
PRAGMATICS STUDY ON POLITENESS DYNAMICS THROUGHOUT ORGANIZATIONAL HIERARCHIES

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Abstract: *This study is focused on the dynamics of language politeness used in local fast-food Industry particularly on handling complaint by hierarchical structure. Adopting pragmatic framework and Leech's Principle of Politeness, Brown & Levinson's face theory. The data were collected from various levels of the organization, from the top managerial level to operational staff. The result shows an inverse correlation between power and the burden of politeness principle in handling complaint. Informants at the CEO level tend to use the bald on record strategy and violate politeness maxims for the sake of policy efficiency. Conversely, informants at the middle level (Manager) use politeness as an instrument of diplomacy, while front line staff (Cashier and Crew) demonstrate compliance with the highest maxims through mitigation and humility strategies to reduce conflict. These results prove that politeness in a professional context is a functional instrument determined by organizational roles and managerial responsibilities, not just personal ethics.*

INTRODUCTION

The formal work environment has certain patterns, dynamics and rules that shape professional behaviour and interactions between employees. The situations arise in them, either reflect the company culture or illustrate how employees adapt to organizational demands. Employee's interaction is built on the basis of professional ethics. Greetings, polite greetings, and structured communication are crucial part in maintaining healthy work relationships(1). Conversations tend to be more focused on work needs, and rarely involve personal topics except in certain circumstances.

A clear hierarchical structure often placed in work environment. Communication appears not as a simple information transmission, it is also created by hierarchical roles, feedback loops, organizational procedures, and interpersonal dynamic (2) The decision-making process follows a certain path that has been determined by the company. In other words, authority and responsibility follow the order from superiors to subordinates. Furthermore, one of the main principles in communication ethics is maintaining the value of politeness (3). Maintain a friendly and polite tone, both in verbal and written communications.

Politeness is not only seen as polite behavior in general, but rather the use of linguistic strategies based on Leech's maxim principles to minimize conflict. (4) and maintain self-

esteem (face) between speakers (employees/leaders) and speech partners (customers).

A study about politeness were conducted by many researchers. (5) investigated the importance of language politeness in a hotel context and the understanding of politeness by front office employees in building a hotel's reputation. both verbal and non-verbal, has a significant impact on service quality and guest satisfaction. The use of polite expressions and strengthening non-verbal communication (6) creates a positive experience for guests. In addition, cultural awareness in cross-cultural communication was also found to be an important factor in ensuring effective interactions with guests from various backgrounds. Therefore, structured language politeness training is very necessary to improve service quality and hotel competitiveness in the hotel industry. (7) Also conducted research on politeness strategies in verbal communication with three factors, power, social distance, and ranking imposition. The result stated that the receptionist prioritizes to save negative face from their hotel guest that is why they implement politeness strategies in their work.

The research gap on this study is about politeness in organizational hierarchy, compare to the previous research, they investigate the way how communicate to customer directly by implementing the proposed maxim. Describe the compliance and violation(8) of Leech's politeness maxims at each level of position in the context of handling customer complaints and explain the influence of power factors and organizational roles on the selection of politeness strategies from a sociopragmatics perspective.

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

The main maxims of the Leech Politeness principle include tact (minimize imposition), generosity (maximize benefit to others), approbation (avoid disapproval), modesty (avoid arrogance), agreement (avoid disagreement), and sympathy (show understanding). (4)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative descriptive is used in this study together with four informants from different level of organizational hierarchy, the CEO, marketing manager, HRD manager, team leader, and cashier from fast-food local restaurant in Semarang with initial "O**". The data describe from interview, transcribing, analyzing, and reporting on this paper.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Leech designed six maxims, namely Tact Maxim, Generosity Maxim, Approbation Maxim, Modesty Maxim, Agreement Maxim, and Sympathy Maxim(9)(10). The results of this research reveal Leech's politeness observance and the violation at each position level in local fast-food restaurants "O**" while handling complaint from customers, then find out the differences in politeness strategies used by informants based on the hierarchy.

- a. **The observance and violation of Leech's politeness maxim while handling complaint.**

Table. 1 Types of Maxims

No	Informan	Types of Maxims
1	CEO	Violation the maxim
2	Marketing Manager	Modesty maxim, approbation maxim
3	HRD Manager	Tact maxim, sympathy maxim
4	Team Leader	Generosity maxim, tact maxim
5	Cashier	Tact maxim,, modesty maxim

The data interview describes from CEO fast-food local “O**” *“Kalau kami tidak usah dilawan komplainnya (I prefer to avoid conflict)”*. Textually, this sentence shows a violation of the Maxim of Agreement. CEO blocked the space for discussion or negotiation with the interlocutor. The use of “tidak usah dilawan (avoid conflict)” this clause is an absolute instruction that minimizes the compatibility of ideas between them. However, in the context of this research, this violation is not necessarily considered impoliteness, but rather than political behaviour adapted to the speaker's position as the CEO, top position hierarchy.

The data interview describes from marketing manager *“Dan apabila ada sebuah permasalahan atau komplain yang terjadi, pasti yang pertama kita akan berterima kasih dulu (if problem arises or complaint gives to us, surely, we thank to customer)”*. The marketing manager complies with the approbation maxim and modesty maxim by saying *“terima kasih dulu (say thank you to the customer)”*. The marketing manager tries to remain positive even though he gets complaints from consumers because according to marketing manager, complaining is an opportunity to maintain relationships and maintain the brand image of the company. He uses thanks as the first response to complaints given.

The data interview describes from HRD manager *“Bonding dan sarana keluhan yang pertama itu kualitas produk (bonding and a place for complaining, the first think is quality)”*. The use of the words “Bonding” and “place for complaining” shows compliance with the maxim of sympathy. HRD positions complaints not as attacks or transactions but as an emotional need that must be accommodated. Furthermore, he also uses Tact maxim on his word “Product quality” the first priority, he shows wisdom in distributing responsibilities. He doesn't blame people, but focuses on the product.

The data interview describes from Team leader *“tiap pagi saya memberikan briefing, briefing pagi, terus saya selalu stay di depan (Every morning I give a briefing, morning briefing, then I always stay at the front).”* Generosity Maxim appears on the sentence, focus on one's own actions for the benefit of others. The sentence *“I always stay at the front”* shows that the speaker maximizes his own

sacrifice (time and energy) to ensure his team is safe from direct customer complaints. Apart from that, the maxim of wisdom (Tact Maxim) by "*giving a briefing every morning*", the speaker takes preventive action. He minimizes potential losses (complaints) for his subordinates by providing guidance at the beginning activity.

The data interview describes from cashier "*Menjaga omongan, tetap kita ngikutin pendengaran dari customer (speak respectfully, follow customer response)*". The answer from the cashier was very different from several previous informants, he received complaints as seen from the maxim that he used. That is called Tact maxim, The cashier applies this maxim by giving the customer as much space as possible to be heard ("follow customer response"). In pragmatics, this is an effort to minimize the customer's psychological harm (who wants to complain) and maximize the customer's gain (feeling heard). Modesty Maxim: The statement "mind your words" shows that the cashier consciously restrains his ego and personal authority to remain under the control of the customer's emotions in order to maintain the business's reputation.

The most frequent maxim politeness that is used on organizational hierarchy is tact maxim where it minimizes cost to other and maximize benefit to others (4). It describes by four informants marketing manager and HRD manager, team leader, and cashier. The informan tries to speak in a way that is not burdensome, does not harm, and remains polite to the person they are speaking to because tact maxim means speak carefully so as not to harm other people.

b. Power and status become parameter to determine politeness principle in organizational hierarchies.

Status and power determine the language used by the CEO, there is a privilege in determining boundaries because CEO's is in professional condition, assertiveness is more important than acting politely with polite sentence. The violation of the tact maxim and agreement was carried out because the CEO did not give a choice to those who complained and refused throughout negotiations because according to CEO complaints were an operational disruption so he firmly stated "kalau kita tidak usah dilawan."

Marketing manager in dealing with consumer complaints is used as an asset in improving the company's brand image. At this level, politeness is used as an instrument to minimize conflict and respect, positioning complaints as an asset for improvement. In contrast to the response from the HRD manager, every complaint that comes in is positioned as an expression of the consumer's internal needs, so a nurturing attitude and building warmer relationships with consumers is prioritized, as can be seen from the "bonding" answer reflecting a sense of wanting to build closeness with consumers.

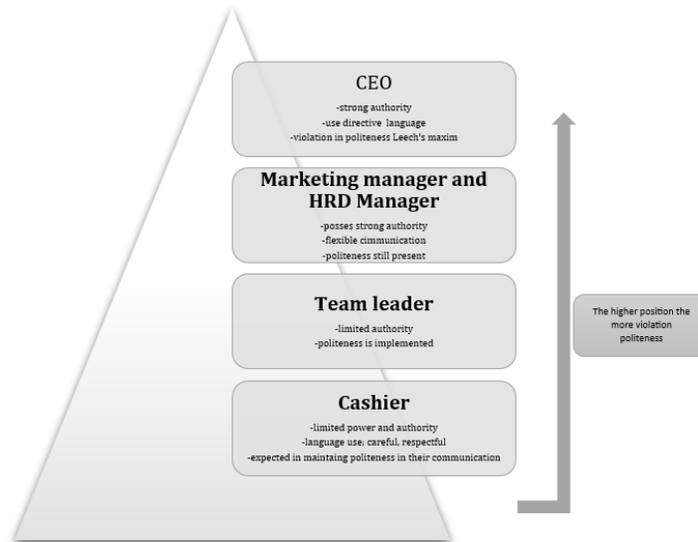
In contrast to the position of team leader, he is responsible by

positioning himself as a shield in the hierarchy of positions. The word *"pasang badan"* shows an attitude of real action and exemplary action. According to team leader complaints are considered as risk mitigation.

The lowest position level is the cashier, in the phrase *"jaga omongan"* he tries to control his emotions and ego in order to maintain the reputation of the business, his complaints need to be absorbed and resolved immediately because his position in front of the consumer.

c. Politeness in organizational hierarchies.

In the top position of the hierarchy, the CEO has ceased to please consumer directly as Leech's maxim traditionally demands rather than policy efficiency. There seems to be a shift in function of politeness as the level of the position hierarchy decreases. At the CEO level, politeness is violated for the sake of firmness of instructions, at the middle level in marketing manager and HRD marketing positions, politeness is done consciously as a diplomatic tool. Meanwhile, at the team leader level, politeness is used to protect and mitigate conflict as a form of responsibility. Then, the lowest level cashier, he is tasked with maintaining politeness because his position close to consumers directly. Following is the picture of politeness organizational hierarchy on maxim politeness.



Implementation of Leech's maxim politeness in organizational hierarchy

CONCLUSION

Organizational hierarchy at fast-food local restaurant "O**" reveal that the burden of complying with politeness maxims is inversely proportional to hierarchical position. cashier and team leader level showed the highest levels of self-suppression through the *"menjaga omongan"* and *"mendengar pelanggan"*. Frontline staff had to abandon their

linguistic authority in order to absorb customer conflict. In contrast, CEOs violated Leech's maxims not because they were impolite, but because their role demanded a quick termination of conflict. These findings contribute to the study sociopragmatics that politeness in the world of work is a functional instrument determined by job descriptions, not just personal character."

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