

Politeness in Balinese and English

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Abstract

The aims of this study are to find the similarities and differences of politeness in Balinese and English. Based on the discussion there are some similarities and also differences between Balinese and English. Balinese language is used mostly in Bali Island. It has the same characteristics with Javanese language. It is used in daily conversation and *adat* (social organization in Bali) meeting among Balinese people. Balinese people are popular for being polite, friendly, and helpful. They have principles of *menyama braya* (cooperative), *asah, asih, asuh* (understanding), *ngendepang raga* (good manners) in getting along with other people. Balinese speech varies depending on social context, using three levels of language called *alus sor*, *alus madya* and *alus singgih*. When one is speaking, he/she has to apply the principles of “*nganutin catur wangsa*” (using certain level of language based on his/her status of being superior or inferior) and *ngendepang raga* (good manners).

Keywords: *politeness, Balinese English, menyama braya, catur wangsa*

1. INTRODUCTION

Language society of Balinese could not be separated from its social stratification. It is called *Catur Wangsa* (*Sudra, Waisya, Ksatria, Brahmana*). There is asymmetric relationship that *Sudra* is the inferior group, *Waisya* and *Ksatria* are more superior groups and *Brahmana* is the most superior group among the others. When the inferior groups speak to the superior group, they have to use politer language than when they speak among own group (symmetric relationship). As we know politeness's goal is to make the listener feel adored, comfortable and happy so the speaker chooses the appropriate diction depending on the addressee. One example of asymmetric relation is when a speaker of *Sudra* caste (inferior) speaks to a person of *Ksatria* caste (Superior) about someone of *Ksatria* caste, named *Ida Ayu Istri*, he/she will say “*Ida Ayu Istri jagi ngrayunin*” which means “*Ida Ayu Istri will eat*”. It is different with symmetric relation, which is when that person speaks with members of the same caste. Showing politeness does not mean the speaker can use the same diction. Instead, to talk about a person named *Wayan*, he will say “*Wayan lakar ngajeng*”, which means “*Wayan will eat*”. The word “*ngrayunin*” and “*ngajeng*” means “to eat” in English. Considering the phenomenon above, the writer is interested in discussing more specific about the politeness in Bali and English. In this project the similarities and differences between them are going to be discussed.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Politeness

“Politeness is social deixis that expresses a low degree of solidarity between the speaker and the addressee” (Hortmann & Stork, 1972, p. 179). Social deixis refers to social characteristics of or distinction between the participants. Considering the statement above, expressing low degree is needed to strengthen the solidarity. The speaker tries to make the addressee feel comfortable and honoured. In term of using language, the speaker chooses the words, phrases, and sentences selectively in order to avoid using word that can make the addressee offended and hurt.

Politeness is best expressed as the practical application of good manners. It is a culturally-defined phenomenon, and therefore what is considered polite in one culture can sometimes be quite rude or simply eccentric in another cultural context (www.wikipedia/politeness). For example Bali; it consists of some regencies and each regency has its own customs. The customs must be understood well and applied in appropriate situation. In term of using language the word “Nani” and “Cai” which means “you” are acceptable in Buleleng regency but are less polite in Tabanan regency.

Politeness is the expression of the speakers’ intention to mitigate face threats carried by certain face threatening act toward another (Milk, 2003, p. 6). According to Brown and Levinson in their 1987 book, face threatening acts (FTAs) are at time inevitable based on the terms of the conversation. A face threatening act is an act that inherently damages the face of addressee or the speaker by acting in opposition to the wants and desires of the other. Understanding the society, culture, setting and time when the conversation occurs can mitigate the face threat. Whether a speaker belongs to standard, politer or the politest category depends on how much he/she can mitigate the face threat.

2.2 Face-Threatening Acts

According to Brown and Levinson, positive and negative faces exist universally in human culture. When an act of verbal or non-verbal communication “runs contrary to the face of the addressee and/or the speaker”, this called a “face-threatening act” (Brown and Levinson 1978: 70). A distinction of the types of face threatening act can be made between (i) FTAs which threaten positive face and those which threaten negative face, and (ii) FTAs which threaten the hearer’s face and FTAs which threaten the speaker’s face.

2.3 Politeness Strategies (Face Saving Act)

Face saving acts of politeness is the expression of the speakers' intention to mitigate face threats carried by certain face threatening acts toward another (Mills, 2003, p. 6). To formulate messages in order to save the hearer's face when face-threatening acts are inevitable or desired, politeness strategies are used. Brown and Levinson outline four main types of politeness strategies: bald on-record, negative politeness, positive politeness, and off-record (indirect).

Bald on-record strategies usually do not attempt to minimize the threat to the hearer's face, although there are ways that bald on-record politeness can be used in trying to minimize FTAs implicitly. Often using such a strategy will shock or embarrass the addressee, and so this strategy is most often utilized in situations where the speaker has a close relationship with the audience, such as family or close friends. Brown and Levinson outline various cases, in which one might use the bald on-record strategy, including:

- a. An emergency: Help!
- b. Task oriented: Give me those!
- c. Request: Put your jacket away.
- d. Alerting: Turn your lights on! (while driving)

Positive politeness strategies seek to minimize the threat to the hearer's positive face. They are used to make the hearer feel good about himself, his interests or possessions, and are mostly used in situations where the audience knows each other fairly well. In addition to hedging and attempts to avoid conflict, some strategies of positive politeness include statements of friendship, solidarity, compliments, and the following examples from Brown and Levinson:

- a. Attend to hearer's interests, needs, wants
You look sad. Can I do anything?
- b. Use solidarity in-group identity markers
Heh, mate, can you lend me a dollar?
- c. Be optimistic
I'll just come along, if you don't mind.
- d. Include both speaker (S) and hearer (H) in activity
If we help each other, I guess, we'll both sink or swim in this course.
- e. Offer or promise
If you wash the dishes, I'll vacuum the floor.
- f. Exaggerate interest in hearer and his interests
That's a nice haircut you got; where did you get it?
- g. Avoid Disagreement
Yes, it's rather long; not short certainly.
- h. Joke

Wow, that's a whopper!

Next, negative politeness strategies are oriented towards the hearer's negative face and emphasize avoidance of imposition on the hearer. These strategies presume that the speaker will be imposing on the listener and there is a higher potential for awkwardness or embarrassment than in bald on record strategies and positive politeness strategies. Negative face is the desire to remain autonomous so the speaker is more apt to include an out for the listener, through distancing styles like apologies. Examples from Brown and Levinson include:

- a. Be indirect
 - Would you know where Oxford Street is?*
 - Excuse me, Sir, would you mind if I asked you to close the window?*
- b. Use hedges or questions
 - Perhaps, he might have taken it, maybe.*
 - Could you please pass the rice?*
- c. Be pessimistic
 - You couldn't find your way to lending me a thousand dollars, could you?*
- d. Minimize the imposition
 - It's not too much out of your way, just a couple of blocks.*
- e. Use obviating structures, like nominalizations, passives, or statements of general rules
 - I hope offense will not be taken.*
 - Visitors sign the ledger.*
 - Spitting will not be tolerated.*
- f. Apologize
 - I'm sorry; it's a lot to ask, but can you lend me a thousand dollars?*
- g. Use plural pronouns
 - We regret to inform you that you need to buy your on plane ticket by your own.*

The final politeness strategy outlined by Brown and Levinson is the indirect strategy; this strategy uses indirect language and removes the speaker from the potential to be imposing. For example, a speaker using the indirect strategy might merely say "wow, it's getting cold in here" insinuating that it would be nice if the listener would get up and turn up the thermostat without directly asking the listener to do so. The other ways to do off-record:

- a. Give hints: *It's a bit cold in here.*
- b. Be vague: *Perhaps someone should have been more responsible.*
- c. Be sarcastic, or joking: *Yeah, he's a real Einstein (rocket scientist, Stephen*

Hawking, genius and so on)!

2.4 Sociological Variables

It is not justifiable, however, to always choose the politest strategy, because “that will imply that the act is more face threatening than it actually is” (Fasold, 1990:162) Therefore, speakers must decide whether or not and how to use the various strategies in real life situations. This decision is based on three sociological factors (Brown & Levinson, 1978:79):

1. **Social distance** between parties (symmetric relation)

- a. Distinguish kin or friend from a stranger with whom you may be of the same social status, but who is still separated by social distance

Example: We may use less elaborate positive strategies or we may choose to use positive rather than negative politeness when speaking with family

2. **Power** relations between parties (asymmetric relation)

- a. we are inclined to speak to our social equals differently than those whose status is higher or lower than our own in a given situation

Example: If a professor is working in her office and people are being very loud and disruptive in the next room, she will go over there and tell them to be quiet but the way she does it will differ depending on who they are.

1. If they are students she will use the bald on-record strategy to make sure there is no confusion in what she is asking

Example: “Stop talking so loud!”

2. If they are colleagues she will claim common ground with the using the positive politeness strategy or frame an indirect request for them to stop talking

Example: “I’m working on a lecture and it’s really hard to concentrate with all this noise.”

3. The absolute **ranking** of imposition in the particular culture.

- a. Some impositions are greater than others. Highly imposing acts like requests demand more redress to mitigate their increased threat level.
- b. Example: asking someone to borrow a quarter dollars would not be as great an imposition as asking that person to borrow one hundred dollars.

2.5 Maxim of Politeness

Apart from the Tact Maxim, there are a number of maxims dealing with polite behavior. Before describing them, I shall note, as a general point, that politeness concerns a relationship between two participants whom, we may call self and other. In conversation, self will normally be identified with *s*, and other will typically be identified with *h*, but speakers also show politeness to third parties, who may or may not be present in the speech situation. The label other may therefore apply not only to addressees, but the people designated by third-person pronouns. The importance of showing politeness to third parties varies: a key factor is whether or not the third party is present as bystander; another is whether the third party is felt to belong to *s*'s or *h*'s sphere of influence.

This, if true, reflects a more general law that politeness is focused more strongly on other than on self. Moreover, within each maxim, sub-maxim (b) seems to be less important than sub-maxim (a), and this again illustrates the more general law that negative politeness (avoidance of discord) is a more weighty consideration than positive politeness (seeking concord). One further difference in importance should be noted, although it is not reflected in the form of the maxims: politeness towards an addressee is generally more important than politeness towards a third party.

3. Discussion

3.1 Politeness in Bali

Balinese language is a part of the Austronesia family and is related to Indonesian and other Malay varieties. Its speakers live in Bali, parts of Sumatra, and some other parts in Indonesia. Balinese people are popular for being polite, friendly, and helpful. They have principles of *menyama braya* (cooperative), *asah, asih, asuh* (understanding), *ngendepang raga* (good manners) in getting along with other people. Balinese speech varies depending on social context, yielding three levels of language called *alus sor*, *alus madya* and *alus singgih*. When one is speaking, he/she has to apply the principles of “*nganutin catur wangsa*” (using certain level of language based on his/her status), *ngendepang raga* (good manners). Here are some examples of how Balinese try to be polite to others.

1. The use of *ngiring* (please)

Any invitation or instruction will sound polite when the word *ngiring* is added. The word *ngiring* is equal to *please* in English.

Ngiring ngranjing dumun (Please come in).

Ngiring kayunin malih pisan (Please think it over).

2. The use of *sugra/tabik* (excuse me)

When someone passes in front of someone else, it is politer to say “*sugra/tabik*” than not saying anything. Below is the example.

Sugra titiang pacang nyelang margi (Excuse me. I will pass in front of you).

Tabik bli, titing negak beduuran (Excuse me, my position is higher than you).

3. The use of terms of address based on the "Catur Wangsa" principle

In Balinese the terms of address used to address someone are based on the "catur wangsa" principle. *Catur Wangsa* principle gives guidance on who to respect more or less based on their level. *Catur Wangsa* is divided into four categories. They are *sudra*, *waisya*, *ksatria* and *brahmana*. The terms of address for *sudra* such as: *I, Ni, Pan, Men*, etc. The terms of address for *waisya* such as: *Gusti, Biang, Aji, Dewa*, etc. The terms of address for *ksatria* such as: *Anak Agung, Anak Agung Istri, Cokorda, Cokorda Istri*, etc. The terms of address for *Brahmana* such as: *Ida Bagus, Ida Ayu (Dayu), Ida Peranda, Sri Empu, Baghawan*, etc. Below are examples of the use of the terms of address in sentences.

Ratu Peranda pacang ngrayunin. (Ratu Peranda will eat)

Nawegang ngrayunin dumun Dayu! (Dayu, please eat the meal first!)

4. The use of *sor singgih basa* (different levels of language)

Balinese has three levels of language. They are *alus sor*, *alus madya*, and *alus singgih*. *Alus sor* is used among close friends, *alus madya* is used towards older people or strangers, and *alus singgih* is used towards respected people. To show politeness, people will use *alus madya* or *alus singgih*. When people argue, in the sense that they are angry or rude, they are not likely to use *alus madya* or *alus inggih*. They will use *alus sor* instead. *Catur Wangsa* is also one significant factor influencing the use of different level of language. We use *basa alus singgih* when talking to someone who has higher social status than us.

Tu Langkir suba medaar? (*alus sor*, neutral) (Has Tu Langkir eaten?)

Biang Mawan sampun ngajeng? (*alus madya*, politer) (Has Biang Mawan eaten?)

Dayu sampun ngrayunin? (*alus singgih*, the politest) (Has Dayu eaten?)

5. Special expressions

To be polite, Balinese use certain expressions for *thanking*, *apologizing*, *leave taking*, *congratulating*, and *greetings*. Failing to do so will be regarded as being impolite.

Thanking : *Matur suksema ping banget sampun ngrauhin* (Thank you very much for coming).

Apologizing: *Sinampurayang titing lali makta cakepan* (I am sorry, I really forget to bring a book).

Leave taking: *Alon-alon nggih* (Take a good care).

Congratulating: *Rahajeng* (Congratulations).

Greetings: *Rahajeng wengi* (Good evening).

6. The use of “*Ngendepang raga/ngesorang dewek*” (Good manner)

Balinese do *ngendepang raga* manner to respect others. They choose words of lower level for him/herself but they choose words of higher level for the listener.

Ajin Sinta : *Ragane sampun mireng ortine ento?* (Have you heard that news?)

Ajin Sonto: *Titang durung miragi,ragane sampun mireng.* (No, I haven't, have you heard?)

3.2 Politeness in English

English is a West Germanic language that originated from the Anglo-Frisian dialects. It is a dominant language in the United Kingdom, the United States, many Commonwealth nations including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and other British colonies. It is the second most spoken language in the world. It is estimated that there are 380 million native speakers, 300 million who use English as a second language, and 100 million who use it as a foreign language (Kachru in Tickoo, 1995). It is the language of science, aviation, computing, diplomacy, and tourism. English speaking people value politeness over directness. They are more likely to forgive inaccuracies than rudeness. English speakers assume implicitly that speakers are mostly concerned about ensuring that their own individual needs are met, and that others are not imposed on (Brown and Levinson, 1987). In English people express their politeness through some linguistic devices. Here are some ways of showing politeness in English:

1. Modals

It is polite when someone uses modal auxiliaries in asking questions. The use of modals *could, may, shall, should, and would* can be regarded as a polite way of saying things.

Do you think you could ...?

I wonder if you could ...?

Should you need any help, just call me is politer than *If you need any help, just call me.*

Would you please speak more loudly? is politer than *Speak more loudly.*

Different modals can also show different degrees of politeness. As seen below, the degree of politeness can vary, from least polite to most polite.

Pick up the phone.
Pick up the phone, please.
Please pick up the phone.
I want you to pick up the phone.
I want you to pick up the phone, please.
Will you pick up the phone?
Will you pick up the phone, please?
Can you pick up the phone?
Can you pick up the phone, please?
Would you pick up the phone?
Would you pick up the phone, please?
Could you pick up the phone?
Could you pick up the phone, please?

2. Euphemism

Sometimes people do not want to say something bluntly. Instead, they choose certain words to express things indirectly, but politely. This phenomenon can be found in the use of *euphemism*. People use *pass away* instead of *die*, *get a cycle* or *period* for *menstruation*, or *expecting a baby* instead of *pregnant*.

“My grandmother *passed away* last year” sounds politer than “My grandmother *died* last year”.

“Mary is always bad-tempered when she gets *her period*” sounds politer than “Mary is always bad-tempered when she gets *her menstruation*.”

“Jane is *expecting a baby*” sounds politer than “Jane is *pregnant*.”

3. Tag Questions

Politeness may be expressed through the use of tag questions. It is usually used to ask for agreement or confirmation.

People may say politely “*You feel tired, don’t you?*” rather than “*Do you feel tired?*”

It is time to have lunch, isn’t it? instead of “*Isn’t it time for lunch?*”

You are not in a hurry, are you? instead of “*Aren’t you in a hurry?*”

4. Negative sentences

Politeness can be found in the use of negative sentences.

If you don't mind, please come before five o'clock.

If you are not busy, please take me to the airport.

5. The word "please"

The word "please" is a very effective word to express politeness. Any sentence using *please* becomes much politer. For example, the sentence "*Do me a favor*" will be politer if it is added with *please* and becoming "*Please do me a favor*". The word *please* can be used at the beginning, at the middle, or at the end of a sentence.

Please give me a hand.

Would you please speak more slowly?

Don't be so noisy, please.

6. Certain expressions

People will use certain expressions for certain occasions in order to be polite. This can take place in *thanking, apologizing, leave taking, sneezing, and making a toast.*

A: Thank you very much.

B: You are welcome.

A: I'm so sorry for coming late.

B: It's okay.

A: Have a nice day.

B: You, too.

A: Excuse me (sneezing).

B: Bless you.

A: Cheers (making a toast).

B: Cheers.

The above expressions (A) and their responses (B) show how people try to be polite in their communication. Failing to behave so can be regarded as being rude or impolite.

7. Address terms

As a polite marker in communicating, one may use address terms (Wardhaugh, 1992). In communication it will be polite to use terms of address such as Sir, Mr., Mrs., Ms., Your Honor, Doctor, Professor, and so forth.

Yes, I will, Doctor.

I will be there for you, Prof.

Let me do it for you, Sir.

In using the address terms people will consider whether they are intimate or distant towards their interlocutors. When they are distant, they use address terms as mentioned above, but when they are intimate, they may use first names instead.

8. Inclusive terms (let's)

Including the interlocutor in our conversation can show some kind of politeness. The sentence “*Let's find out the answer*” sounds less rude than “*Find out the answer*”.

9. Speech acts

People may express what they want indirectly. Indirect speech acts may have the shape of question or declarative sentence, requesting for action (Duranti, 2000). Instead of using an imperative, for example, one may say “*This room is hot*” to mean “*Open the windows*”. “*Can you reach the salt?*” means asking someone to pass the salt for the speaker. The answer will not be *Yes, I can* or *No I can't*. Rather, the interlocutor will pass the salt for the speaker.

10. Avoiding the word “you”

In order not to sound rude, the word *you* is often avoided when there seems to be something wrong.

“*You made a mistake*” becomes “*There seems to be a mistake*”.

“*You said ...*” becomes “*We understood*”

11. Avoiding making demands or giving instruction

A phrase like “*I want ...*” sounds rude. It will be better if we use “*I would like ...*” or “*I would be grateful if ..*”

I would like some details of your products instead of “*I want some details of your products*”.

I would be grateful if you send us the sample of your products instead of “*Send us the sample of your products*”.

12. Rejecting

When someone rejects an offer from someone else, he/she may not reject it in a direct way. Rather, he/she will reject it in a polite way by rendering a reason for not being able to do as requested.

For example:

Jack: Could you come to my birthday party tonight?

Mary: *I'd love to but I have a paper due tomorrow.*

3.3 Similarities between Balinese and English

There are a number of similarities between politeness in Balinese and in English.

a. Use of *larisang* and *please*

Please is an English word, and the word *larisang* which is a word in Balinese has the same meaning as *please*.

For example:

Take a set, *please*. (English)

Larisang melinggih dumun. (Balinese)

b. Terms of address

English people use terms of address such as Sir, Mr. Dr. and Professor, while Balinese use similar terms of address such as *ragane* (you), *Ida* (He), *Aji* (Sir), *Biang* (madam), *Dok* (doctor).

c. Special expressions

Both English and Balinese have terms for thanking, apologizing, leave taking, congratulating, and greeting.

The following table shows the similarities of politeness between Balinese and English

Table 1. The similarities of Politeness between Balinese and English

Kind of expression	English	Balinese
<i>Thanking</i>	Thank you.	<i>Matur suksema.</i>
<i>Apologizing</i>	I am sorry.	<i>Nunas sinampura.</i>
<i>Leave taking</i>	Take a good care.	<i>Alon-alon nggih.</i>
<i>Congratulating</i>	Congratulations.	<i>Rahajeng.</i>
<i>Greeting</i>	Good morning.	<i>Rahajeng semeng.</i>

3.4 Differences of Politeness between Balinese and English

In Balinese, the most outstanding sign of being polite is the use of language levels of *alus madia* and *alus singgih*. In English, there is not any kind of language levels to show politeness.

Table 2. The differences of Politeness between Balinese and English

Levels of Language	Balinese	English
<i>Alus sor</i> (neutral)	<i>Putu suba medaar ?</i>	Has Putu eaten?
<i>Alus madya</i> (politer)	<i>I Bapa sampun ngajeng?</i>	Has my father eaten?
<i>Alus singgih</i> (the politest)	<i>Ida sampun ngrayunin?</i>	Has Ida eaten?

In English the use of modals, such as *would*, *could*, and *should*, is very effective to show politeness. This phenomenon cannot be found in Balinese for this kind of linguistic feature does not exist in Balinese.

4. Conclusion

Although the native speakers of English and Balinese live far away from each other, there seem to be some similarities in expressing politeness in both languages. Politeness in thanking, apologizing, greeting, leave taking, the use of please and *larisang*, and the use of address terms, for example, shows that both languages have some similarities. The same similarities may also exist in other languages, and may give the notion of the existence of universals across languages all over the world.

Despite the similarities in English and Balinese, of course there are some of differences. The most obvious one is the use of language levels in Balinese. The use of language levels such as *basa alus sor*, *alus madia* and *basa alus singgih* in Balinese is not found in English. There is not any level of language in English to express politeness. Using modal auxiliaries to express politeness in English is not found in Balinese either. There is no equal expression of modal in Balinese. This may be caused by the fact that every language has its own uniqueness.

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