

## Unravelling Cultured Politeness: IAIN Ternate KKN Students in the Heart of North Maluku

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### Article Info

Article History:

Received September 2024

Accepted October 2024

Published November 2024

Keywords:

Politeness strategy,  
cultural values, IAIN  
Ternate

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### Abstract

This study examines the politeness strategies used by IAIN Ternate students during the Community Service program (KKN), focusing on the politeness theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). This study uses a descriptive qualitative method to gain an in-depth understanding of the types of politeness strategies applied in students' daily interactions during the KKN program, both in formal contexts, such as group meetings, and informal situations, such as eating together and casual conversations. Data were collected through participatory observation, recorded conversations, and in-depth interviews with KKN students. Recorded conversations were transcribed and translated with the help of native speakers of the North Maluku language to ensure linguistic accuracy. In addition, interviews with local students were conducted to understand how they perceive cultural values in politeness. The results found that all types of politeness strategies were found in daily conversations during KKN: on record politeness, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record. This study showed that local cultural values such as solidarity, respect, and inviolability strongly influence the way IAIN Ternate students communicate, regulating the balance between politeness and effectiveness in social interactions. These results underline that politeness is not only universal but also highly contextualized, depending on local social and cultural norms.

## INTRODUCTION

In social interactions, individuals tend to use polite language to maintain smooth and harmonious communication Lakoff (2004). One important aspect of personal interactions is the use of politeness strategies, which show how people express respect, consideration, and acknowledgment toward others. These strategies are influenced by cultural, social, and situational factors, resulting in diverse practices across different communities.

Brown and Levinson (1987) introduced a theory of politeness with four main strategies. On record involves speaking directly and assertively without softening the words, often used in urgent situations. Off record is a more indirect approach where the meaning is implied, requiring the listener to interpret it, usually to avoid direct conflict. Positive politeness aims to build warmth and friendliness through engaging and supportive language, while negative politeness seeks to maintain distance and show respect by using polite and non-intrusive language. This theory helps explain how people adjust their communication to remain polite in various social contexts.

Several studies discuss politeness strategies, including in movies (Fitri, 2022; Irawansari & Ariyaningsih, 2024; Musyafa'ah et al., 2022) which concluded that it is very important in the world of film to apply politeness strategies when characters communicate with each other because this can be a good learning tool. Musyafa'ah et al. (2022) said that 'Politeness strategies in the movie became the study's focus leading to EFL's contribution to comprehending cross-cultural understanding (CCU), especially in Western culture.' Overall, these studies provide useful descriptive insights. However, there is still significant room for expanding the scope of samples, deepening theoretical analysis, and improving methodology to produce more robust and meaningful results in the study of politeness in the movie.

Then, there is also research that discusses politeness strategies in social media (Pasaribu et al., 2021; Sarila et al., 2023; Sholehah & Kusumaningtyas, 2022). Politeness strategies are also applied in social media but are different from verbal communication. Because social media limits the number of characters and encourages rapid interaction, the communication style on these platforms tends to be shorter and to the point. Pasaribu et al. (2021) said that "in social media, the use of non-verbal language in interactions, such as emoticons, is also part of the politeness strategy to maintain good interactions between students and lecturers during thesis consultations via WhatsApp." The three studies discuss politeness strategies in social media and online communication, but all face

limitations in small sample sizes. The first and second studies highlight the use of politeness on social media platforms but do not sufficiently explore broader cultural and contextual factors. Meanwhile, the third study discusses academic consultations via WhatsApp, but the results are limited to one university and do not take into account other variables that influence the lecturer-student relationship.

On the other hand, politeness strategies are not only applied in informal situations but also very relevant in formal situations such as classroom interactions, as has been proven by various studies (Aprianti et al., 2022; Ginting & Pasaribu, 2023; Mukharomah & Sumanto, 2023). These strategies are not only relevant in verbal interactions on-screen or digital platforms but also play an important role in everyday interactions in the real world (Aprianti et al., 2022). In the context of education, especially in the academic environment, politeness strategies are key to maintaining harmonious relationships and mutual respect among the actors. These studies provide valuable insights into politeness strategies in the Indonesian educational context, particularly in classroom discussions and teacher-student interactions. However, they lack depth in exploring local cultural influences such as social hierarchy and Indonesian communication norms, thus limiting a more comprehensive understanding of the role of culture in such politeness strategies.

In this study, the researchers are from Surabaya, Java, and participated in the community service program or *Kuliah Kerja Nyata* (KKN) in Ternate, North Maluku. The KKN participants consist of students from Surabaya, Tulungagung, Malang, Makassar, and Ternate. Based on this understanding, This study explored the perception of politeness between researchers from Surabaya, East Java, and IAIN Ternate students during KKN in North Maluku. The researchers, who are familiar with Javanese norms, often perceived IAIN Ternate students' interactions as somewhat impolite, especially when they communicated with flat expressions and direct commands. However, for students from Ternate, these behaviors are considered normal and even polite in their cultural context. This study examines the types of North Maluku language politeness strategies that IAIN Ternate KKN students use in their daily interactions. Also, how cultural values are perceived with politeness among IAIN Ternate students in understanding and assessing politeness in their interactions. By addressing these different perceptions, this study not only contributes to politeness theory but also sheds light on how cultural norms influence communication and politeness perceptions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Politeness Strategies

Brown and Levinson (1987) introduce the idea of “face” in their discussion of politeness strategies. This concept refers to how people use language to maintain their reputation and present themselves well in conversations. They categorize politeness strategies into four main types:

*Bald on record* is a communication strategy used when the relationship between speaker and listener is very close. In this strategy, the speaker gets their point across directly without masking or minimizing potential face-threatening acts (FTAs). This meant that the speaker did not use words that soften the message or preserve the listener’s feelings. An example of bald on record is when someone familiar with a friend said, ‘Close the door!’ without a preamble. This strategy is also known as the missing politeness strategy (Lakoff & Ide, 2005) because it does not involve any element of politeness. Usually, this strategy is used between people who already know each other and are equals, such as peers (Coupland et al., 1988, p. 257). Because the delivery is explicit and direct, this strategy is considered to have a low level of politeness and, if applied to people who are not familiar, can come across as impolite or threaten the listener’s negative face.

*Positive politeness* is an attempt to build a good self-image in the eyes of others. In social interactions, this strategy is important because it helps to create a warm and respectful atmosphere in society. Every community, which consists of individuals living and interacting in one environment, usually highly values politeness. Therefore, this strategy often appears, either consciously or unconsciously, to ensure that each individual can give a positive impression to each other and strengthen their social relationships Brown and Levinson (1987). For example, one might praise a colleague’s work by saying, ‘You’re great; your work is always amazing!’ This reflects the use of positive politeness strategies to create mutual respect.

*Off-record*, where the speaker conveys their intent indirectly through implied clues, hoping that the listener can pick up on the message without having to state it explicitly. For example, someone might say, ‘It’s so hot today,’ as a subtle code for the other person to open the window without asking directly.

*Negative politeness* is used when the speaker wants to maintain politeness but still convey the message directly while trying to avoid appearing pushy. For example, when

someone asks for help by saying, 'Excuse me, can you help me for a moment?' This is a way to show respect for the listener's freedom and minimize the burden of the request.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study used a descriptive qualitative method to answer two research questions, identifying the types of North Maluku language politeness strategies used by IAIN Ternate KKN students, as well as understanding the cultural values perceived as politeness by these students. The descriptive qualitative method allows researchers to explore in depth the social and cultural phenomena associated with language use in daily interactions, especially in the context of KKN. This approach is in line with Taylor et al. (2016), which emphasizes the importance of understanding human actions through the analysis of observed data, both oral and written.

This study focused on analyzing politeness strategies used by KKN students based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory. Data were obtained through recordings of student conversations in various situations, both formal during group meetings and informal situations during meals together, social events, or casual conversations in daily activities. The researcher used instruments such as conversation recordings, participatory observation, and in-depth interviews to capture the use of the North Maluku language as a politeness tool. These recorded conversations were transcribed and translated with the help of native North Maluku speakers to ensure the accuracy of the linguistic data. Then, the researchers explored the perceptions of IAIN Ternate KKN students regarding the cultural values underlying politeness. In-depth interviews were conducted with local students to understand how they perceive cultural values of politeness as manifestations such as togetherness, solidarity, and respect in the context of politeness. Through this approach, this study aimed to provide a deeper understanding of how politeness strategies are practiced among IAIN Ternate students in the KKN program and how cultural values influence communication in different social situations.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Politeness Strategies Used by IAIN Ternate Students in the KKN Program**

In this section, the researchers answered the research question concerning the types of politeness strategies used by IAIN Ternate students. The research data were presented by showcasing dialogues that demonstrated each type of politeness strategy employed by the students in their daily communication during the KKN program. A total of 10

recordings were collected, which included examples of positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record, and bald-on-record strategies.

**Table 1. The Politeness Strategies Used by IAIN Ternate Students in the KKN Program**

Politeness Strategy	Frequency
Bald on Record	5
Positive Politeness	3
Off Record	1
Negative Politeness	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>

The data revealed that the most frequently used strategy in their interactions was bald-on-record, appearing in 5 out of the ten recordings. This indicated that direct communication was often preferred, reflecting the efficiency and straightforward nature of their conversational style. Other strategies, such as positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies, were also identified but were less dominant compared to bald-on-record.

### *Positive politeness*

The following informal conversation took place between two students who were discussing their tasks during KKN. They are speaking in the North Maluku language in a casual moment, where Siti and Defi are present. Defi is younger than Siti, and she was scheduled to cook that day. During the conversation, they talked about their daily tasks while Siti gave some advice and offered to help Defi.

Siti: *"Ngana pi mana, jo?"*

(Where are you going?)

Defi: *"Sa pi ambe air di kali, ngana mo ikut kah?"*

(I'm going to fetch water at the river, do you want to come along?)

Siti: *"Bae, sa mo tinggal di sini bantu dorang bikin laporan."*

(It's okay, I'll stay here and help them with the report.)

Defi: *"Oke, kalau ada apa-apa, bilang jo, ngana tra usah segan."*

(Alright, if you need anything, just let me know, don't hesitate.)

Siti: *"Iyo, makase banyak eh."*

(Yes, thank you very much.)

This conversation highlights how Siti, as a student of IAIN Ternate KKN, used positive politeness strategies in their daily communication, such as "If you need anything, just let me know, don't hesitate." The invitation to not be shy and to offer help willingly is a reflection of local cultural values that uphold togetherness and solidarity.

### ***Bald on Record***

This formal conversation took place during a meeting between two students, Zul and Julfanti. Julfanti is the KKN coordinator responsible for overseeing the work program, while Zul is a team member assigned to prepare the presentation. In this conversation, Julfanti directly instructs Zul on a task that must be completed immediately.

Julfanti: *"Zul, selesaikan presentasi itu sebelum jam lima sore, jangan terlambat!"*

(Zul, finish that presentation before five o'clock, don't be late!)

Zul: With a flat face and a casual tone *"Oke, nanti sa kasi selesai secepat mungkin."*

(Okay, I'll finish it as soon as possible.)

Julfanti: With a firm and slightly sharp tone *"Bagus. Nanti lapor langsung ke kita e kalau sudah!"*

(Good. Report directly to me once it's done!)

Zul: Without changing his expression *"Siap, nanti langsung lapor."*

(Sure, I'll report to you right away.)

In the above conversation, Julfanti used bald on record when giving instructions directly: "Zul, finish that presentation before five o'clock, don't be late!" without using softening words such as "if possible" or "please" because the situation was urgent. Julfanti did not try to adjust the language to be more subtle because the context of the conversation between them was quite informal, and there was a close relationship. Zul responded briefly and appropriately, showing that clear and direct instructions were not considered rude or disrespectful. This conversation highlights how close relationships and urgent contexts make the use of bald on record in the North Maluku language acceptable without compromising politeness.

### ***Negative Politeness***

The conversation involves Fatih, Siti, and Julfanti discussing volunteer compensation practices during a meeting. Fatih, a Javanese student, asked about local customs in North Maluku, where Siti explained that volunteers are not usually given extra money. Julfanti confirmed this practice. The exchange highlighted different cultural norms and used negative politeness to navigate these differences respectfully.

Fatih: *"Di Jawa, kami biasanya kasih uang, meskipun sedikit. Bagaimana biasanya di sini?"*

(In Java, we usually give money, even if it's a small amount. How is it usually done here?)

Siti: In a polite and slightly formal tone in the North Maluku language *"Di sini, kalau torang sudah jadi volunteer, biasanya tra perlu kasih uang. Tu*

*sudah dianggap cukup sebagai bentuk kontribusi dan partisipasi. Ngoni bisa cerita kalau di Jawa bagaimana?"*

(Here, if you're already a volunteer, you usually don't need to give money. That's considered enough as a form of contribution and participation.

Could you tell me how it is in Java?)

Julfanti: Gracefully *"Betul, kalau torang sudah bantu, itu sudah dianggap cukup. Kasih uang tambahan tra umum di sini.*

(That's right, if they're helped, it's considered enough. Giving extra money is not common here.)

Fatih: With a slightly surprised expression and adjusting *"Oh, begitu. Saya mengerti. Jadi, di sini lebih fokus pada kontribusi tanpa harus ada kompensasi tambahan. Kalau di Jawa kami biasanya kasih uang, meskipun sedikit, kepada para volunteer yang bantu di acara kami. Ini dianggap sebagai bentuk penghargaan atas waktu dan usaha mereka. "*

(Oh, I see. I understand. So, here, it's more about contribution without needing additional compensation. In Java, we usually give money, even a little, to volunteers who help at our events. This is considered a form of appreciation for their time and effort.)

Siti: *"Iya, betul. Kita anggap bahwa bantu tu sudah bagian dari budaya kita di sini. Tra perlu khawatir tentang kompensasi tambahan. "*

(Yes, that's right. I consider that helping is part of our culture here. No need to worry about additional compensation.)

In the conversation, Siti used negative politeness by asking, "Could you explain how it is in Java?" to respect her conversation partner and avoid direct statements. Julfanti responded with a polite but straightforward explanation, pointing out the local differences, and Fatih, as a Javanese student, noted that giving money to volunteers was customary for him. Despite these differing views, the conversation proceeded respectfully and allowed for mutual understanding.

### ***Off Record***

The following conversation took place between two students who were having a casual discussion about an event to be held in the future. In this conversation, Asri and Zulkifli, who are responsible for organizing the closing ceremony, subtly convey their preferences without making a direct request.

Asri: *"Tadak nyo kemarin sempat cari baju yang cocok, ka?"*

(Didn't you find a suitable outfit yesterday?)

Zulkifli: *"Iya, kemarin sa coba cari, tapi ada yang agak susah nyari. "*

(Yes, I tried to look yesterday, but it was a bit difficult to find.)

Asri: *"Kasih tau ajah kalau butuh bantuan, ada teman yang mungkin bisa bantu. "*

(Just let me know if you need help; I have friends who might be able to assist you.)

Zulkifli: *"Makasih, sa coba cari lagi, nanti kalau perlu, sa hubungi. "*

(Thanks, I'll try to look again, and if needed, I'll contact you.)

In this conversation, Asri used an off-record strategy by suggesting help without making a direct offer “. This subtlety is often used to avoid imposing or making a request too explicit. Zulkifli’s response acknowledges the offer without directly asking for assistance, maintaining the indirect nature of the interaction. This reflected a cultural norm of maintaining politeness and respect while navigating potential needs.

### **Cultural Values of Politeness Perceived by IAIN Ternate KKN Students**

The analysis of cultural values reflected in the conversation above about politeness strategies used by IAIN Ternate KKN students reveals insightful patterns in their interactions. In the conversation between Siti and Defi, positive politeness was demonstrated through a supportive and generous approach. Siti offered to stay behind and assist with the report, and Defi responded by inviting Siti to express any needs without hesitation. This exchange showcased the importance of mutual support and solidarity in North Maluku culture, where a sincere offer of help and a willingness to assist are key aspects of maintaining strong social bonds. In contrast, the interaction between Zul and Julfanti highlighted the use of bald on record strategy. Julfanti issued direct instructions to Zul, emphasizing the urgency of completing the presentation on time. Zul’s brief and straightforward response indicated that in this informal and pressing situation, direct communication was appropriate and expected. The context of the conversation allowed for clear and unembellished language, reflecting an understanding of the urgency and the close relationship between the participants.

The conversation between Fatih, Siti, and Julfanti illustrated the use of negative politeness to address cultural differences respectfully. Fatih inquired about local customs regarding volunteer compensation, and Siti and Julfanti provided explanations about the practice in North Maluku. Siti’s use of a polite inquiry to understand Fatih’s perspective demonstrated a respect for cultural differences and a desire to navigate these differences delicately. This approach helped to maintain respectful communication despite differing practices between Java and North Maluku. Lastly, the dialogue between Asri and Zulkifli exemplified off record strategies, where Asri subtly suggested offering help without making a direct request. Zulkifli acknowledged the offer while maintaining an indirect response, reflecting the cultural norm of preserving politeness by avoiding explicit requests. This method of communication highlights the cultural value of indirectness and respect in interactions, ensuring that offers of assistance do not come across as imposing or intrusive.

Together, these conversations provide a comprehensive view of how politeness strategies and cultural values intersect in daily interactions among IAIN Ternate KKN students.

This study revealed that the North Maluku language politeness strategies used by IAIN Ternate KKN students reflect local cultural values such as solidarity, respect, and indirectness. The use of these politeness strategies shows how students apply various communication approaches in their social interactions, both formally and informally, in accordance with local cultural norms. Positive politeness strategies, such as offering help without hesitation, illustrate the importance of solidarity and togetherness in North Maluku culture, where helping each other is a key value Brown and Levinson (1987). Meanwhile, the bald on record strategy is used in urgent situations, such as direct orders. This shows that in the context of urgency, straightforward and assertive communication is not considered to reduce politeness but rather is part of situational adaptation in familiar relationships Leech (2014).

In the context of cultural differences, off-record strategies or negative politeness tend to be used to maintain harmony and avoid potential misunderstandings, especially when interacting with individuals from different cultures (Holmes, 2013). These local cultural values, such as efficiency and familiarity in social relationships, encourage IAIN Ternate KKN students to use more direct communication strategies and not consider them a form of impoliteness (Scollon & Scollon, 2001). However, for researchers from Surabaya, Java, a more direct communication strategy might be interpreted as less polite, as they are used to a more formal approach and use material forms of compensation as rewards in social interactions (Geertz, 1973).

When viewed in the context of previous research, the politeness strategies in this study underscore similar findings put forward in film and social media. Fitri, 2022 and Pasaribu et al. (2021) found that politeness strategies not only function in everyday conversations but also become an important tool in shaping cross-cultural interactions, both on-screen and on social media. However, this study adds depth by exploring local cultural aspects that have not been fully explored in those studies. For example, Pasaribu et al. (2021) only discussed academic consultations via WhatsApp without taking into account broader cultural differences. This research offers a new perspective on how local culture influences the understanding and practice of politeness, as well as provides a more comprehensive insight into the way politeness strategies are applied in real social interactions, not just in digital media.

## CONCLUSION

After a comprehensive analysis, the researchers concluded that the politeness strategies, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), used by IAIN Ternate students during KKN, be it on-record baldness, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record, appear in daily conversations. Cultural values such as solidarity, respect, and indirectness play an important role in shaping the communication style of IAIN Ternate students during KKN. In addition, this study confirms that politeness strategies are contextual and influenced by the social environment, local customs, and cultural values inherent in North Maluku society. Thus, the researchers hope that readers will become more sensitive to cultural differences and wiser in adjusting communication strategies, thus encouraging the creation of a more friendly and harmonious social environment.

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