

# Language Politeness Issue: Song Lyrics and Expression of the Drag on the Cabaret Show in Yogyakarta

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## ABSTRACT

Drag performance in the cabaret show in Yogyakarta is a modern Indonesian performance which prioritizing cross gender roles. The characteristics of male actors with female attribute, causing negative public responses, where they were expected to behave in accordance of their sex. The expression of the drag song's lyrics is a form of contradiction and fantasy against reality whereas is interesting to study upon. The research based on the data which are consisting informants of cabaret show artists, both from the drag queen, drag effeminate male, and drag transgender. The research data based on its source consists of verbal information from informants, textual information from related documents, and visual information of the "cabaret show" performance. This study utilizes the perspective and approach of cultural studies with a single focused case study model by developing the theory of drag performance [8], and language manners [3]. The validity of the research data was examined by peer debriefing, while the data analysis used the interactive analysis model of Miles and Huberman [9]. This research obtaining results such as; first, the lyrical expression of the drag's song produces a positive image so that its appearance is attractive, while negative image makes its presence acceptable or not resisted. Second, the complexity of actors as drag queen, drag effeminate male, and drag transgender produces language expression as a form of parody and self-parody as well.

**Keywords:** Cabaret Show, Drag, Expression, Language, Politeness, Song's Lyric.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Cabaret show in Yogyakarta as a modern Indonesian performing art is a new genre of Indonesian performing arts. It takes a different form, by prioritizing cross-gender actors which seems to indicate the openness and dynamic of art in the life of the people of Yogyakarta. Initial observations of this study indicate that the appearance of cross gender in the cabaret show includes performances consisting female imitation. The problem of the female imitation was raised when an independent state institution of Indonesian Broadcasting Commission [11] issued a official letter K/KPI/2016 dated on 23 February 2016 concerning the prohibition of broadcasting male behaves as female to all television stations. Recognizing Javanese cross gender especially in Yogyakarta which featured drag performance seems to be a redefinition of recognition by McNeal [8] upon drag performance which includes performance

such as drag queen, drag transgender, and drag gay. The redefinition is based on the nature and characteristics of the cross gender artists in Yogyakarta, such as the characteristics of the performance that prioritizing the drag queen, drag effeminate male, and drag transgender. Aspects of the one in question, such as male and transgender, seems to be aspects that often appear in news and represent negative characteristics. As in Yanita and Suhardijanto [20] who grouped the ten most significant collocations in Republika daily paper, among them, transgender are the most prominent aspect and gay as a contrasting aspect. Collocation is juxtaposed with the top ten semantic fields including groups and community, where these aspects constitute a group.

The existence of the cabaret show since ten years ago still received negative stigma among community groups. Cross gender artists are still struggling in their life and art. The cabaret show in Yogyakarta,

located Raminten 3 restaurant, Jalan Malioboro is inseparable from the role of Hamzah Sulaiman, a cross-gender artist with Chinese descent who loves and upholds Javanese cultural values. Sulaiman recruits cross gender artists, straight men, effeminate male, and transgender who really have possibility. His concern is based on the life of cross gender artists and fellow male being who have female personalities and traits, regardless of their ethnicity.

The development of cabaret shows in Yogyakarta seems to have such a history of a journey which is emotionally draining. It is starting from negative opinion towards the cross gender artists to the performances which are considered as shallow and cheap. Along with its development, it seems that these different artisans are actually able to produce and create art genre which is identical to the drag. They are able to show their qualities that were initially considered as their negativity, even the traits and styles that were initially considered as the weakness, have become advantages not everyone is able to do so. These artists, who consist of young people, seem able to adapt toward global popular culture, something which is not just a mere pleasure but also followed by creative abilities. As stated by Sugihartati [17], young people who are able to adapt upon global popular culture are not only a form of mere expression of pleasure, but are active people who create cultural texts as their creative abilities.

The negative stigma from society which constantly makes cross-gender artists uncomfortable is how one should behave and look according to his gender. Appearance with the use of clothing considered as odd and imitating women is considered against the manners or values of ideal decency of the male gender. The public's negative opinion of drag artists also emphasised how person should speak with certain language style and normal body gestures in accordance with their gender. Cabaret show as performance is presenting female imitation as if it presents contradictions of the modesty or the ideal gender values. Expressions of womanhood, female outfit, and vocals, and even psychologically are aspects in the performance where the values of politeness are always closely observed. These contradictory actions and appearances raise the question of justifying this as a form of efforts to deny negativity as the efforts as appear in another marginal society in general while fighting for gender flexibility. Or is it just a proof that they are male who have different personalities and are talented so that

should fight for their abilities in the form of artistic creativity.

Cabaret shows in different parts of the world, show the uniqueness of each in accordance with its surrounding development and environmental conditions. Cabaret show in Yogyakarta seems to have a resemblance to the cabaret in New York. Protat [12] reveals that New York's cabaret show is a popular entertainment and has become the heart of night life of New York. Similarly, the cabaret show in Yogyakarta seems to be a particular identity of the Raminten 3 Yogyakarta restaurant. At a glance, this cabaret show also has similarities with the Mexican cabaret, as stated by Alzate [1] that contemporary Mexican cabaret is a commercial theatre type that shows symbol of the subjectivity of the performers. Although the back ground complexity of the performers in Yogyakarta varies, in general it is synonymous with the drag. The imitation of women by actors, who are identical to the drag, shows their performativity. As it is mentioned by Butler [2] and Morris [10] who revealed that performance that exposes the drag is its performative form. The appearance of the drag in the cabaret show is a performance based on a different spirit which is an expression of their performativity. One form of performativity is occurred through singing with song lyrics that embodies creativity and emotion. As stated by Razali and Salleh [14], there is a combination of two different art forms into one that embodies creativity and the quality of emotions and text.

Apart from its emotional nature, cabaret shows are also presenting light and loose performance. One of the efforts to attract the audience is by presenting popular songs in the show, where popular singing is an important element in the entertainment business. Similar form are often practiced in other countries, such as in Thailand by presenting popular songs in the entertainment business. Inkhong, Amatyakul, and Pidokrajt [5] stated that popular singing is an important element in the entertainment business. Even though in the cabaret show in Yogyakarta popular singing is carried in lip sync, it is still has its own charm as it is performed by talented actors who are able to imitate women's roles well.

The imitation of the female character of a drag player in a cabaret show is including presenting popular songs with the vocals of popular female singers. Vocal through the expression of song lyrics and the female style of the drag cabaret show form its

own expression in language as an expression of communication. Straight song lyrics with a humorous attitude will develop funny expressions; straight song lyrics with a straight attitude will form straight expressions as well. These various expressions are within a boundary, perhaps even being said to be under cultural conventions that regulates the value system of politeness. Early exploration of the song lyrics and attitudes brought by the drag, among others, were created straight expressions and expressions of contradiction. The example of song that create straight expressions are song that are performed according to natural attitudes and expressions, while expressions that present contradictions are attitudes and expressions that do not prioritize politeness and beauty. One example is the use of lyrics with simple, straightforward, and slightly harsh expressions.

The problems that characterize the drag in the cabaret show can be drawn from the problems of politeness of the song lyrics and expressions of the drag people in the cabaret show in Yogyakarta. This is contemporary social-culture problem that is resolved by means of a cultural studies perspective by applying McNeal's [8] drag performance theory and Brown and Levinson's [3] language manners [21].

## 2. METHODS

The research was conducted on the cabaret show, especially the cross gender actors who perform the drag performance at Raminten 3 restaurant, Jl. Margomulyo No. 9 Malioboro, Yogyakarta. The research was conducted qualitatively with a single focused case study approach model. Research considers specific problems that are unique, different, even deviant, but still focused on certain cases [13], so the proper approach is an exploratory approach.

The research involved informants who really mastered the problem of this study. They were Bayu, 40 years old, a male drag artist, Mamuk Rahmadona, 36, a male drag artist, and *Sarita Kamasutra*, 40 years old, drag transgender artist. The data source includes photo document and video of the performance. Data analysis techniques use interactive analysis [9]. The approach, technique and strategy of this research are able to explain language politeness related to song lyric and drag expression in the cabaret show in Yogyakarta in accordance of the theory of drag Performance by McNeal [8] and Brown and Levinson [3]

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. *Indirect Speakers (Off Record) Build Positive and Negative Faces*

Imitation of women in a cabaret show is presenting by lip sync show. Lip sync is short for lip synchronization; a performance technique synchronizes lip movements with vocals in harmony with movement, music, and performance. The movement of the lips and the performance was accompanied by music and songs played through computerized device which was then connected to the sound system. The reason for performing the lip sync is, among other, to produce female voice as expected of a show featuring female impersonation. Another reason for doing lip sync is to fulfill the need for entertainment and the ability to create comedic atmosphere. Another reason is to simplify the players' tasks on the stage, where the demands of a professional artist are that male players are able to portray female as a whole from all aspects both audio and visual.

The practice of lip sync in the cabaret show can be classified as an indirect or off record speaker practice. Brown and Leviston [3] explain that the practice of indirect speakers (off record) can be accompanied by smoothing actions. The lip sync cabaret show practice produces vocals obtained from the original singer's voice recordings which are played back during the performance. The resulting sound and song lyrics are the actual singer's vocals and song lyrics. For example, the cabaret show artist Bayu, which is actually a male playing as a female role with the stage name *Ayu Wulandary*, resembling the famous artist Titi Dwi Jayanti with actual singer vocals even though in recorded form.

One of the songs that are often performed by drag Queen artist Bayu is "*Sang Dewi*" with the voice of the real artist Titi Dwi Jayanti. The lyrics of the song "*Sang Dewi*" content of poetry with a beautiful choice of words. Song elements, rhythm, and sound harmony are put forward. Likewise, the entire content of the song is conveyed not only implicitly but also explicitly. In addition to obtaining smooth speech, this also obtains vocals with subtle vocal sounds. The lyrics of the song "Sang Dewi" which is presented in the form of a poem get positive faces; it can be seen from the drag queen player who is able to create interesting performances. Drag queen in McNeal [8] is a player who plays the role of female only on the stage, while positive faces in Brown and Leviston [3]

are obtained from speakers who want their faces to be liked by the interlocutor so that the effort made is an

act of refinement. One of the identifications of song lyrics for drag queen artists can be seen as follows.

**Table 1.** Three Sample of Drag Artist

Three classification of Drag Artist	Artist	Result of the Face	Expected Performance
Drag Queen	<i>Ayu Wulandary</i>	Positive Face	To be liked
Drag Effeminate	<i>Mamuk Bohai</i>	Positive and Negative Face	To be liked, create comedy, not resisted
Drag Transgender	<i>Sarita Kamasutra</i>	Positive and Negative Face	To be liked, not resisted

**Table 2.** The Expression of Positive Face of Drag Queen

Cast	Sample of Song's Lyric	Developed Element
Drag queen	<p><i>Walaupun kau bukan titisan Dewa Ku takkan kecewa Karena kau jadikanku sang dewi Dalam taman surgawi</i></p> <p>(Even though you are not an incarnation of a God I will not be disappointed Because you made me a goddess In the heavenly garden)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• refinement of speech and vocal (recorded)</li> <li>• the choice of beautiful lyric</li> <li>• element of song, rhythm and harmony is highly considered.</li> </ul>

**Table 3.** Expression of Poistive and Negative Face of Drag Effeminate Male

Cast	Sample of Song's Lyric	Developed Element
Drag effeminate male	<p><i>Jaman mbiyen kae mak'e wes natih ngelingne Judine mbok ojo diteruske Mbok dipikir tuek'e timbang soro uripe Ora sugih sing ono malah kere</i></p> <p>(In those days, Mama has reminded the gambling please don't continue Please think of his old age rather than the misery of his life Not rich but poor)</p>	<p>-refinement of speech and vocal (recorded) -the word's choice is simple and straight forward.</p> <p>-The element of song and the rhythm is expressive following the drum (<i>kendang</i>), sometimes slow, sometimes suddenly stomping.</p>

Speakers who were carried out off record as a refinement did not fully bring up positive faces; they also found negative faces of male drag artists and transgender drag artists. This is because their presence on the stage of the show is not resisted or still accepted. The negative face in Brown and Leviston [3] is the speaker's desire not to be resisted. One example of a song that is usually performed by an artist with the stage name *Chika Cihua Hua* includes a song from *campursari-koplo*, music where the choice of *campursari-koplo* music is expected to

be able to express his soul that is not only feminine but also expressive. It is a mix of *campursari* music with *dangdut koplo* where the East Javanese drum instrument is so dominant in the presentation. It is featuring songs with simple, straightforward, and expressive language with tones following the rhythm of the drums. The lyrics are suitable for expressing the turbulent soul of an artist is a song with the title "*Do re mi*" or "*Dadu karo Remi*" (Dice and Remi Cards) which was popularized by Sagita. The analysis of the expression of the male drag artist is as follows.

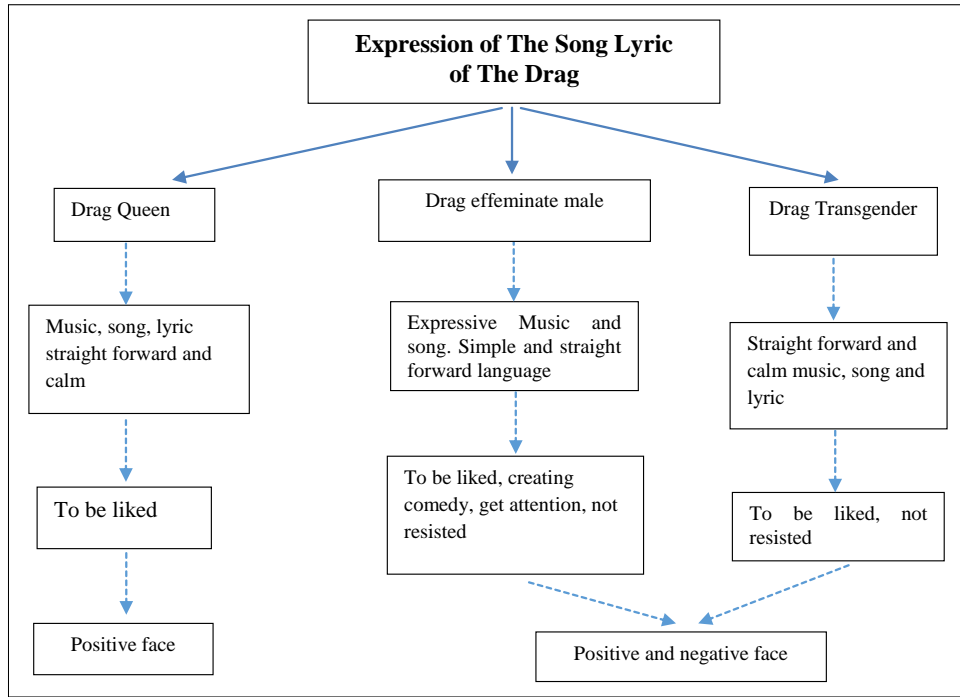


Figure 1. Song Lyric and Expression of the Drag Gaining Positive and Negative Face

3.2 Indirect Speaker (Off Record) Expressing Parody and Self-Parody

The songs performed by the drag create their own expression, forming different arts associated with the soul of the performer. This is suit to the opinion of McNeal [8] that there are parodies and self-parodies in the drag performance. In the Cabaret show, in its appearance, there are parodies originating from drag queen and self-parodies originating from male drag and drag transgender. The choice of songs and music with song lyrics contained in it is a mean to express the soul of the artist. Parodies by drag artists tend to choose music and songs with straight and calm lyrics, while self-parodies by drag artists from males and transgender tend to choose music and songs with expressive lyrics.

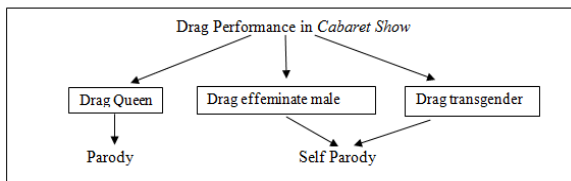


Figure 2. Drag Performance in Cabaret Show Creating Parody and Self-Parody

4. CONCLUSION

Cabaret show as a performance of female impersonation or drag performance presents a lip sync performance where the inner aspect of the performer determined the art form. Songs presented

off record create both positive and negative faces. Positive faces came from the drag queen artists, while both positive and negative faces came from the male drag artists and the transgender drag artists. This is based on the underlying turmoil of the artists, including that drag queen artists have the motivation to be liked, while drag effeminate male and transgender have the motivation to get recognition and so that their presence is not resisted.

Positive and negative faces can be seen in the selection of songs through the song lyrics performed by the actors. A positive face is found in the drag queen's performance through the selection of songs by prioritizing beauty and refinement in the lyrics, vocals, and rhythm. Positive and negative faces are found in the appearance of male drag and transgender men with the selection of songs that prioritize simple and straightforward lyric choices, as well as expressive rhythms.

The expression of the spirit of the drag through singing in the form of the appearance of song lyrics forms two artistic expressions of the performer. The expression of the drag player presents his appearance as a parody and a self-parody. The parody is the expression of the drag player from the drag queen player, while the self-parody is the expression of the drag player from male and transgender men. The drag queen parody presents a straight and calm performance, while the self-parody of the male transgender man presents a simple, straightforward, yet expressive.

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