

**RELATIVISM IN LANGUAGE STUDY: A CASE OF FACE  
THREATENING ACTS AND POLITENESS IN KEDIRI,  
INDONESIA**

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**Abstract**

The rising or decreasing level of politeness impacts the intensity of human behavior. By using the theory of Brown and Levinson's model of politeness and civility theoretical model of Robin Lakoff, this paper aims to describe the Face Threatening Acts performed in public notices in Kediri. This study used the qualitative method because it focuses more on the analysis of written data rather than numbers. This study looks into public notices written by people in public places. The writer uses the theory of Relativism and politeness. The findings show that using more power, being forced, and playing with an adversary can create discomfort. An example can be seen from the public notice "*Angel Ngeyel "JOTOS"* (English translation: *Those who are disobedient will get punched*). People who read this notice will feel uncomfortable and it may potentially influence the readers to think and act rudely. It affects people's behavior. Another notice reads "*Mlebu kene SETOR NYOWO*", which is about "*Zona Rawan Pukul*". This means that people must not enter the village because of the pandemic Covid 19. If they insist to enter the village, they will die or lose their lives. Based on the theory of Robin Lakoff, the notice tends to have declined politeness. This phenomenon is a result of unbridled democracy so everyone feels entitled to talk about anything, the higher frequencies that do not use polite language in the mass media and electronic, and depletion of mutual respect between people. As a result, the behavior of this nation into insolent, and destructive, and the hostility between people are increasingly visible and tend to be light publicly.

Keywords: *Face Threatening Acts, Politeness, Public Notices, Relativism*

**Introduction**

Each of us has the opportunity to give our opinion, and it may happen that people would have some idea that is different from others. People might take it to the media to add their knowledge, to make themselves happy, and to make communication with others. Those activities demonstrate expressions of ideas. Criticism, suggestion, and comment would appear on the page on social media, printed media, or warnings in our surrounding. Communication is defined as a process by which we assign and convey meanings in an attempt to create shared understanding. Through communication, people try to say and express their ideas

in proper language. They use polite language to make their conversation runs well and goes smoothly.

Every language has its own characteristics because the language patterns revealed by the analysis of actual language are a reflection of the thought patterns of native speakers. According to Edward Sapir, a supporter of Franz Boas, relativism in such language results from either the belief that language can alter how people perceive reality or from the idea that the world, including the physical and social environment, is a language construct (Sidnell & Enfield, 2012).

The use of language in interaction among people of Indonesia need more attention. This phenomenon is a result of unbridled democracy so everyone feels entitled to talk about anything, the higher frequencies that do not use polite language in the mass media, and the depletion of mutual respect between people. As a result, the behaviors of this become wild, destructive, and hostile nature among people.

Politeness is described as a social norm or a set of prescriptive social 'rules'. Many linguists have aimed to research politeness. Brown and Levinson (1987), developed their 'face theory' based on the principles of our desire to be liked and not to be imposed. In Indonesian, politeness is also connected with social distance and the age of the participants of an interaction. However, there is a difference between English and Indonesian in applying politeness. Indonesian considers many attributes put before the name of someone we call. Even though we have known the person well, and we have a close relationship with her/him, still we have to put 'Mas' or 'Pak' for men and 'Mbak' or 'Bu' for women. There are many politeness theories. Among others are proposed by Leech, Brown and Levinson, Grundy, Grice, and Fraser. However, this article is only going to focus on Brown and Levinson's theory since it is the most influential one. Leech (in Thomas, 1995:158 stated that since politeness can satisfactorily explain exceptions to and apparent deviations from the cooperative principle, politeness is seen as crucial to explaining why people are frequently so indirect in conveying what they mean. Leech introduces the politeness principle which principally minimizes the expression of impolite beliefs, and maximizes the expression of polite beliefs.

## **Research Method**

The research adopts a qualitative design to make sure that the result of the data is possible to answer the problem of the study. This study used the qualitative method because it focuses more on the analysis or a form of written data rather than numbers. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) stated that qualitative research is descriptive, which means the result or data of the study are mostly in the form of words rather than numbers.

This study focuses on public notices written by people in public places. The writer uses the theory of Relativism and politeness to analyse how these notices perform politeness. The researcher uses some public notices around Kediri containing face-threatening acts and rules of politeness based on Rabin Lakoff's theory. The data was obtained by collecting some notices found as a document. The data of this research was collected by using the following steps: finding notices/writing in public places around Kediri, reading and selecting the notices which contain rules of politeness, and their categories, and analysing the notices using the theory of Relativism and Politeness.

## **Findings and Discussions**

In this section, the researcher presents the resulting research finding on how the notices perform Face Threatening Acts in public places in Kediri. From the data findings, the researcher analyzes based on the theory of Robin Lakoff. The analysis of the finding is presented below:

### **Data 1**



**Picture 1: Taken in Silir Village**

The notice was taken in Silir village. It is always served to the public reading every day. Robin Lakoff's politeness theory, the above data show no abiding maxim of politeness. The above data is a violation of the first maxim of politeness. It is advisable not to force, even overbearing. Data is also a violation of the second maxim. It is advisable to provide a choice. It is recommended to make the recipient happy; it makes it difficult. The theory of Brown and Levinson, W (FTA) is very heavy with too heavy R, D is farther away, and P are the same height between sender and receiver. This proves that Indonesian society is civility and time to time the decline in quality. The word "*Angel Ngeyel "JOTOS"*" are really bad based on the Indonesian people. It doesn't make the readers feel comfortable. It will influence the reader to think and act like the rude ones. It affects people's behavior.

As is the case with the principle of cooperative, any violation of the maxim (flouting of the maxims) will change the meaning, so long as it is understood as a breach of Robin Lakoff's politeness maxims formulated as follows:

Do not force it!

Give an option!

Make the recipient feel safe and comfortable!

Cooperative principles and politeness principles are often in conflict with each other. Conflicting demands of the two principles are very aware of language speakers and listeners.

## Data 2



Picture 2: Taken from Jatirejo village

This notice shows the decline of politeness every day exposed to the reading public in Indonesia. The writing “*Ngewel Goreng*” on notice makes the reader feel uncomfortable. Based on the theory of Robin Lakoff on rules of politeness, it does not give any choices and tends to the reader doing the action based on the notice. It affects people's behavior. The use of the word that brings face threats, words that reflect the growing compulsion, words that express the growth of social distance, and words that express an interesting dance of power. Every day the people of Indonesia were serving to use the word that expressed reluctance to use bad words and words that bring facial threat. If it happens every day and people read every day, it can make the reader feel uncomfortable. Based on the rules of Robin Lakoff's theory that this notice does not make the reader feel comfortable, it does not give any choices and tends to have conflict among them.

### Data 3.



Picture 3: Taken from Dadapan Village

This notice is about the remainder of the people around. The writing is about “*Mlebu kene SETOR NYOWO*”, which means that the people cannot enter the village because of the Covid 19 Pandemic. If people come into the village, they will die or lose their lives. Based on the theory of Robin Lakoff, the notice tends to have declined politeness. It is the same with no option (Give option) to the reader. The use of vocabulary that has coercion, stating vocabulary is not the option, vocabulary which does not make the listener safe and comfortable (in the concept of Robin Lakoff), which does not have the vocabulary at all politeness loyalty herd (solidarity politeness) and politeness respect (respect politeness). What happened instead

increasingly heavy burden of threatening facial actions (face-threatening acts), the amount of force (rate of imposition), the social distances between personnel involved in the communication, and the thinness of the recognition of the power possessed by the other person.

**Data 4**



**Picture 4: Taken from Bawang Village**

This notice also uses rude vocabulary. The writing is about “*Zona Rawan Pukul*”. It means that the people who try to come into the village will be hit by the villagers. It is a reminder of the Covid 19 disease. Based on the theory of Rubin Lakoff about politeness rules. It makes the reader feel uncomfortable. If the people want to come into the village. They have such feelings worried. It does not give people feel comfortable and safe. The use of the word that brings face threats, words that reflect the growing compulsion, words that express the growth of social distance, and words that express an interesting dance of power. Every day the people or villagers were served to use words that expressed reluctance, rude, and tended to conflict among the people.

**Data 5**



**Picture 4: Taken from Silir Village**

This notice also uses rude vocabulary. The writing is about “*Ngebut Benjut*”. It means that the people who try to come into the village will be hit by the villagers. It is a reminder for the rider of transportation. There are so many children and the road is rushed. Based on the theory of Rubin Lakoff about politeness rules. It makes the reader feel uncomfortable. If the people want to come into the village. They have such feelings worried. It does not give people feel comfortable and safe. The use of the word that brings face threats, words that reflect the growing compulsion, words that express the growth of social distance, and words that express an interesting dance of power. Every day the people or villagers were served to use words that expressed reluctance, rude, and tended to conflict among the people.

### **Conclusion**

At the beginning of this paper, the language of relativism, human language determines human behaviors. I have shown that the decline in civility in Indonesia, among others, is marked formally by (a) using harsh words as the linguistic mark of politeness in writing and (b) the use of vocabulary that has coercion, stating vocabulary is not the option, vocabulary which does not make the listener safe and comfortable (in the concept of Robin Lakoff ), which do not have the vocabulary at all politeness loyalty herd ( solidarity politeness ) and politeness respect (respect politeness ). What happened instead increasingly heavy burden of threatening facial actions (face-threatening acts), the amount of force (rate of imposition), the social distances between personnel involved in the communication, and the thinness of the recognition of the power possessed by the other person.

The reduced degree of civility in the quality of language contributed to the destructive behavior that afflicts most of the Indonesian nation today. A nation's destructive behavior is realized in a physical conflict horizontally or vertically. Horizontally, physical conflicts between villages in the form of fights, inter-ethnic, inter-school, inter-party, and class. Vertically, physical conflict is characterized by the resistance between workers and employers and the government, between the people and government authorities, and between the student and the institution of the university.

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