

# HOW POLITENESS REFLECTS SOCIAL BEHAVIOR IN JAVANESE AND BATAK LANGUAGE

Yuyun Tiarawati & Dwi Wulandari

English Department Faculty Of Humanities  
Diponegoro University Semarang

---

## ABSTRAK

Indonesia sebagai negara yang memiliki keanekaragaman budaya mampu mempertahankan berbagai dialek yang tersebar diseluruh penjuru negara. Walaupun masyarakat Indonesia memiliki Bahasa Indonesia sebagai bahasa resmi mereka, mereka masih menggunakan berbagai dialek yang juga merupakan bahasa ibu mereka untuk berkomunikasi dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Masyarakat suku Jawa dan suku Batak adalah dua suku dengan karakteristik berbeda yang tercermin dalam penggunaan bahasa mereka. Ada penilaian dari masyarakat Indonesia secara umum kepada kedua suku tersebut. Masyarakat biasanya menilai masyarakat suku Jawa sebagai masyarakat yang berbicara secara sopan dan halus, sedangkan masyarakat suku Batak sebagai masyarakat yang berbicara secara kasar dan blak-blakan. Dalam penelitian ini, penulis mencoba untuk mengetahui alasan dibalik penilaian masyarakat Indonesia secara umum tersebut dan menguraikannya dengan Teori *Politeness* dari Brown dan Levinson.

Kata kunci: suku Jawa, suku Batak, dialek, penilaian, *Politeness*.

---

## 1. Introduction

People use language as not only a means of communication, but also a tool to reflect someone's identity. Indonesian people say, "Bahasa menunjukkan bangsa", which means when language shows someone's identity, like their social status, gender, age, ethnicity and their social networks.

Indonesia, as a big country with more than 13,000 islands, has approximately 600 different languages in different ethnic groups (Scott Pauww, 2009). Every ethnic group has their own characteristics, like their dialects, that differentiate one dialect to another one. The factors behind them are the distance between islands, the different culture of each ethnic group, the way of living, and the religion or belief (Tobing, 2014). With the variation of dialects makes Indonesia to become a country with rich culture and tradition.

Javanese and Batak language are two of many dialects in Indonesia that have very particular characteristics in the way they communicate that many linguists are interested in studying those dialects. Muryantina, (2011:1) said that, Javanese and Batak are usually seen as two opposite cultures based on the way they interact with other people.

I interested in chosing the topic because with the particular characteristics of Javanese and Batak language, I think it is easier to compare them. Addition to that, I want to know more about these two languages together with the culture and tradition in order to understand about the use of Politeness Strategy that reflects Javanese and Batak people's social behavior.

After the research, I expect myself to understand more about Javanese and Batak language, so that I am no longer only listen and believe in stereotypes in the society because I understand the factors and reasons of how Javanese and Batak people use their languages.

## 2. Politeness

Politeness is what people see as the norms and principles to be polite. Lakoff (1990:34) defined Politeness as a system of interpersonal relations to minimize conflict, to establish levels of mutual comfort, and to show awareness of another person's face. Brown and Levinson (1987) added that face itself is someone's self-image that should be maintained while interacting with others.

In Brown and Levinson's Politeness, there are negative and positive face. Negative face claims to personal freedom that cannot be invaded by others, while positive face tries to create positive image to gain acknowledgement. If someone gives a threat to another, it means threatening someone's face. By acting opposite to someone's wants and desires can damage the face of the addressee (Brown & Levinson, 1987:61)

Politeness Strategy is used to lessen the threat to someone's face or can be called as face saving acts. There are two types of Politeness used in interaction, negative and positive Politeness. Negative Politeness is stated as "the most elaborate and the most conventionalized set of linguistic strategies" because it concerns with someone's negative face to show deference and emphasize the important of others. Meanwhile, Positive Politeness is stated as "redress directed to the addressee's positive face, his perennial desire that his wants (or the actions/acquisitions/values resulting

from them) should be thought of as desirable” because it includes face saving acts to show solidarity (Brown & Levinson, 1987:18)

In the way of using Politeness strategy, Javanese people tend to use negative Politeness, as when they are showing deference to the addressee and minimize imposition. Batak people tend to use positive Politeness as they focus on showing solidarity.

### **3. Social Behavior**

Social behavior is behavior that is socially oriented, it is directed towards society and between the members of their kind. Language and social behavior are related because language can be called as a social behavior as language shows the identity of the user. In using language, people convey their thought and expect other to response to them. While conveying their thought, people use some expressions or actions that can be categorized as behavior. It does not have to be in a spoken form because smiling or crying are the forms of their behavior as well.

### **4. How Politeness Reflects Social Behavior in Javanese and Batak Language**

#### **4. 1. Javanese Language**

Javanese are people mainly living in Central Java, East Java, and Special Region of Yogyakarta. According to the survey of *Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia* in 2010, the total amount of

population is 73.316.905 out of 237.641.326 population of Indonesia. Javanese language is spoken by 47.8 percent Indonesian, spreading all over the country (Sakti & Nakamura, 2014).

According to a study conducted by Scott Pauww in 2009, Javanese language has particular characteristics compared to other dialects in Indonesia. It has variation depending on their social class, contexts, styles, and registers which is completely different in every degree depending on the age and the social class of the addressee. Each style has its own vocabulary and grammatical rules. These complex structures make Javanese language difficult to be learned by outsiders (Pauww, 2009:2)

There are three degrees of formality in Javanese language, *ngoko*, *krama*, and *madya*. *Ngoko* is informal speech used to communicate with friends or close relatives; *madya* is the intermediate level of *ngoko* and *krama*; and *krama* is the polite and formal style used to communicate with elders, people with higher position, or respected people.

#### 4. 2. Batak Language

The term “Batak” defines the people who live in North Sumatra. According to the survey of *Badan Pusat Statistik Indonesia* in 2010, the amount of Batak population is 12.982.204 citizens, who are not only live in North Sumatra but also spreading all over Indonesia. Batak, similar to Javanese, has a long history as it is categorized as

one of the oldest populations in Indonesia, which makes Batak able to create a certain system in their language that is still used until today (Sakti & Nakamura, 2014:47-48)

#### 4. 3. Comparison of Javanese and Batak Language in Representing Social Behaviors

Javanese language and Batak language have different characteristics as following.

##### 1. Speech Act

Javanese people have three honorific levels in their society depending on social class, context, style, and register, *ngoko*, *krama*, and *madya*. On the other hand, Batak people do not have that kind of honorific level. There are some factors behind the use of that certain degree of formality in Javanese language (Tobing, 2014:4)

According to Tobing (2014:8), she said that Javanese people were divided into two classes, *priyayi* and *rakyat jelata*. They use degree of formality because they believe that every people should use the right register to the addressee depending on their social class, status, age, and profession. Meanwhile Batak people do not have that such of social class, because they believe that every one of them is equal. Thus, there are no higher and lower class.

According to Cunningham (2009:11) the reason why there is such a class stratification in Indonesia is because some provinces used to be ruled by king, such as in Java, Sumatra, and Kalimantan. Meanwhile, Batak and Minangkabau people are able to combine the system with a clan loyalty.

## 2. Traits

Indonesian people usually judge Javanese and Batak people to have some different traits based on the way they interact with people. According to Muryantina (2011:1), the common stereotype is that Batak people usually speak outloud in an aggressive manner. So, people often considered them as '*kasar*' or rude. On the other hand, Javanese people usually speak politely and calmly. So, people often seen them as polite, and else '*tidak tegas*' or indecisive.

I think, the factors behind the existence of these traits are more complicated than what people think as stereotypes, because the traits are affected by the way of living, culture, and tradition.

Javanese people believe that they cannot be straight-forward because it can be considered as rude or impolite. On the other hand, Batak people are straight-forward and believe that if there is any problem they should solve it right away. They also usually speak in a high tone, harsh, and confident. For people who do not know this

fact, Batak people are considered rude. However, Batak people believe that it does not matter as long as it does not insult other.

### 3. Culture and Tradition

The culture and tradition in Javanese and Batak influencing the language their people used. It gives characteristics to the language and affects on forming their people's social behavior.

Javanese culture is influenced by the existence of kingdom, which still exists until today, such as the Yogyakarta Sultanate and Surakarta Sultanate. Javanese people are expected to speak softly and politely while giving the honor to the king.

It is stated that Batak people mainly live in mountains and their houses are far from each other. In order to make other people hear their voice, Batak people need to scream. That is believed to be the reason why Batak people are always speak very loud and in big tone.

### 5. Conclusion

Both Javanese language and Batak language shows that language is not only a social phenomenon, but also a cultural phenomenon since the language they used reflects their culture and tradition. The different culture and way of living become the biggest influence on how Javanese and Batak people communicate.

Since Indonesia is famous of being friendly and polite, Politeness Strategy in speaking is very important because it reflects people's social



behavior as well as their identity. When Batak people communicate, to some people who do not know them, they might be considered as rude and impolite because they have different characteristics from most Indonesian people. Thus, people who are commonly polite, should consider the factors that influence this behavior in order to understand them because someone's assumption can be different from the other and it can be wrong also.

## REFERENCES

Cunningham, Clark E. (2009). *Culture of Indonesia - history, people, traditions, women, beliefs, food, customs, family, social*. Illinois: University of Illinois.

- Holmes, Janet. (1992). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Iliescu, Andrea. (2006). *Language as Social Behavior*. Craiova: University of Craiova.
- Levinson, Stephen C., and Brown, Penelope. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Mitri, Sara. (2008). *Social Behavior: From Cooperation to Language*. Lausanne: Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne.
- Muryantina, Rima. (2011). *The Indecisive Vs. The Rude: Comparing Javanese and Toba Batak Cultural Speech Behaviours*. Jakarta: University of Indonesia
- Pauww, Scott. (2009). *One Land, One Nation, One Language: An Analysis of Indonesia's National Language Policy*. New York: University of Rochester.
- Tobing, Roswita Lumban. (2014). *Tingkat Tutur Dalam Budaya Jawa dan Batak: Analisis Sosio-Pragmatik*. Yogyakarta: University of Yogyakarta.
- Yule, George. (1996). *Pragmatics*. London: Oxford University Press.