

## GENDER AND POLITENESS VARIATION IN LANGUAGE FOR WOMEN AND MAN

Yuni Lutfiah<sup>1\*</sup>, Annisa Nur Kholijah<sup>2</sup>, Pratiwi Nurresta<sup>3</sup>, Fauzan Rofiqi<sup>4</sup>, Nargis<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> English Language Department, Faculty of Teaching Training and Education  
University of Muhammadiyah Tangerang

Email: yunilutfiah6@gmail.com, annisaijah16@gmail.com, pnurresta27@gmail.com,  
frofiqi28@gmail.com, nargis@umt.ac.id

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### ABSTRACT

*Language reflects societal and cultural norms, including how politeness and gender variations are expressed. Women often use formal and polite language, highlighting empathy and gentleness, while men tend to prefer direct and informal expressions, emphasizing assertiveness. This pattern is influenced by social norms and can be observed in various languages, such as Japanese and Indonesian. In Japanese, gender differences are evident in grammar and vocabulary. Meanwhile, although Indonesian lacks grammatical gender distinctions, women frequently use polite expressions like "sorry," "please," and "thank you" more than men. Politeness in language is closely tied to societal hierarchies and traditional gender roles, shaping daily communication. These linguistic differences reinforce cultural expectations and social structures, highlighting the role of language in reflecting and perpetuating gender norms. Understanding this dynamic provides valuable insights into how language and culture interact to shape human interaction.*

### INTRODUCTION

Language is more than just a communication tool; it also refers to cultural and societal norms. One of the most interesting aspects of language is how its users can determine gender and politeness threshold. Gender-based politeness variations are evident in various languages around the world, as women and men use different languages.

Gender Effects on Language and Politeness Variations. Every language has a unique way of expressing emotions, and this variation is frequently influenced by gender. For example, women are more likely to use more informal language. On the other hand, children are more likely to use informal language patterns. This can be attributed to social norms that have been established throughout time, where women are expected to be more empathetic and delicate in their writing, while men are expected to be more empathetic in their expression of their feelings.

In contrast, men are often expected to be more assertive and direct in their language use. They may use more informal language, especially in casual settings, and avoid the use of polite markers that are commonly employed by women. This divergence in language use can be attributed to the social norms that define the roles of men and women in different cultures. For example, in many societies, women are expected to be more relational and emotionally expressive, while men are often encouraged to be more independent and less emotionally expressive. This creates a gendered approach to language, where politeness becomes a marker of social expectations.

Politeness in language has a strong correlation with social rank and relationships. In the context of gender, social relationships between parents and children can also influence the type of language used. In other cultures, it is more common for women to use change or greeting, which indicates more affection for the speaking, especially if the talk has a more prestigious standing. For example, there are many dialects of Japanese that are used by women and men. Japanese women consistently use more formal and concise language, such as by adding "-desu" or "-masu" at the end of words. On the other

hand, especially in informal settings, frequently use more straightforward and abusive sentence forms.

The impact of gender on politeness may also be seen in Indonesian. Even though Indonesian does not have a grammatical structure that distinguishes between male and female, the way that they interact might differ, especially in the context of regional culture. There are dialects of "*krama language*" (soft language) used in some regions, such as in Javanese, to indicate the respect, and it is frequently expected that women will use this language more often than they will use other languages. In addition, Indonesian women are becoming more aware of the importance of choosing appropriate words and expressions in daily life. For example, in the given situation, women may use words like "Sorry", "Please", or "Thank You" more frequently than men. This can be considered a form of gender-neutral in additional politeness in Indonesia.

In conclusion, the relationship between gender and politeness in language is complex and varies across different cultures and languages. While women are often expected to use more polite and formal language, men may adopt a more direct and informal approach to communication. These differences are shaped by societal norms and expectations, which continue to influence how men and women use language in their daily interactions. Understanding these variations is crucial for gaining insight into the role of language in reinforcing gender roles and social hierarchies.

## Literature Review

### Sex and Gender

The word "sex" in English refers to gender. According to Webster's New World Dictionary, gender is defined as the visible differences between men and women in terms of values and behaviour. It is a concept that identifies how socio-cultural influences create differences between men and women. Gender is seen as a mental and cultural interpretation of these differences and is commonly used to illustrate the division of workforce deemed appropriate for each sex. There are several linguistic differences between men and women, including phonology, morphology, and diction. In terms of phonology, differences exist; for instance, in America, women tend to use palatal velar sounds rather than aspirated sounds, as seen in the words "*kjatsa*" (spoken by women) and "*djatsa*" (spoken by men). In Scotland, most women pronounce the /t/ sound in words like "got," "not," and "water," while men often substitute the /t/ sound with a noticeable glottal stop. In morphology, linguist Robin Lakoff notes that women frequently use colour terms such as "mauve," "beige," "aquamarine," and "lavender," which are rarely employed by men. Additionally, women often use adjectives like "adorable," "charming," "divine," "lovely," and "sweet." From a diction perspective, women have certain vocabulary choices to convey specific effects, using expressions like "so good," "adorable," "darling," and "fantastic." English also distinguishes certain words based on gender, such as "actor" and "actress," "waiter" and "waitress," or "Mr." and "Mrs." This distinction arises from a societal awareness of how vocabulary choices reflect the respective roles held by men and women.

The way women communicate differs from that of men. When addressing women, terms such as "dear," "miss," "lady," or even "babe" are commonly used. In social interactions, men tend to discuss topics like sports, business, politics, formal matters, or taxes. In contrast, women often focus on issues related to social life, books, food, drinks, and lifestyle. There is an expectation for women to speak more politely, and it is uncommon for them to use strong language or swear words like "damn" or "shit." Instead, women might respond with phrases like "oh dear." By using polite or standard language, women aim to express their desires or needs while also seeking social status. Gender distinctions play a significant role in shaping behaviours across different cultures. The concept of gender influences various aspects, including time, place, tools, tasks, gestures, forms of speech, and the perceptions associated with men and women (Budiman, 2004).

Gender serves as the foundation for the continuity of a community's institutions. It influences how men and women perceive themselves, their identities, the distribution of jobs, the division of authority, and the framework of a gender-based social system. Additionally, gender regulation is standardized through various existing institutions, which play a critical role in socialization and the internalization of values. According to (Fakih, 1997: 25) he said if these institutions include family, formal education, religion, the political system, and the economic system.

From childhood, we learn language through language acquisition that occurs within the family environment. We start by recognizing sounds, words, and simple sentences, gradually building our skills over time. The language we write or memorize must carry meaning. It allows us to express our thoughts and ideas. Language is fundamental to all our activities, as it supports our interactions in social life. It serves as a means of communication, conveying information, and exchanging thoughts. When we use language as a communication tool, we typically have specific goals in mind, and our communication is

often planned. However, it's also common for communication to occur spontaneously. Ultimately, when we communicate, our goal is for others to understand what we are trying to convey.

The relationship between language, vocabulary, and the gender of the speaker can be examined from a sociolinguistic perspective, as it involves both social issues and linguistic elements. Gender significantly influences language use in societies worldwide. It refers to the differences and functions of social roles as constructed by society, as well as the responsibilities assigned to men and women. Gender relates to the beliefs about how men and women are expected to behave, shaped by established values and the social and cultural contexts in which they live.

Women and men possess different characteristics and abilities. The differences in verbal skills are often influenced by factors such as body movement, facial expressions, voice quality, and intonation. These variations in language do not imply that male and female languages are completely distinct; rather, they represent different characteristics within the same language. Women tend to emphasize the use of language, while men are more likely to be innovative and experimental with it. Most people can distinguish between male and female voices, even while blindfolded. This is largely because male voices generally have a greater volume than female voices. In the realm of vocal music, there are recognized categories for both genders: women typically fall into alto and soprano ranges, while men are classified as tenor and bass. These distinctions arise from the different physiological structures of the vocal organs in men and women. However, this paper does not delve into a detailed discussion of the body organs responsible for producing sound.

Most of us can distinguish between male and female voices even when blindfolded. Generally, male voices tend to have a greater volume than female voices. In the realm of sound art, certain groups also differentiate between male and female voices. For instance, women typically have alto and soprano vocal ranges, while men have tenor and bass ranges. This distinction arises from the physiological differences in the vocal organs of men and women. Unfortunately, this discussion does not delve into the specific organs involved in sound production. Additionally, it's important to note that women's voices are generally softer compared to men's. This difference is influenced by social values and cultural norms. For example, in Javanese culture, a woman who speaks loudly may be perceived as improper or unruly, while a man who speaks softly and slowly might be viewed as "feminine."

### **Politeness in Language**

According to Leech (1983), politeness is interpreted as a treatment that can reduce shifts in an interaction. The use of language should be subtle, polite, civilized, gentle, and virtuous to reduce conflict or facilitate change. According to Ferguson (1986), politeness applies when a contract of conversation is used by speakers and listeners as an effort to perpetuate harmony communication without causing conflict. Politeness encompasses not only language but also nonverbal elements such as behaviour, facial expressions, and tone of voice. Fraser and Nolan (1981) argued that politeness is valid if a contract of conversation used by the speaker and listener intended to perpetuate a harmonious relationship in communication. Brown and Levinson (1987) consider politeness as an attempt to reduce Face Threat Actions (TAM) in conversations with listeners. In the context of language politeness, Omar (2000) links it with the use of everyday language that does not cause anger, anger, and offense from the listener. This will foster a harmonious relationship between the speaker and the listener. According to Zamzani, et al. (2010: 2) politeness is behaviour that is expressed in a good or ethical way. The politeness of language is evident in how we communicate through verbal cues and established language practices. Politeness in language involves adhering to the principles of courtesy that are accepted within the user community. Therefore, speakers need to observe these principles when interacting with their partners to maintain positive relationships.

### **The Politeness Principles of Geoffrey Leech**

#### **a. Maxim of Wisdom**

Make the loss of others as small as possible, make the profits of others as big as possible (Leech, 1983: 206). For example, a boss with patience tells his new secretary:

1. Can you type these letters?

An older example of language usage is the word "may," which is often used in a permissive sense but can also serve as a command. For instance, in a Victorian story about a schoolboy's adventures, a principal might tell a student to leave with phrases that sound permissive but are actually directives.

2. Smith, you may leave now.

At first glance, sentences [1] and [2] suggest that the speaker intends to act politely by allowing the listener to do something enjoyable. However, this interpretation does not hold up under closer

scrutiny. Sentence [1] will inevitably lead to the act of typing letters, while [2] will certainly result in the student leaving immediately. This outcome is often felt or observed.

#### **b. Maxim of Generosity**

Aim to minimize your profit and maximize your loss. There is no need to distinguish between a self-serving philanthropic principle and others. For instance, the imbalance present in sentences [3] and [4] or [5] and [6] can be clarified by using one of these principles.

1. \* You can lend your car to me. (impolite)
2. I can lend to you my car.
3. You must come to dinner at our house.
4. \* We must come and have dinner at your place. (impolite)

(Note: The sign (\*) indicates that, in absolute terms, this speech is less acceptable than the speech of the partner; remember we are still discussing absolute courtesy, not relative courtesy).

#### **c. Maxim of Praise**

Criticize others as little as possible and praise them as much as possible. This principle, sometimes referred to as the "praise maxim," could also be called the "flirt maxim," though the term "seduction" is typically associated with insincere compliments. The negative aspect of this maxim is highlighted by the word "don't," which conveys unpleasant thoughts about others. According to the praise maxim, a compliment like "Your cooking is excellent" is highly appreciated, while a statement such as "Your cooking is not tasty at all!" will not be well received.

#### **d. Maxim of Modesty**

Praise yourself as little as possible; criticize yourself as much as possible. The principle of humility, like the principle of good manners, can also take asymmetrical forms.

14. A: they are very kind to us
- 14a. B: yes, That right
15. A: you are very kind to me
- 15a. B: \* yes, that's right
16. A: How stupid I am!
- 16a. B: \* How smart I am!
17. A: \* you are so stupid!
- 17a. B: How clever you are.
18. please Accept this small gift as a token of our appreciation.
19. \* receive this great as a token our appreciation.

The sentence [14] illustrates that it is considered polite to agree with others' praise, unless that praise is directed at ourselves. Similarly, sentence [16] indicates that self-criticism is acceptable, even if it is exaggerated for humorous effect. In sentence [18], it is normal and conventional to downplay one's own generosity; however, this is not the case when the generosity is overstated or exaggerated. Sentences [15] and [19] show that violating the first submaxim of humility results in bragging, which is viewed as a social offense.

#### **e. Maxim of Sympathy**

Minimize feelings of antipathy between yourself and others, and maximize sympathy as much as possible. This principle explains why offering congratulations and condolences are considered polite and respectful acts, even if condolences convey the speaker's negative view of the situation. For instance, while it is proper to express condolences, saying something like, "I am very happy to hear that your cat is dead," would be highly impolite. By acknowledging the situation in condolences, we are addressing a difficult truth, which can be seen as expressing an unfavorable belief. Nonetheless, the act of offering condolences remains courteous in comparison to outright negativity.

The study of "Gender and Politeness Variation in Language" is a fascinating area within sociolinguistics that explores how language use varies across genders, particularly focusing on how politeness strategies are employed differently by men and women. This research draws from both linguistic theory and social theories of gender and power, aiming to understand how societal norms and expectations shape communication practices.

### **Politeness Theories**

Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987): This foundational framework posits that politeness is a strategic behaviour used to manage social distance and maintain face. According to Brown and Levinson, there are two main aspects of politeness: positive face (the desire to be liked, admired, and accepted) and negative face (the desire not to be imposed upon). They describe four types of politeness strategies:

- 1) Bald on-record (direct and unambiguous)
- 2) Positive politeness (appealing to the listener's desire to be liked)
- 3) Negative politeness (minimizing imposition)
- 4) Off-record (indirect or ambiguous communication)

This theory has been applied to examine how men and women may deploy these strategies differently, given varying social expectations about gendered behaviour.

### **Gender Differences in Politeness**

A key finding in early sociolinguistic studies is that women are often perceived as more polite than men, though the way politeness is defined may differ across cultures and communities. This difference can manifest in a variety of linguistic forms:

- 1) Indirectness: Women are generally more likely to use indirect speech acts (e.g., using hedges, mitigators, or questions to soften requests). For example, a woman might say, "Could you possibly...?" instead of a direct request like, "Give me that."
- 2) Tag Questions: Women are often reported to use tag questions more frequently (e.g., "It's a nice day, isn't it?"), which can soften statements and invite confirmation or agreement.
- 3) Hedging: Women might use more hedging expressions (e.g., "I think," "maybe," "kind of") to reduce the risk of being overly assertive or confrontational.

### **Cultural and Social Factors**

**Socialization and Norms:** Research often suggests that gendered differences in politeness are largely shaped by cultural norms and socialization. In many cultures, women are expected to be nurturing, non-confrontational, and more concerned with maintaining social harmony, which influences their use of politeness strategies. Conversely, men may be socialized to appear more authoritative, direct, or assertive in their communication.

**Power and Status:** Power dynamics also play a role in politeness variation. Studies suggest that politeness is not only influenced by gender but also by power relations. For example, a lower-status person (regardless of gender) might use more politeness strategies to avoid face-threatening acts when speaking to someone in a higher-status position.

### **Language and Identity**

**Gendered Speech Communities:** Some scholars argue that men and women belong to different speech communities with distinct norms and expectations for how language should be used. Women's speech may be oriented more toward cooperation and inclusivity, while men's speech might emphasize dominance, independence, and assertiveness. However, this view has been critiqued as oversimplified and overly deterministic, with many researchers noting the variability of language use within each gender group. And the objectives of this research are outlined based on the following questions.

1. How do specific socio-cultural factors in Indonesia influence gender-based politeness variations in everyday language use?
2. What politeness strategies are more commonly used by men and women in direct interactions based on empirical data?
3. How do contextual factors such as age, education, and socioeconomic status affect the variations in politeness between genders?
4. How can research findings on gender-based politeness be implemented in language learning and cross-cultural communication training?

## **METHOD**

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method to analysis gender-based politeness variations in language use. The researchers will explore politeness strategies used by men and women through interviews, observations, and document analysis. This technique is chosen to provide an in-depth description of phenomena based on relevant empirical data. The population studied consists of individuals living in Indonesia, focusing on multilingual communities from diverse cultural backgrounds. The sample includes 30 participants, consisting of 15 men and 15 women, aged between 20 and 40 years, with active communication skills in both regional languages and Indonesian. The sampling technique used in this study is purposive sampling, ensuring that participants represent various genders, ages, and cultural backgrounds. The data collected or sources of data for this study come from two types:

### 1. Primary Data

In-depth interviews with participants regarding their use of politeness strategies in daily conversations. And direct observations in formal and informal situations.

### 2. Secondary Data

Written documents such as conversation transcripts, and text messages. Furthermore, a literature related to gender-based politeness variations in Indonesian and global cultures.

## Data Validity

To ensure the validity of the data, this study will employ the following triangulation methods:

### 1. Data Triangulation

Comparing data from interviews, observations, and document analysis to ensure consistency in results.

### 2. Source Triangulation

Examining the alignment of data from various participants with different backgrounds (age, education, culture).

### 3. Peer Review

Involving linguistics or sociology experts to assess whether the data interpretation aligns with the theoretical framework used.

### 4. Member Checking

Confirming the interview results or analysis with participants to ensure the accuracy of their data interpretation.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The research on gender-based politeness variation in language use in Indonesia reveals several key findings regarding the different strategies employed by men and women, as well as the socio-cultural factors influencing their linguistic behavior. The study's data, gathered from in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis, provide insights into the following areas:

### 1. Politeness Strategies in Daily Interactions

a. Women's Politeness Strategies: Women in the study were found to consistently employ more indirect and mitigated forms of speech, often using hedging expressions like "I think," "maybe," or "could you please." This tendency aligns with societal expectations of women being more empathetic, nurturing, and non-confrontational in their communication. Women also used more formal language, particularly in situations requiring respect, such as addressing elders or superiors.

b. Men's Politeness Strategies: Men, on the other hand, were observed to use more direct language, especially in informal settings. They were less likely to use mitigators or indirect speech acts, and their communication was often more assertive and straightforward. However, in formal contexts or when interacting with individuals of higher social status, men did show some politeness markers, although these were less frequent compared to women.

### 2. Influence of Socio-Cultural Factors

a. Cultural Norms in Indonesia: The study found that cultural norms, particularly those rooted in Javanese tradition, play a significant role in shaping gendered language use. In Javanese, the use of "*krama*" (respectful language) is more commonly associated with women, reinforcing the expectation that women should use softer and more polite language. This aligns with the findings that Indonesian women are more likely to use expressions like "sorry," "please," and "thank you" in their daily interactions.

b. Regional Dialects and Gender: While Indonesian as a national language does not have gender-specific grammar, regional dialects like Javanese contribute to gendered language variation. Women from Javanese-speaking communities were more likely to use the polite "*krama*" form compared to men, who were more inclined to use the "*ngoko*" (informal) form.

### 3. Age, Education, and Socioeconomic Status

a. Age: Younger participants, regardless of gender, were observed to use more informal language and less politeness compared to older individuals. This was particularly evident in the use of slang and colloquial expressions, which were more prevalent among younger speakers.

- b. Education: Participants with higher educational backgrounds demonstrated a greater awareness of the importance of using polite language. They were more likely to choose appropriate expressions in formal settings, with women especially showing a preference for formal and respectful language.
  - c. Socioeconomic Status: Socioeconomic factors also influenced politeness strategies. Individuals from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tended to use more formal and respectful language, particularly in interactions with strangers or individuals of a higher social rank. Conversely, those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were observed to use more casual and direct language.
- 4. Gendered Language in Formal and Informal Contexts
  - a. In formal contexts, both men and women showed more politeness, but women were consistently more formal in their expressions. This was evident in their use of polite markers, honorifics, and formal speech patterns.
  - b. In informal settings, men were more likely to use direct and sometimes blunt language, while women employed more hedging and indirectness to maintain politeness. This difference highlights the societal expectation that women should be more relational and emotionally attuned in their communication, whereas men are expected to maintain a certain level of authority and independence in their speech.
- 5. Gendered Differences in Written Communication: Analysis of written communication, such as text messages and social media posts, showed similar trends. Women tended to use more polite phrases, emoticons, and expressions of empathy in their written communication. Men, in contrast, were more direct in their messaging, often opting for concise and to-the-point language without much use of polite markers.

## CONCLUSION

The relationship between gender and politeness in language is complex and shaped by societal norms and cultural expectations. This study highlights how language use varies between men and women, with women often employing more polite, formal, and indirect language, while men tend to use more direct and assertive forms of communication. These differences in language use are not merely linguistic but are deeply rooted in the social roles assigned to each gender, influenced by culture, power dynamics, and societal values.

In Indonesia, despite the absence of gender-specific grammatical markers, gender-based politeness variations are still evident, especially in the use of regional languages like Javanese. Women are more likely to use polite and formal expressions in daily interactions, while men may adopt more casual and straightforward language, reflecting their distinct social roles. These variations also extend to factors such as age, education, and socioeconomic status, which further influence language use.

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