



Ethics of Language Through Speech Actions

Linda Handayani

Universitas Muhamamdiyah Mahakarya Aceh, Indonesia

Corresponding Author :  linda@kampusummah.ac.id

ABSTRACT

To engage in civilized discourse, three aspects need to be upheld: linguistic politeness, conversational politeness, and ethical discourse. Linguistic politeness involves the selection of respectful lexical elements and varied sentence structures; conversational politeness pertains to the social status of the interlocutor; and ethical discourse relates to the behavior while communicating. These three elements constitute a unity aimed at achieving the attribute of civilized discourse. Moreover, the ethical dimension of speaking, as discussed by Masinambouw and Geertz, emphasizes the connection between language use and societal norms. The ethics of speaking encompass considerations of appropriate speech topics, linguistic variety, turn-taking, active listening, vocal modulation, and physical demeanor. These ethical guidelines serve as a framework for individuals to communicate responsibly, demonstrate respect for social norms, and contribute to the harmonious functioning of society. In essence, effective communication encompasses not only the exchange of information but also the application of linguistic politeness and adherence to ethical discourse principles. As individuals navigate complex social contexts, understanding and employing these principles can facilitate meaningful and respectful interactions, fostering an environment of understanding, cooperation, and mutual respect.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received

10 June 2023

Revised

25 July 2023

Accepted

10 August 2023

Key Word

Sociolinguistics, Speech Acts, Sentence Variations

How to cite

<http://pusdikra-publishing.com/index.php/jsr>

Doi

[10.51178/jsr.v4i2.1439](https://doi.org/10.51178/jsr.v4i2.1439)



This work is licensed under a

[Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

INTRODUCTION

There is a circulating video post on the social media platform Facebook that claims political observer Rocy Gerung has been declared a suspect due to his statements during an event held by the Indonesian Workers Union (SPSI) in Bekasi on July 29, 2023. These statements were deemed insulting to President Joko Widodo (Jokowi). Through our television screens, we witnessed how Rocy Gerung's words and phrases sparked a significant controversy. The uproar was so intense that profanities like "stupid scoundrel, cowardly scoundrel" reverberated in the SPSI event venue, eliciting cheers and jeers from attendees, and leading to both support and opposition.

This uproar highlights three violations in the use of language: (1) a breach of linguistic politeness, (2) a breach of conversational politeness, and (3) a breach of ethical discourse. These three aspects will be discussed in this writing.

Linguistic Politeness Linguistic politeness, achieved by using respectful words from a range of synonyms or selecting phrases from various sentence structures, has been extensively discussed by experts.

RESEARCH METHOD

Literature research, also known as a literature review or bibliographic review, is a process of investigation and analysis of literature or relevant sources of information that have existed previously. The purpose of literature research is to comprehend and depict what has been previously known and studied regarding a specific topic within a particular field of science or study.

The process of literature research involves the following steps:

1. Topic Identification: Determine the research topic or question you wish to explore within the literature.
2. Literature Collection: Gather literature and relevant sources of information pertaining to your topic. This may include books, journal articles, conference papers, research reports, and other sources.
3. Literature Selection: Choose the most relevant and significant literature for your topic. Establish clear selection criteria to aid in choosing the appropriate literature.
4. Literature Analysis: Read and carefully analyze the selected literature. Identify findings, arguments, methodologies, and contributions from each source.
5. Summarization: Create summaries of each analyzed source. Identify patterns, similarities, and differences among these sources.
6. Identification of Research Gaps: Identify areas where there are gaps in research or understanding. Demonstrate how previous research has not covered specific aspects or addressed relevant questions.
7. Synthesis and Analysis: Develop a synthesis of the findings identified in the literature. This synthesis analysis helps you deepen your understanding of the topic.
8. Interpretation and Conclusion: Draw conclusions from your analysis. Express your perspective on what you have learned from the literature, how the literature guides your research, and how your research can contribute new insights to the topic.

Literature research is not only beneficial for identifying the existing developments in scientific knowledge but also assists researchers in identifying the appropriate theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and approaches for their research.

Furthermore, literature research aids in identifying research gaps that can be filled by new studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Among others, Brown and Levinson (1978), Geoffrey Leech (1983), Robin Lakoff (1973), and Bruce Fraser (1978) are notable scholars in the field of politeness and speech acts. In the context of this discussion, the theories presented by Brown and Levinson will be outlined. These theories propose various strategies to uphold positive face and negative face, which contribute to maintaining effective communication in social interactions.

One such strategy involves using indirect speech acts, such as in the example:

(1) "May I kindly ask you to help fetch the book?" Compare with the direct request in (1a): (1a) "Could you please get me the book?" Another strategy is the use of hedges to convey politeness or mitigate the impact of a statement. For instance: (5) "I'm no expert, but I think this might not work out." This indicates a pessimistic stance. Furthermore, speakers often minimize imposition to maintain politeness: (6) "Could I possibly bother you for a moment?" Respect and deference can be shown through honoring the other person's positive face: (7) "I'm humbly requesting your assistance, knowing that you're always willing to help." Apologies are another means of politeness: (8) "I apologize for my child's behavior, but..."

Using impersonal forms, such as avoiding direct reference to the speaker and hearer, can also soften speech: (9) "It seems like this table needs to be moved." Additionally, using general statements can reduce directness and avoid potential imposition: (10) "Passengers are kindly requested not to smoke on the bus."

Brown and Levinson also discuss the concept of "positive face," which refers to an individual's desire to be seen positively by others. To maintain positive face, individuals utilize various strategies, such as: a. Considering the preferences, desires, and needs of the listener. b. Demonstrating sympathy, approval, and empathy. c. Intensifying attention through dramatization. d. Using group identifiers, dialects, jargon, or slang. e. Seeking agreement through general topics or repeating the interlocutor's speech. f. Avoiding disagreement through pretense, white lies, or minimizing directness. g. Indicating understanding of the listener's wishes. h. Employing humor. i. Establishing mutual obligations.

The theories of politeness and positive face emphasize the intricate ways individuals navigate communication to maintain social harmony and mutual respect.

Maximize benefit

This maxim suggests that every participant in a conversation should minimize the harm to others or maximize the benefit to others. Consider examples (27) to (30) taken

from Leech (1983), which demonstrate different speech behaviors. Utterances with lower numbers indicate lower levels of politeness compared to those with higher numbers.

(27) "Answer the phone!" Not polite

(28) "Will you answer the phone?"

(29) "Can you answer the phone?"

(30) "Would you mind answering the phone?" Polite

From the examples provided by Leech, it can be inferred that: a) The longer the utterance, the greater the speaker's desire to be polite towards their interlocutor. b) Indirect speech acts are generally more polite than direct ones. c) Declarative or interrogative sentences are more polite than imperative ones.

If a speaker aims to maximize the benefit for others, the listener should be willing to accept some level of discomfort. Consider utterances (31) complying with the maxim of maximizing benefit and utterances (32) violating it: (31) A: "Allow me, I'll bring your bag, Sir!" B: "No, you don't need to." (32) A: "Let me bring your bag, Sir!" B: "No, leave it like that; I'll manage." Maximize acceptance This maxim suggests that each participant should maximize their own discomfort and minimize their own benefit. Compare utterances (33) and (34): (33) [Speaker A is asked to donate to a charity] A: "Sorry, I can't donate." (34) [Speaker A is not asked to donate] A: "Oh, I was actually thinking of donating." These examples highlight the nuanced ways in which speakers adjust their language to align with the politeness principle of maximizing benefit and acceptance in communication.

Ethics of Speaking

If politeness in speech is closely related to the choice of lexical items and sentence variations (that are polite), and politeness in speech is related to participants, speech topics, places, and speech situations, then the ethics of speaking is closely related to the behavior of participants in communication. In this regard, Masinambouw (1984) states that language systems function as a means for human interaction within a society. This implies that linguistic behavior or speech behavior must be accompanied by norms that apply in the cultural context of that society. According to Geertz (1976), linguistic behavior following cultural norms is referred to as language ethics, ethics of speaking, or speech etiquette. Since the ethics of speaking is closely tied to the social norms of a cultural system that exists within a society, it "regulates" us in the following ways: (a) What we say to our interlocutors at specific times and under certain circumstances, concerning our social and cultural status within our society. Good and proper use of the Indonesian language adheres to the norms of our society and follows the rules of the Indonesian language. (b) The linguistic variety (lexical items and sentence variations) that is most appropriate to use in specific times and cultural contexts. (c) How we take

turns in speaking and how we interrupt or interject during others' conversations. (d) When we should remain silent and listen to others' speech. (e) How we modulate our voice, whether it's loud, soft, high-pitched, and so on. (f) How our physical demeanor contributes to our speech.

These aspects of the ethics of speaking are not isolated from one another. Rather, they are integrated into communicative behaviors. Points (a) and (b) suggest that we should use specific linguistic forms for specific participants or interlocutors, in accordance with their social position. For instance, we address a male interlocutor using "Anda" instead of "kamu" to adhere to proper social norms.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the circulating video post depicting political observer Rocy Gerung's alleged involvement as a suspect due to his controversial statements during an Indonesian Workers Union (SPSI) event on July 29, 2023, sheds light on the complexities of language use, politeness, and ethical discourse. The strong reactions evoked by Gerung's words underscore the significance of linguistic and conversational politeness in maintaining effective communication and harmonious social interactions. The study of politeness theories, such as those proposed by Brown and Levinson, Geoffrey Leech, and others, reveals various strategies employed to uphold positive and negative face, contributing to the maintenance of civil discourse. These strategies include using indirect speech acts, employing hedges, minimizing imposition, offering respect and deference, apologizing, and using impersonal forms to soften speech. Such strategies enable individuals to navigate social interactions with sensitivity and cultural awareness, recognizing the importance of maintaining face and promoting mutual understanding. Moreover, the ethical dimension of speaking, as discussed by Masinambouw and Geertz, emphasizes the connection between language use and societal norms. The ethics of speaking encompass considerations of appropriate speech topics, linguistic variety, turn-taking, active listening, vocal modulation, and physical demeanor. These ethical guidelines serve as a framework for individuals to communicate responsibly, demonstrate respect for social norms, and contribute to the harmonious functioning of society. In essence, effective communication encompasses not only the exchange of information but also the application of linguistic politeness and adherence to ethical discourse principles. As individuals navigate complex social contexts, understanding and employing these principles can facilitate meaningful and respectful interactions, fostering an environment of understanding, cooperation, and mutual respect.

REFERENCES

- Allan, Keith. 1996. *Linguistic Meaning*. London: Routledge and Keagan Paul.
- Austin, J. L. 1962. *How to do Thing With Word*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Aziz, E. Aminudin. 2005. Konsep Wajah dan Fenomena Kesantunan Berbahasa pada Masyarakat Cina Modern: Kasus Shanghai dalam Linguistik Indonesia th ke-23 no.2: 205-214.
- Brown, P dan Stephen Levinson. 1987. *Politness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chaer, Abdul. 2009. *Pengantar Semantik Bahasa Indonesia: Edisi Revisi*. Jakarta: Rineka
- Chaer, Abdul & Leonie Agustina. 2004. *Sosiolinguistik: Perkenalan Awal*. Jakarta: Rineka Cipta.