial or complete.

#### Subject 8

(5) S4 : *Alah mosok ra duwe duwet?*

**Translation** : *Alah* is it really {true you} don't have any money?

The word *mosok* used by S4 are variations of the performative hedge *mosok* (*really*). These two performative hedges are used here to indicate S4's disbelief or surprise (although she may be pretending to be surprised) that the client does not have any money.

### Strategy 4: Minimize the imposition, Rx

To minimize the imposition, Strategy 4 is used with expressions such as: *just, a tiny little bit, a sip, a taste, a drop, a smidgen, a little, or a bit* for requests. In Javanese the word '*wa'e* (*just* in English) functions in a similar way. In extract 9, Subject 2 uses '*sedelok wae*' (*just for a second*) to minimize the imposition on the potential client.

#### Extract 22

##### Subject 2

S2 : [*silent*] *sedelok wae yo?*

**Translation** : [*silent*] just for a second, it's ok?

S2 uses *wae* to give an indication to the client that she wants the client just for a short time. This lessens the threat to the hearer because she is only suggesting a short period of engagement.

### Strategy 5: Give deference

This strategy is aimed to give deference to the addressee or the hearer. The speaker humbles himself or herself as he/she places the hearer above himself/herself. In addition, this can be indicated by giving honorifics to the hearer. The honorific can be a title or by referring to the hearer by his/her last name. In Javanese culture, honorifics are represented by the use of appropriate address systems for example *mas* and *pak*.

### Strategy 6: Apologize

This strategy is used by the speaker to apologize for his doing an FTA. By apologizing for doing an FTA, the speaker can indicate his reluctant to impinge on hearer's negative face and thereby partially redress that impinge.

#### Extract 10

(13) Subject12: *Maaf mas / cari yang lain saja*

**Translation** : Sorry sir / just find others.

In extract 10, S12 shows that she does not want to accept her potential client's price. However she does so while still showing her sense of humility.

### Strategy 7: Impersonalize S and H

This strategy avoids the use of pronouns as if the speaker and the hearer do not know each other. By not using the pronouns 'I' and 'you', the intention is not to impinge on each other. The direct expressions can cause face threatening speech acts.

#### Extract 11

(7) S3 : *Emoh / mlebu jam piro?// nek gelem / yo rong atus seket.*

**Translation** : {I} won't / what time {you} want to start? // If {you} will / the price two hundreds and fifty thousand Rupiahs.

In extract 11, S3 avoids using the pronoun 'you' in order to minimize the threat on the client's face. It would sound impolite if the pronoun 'you' is used in her utterance such as *yen kowe gelem* (if you will).

**Strategy 8: State the FTA as a general rule**

This strategy is to state the general rule, which will threaten the hearer but the FTA is forced as a general condition that should be done.

**Extract 12**

(5) Subject 6: *Pasarane sakmono // ga po po kanggo penglaris.*

**Translation** : It is fixed price // never mind for the first customer.

Subject 6 lays down the general rules which should be followed by every client that is to pay at least as much as the standard rate

for their services. S6 says *pasarane sakmono* (the price is fixed) indicating that she does not want to impose on the client, but this is the rule in the brothel and that the client should comply by paying the amount that is already determined.

**4. Conclusion**

Prostitutes are considered as marginalized people, and then women as sub group tend to speak more politely. There are many subordinate groups which have their own set of communication rules, apart from the universal rules. In this case, women as a subordinate group, must avoid offending men-and they must speak carefully and politely.

Different cultures, however, have different levels of required politeness and different ways of being polite, but all people have the need to be appreciated and protected, as it is called *face needs*. The present study found interesting features in the way the subjects manipulate and manage their interactions in order to get their intended message across employed six positive and seven negative politeness strategies.

**REFERENCES**

Asmah haji Omar.1993. *The Linguistic Scenery in Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Brown, Penelope and Levinson, C. Stephen.1978. *Universal in Language usage: Politeness Phenomena*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Brown, Penelope and Levinson, C. Stephen.1987. *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Elich, Konrad. 1992. "On the historicity of politeness". In *Politeness in Language: Studies in its History and Practice*, R. Watts, I. Sachiko and K. Ehlich (eds), 71-107. Trends in Linguistics, Studies and Monographs 59, Berlin: Mouten de Gruyter.

Geertz, C. 1960. *The Religion of Java*. Glencoe, IL Free Press. Excerpted in

Geertz, Hilder. 1961. *The Javanese Kindship Family*. Glencoe, IL Free Press. Excerpted in Fishman (1968a) and Pride and Holmes (1972).



- Goffman, Erving. 1967. *Interactional Ritual*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company.
- Goffman, Erving. 1981. On Face-Work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction. *Psychiatry*, 18: 213-31. In Iver and Hutcheson (1972).
- Holmes, Janet. 2001. *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*.
- Hua, Z., Wei, L., & Yuan, Q. 2000. The sequential organization of gift offering and acceptance in Chinese. *Journal of Pragmatics* 32. 81-103.
- Jamaliah Mohd. Ali. 1995. *Malaysian Student Seminar: A Study of Pragmatic Features in Verbal Interaction*. Unpublished Phd. Thesis. University of Malaya. Kuala Lumpur.
- Koentjoro. 2004. *On the Spot: Tutar dari Sarang Pelacur*. Tinta: Yogyakarta.
- Koyama, Tetsuharu. 2001. *Universal in perceived politeness: Comparasion of native and non-native speaker of English*. M.A. Thesis. Univ. of Arizona: Mchihan USA. UMI
- Reiter, Rosina Marquez. 2000. *Linguistic Politeness in Britain and Uruguay: A Contrastive Study of Request and Apologies*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Co.
- Suseno, Franz Magnis. 1984. *Etika Jawa*. Jakarta: P.T. Gramedia
- Wouk, F. 2001. Solidarity in Indonesia conversation: The discourse marker *ya*. *Journal of Pragmatics* 33. 177-191.