

# Politeness Strategies and Norms in Waiter-Consumer Communication at Student Cafes: A Sociopragmatic Analysis

Budi Purnomo  
Tourism Department  
Sahid Tourism Institute of Surakarta  
Surakarta, Indonesia  
budipurnomo989@yahoo.co.id

**Abstract**—This research is intended to investigate the use of politeness strategies and norms in waiter-consumer communication at student cafes. This descriptive and qualitative study is presented within the framework of sociopragmatics which can be broadly defined as the study of speech acts and the contexts in which they are performed with social and pragmatic approaches. To achieve the goal above, data on utterances expressing waiter-customer communication were collected through observation and field notes, recordings, questionnaire and in-depth interviewing. Furthermore, the data were analyzed by using the parameter of politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and politeness norms (Poedjosoedarmo, 2017). The research findings show that: (1) foreign students used various politeness strategies on one occasion, but violate them on another occasion and (2) English speaking waiters/waitresses used various politeness norms on one occasion, but violate them on another occasion.

**Keywords**—politeness strategies, politeness norms, waiter-consumer communication

## I. INTRODUCTION

In this globalization era, the community mobility among countries is increasing. In the area of higher education, the government supports universities in Indonesia to move towards the development of international campuses, among others by providing opportunities for foreign students to study in Indonesia. In Surakarta City, Central Java, student cafes become places of interaction between foreign students as consumers and cafe waiters/tresses during leisure time.

The use of politeness to mitigate Face-Threatening Act (FT) in various speech acts and contexts, such as in a cafe as one of the service industries has attracted many Western and Indonesian scholars. One of the major approaches to politeness is Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness strategies. On the other hand, one of the major approaches to politeness in Indonesia is Poedjosoedarmo's (2017) theory of *unggah-ungguh* 'politeness norms.'

Brown and Levinson posit 15 sub-strategies of politeness addressed to the hearer's positive face and 10 addressed to hearer's negative face. The positive politeness strategies include (1) notice, attend to H; (2) exaggerate; (3) intensify interest to H; (4) use in-group identity markers in speech; (5)

seek agreement in safe topics; (6) avoid disagreement; (7) presuppose/raise/assert common ground; (8) joke; (9) assert or presuppose knowledge of and concern for hearer's wants; (10) offer, promise; (11) be optimistic; (12) include both S and H in the activity; (13) give or ask for reasons; (14) assume or assert reciprocity; and (15) give gifts to H. In addition, the negative politeness strategies include: (1) be conventionally indirect; (2) question, hedge; (3) be pessimistic; (4) minimize the imposition; (5) give deference; (6) apologize; (7) impersonalize the S and H; (8) state the FTA as a general rule; (9) nominalize; and (10) go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebteding H.

Poedjosoedarmo states that there are six politeness norms: (1) *sumanak* 'friendly'; (2) *sabar lan sareh* 'patient with ease, calm'; (3) *tepa slira* 'showing a feeling of sympathy or solidarity'; (4) *andhap asor* 'giving a high respect, appropriate appreciation'; (5) *empan papan* 'matches with the setting and occasion'; and (6) *nuju prana* 'pleasing, satisfying.'

Typically cafe waiters/tresses normally act politely and follow generally politeness norms which come from Javanese nuance politeness when serving consumers. On the other hand, English speaking students as consumers follow generally politeness strategies when communicating with cafe waiters/tresses which come from Western nuanced politeness. In an interaction waiters/tresses and consumers co-operate with each other to ensure that their speech flows well, and so that each speaker can understand what the other wants through their respective utterances.

Issues on the interaction between international students and local people have been discussed by a number of researchers such as Murphy & Levy (2006), Natarova (2011) and Spitzman (2014). However, these studies are limited to intercultural competence. On the other hand, issues on communication in the service industry have been discussed by Lahap, O'Mahony & Dalrymple (2016). However, this study is limited to the internal communication among hotel employees and does not discuss the politeness strategies and norms between hotel employees and hotel guests.

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the use of politeness strategies and norms in waiter-consumer communication at student cafes. Moreover, the benefits of this research contribute towards understanding politeness in the service industry, which is used for smooth communication

through the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships between waiters/tresses and consumers.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study is of a descriptive and qualitative nature. The data on utterances expressing waiter-consumer communication were collected through observation and field notes, recordings, questionnaire and in-depth interviewing. Furthermore, the data were analyzed by using the parameter of politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and politeness norms (Poedjosoedarmo, 2017). There were 150 foreign students studying at top three campuses at Surakarta City, Central Java and 30 English speaking waiters/tresses working at student cafes around the campuses involving the waiter-consumer communication prepared as research subjects.

## III. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

### *Politeness Strategies in Waiter-Consumer Communication*

The following is an example of the implementation of politeness strategy in waiter-consumer communication.

Data (1) Context: Conversation between a waiter (W) and a consumer (C) during taking an order at a student cafe.

W: Hello. May I take your order?

C: Hi. I just want a *gado-gado*.

W: And the drink?

C: I think I'll have mango juice.

W: Anything else?

C: No, thanks.

W: *Gado-gado and mango juice for the drink. Is that correct?*

C: Yes, that's it.

In the underlined expressions, the waiter inserted utterances *Is that correct?* by the purpose to not only involving the guest in the interaction but also letting her agreed or disagreed of what had been written in the waiter's order sheet. By the kind of insertion, it can be inferred that the waiter's utterances *Gado-gado and mango juice for the drink. Is that correct?* follow Brown and Levinson's intensify interest to H.

Why did the cafe waiter use the underlined expressions above? They were used because the waiter tried to check the meals order in order to avoid mistakes. By confirming to the guest about the correctness of the meal items ordered, some mistakes which might be caused by a misunderstanding of their conversation could also be avoided.

Another example of the implementation of politeness strategy in waiter-consumer communication is as follows:

Data (2) Context: Conversation between a cafe cashier (C) and a new visitor (V) during paying a bill.

V: I want to pay my bill.

C: What is your table number?

V: 12.

C: Just a moment, please. This is your bill. The total amount is 52,000 rupiahs. *I give you a discount, just pay 50,000 rupiahs, okay?*

V: Okay, many thanks.

In the underlined expressions, the cafe cashier gave a discount to the new visitor. By the action, the cashier satisfied more the visitor's wants. Therefore, it can be inferred that the cashier's utterances *I give you a discount, just pay 50,000 rupiahs, okay?* follow the Brown and Levinson's give gifts to Hearer (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation).

Why did the cashier use the underlined expressions above? They were used because she tried to attract the new visitor to be his customer.

Unlike the above examples, the following is a violation of politeness strategy implementation in waiter-consumer communication.

Data (3) Context: Conversation between a waiter (W) and a consumer (C) during serving meals at a student cafe.

W: This is the meal you ordered. Enjoy it.

C: Goodness, brother... I ordered special fried noodle... why you give me this?

W: *Oh sorry... sorry. I thought it boiled noodle.*

C: How come, you heard or not?

In the underlined expressions, the waiter did not repeat parts of what the guest said in preceding conversation related to the meal order. That is why he made mistakes in serving the kind of meal. Therefore, it can be inferred that the utterances *Oh sorry... sorry. I thought it boiled noodle* do not follow the Brown and Levinson's seek agreement.

Why did the waiter violate the Brown and Levinson's seek agreement? It was violated because the waiter did not write the meals in an order slip. He just relied on his memory of what had been said by the guest when taking the meals ordered. Therefore, he made a mistake because he should remember too much meals order since there were many guests who were sitting in line to be served.

Another example of a violation of politeness strategy implementation in waiter-consumer communication is as follows:

Data (4) Context: Conversation between a waiter (W) and a consumer (C) during serving meals.

C: Goodness brother, how come the roasted fish is well done fast? It means that you didn't use fresh fish, did you?

W: *I used fresh fish, brother. I mean, because it needs a long time to cook fresh fish, we always have stock of fried fish...then we just roast it for a moment.*

In the underlined expressions, the waiter did not try to avoid disagreement with the visitor. On the contrary, he answered the consumer's question steadily with the utterance which was opposite to the visitor's perception related to the fresh fish. Therefore, it can be inferred that the utterances *I used fresh fish, brother. I mean, because it needs a long time to cook fresh*

fish, we always have stock of fried fish...then we just roast it for a moment do not follow the Brown and Levinson's avoid disagreement.

Why did the waiter violate the Brown and Levinson's avoid disagreement? It was violated because the waiter tried to give an explanation about the method of cooking to the consumer. By using the strategy, the waiter expected that he would not disappoint the visitor.

#### Politeness Norms in Waiter-Consumer Communication

The following is an example of the implementation of politeness norm in waiter-consumer communication.

Data (5) Context: Conversation between a waitress (W) and a visitor (V) during taking an order.

V: What is your today's special menu, sister?

W: As I know your favorite menu is fried fish with soy sauce spices. Just by chance, the soy sauce spices are exhausted. So, I prepare a sauce made with shrimp paste which is exactly more delicious.

V: It sounds nice. Okay.

In the underlined expressions, the waiter pleased the consumer's heart. Although the actual price for the sauce made with shrimp paste was more expensive than the soy sauce spices, he would charge it the same because the visitor was a cafe customer. In other words, the utterances he expressed was *ngresepake* 'causing pleasant feeling.' Moreover, the content of the message was *cekak aos* 'brief but comprehensive.' Therefore, it can be inferred that the waiter's expressions *Just by chance, the soy sauce spices are exhausted. So, I prepare a sauce made with shrimp paste which is exactly more delicious* follow the Poedjosoedarmo's *nuju prana* (pleasing, satisfying).

Why did the waiter use the *nuju prana*? It was used because the waiter tried to satisfy the visitor and maintain her loyalty as a cafe customer.

Another example of the implementation of politeness norm in waiter-consumer communication is as follows:

Data (6) Context: Conversation between a waiter (W) and a consumer (C) during taking an order.

W: Hello, brother. Are you ready to order?

C: One sirloin steak and avocado juice for the drink.

W: Mm...I'm a really sorry brother, the sirloin steak is sold out. There is still tenderloin steak if you like.

C: Okay.

In the underlined expressions, the waiter showed his 'low and humble' utterances by apologizing if the sirloin steak was sold out. Therefore, it can be inferred that the waiter's utterances *Mm...I'm a really sorry brother, the sirloin steak is sold out* follow Poedjosoedarmo's *andhap asor* (giving high respect, appropriate appreciation). Furthermore, the waiter pleased the consumer's heart by offering another kind of steak. Therefore, it can be inferred that the waiter's utterances *There is still tenderloin steak if you like* follow Poedjosoedarmo's *nuju prana*.

Why did the waiter use *andhap asor* and *nuju prana*? Both politeness norms were used because the waiter tried to not disappoint the consumer.

Unlike the above examples, the following is a violation of implementation politeness norm in waiter-consumer communication.

Data (7) Context: Conversation between a waitress (W) and a consumer (C) during eating meals.

C: Why the fried rice here is salty, sister?

W: Really? We have a good cook.

C: Just taste it!

In the underlined expressions, the waiter did not show his sympathy to the costumer's dissatisfaction. Instead of expressing solidarity to what had been felt by the consumer, he was even *umuk* 'conceited' and *nggunggung diri* 'brag or indulge in showing the cook-off' by claiming that the cafe has a good cook. Therefore, it can be inferred that the waiter's utterances *Really? We have a good cook* do not follow the Poedjosoedarmo's *tepa slira* 'showing a feeling of sympathy or solidarity.'

Why did the waiter violate the *tepa slira*? It was violated because he trusted his cook more than his consumer.

Another example of a violation of implementation politeness norm in waiter-consumer communication is as follows:

Data (8) Context: Conversation between a waitress (W) and a consumer (C) during delivering meals.

W: This is your order.

C: Thanks. You know, I think this egg is fried, and I order scrambled!

W: Oh, should I recheck the order slip?

C: Up to you. Change it, please.

In the 1st underlined expressions, the waitress did not use politeness markers, like 'excuse me' and 'brother' from the beginning of her expressions. Therefore, it can be inferred that the waitress' utterances *This is your order* do not follow Poedjosoedarmo's *sumanak* 'friendly.' Moreover, in the 2nd underlined expressions, the waitress did not agree with the mood of the consumer. Instead of changing the meals, she even asked to herself to recheck the order slip that made the consumer angry. Therefore, it can be inferred that the waitress' utterances *Oh, should I recheck the order slip?* do not follow Poedjosoedarmo's *nuju prana* (pleasing, satisfying).

Why did the waiter violate the *sumanak* and *nuju prana*? They were violated because the cafe situation was a lot of visitors so she was overwhelmed by serving meal orders from consumers.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

This research has been able to achieve the main purpose of this study. The analysis has indicated that foreign students used various politeness strategies on one occasion, but violate them on another occasion. On the other hand, the English speaking waiters/waitresses used various politeness norms on one occasion, but violate them on another occasion. The value of this study contributes towards understanding politeness strategies which come from Western nuanced politeness theory and politeness norms which come from Javanese nuanced politeness theory, both are used for smooth communication through the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships.

## REFERENCES

- [1] P. Brown and S.C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some Universal in Language Use*. Great Britain: Cambridge University Press.
- [2] S. Poedjosoedarmo, "Language propriety in Javanese," *Journal of Language and Literature*, vol. 17, pp. 1-9, April 2017.
- [3] M. Murphy and M. Levy, "Politeness in intercultural email communication: Australian and Korean perspectives," *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, vol. 12, pp. 1-10, 2006.
- [4] T. Natarova, "Intercultural communication experiences of foreign students with a focus on their perspectives of national, cultural and ethnic identity: case of exchange and degree students in Jyvaskyla, Finland," unpublished.
- [5] E. Spitzman, "Situating intercultural communication: domestic and international student interaction," unpublished.
- [6] J. Lahap, B. O'Mahony & J. Dalrymple. "The importance of communication in improving service delivery and service quality in Malaysian hotel industry," *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 224, pp. 213-220, 2016.