# Politeness Principles Expressed by Minangkabau Migrants in Traditional Market: A Cultural Pragmatic Study

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Abstract: Politeness is a social as well as a universal phenomenon involving language as its representation to be measured. Massive globalization and developing technology have contributed to the migration of people and the language used by the speakers as well as the politeness applied. This paper aims at analyzing the politeness principles represented by *Minangkabau* migrants in *Halat* traditional market in the city of Medan. This research was the combination of library and field research by applying descriptive qualitative method focused on a cultural pragmatic study supported with documentation, in-depth interview and questionnaire. It involved 12 (twelve) migrant sellers and buyers as the population and 3 (three) of them were selected as the sample. The transcribed text obtained from the conversation happened between migrant sellers and buyers was selected as the main data and the result of an in-depth interview and questionnaire was treated as additional data. The research found 6 (six) politeness maxims proposed by Leech (2014) were found in the conversation involving MK migrants in the selling and buying process, yet the violation of maxims also occurs. It shows that globalization and technology contribute much to the language politeness of migrants Minangkabau in their daily life.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Politeness in general covers many aspects of human life. One of the crucial aspects required by people as the building blocks of a society is communication. Communication itself encompasses the role of language and politeness in order to manage the people with various background and needs. In other words, politeness and language must be present during communication. It is difficult to define which comes first or becomes the priority. Both are social as well as a universal phenomenon found around the world. Politeness itself has become a prominent issue to be discussed as it has been viewed from different perspectives (Shahrokhi and Bidabadi, 2013): facesaving view (Brown and Levinson, 1978,1987), emotive communication and interpersonal politeness (Arndt and Janney, 1985, 1991), discernment and volition (Ide, 1989), social norm view and conversational contract view (Fraser, 1990), conversational maxim view (Grice, 1975; Leech, 1983, 2014; Lakof, 1989, 1990), rapport management (Spencer-Oatey, 2000), intercultural communication (Scollon and Scollon, 2001), even politic behaviour

(Watts, 2003, 2005). It also has been analyzed in many areas: classroom (Jiang, 2010), advertisement (Liu, 2012), administration (Hammond, 2017), a movie (Budiarta and Rajistha, 2018), etc. Moreover, politeness has received various amounts of attention from all areas of linguistics throughout the twentieth century (Held, 1992). It represents that significantly politeness is still attractive to be studied further and wider. However, analyzing politeness principles in which traditional market used as the research of location and the speakers are migrants speaking in their native language is still limited conducted. Thus, this research tries to analyse this problem thoroughly.

Language as a primary media in communication presents among the communities in order to bridge any existing purposes. It is definitely accepted that language has a closed relationship with politeness. In linguistics, politeness is a well-established scholarly concept, basic to 'politeness theory' – one of the more popular branches of contemporary pragmatics, and a widely used tool in studies of intercultural communication. It has been improved for many years with certain emphasize of its functions through politeness principles. One of the notable theories on

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politeness proposed by Leech (2014) emphasizing the notion of politeness on an atmosphere of relative harmony in social interaction described on eight characteristics, they are: 1) it is not obligatory, 2) varying gradations of polite and impolite behavior, 3) a sense of what is normal, 4) depends on situation, 5) reciprocal asymmetry, 6) battle of politeness, 7) transaction of value and 8) a balance among participants. These characteristics are used generally in order to classify what being polite or impolite. Furthermore, Leech improved the correlation between politeness and language in the form of maxims of the politeness which are divided into 6 (six) types, they are:

- 1. Tact maxim: minimize the cost to other, maximize the benefit to other.
- 2. Generosity maxim: minimize benefit to self, maximize cost to self.
- 3. Approbation maxim: minimize dispraise of other, maximize praise of other.
- 4. Modesty maxim: minimize praise of self, maximize dispraise of self.
- 5. Agreement maxim: minimize disagreement between self and other, maximize agreement between self and other.
- 6. Sympathy maxim: minimize antipathy between self and other, maximize sympathy between self and other.

These principles indicate that politeness basically tends to build good relation among the community members or simply speakers involved in a communication process. In Indonesia, everyone appreciates politeness as one of the Indonesian personality characteristics instead of cultural diversity. It is still considered as a crucial aspect embedded within the culture of a community. A number of different factors involved in determining politeness, such as behavior, status, language, culture, etc. also contribute to the politeness. However, being polite or impolite is actually relative and naive as there is disagreement on the parameters or criteria related to it. It indicates there is a gap occurring due to the differences existing among generations. The simple illustration given here is the age difference between young and old. This difference influences the way of thinking of each generation and sometimes leads problems; for instance, the youngsters must speak in a lower tone to the elders, listen to their advice or ask for their suggestion of doing or planning something; therefore, they must consider the way to express the language and the language used, yet they often ignore these things. For youngsters, politeness is an obstacle for their life since it makes them

become unconfident and outdated, especially dealing with local language. The rules purposed for politeness make them feel discomfort or in other words; youngsters need the feeling of freedom, included in the communication. It is also supported by the development of technology which partially also causes the youngsters to leave the politeness principles in communication. As a result, it leads them to the image of 'polite' or 'impolite'.

Furthermore, in Indonesia, everyone appreciates politeness as one of the Indonesian personality characteristics instead of its cultural diversity. Multiethnic enriching and supporting national identity become one of the Indonesian culture diversities. Each ethnic has certain characteristics reflecting any cultural features belonged to it; believed, performed, and integrated into the community. The language itself can be regarded as the first acquired and developed by an ethnic which has significant functions and roles for the people living with it. This language is commonly known as vernacular language or local language designating the ethnic itself. For instance, Minangkabau people with Minangkabau language, Batak people with Batak language, Javanese with Java language, etc. Minangkabau language is one of the local languages spoken throughout the Indonesian archipelago due to the Minangkabau *marantau* tradition of migration with approximately seven million speakers (Drakard, 1999). It is an Austronesian language primarily spoken by Minangkabau ethnics living in the highland of West Sumatera (Gordon, 2005), which is known as *Minang* or *Padang* language and becomes a daily language used for communication for a long time and identic with rhythmical intonation. This language has both a pragmatically motivated voice system and a conceptually motivated voice system (Crouch, 2009). This rhythmical intonation even can denote meaning for the politeness of the speaker. For example, the high and loud tone of a speaker is considered as impolite if she/he talks to others, especially for the older. Moreover, according to Azrial (2008) in Kurniawan and Isnanda (2014), Minangkabau people has certain rule related to language they use in their daily communication which is known as Nan Ampek (The Four), consisting of Kato Mandaki (the language used to the elders), Kato Manurun (the language used to the younger), Kato Mandata (the language used to the same age), and Kato Malereng (the language used to the honors). Thus, MK people try to maintain their local language in every activity as for them language is also the representation of politeness.

Developing and massive globalization has led MK people to take part in mobilization for various reasons and purposes. Demographically, in Indonesia, it will be found in many ethnic communities that have out-migrated to places outside their homelands. They become migrants (perantau) and spread throughout the Indonesian archipelago. It certainly affects the socio-cultural and language domains of the migrants as they have to adapt to the new places and it leads them to disengage from their own culture. They come from various ethnics in Indonesia, such as Bataknese, Javanese, Malay, and Minangkabau. North Sumatera Province is one of the preferred regions by the migrants to live in. Medan as the capital city becomes the most favorite destination to settle permanently for it offers economic potentiality for migrants to support their life. Medan is interesting to be selected as the location of the research as it consists of various ethnics or plural communities either as natives or migrants who are different from other cities or regions in Indonesia. It is difficult to find a person speaking in local dialects for daily language differ from other cities in Indonesia, for instance in Java. People living in part of Java will be easier to be recognized due to their special dialect, yet it will be different from the migrants living in Medan, especially for MK people. Consequently, other ethnics must go to certain places in order to find out MK people speaking in their native language, for instance, a traditional market. Minangkabau ethnic is one of the most migrants living in Medan. They live in certain districts in part of Medan, such as Matsun, Halat, Perjuangan, Sukaramai, etc. Most of them working as merchants or sellers at the traditional market around their homes. It has become their job since their ancestors are also well-known as traders. Thus, nearby markets are labeled by MK markets as the sellers and buyers are dominated by MK people, one of them is Halat market located at City of Medan.

MK migrants are used to practicing MK language to interact with each other and politeness becomes an obligation in selling and buying transaction. It is actually a hard fact to be challenged as in the reality, the situation and condition encountered have made and led them to speak language other languages to build communication in selling their goods or products. It means that politeness principles dealing with language must be maintained to achieve good interpersonal relationship during selling and buying transaction, yet the violation toward it may take place. Thus, this research aims at analyzing six types of maxims of principle politeness expressed by MK migrants in *Halat* traditional market and the violations occur towards those maxims during selling and buying transaction in order to provide a new model of identifying the level of language politeness used by speakers.

### 2 METHOD

This research was the combination of library and field research by applying descriptive qualitative method supported with documentation, in-depth interview and questionnaire. 12 (twelve) Minangkabau migrants working as sellers were selected as population and 3 (three) of them together with the buyers became the sample of the research. The transcribed text obtained from the recorded conversation happened between migrant sellers and buyers was selected as the main data and the result of an in-depth interview and questionnaire was treated as additional data.

The main data then were translated into Indonesian language and English in order to find out six types of maxims of the politeness proposed by Leech (2014) used by Minangkabau migrants at *Halat* traditional market. However, only the conversations translated into English were displayed in the analysis. The translated conversations in the Indonesian language were only used in order to help the translator in understanding the message of information conveyed by the speakers and translating them into English. These data then were compared with the violations occurred and were analyzed by using the data from the result of an in-depth interview and questionnaire.

## **3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The data of this research were conversations of MK migrants working as sellers and their buyers at *Halat* international market. The conversation was recorded and transcribed. After that, the conversation was translated into Indonesian Language and English and was used as the analyzed data. Based on the result of analysis, it was found that all six types of maxims of politeness principles; tact maxim, generosity maxim, approbation maxim, modesty maxim, agreement maxim, and sympathy maxim improved by Leech (2014) were used in the conversations expressed by the MK migrants working as sellers with their buyers at *Halat* Traditional Market, however, the violations also occur, as shown in the actions illustrated in table 1 (one) and table 2 (two).

Table 1: Actions Represented Politeness Maxim

| -   |             |  |
|-----|-------------|--|
| No. | Politeness  | Actions  |
|     | Maxims      |  |
| 1   | Tact        | - Patiently gives reasonable opinions to ensure the buyer for her choice.  |
| 2   | Modesty     | <ul> <li>Greets the buyer friendly<br/>and politely to see her<br/>goods.</li> </ul>   |
| 3   | Approbation | <ul> <li>Praising the buyer by<br/>saying 'thank you'.</li> <li>Answering the buyer's<br/>questions.</li> <li>Doing what the buyer<br/>asks/orders without<br/>complaining.</li> </ul> |
| 4   | Generosity  | - Giving a cheaper price.  |
| 5   | Agreement   | - Agreeing to give the price determined by the seller.   |
| 6   | Sympathy    | - Asking for forgiveness for the inconvenience.  |

Table 2: Actions Represented Violations of Maxim

| No. | Violations | Actions   |
|-----|------------|---|
|     | of Maxims  |   |
| 1   | <i>a</i> . | - Feeling reluctant to give   |
|     | Generosity | the lower price to the buyer  |
| -   |            | by describing strict reasons.   |
| 2   | Agreement  | <ul> <li>Deciding the final price and<br/>neglecting the buyer's</li> </ul> |
|     |            | request.  |

The occurrence of the maxim of politeness table 1 (one) represents that MK Migrants working as sellers in the traditional market still maintain the politeness of language in interaction. It is certainly supported by the primary aim of sellers in selling and buying process, to attract buyers in order to buy their products through the process of bargaining and the agreement of price, as illustrated in conversation 1 (one):

#### Conversation 1

| Buyer  | : | Iko bara ciek, Pak?                |
|--------|---|------------------------------------|
|        |   | (How much is it, Sir?)             |
| Seller | : | Mano, Mak? Iko? Dua limo.          |
|        |   | (Which one, Madam? This one? It is |
|        |   | twenty thousand rupiah.)           |
| Buyer  | : | Lai warna lain?                    |
|        |   | (Are there other colors?)          |
| Seller | : | Ado. Merah.                        |
|        |   | (Yes, it is red.)                  |
| Buyer  | : | Mano? Caliak.                      |
|        |   | (Which one? Can I see?)            |
| Seller | : | Iko.                               |
|        |   | (Here it is.)                      |

| Buyer  | : | Indak kurang ko haraganyo?          |
|--------|---|-------------------------------------|
|        |   | (Can it be cheaper?)                |
| Seller | : | Dua tigo.                           |
|        |   | (Twenty-three thousand rupiah.)     |
| Buyer  | : | Dua puluah yo?                      |
|        |   | (How about twenty thousand rupiahs? |
| Seller | : | Ambiaklah.                          |
|        |   | (Okay)                              |
| Buyer  | : | Tarimo kasi yo.                     |
|        |   | (Thank you.)                        |
| Seller | : | Samo-samo.                          |
|        |   | (You are welcome.)                  |
|        |   |                                     |

Conversation 1 (one) involves 2 (two) speakers, one is a buyer (female) and another is a seller (male). According to the data obtained through in-depth interview and questionnaire, both are migrants, but they come from different areas or hometowns of West Sumatera Province. The former comes from *Solok* and she has lived in Medan for more than 50 (fifty) years. She moved to Medan for getting an economically better life for her family. The latter comes from *Payahkumbuh* and he also has lived in Medan to get a better job, but finally, he decided to be a seller and make a life hereafter.

Based on the result of the analysis of conversation 1 (one), it is found that there are 3 (three) maxims exemplified; approbation maxim, generosity maxim, and agreement maxim. The approbation maxim is described in the conversation started by a buyer asking for the price of a pair of sandals. The seller appreciates the buyer by answering the buyer's question. After that, the buyer gives another question; asking about alternative colors and the seller again patiently answers that question. Then, it is continued with the buyer's request to show the sandals which she asks for and the seller gives the sandals immediately. These parts of conversation imply that the seller tries to minimize dispraise of other and maximize praise of other. The conversation is continued by the buyer by asking for cheaper price and the seller generously gives the lower price, yet unpredictably the buyer bargains the sandals for the lowest price and the seller, agrees with her. This situation reflects that the seller also tries to minimize benefit to self, maximize cost to self or in politeness principles it is categorized as generosity maxim. The conversation is ended by the agreement on price between seller and buyer as a form of the maxim of agreement and thanking expression from the buyer for kindly giving what she wants and needs, especially dealing with the price and the buyer responds it well.

The whole utterances in the conversation indicate that both, buyer and seller maintain politeness during

the selling and buying process. Since both are about the same age, so they speak the language to the same age (*kato mandata*) which makes them feel more free in expressing what they want. In other words, the language they use will support them in selling and buying transaction even though they have migrated for years. However, this situation does not happen if the seller and buyer have the different level or type of the language used, as described in conversation 2 (two):

| Conversation 2 |     |  |  |
|----------------|-----|--|--|
|                | :   | Apo caliak? Singgahlah siko sabantah.          |  |
|                |     | (Come and see, Madam.)                         |  |
|                |     | (A buyer points a long dress.)                 |  |
| Buyer          | :   | Baranya ko, Uni?                               |  |
|                |     | (How much is it?)                              |  |
| Seller         | :   | Saratuih ribu.                                 |  |
|                |     | (One hundred thousand rupiah.)                 |  |
| Buyer          | :   | Indak kurang?                                  |  |
|                |     | (Can it be cheaper?)                           |  |
| Seller         | :   | Ado kurang. Bisa.                              |  |
|                |     | Awak sama awak yo.                             |  |
|                |     | (Yes, it can. You are Minang, aren't           |  |
|                |     | you?)  |  |
| Buyer          | :   | Hijau barendo.                                 |  |
| •              |     | (But, I do not like the green dress with       |  |
|                |     | lace.)   |  |
| Seller         | ÷.  | Ndak barendo. Kombinasi. Rancak.               |  |
|                |     | (It is not full of lace, it is a combination.) |  |
| Buyer          | :   | Baranya ko, Uni?                               |  |
|                |     | (How about this one. How much is it)           |  |
| Seller         | : \ | Iko hargo saratuih dua puluah.                 |  |
|                |     | (It is one hundred and twenty thousand         |  |
|                |     | rupiah.  |  |
| Buyer          | :   | Indak kurang?                                  |  |
|                |     | (Can it be cheaper?)                           |  |
| Seller         | :   | Beko bertransaksi tak tawar menawar.           |  |
|                |     | Iko alah harago pas. Ndak bisa ditawar         |  |
|                |     | lai.   |  |
|                |     | (You do not need to bargain as I always        |  |
|                |     | give the lowest price. It cannot be            |  |
|                |     | bargained. It is a fixed price.                |  |
| Buyer          | :   | Baranyo kuniang?                               |  |
|                |     | (How much is the yellow dress?)                |  |
| Seller         | :   | Saratuih ampek puluah.)                        |  |
| -              |     | (One hundred and forty thousand.)              |  |
| Buyer          | :   | Iko punya jadi bakuranglah haraganyo.          |  |
|                |     | Saratuih dua puluah yo?                        |  |
|                |     | (Would you give me the cheaper price if        |  |
|                |     | I bought this dress? How about one             |  |
| 0.11           |     | hundred and twenty thousand rupiahs?           |  |
| Seller         | :   | Yang mana ko?                                  |  |
| ъ              |     | (Which one?)                                   |  |
| Buyer          | :   | Iko.   |  |
| Caller         |     | (This one.)                                    |  |
| Seller         | :   | Bukan begitu Bu sayang. Ambo terus             |  |
|                |     | terang kalau nak bajualan ndak baduto.         |  |
|                |     | Saratuih ampek puluah ribu. Modal              |  |

puluah ribu. Indak baduto. Sebab siko langganan dah lamo-lamo. (Let me explain my dearest, Madam...I am definitely honest to sell. I only get twenty thousand rupiahs of one hundred and forty thousand rupiahs I sell to you. I talk honestly. You can ask the visitors as they are all my old customers.) Saratuih tiga puluah ribu yo? Buyer : (How about one hundred and thirty thousand?) Seller : Astagfirullahaladzim. Dapek sapuluah ribu. Belum lai ongkos becak barang. Ko tanyalah ke urang. Buat mahal ambo indak pernah. Indak pernah. (Please forgive me, God. I only get ten thousand rupiahs for my profit. It is not even enough to pay for the cart cost. You can ask other people. I never sell with the high price. Never.) Buyer : Bara haragonya kini? (So, how much is the final price) Seller : Satu ampek ambiaklah. (It is still one hundred and forty thousand) Bara samuanyo? Buyer : (How much is the total price?) Seller : Duo anam. Minta izin labiah kurang. (Two hundred and sixty thousand rupiah.) Please forgive me for the

saratuih dua puluah ribu. Ambiak dua

inconvenience. Buyer : Samo-samo. (So do I) There are 2 (two) speakers involved in

conversation 2 (two) speakers involved in conversation 2 (two). Both of them are female. The word *Uni* expressed by the buyer in the conversation is referred to an older woman and indicates that the buyer is younger than the seller. Based on the result of the in-depth interview and questionnaire which is treated as supporting data, it is found that both of them are migrants and come from *Bukittinggi*. The buyer has lived in Medan for more than 40 (forty) years meanwhile the seller has lived in Medan for more than 60 (sixty) years. The buyer moved to Medan for family reason, contrastively, they seller moved for an economic reason. Both still maintain their local language in their daily life although they have been living in the city for years.

The result of analysis done on conversation 2 (two) found that there are 4 (four) maxims of politeness principles represented in the conversation, namely tact maxim, modesty maxim, generosity maxim, and approbation maxim, however, the violations also occur. The beginning of the conversation illustrates the modesty maxim in which the seller greets the buyer friendly and politely and it

makes the buyer is attracted to see her products. The conversation is continued by the buyer asking for the price of a long dress and lower price. The seller answers the buyer's question and also agrees to give a lower price as the buyer is Minangkabau ethnic. This situation describes that approbation maxim takes place in the conversation. However, the buyer does not want to buy the long dress as it has lace with it. Nevertheless, the seller patiently gives a reasonable opinion to ensure the buyer for her choice and it implicitly shows the tact maxim. The buyer directly asks the seller the price of another long dress and also asks for the lower price. The seller answers it but she does not agree to give a cheaper price and tries to give an understanding to the buyer. This part of the conversation indicates that the violation of agreement maxim occurs because the seller, in this case, maximizes disagreement between her and the buyer. The buyer agrees to buy the long dress due to she has no alternatives for the dress she wanted.

The following conversation describes the buyer who asks for yellow long dress and begs for the seller generosity to give a lower price. However, the seller starts giving strict explanations and reasons which clearly concludes that she feels reluctant to accept the buyer's request. In other words, this situation implies the violation of the maxim of generosity. The buyer keeps begging for the seller's generosity by bargaining the price of the yellow long dress she is interested in, yet the seller refuses her offer by repeating the word 'never' which emphasizes that it is actually the cheapest and final price. Strict opinions and explanations stated by the seller breaks the politeness principles as the seller maximizes the benefit to herself which means as the violation of generosity maxim. The buyer finally unwillingly accepts the final price and confirm the total of the price that she must pay to the seller. This situation also shows the violation of agreement maxim. The buyer ends the conversation by telling the total of the price, however, she also forgives for the inconvenience. This situation describes the sympathy maxim because the seller minimizes antipathy between herself and the buyer, and the buyer responds to her forgiveness.

Since the seller is older than the buyer, violation of the maxims of politeness principles are potentially done by her. It is due to she has more authority to control the situation. This situation surely has a relationship to the level of language in which the seller speaks with *kato mandata* (the language used to the younger) whereas the seller must speak with *kato mandaki* (the language used to older). This age difference certainly limits the buyer's power in the selling and buying process. In other words, it can be said that the level or types of language used by MK migrants contribute to the application of politeness principles as well as the violation during the selling and buying process.

### 4 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis done, it is found that the six maxims of politeness; tact maxim, modesty maxim, approbation maxim, agreement maxim, generosity maxim, and sympathy maxim proposed by Leech (2014) are found in the conversation done between migrant Minangkabau sellers and buyer in traditional market during selling and buying transaction. Furthermore, politeness principles are applied conditionally; depend on the speakers' background involved, especially age and social status which associate with the language they use (*Nan Ampek*).

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