

## Politeness Strategies of Criticism in Gorontalo Community: A Socio-pragmatic Study

Fajrul Shidiq Djunu<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Airlangga, Indonesia

\*Correspondence: [fajrul.idiq.djunu-2023@fib.unair.ac.id](mailto:fajrul.idiq.djunu-2023@fib.unair.ac.id)

### ABSTRACT

*Criticism is a speech act that tends to damage social relationships between individuals. Therefore, criticism needs to be constructed in such a way using politeness strategies so that the level of threat that can damage interpersonal relationships can be reduced. This socio-pragmatic study aims to find out how politeness strategies are applied in speech acts of criticism used by the Gorontalo community in different situations. The Gorontalo people are one of the tribal groups in Indonesia located on the island of Sulawesi, which has language and cultural differences with other Indonesian tribes. This study uses the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) as the data collection technique, which is an elicitation method in the form of a questionnaire equipped with situational descriptions to facilitate completion. The questionnaire, containing nine different situations designed to trigger criticism. The DCT was distributed to 45 Gorontalo people who have different backgrounds. The results of the data analysis in this study show that in conveying criticism, the Gorontalo community employed the forms of politeness strategies include bald-on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. Furthermore, this community tends to use politeness strategies that are influenced by two factors: the situational context and the social context. The situational context refers to the specific situation that triggers criticism. Meanwhile, the social context refers to the difference in social class between speakers and interlocutors, where the older/higher the position, the more polite the language used.*

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### 1. Introduction

Criticism is often found in interactions carried out by individuals or groups in everyday life. This is considered reasonable and be generally understood as a form of evaluation of the attitudes or behavior of individuals or groups being criticized. However, in the act of conveying criticism, speakers must consider important aspects related to norms and socio-culture. According to Jauhari (2018), criticism in various cultures cannot be expressed carelessly. But must be expressed carefully, paying attention to the values of politeness or socio-cultural norms that apply in the community concerned. If this is ignored, then the criticism that thrown out is prone to threatening the image (face) of the speaker (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Hidayat et al., 2023; Sukmawaty et al., 2022; Lanta et al., 2022). Therefore, a strategy based on norms and culture is needed to refine criticism or reduce the stinging power of the criticism given.

The strategy of criticism cannot be separated and always intersect with culture, values, or politeness norms that are upheld as a rule that is attached to each individual or group. As in Jauhari's (2018) research that aims to explore how politeness strategies are applied in criticism by the Javanese people in Surabaya. This ethnic was chosen by Jauhari based on Magnis-Suseno's (1988) theory which states that the Javanese people highly uphold the principles of harmony and mutual respect when interacting and communicating in daily. Based on that, Jauhari intended to find out what strategies does this community used when they criticize.

There are several other studies that focus on speech act strategies, especially criticism, including Alhusein (2024); Al Kayed & Al-Ghoweri (2019); and Hosseinizadeh & Moqadam (2019). However, unlike El-Dakhs et al (2019) and Jauhari (2018) who was using pragma-linguistic methods on their study, these studies was using different method, namely socio-pragmatic that are intended to examine pragmatic aspects that are related to or based on certain cultures, certain language of communities, and certain condition as well. Meanwhile, pragma-linguistics does not require context and culture (Leech, 1993; Bachriani et al., 2018; Andini et al., 2021; Said et al., 2021).

In contrast to previous studies that have been mention above, this research aims to find out how politeness strategies are applied in speech acts of criticism used by Gorontalo community in different situations. This research focuses

on speech act strategies, especially criticism, that employed within the Gorontalo community. This ethnic group, originating from the island of Sulawesi, possesses distinct linguistic and cultural characteristics compared to larger ethnic group in Indonesia, such as the Javanese. Therefore, the research question in this study is: How are politeness strategies of criticism practiced in the communicative interactions of the Gorontalo community? Furthermore, this study utilize the socio-pragmatic approach in analyzing and identifying the linguistic elements in the criticism strategies due to the existence of sociocultural aspects of Gorontalo community.

### **1.1 Speech Act**

Austin (1975) elucidates that not every utterance reflects a literal state of affairs; rather, utterances often transcend their literal meaning. Consequently, Austin categorizes speech acts into three distinct categories: locutionary acts (the act of saying something with literal meaning), illocutionary acts with meaning based on the speaker's intention), and perlocutionary acts (acts that affect the hearer). Building upon this theoretical foundation, Searle (1979) proposed a novel taxonomy, classifying speech acts based on illocutionary force (assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives).

However, Searle posted that individuals frequently perform multiple speech acts simultaneously within a single utterance. Consequently, Searle introduced a novel contribution by dichotomizing speech act theory into direct and indirect speech acts. Direct speech act occurs when the speaker's intention aligns with the literal meaning of the sentence, such as "please turn on the air condition". Conversely, indirect speech acts arise when the speaker's intention diverges from the literal meaning of the sentence, as in "aren't you feeling hot in here?", with the aim of prompting the hearer to turn on the air conditioner in their shared environment.

### **1.2 Politeness in Criticism**

In the practice of speech act usage within a group, it is imperative to consider the prevailing social and cultural norms as a governing framework. Nearly all groups uphold politeness in speech as a paramount values. The theory of politeness is grounded in the concept of face management (Brown and Levinson, 1978; Sukmawaty et al., 2022). Goffman (1967) elucidates that face management refers to the positive social value that an individual effectively claims for themselves, based on the attitudes other assume towards them in a given interaction. Building upon this definition, Brown and Levinson delineate two distinct types of "face": positive face, which pertains to an individual's self-image, wherein they desire their actions, possessions, or values to be appreciated or acknowledged as positive and agreeable; and negative face, which refers to an individual's desire to (a) be left free to act, or (b) be free from imposition."

The central premise in politeness theory is that many speech act can potentially threaten the speaker's "face". Criticism is one such speech act that carries a negative impact on the interpersonal relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor. Criticism, as a form evaluation of an individual's attitudes, behavior, or actions, has the potential to damage relationship between speaker and interlocutor, thereby threatening the interlocutor's face. Drawing from the definition proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), the illocutionary act of criticism can threaten the interlocutor's negative face (freedom from imposition) because it disrupts, impedes, and restricts the interlocutor's freedom. Consequently, speech acts used in an interaction that have the potential to threaten face need to be mitigated through strategies grounded in the norms, social values, and culture prevalent within the interactional setting.

Politeness strategies for criticism can be classified using politeness theory. Brown and Levinson (1987) propose four politeness strategies: (1) bald-on record, which involves direct and clear communication without attempting to mitigate the impact, and is suitable when the speaker has greater authority; (2) positive politeness, which is a strategy that emphasizes closeness, solidarity, and making the interlocutor feel valued, and is typically used to seek agreement, find common ground, and make promises; (3) negative politeness, which is a strategy that focuses on respecting the interlocutor's personal space and autonomy, using indirect language, questions, and hedges; and (4) off-record, which is a strategy that involves implicit cues or hints rather than stating the intention explicitly, such as implied clues, presuppositions, ambiguous language, and rhetorical questions.

### **1.3 Previous Study**

The most recent on criticism speech act strategies was conducted by Alhusein (2024). The purpose of this study was to investigate reprimand strategies in Arabic within Saudi Arabian society. This research employed a discourse completion task (DCT) comprising five situational scenarios, utilizing Garcia's categorization of reprimands in conjunction with Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. Consequently, Alhusein found that reprimand strategies in Saudi Arabian

society are grounded in context and relationship. This finding contributes to the understanding of language, culture, and contextual elements applied in the practice of reprimand speech acts within Saudi Arabian society.

Another research is conducted by Al Kayed & Al-Ghoweri (2019). This research was investigating the strategies of speech act of criticism in Jordanian Arabic. The sample of the study consisted of 120 undergraduate Jordanian student that living in Jordan. They were selected randomly regardless of gender, social class or major. The data is collected by means of discourse completion task (DCT) which contains 10 scenarios. After collecting the data, the researcher categorizes criticizing strategies using Nguyen's Model. Al kayed & Al-Ghoweri found that Jordanians adopted more indirect strategies than direct strategies to perform criticism.

Further research concerning criticism strategies and their relation to cultural values was also conducted by Hosseinizadeh & Moqadam (2019). This research focused on the practice of criticism occurring in online interactions. They centered their research on investigating cross-cultural perceptions between Persian and American individuals in the strategies they employed for criticism on Facebook. This research identified 17 types of criticism utterances, of which 10 were found to be used by both groups, three were used exclusively by Persian speakers, and four were used exclusively by American speakers. According to Hosseinizadeh and Moqadam (2019), Persian speakers employed more indirect strategies, while American speakers exhibited the opposite tendency. Furthermore, they explained that Persian speakers tended to prioritize safeguarding the interlocutor's face and honoring their cultural values. Conversely, American speakers were observed to favor direct utterances, categorized as polite assertive criticism speech acts.

Subsequently, research conducted by Jauhari (2018) focused on politeness devices in criticism speech acts. This research aimed to examine politeness devices in criticism employed by the Javanese community of Surabaya. Utilizing a DCT for data collection, the findings revealed that there are various linguistic forms are frequently used as tools to soften the impact of criticism within the Javanese community of Surabaya, particularly in the workplace. According to Jauhari, these forms include modifiers, the use of passives sentences with the "di-" prefix for the second person, and the use of inclusive first-person pronouns.

In the search for prior research, no studies were found that specifically examined politeness strategies in criticism within the Gorontalo community using socio-pragmatic. Therefore, this research was chosen to investigate the practice of polite criticism speech acts within the Gorontalo community, utilizing socio-pragmatic approach.

## 2. Methodology

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach was chosen to ensure that the explanation of the social phenomena under investigation can be clearly and comprehensively articulated. Descriptive qualitative research is an approach used to examine the attitudes, behaviors, and experiences of a specific group through data analysis and interpretations (Dawson, 2007). Descriptive qualitative approaches can portray data in the form of images and words, rather than numbers of statistics. In this research, descriptive qualitative method aid in investigating criticism speech act strategies and their correlation with the norms or culture of a group. As Bloomer (2006) asserts, the qualitative approach focuses more on describing and interpreting data than on qualifying features.

The sample of the research consists of 45 native speakers of Gorontalo language with various background. The subjects were chosen randomly regardless of their gender and age. The technique of data collection in this research using discourse completion task (DCT). This method constitutes a form of elicitation technique that resembles a questionnaire which consist of short dialogues or descriptions of specific situations (Jauhari, 2018). Using Google form, the DCT in this research was designed to focus on nine simple situations frequently encountered in daily interactions of the community, which are likely to elicit criticism. Here are the example of DCT:

Situation Description: You are in a restaurant. After choosing the food you want to order, you take a seat at a table while bringing your order number. In couple of minutes later a waiter/waitress brings the food and then puts it on your table. But it turns out that the food is not what you ordered. Therefore, you feel the need to do a criticism to the waiter/waitress.

Question: how would you articulate your criticism to the waiter/waitress?

Answer: Bolomaapu, jatilala lodepito yi'o? Wa'u jalo polahuli utiye. (Sorry, did you misplace the order? I feel like I did not order this)

The technique of data analysis was conducted through several stages. Firstly, all data collected using the discourse completion task (DCT) were identified for their constituent elements. These elements were posted to potentially influence

politeness values in criticism, thereby facilitating the categorization of speech acts types. If others aspects that could mitigate the force of criticism were found, such as personal pronouns, sentence structures, and other related features, it can be categorized as politeness strategies of criticism.

Secondly, the identified speech acts were classified using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies theory, namely: (1) bald-on record, (2) Positive politeness, (3) negative politeness, and (4) off-record. Finally, the utterance elements and linguistics aspects were correlated with social and cultural norms to determine the relationship between politeness strategies and the prevailing sociocultural context within the Gorontalo community.

### 3. Result and Discussion

From the data analysis collected using discourse completion task in the form of google form. It was found that in the practice of politeness strategies for speech act of criticism used by the Gorontalo people can be categorized as follows:

#### 3.1 Politeness Strategy

##### 3.1.1 Bald-on record

Bald-on record, which involves direct and explicit communication without attempting to mitigate the impact, is appropriately employed when the speaker possesses bigger authority. Finding regarding the practice of speech acts of criticism categorized as bald-on record are frequently can be found in the contexts related to the interaction between parents and children, as well as siblings. The following data illustrates this below:

- a. Giving command/intimidate/accuse

##### Data 1

*So barapa kali mama ada bilang pa ngana, siram bunga! Aliheo badiri ngana kong pigi siram itu bunga skarang! Jang mama mo dapa tumbu pa ngana! (how many times do I have to tell you, the plant needs to be watered! Hurry up and go water the plants now! Or you will get a slap!)*

The data above shows the use of a threat or intimidation employed by a parent towards a child who has failed to fulfil their household duties, expressed in the phrase 'or you will get a slap'. Data 1 above constitutes a direct utterance and, in terms of meaning, represents a speech act of criticism performed by the parent (mother). This elucidates the inherent authority within familial norms, wherein a mother possesses authority over her child to enforce compliance with her wishes.

Another following data categorized as bald-on record employed within a context involving speakers and interlocutors in equal standing. Here are the subsequent data 2 below:

- b. Giving command

##### Data 2

*Soitu delo kase bae ini lampu eh, pe galap skali di sini ini pa (that's why this light should be repaired, it's really dark here).*

The data above demonstrates a directive sentence employed by a sister towards her sibling. The utterance 'soitu delo kase bae ini lampu eh' (that's why this light should be repaired) is classified as bald-on record due to its direct and explicit nature as a form of criticism. This speech act of criticism is applicable by the speaker to the interlocutor, given their equal standing (e.g. siblings, close friends, etc).

##### 3.1.2 Positive Politeness

Positive politeness is a strategy that emphasizes closeness, solidarity, and fostering a sense of appreciation of interlocutor, is typically employed to seek agreement between speaker and interlocutor, establish commonalities, and make promises. Here are the following illustrative data that have been found in this research:

a. Asking for cooperation

**Data 3**

*Ngana pe tanpa ini kotor skali aba... Mari jo sahib, baku bantu ba kase bersi biar gaga mo lia kasana to (your room is really dirty... let's clean up the mess my friend, so that it looks neat and clean).*

Data 3 above shows the speech act of criticism which used for asking a cooperation. The word 'sahib' which means 'my dear friend' used to soften the way of asking for a cooperation and reducing the power of criticism. Word 'sahib' also indicates the closeness, solidarity, and appreciation to the interlocutor. There is another data of politeness strategy that have been found down below:

b. Giving advice

**Data 4**

*Papa, ti papa bole mo makan yang manis skali-skali asal jangan banya-banya aa (dad, you can eat something sweet sometimes but don't overdo it).*

The data 4 above demonstrates a child's attempt to advise their father against excessive consumption of sugary goods. Within the actual context, the child endeavors to diminish potential offense to their father's predilection for sweets by permitting the consumption of favored treats, albeit with moderation.

### 3.1.3 Negative Politeness

Negative politeness constitutes the efforts to respect the personal space and autonomy of the interlocutor, employing indirect language, questions, and expressions that convey hesitancy. Here are some data that have been found down below:

a. Apologize

**Data 5**

*Bolomaapu ka, di sini tida bole ba roko sup (so sorry bro/sis, smoking are prohibited in here)*

b. Requesting permission leading to giving question

**Data 6**

*Misi ka, bole mo kase kacili sadiki ba cirita? (excuse me bro/sis, can you guys turn down the voice a little?)*

In data 5 above, the criticism employs the term 'bolomaapu', which translates to 'I apologize' which constitutes a component of negative politeness strategy, wherein the objective is to prioritize sense of respect for the interlocutor's autonomy. This is executed by the speaker, positioned as a waiter/waitress towards the guest (the interlocutor). Data 6 share a similar setting which is the social class of the speaker was below the interlocutor. The use of asking permission such as 'misi ka' which lead to the main point of criticism which was questioning the interlocutor misbehavior. The main point of this criticism was nuanced as a doubt. Moreover, the use of 'ka' which means 'someone older' in both utterances was to respect the space of interlocutor and to soften the speech act of criticism that have been given by the speakers.

### 3.1.4 Off Record

Off record strategy involves the utilization of implicit cues or allusions rather than explicit declarations of intent. This encompasses indirect indications, presuppositions, ambiguous language, and rhetorical inquiries. The following data were ascertained below:

a. Giving implicit cue

**Data 7**

*Ngana tau cewe-cewe itu nda suka cowo caparuni aba (do you know girls does not like a filthy boy)*

Data above showing the use of off record strategy by utilizes an implicit cue. This speech act strategy appears in the context of the speaker should criticize the look of the interlocutor. All data was found in this situation using satire like the data above. Satire was used for making soften the power of speech act of criticism so that the interlocutor will not offend. Furthermore, the intention of using satire was to give a cue or reminder to the interlocutor.

a. Giving question/statement

**Data 8**

*Tida cape ngana pake itu-itu turus? (don't you even get tired of wearing it constantly?)*

**Data 9**

*Tida ada baju lain ngana ini kita lia-lia anggu (it looks like you don't have any other clothes besides that)*

Both data above share the same context with data 7. Data 8 was found using the element of giving a question while data 9 was found using a statement to criticize the interlocutor. These utterances characterized as the off record of politeness strategy because the intention of both speech acts was for criticizing the appearance of interlocutor without being offensive to them.

### 3.2 The Factor of Using Politeness Strategy

After classify those speech act that have been found, the aforementioned data of speech act of criticism provide an illustration of how the selection of criticism strategies is conducted within the Gorontalo community. Factors influencing the selection of strategy include situational contexts and the relationships between individual that engaged in the interaction. For instance, the use of criticism speech act strategies directed towards children, siblings, or close friends frequently employs reprimand strategies which tend to be direct and explicit, without diminishing the intensity of the criticism delivered. In this case, the strategies involving threats, warnings, accusations, and commands exemplify direct criticism that retains its potency and is classified under Brown and Levinson's bald-on record politeness strategy. This is attributed to the authority held by the speaker over the interlocutor (e.g. parents over children).

Furthermore, the utilization of positive politeness strategies revealed a different pattern. The application of positive politeness strategies in this study involved direct criticism, albeit with a diminished intensity. Speakers of criticism mitigated the severity of their critiques by employing familiar address terms or providing validation to acknowledge the interlocutor's decisions. These strategies were observed in scenarios aimed soliciting cooperation and offering advice. In contrast, negative politeness in this study was observed in utterances incorporating apologies and requests for permission which were often framed as questions conveying a sense of hesitancy. This strategy emerged when the situational context shifted from domestic to workplace or public settings. Its application frequently involved a sentences that emphasized the respect for the interlocutor's personal space and autonomy. By employing indirect language, such as apologize, asking a question, and expressions of doubt, speakers sought to elevate the level of politeness and diminish the intensity of criticism.

The Gorontalo community also employs off-record speech act strategies to convey criticism. Off-record politeness strategies can occur in various situational contexts. Most of them commonly observed in workplace environments, where they utilize this strategy by employing a cynical tone or using implicit or satirical statements within a jesting context. This is typically found in interactions between speaker and interlocutors who have established long-standing and close relationship.

### 4. Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the Gorontalo community employs various speech act strategies in their daily life communication. Utilizing a socio-pragmatic approach, this study has revealed that the selection of criticism strategies is contingent upon situational contexts and the relational dynamics between speakers and interlocutors. This research identified four distinct politeness strategies from Brown and Levinson's theory applied by the Gorontalo community in delivering criticism. However, alterations in situational contexts and shifts in the relational distance between interacting individuals can precipitate changes in the employed politeness strategies.

Within the domestic sphere, politeness strategies employed tend to gravitate towards bald-on record usage, wherein speakers utilize direct utterances without mitigating the intensity of the criticism. This phenomenon is influenced

by the authority wielded by the speaker over the interlocutor, such as parental authority over children, enabling them to assert their desires. The majority of interactions within the domestic environment are characterized by warnings, threats, accusations, and commands. In analogous situations, positive politeness strategies are also applicable. These strategies typically involve providing advice (e.g. from children to parents) through direct criticism, albeit in a courteous manner, by validating the interlocutor's life choices. Other criticism classified under positive politeness include utterances aimed at soliciting cooperation, employing language that demonstrates solidarity or egalitarian camaraderie.

Subsequently, when the situational setting shifts to a workplace or public environment, characterized by a greater relational distance between speakers and interlocutor, the politeness strategies employed in speech act of criticism also undergo transformation. In such contexts, negative politeness strategies are frequently found. Negative politeness which focuses on respecting the interlocutor's personal space and autonomy, is manifested through the use of indirect language, questions, and expressions of doubt. For instance, speakers may apply utterances that include apologizing or asking permission which aiming to pose questions in the sense of hesitancy, thereby attenuating the force of the criticism. This typically occurs in public setting where social hierarchies prevail, such as between employees and customers. Lastly, off-record strategies are also applied across various situations but are particularly prevalent among individuals with close relational ties. The use of figurative language or implicit statement is commonly observed in the delivery of criticism.

This research reveals that the utilization of discourse completion task (DCT) as the primary data collection technique imposes limitations on the development of a comprehensive understanding of the Gorontalo community's speech act of criticism strategies. However, it serves as a valuable tool for rapid data acquisition. Additionally, the dynamic nature of language, which consistently evolves in response to contemporary trends, is reflected in the data findings, where several respondents employed English or other languages. This phenomenon is attributable to shifts in social environments, generational changes, and various external factors.

Consequently, this research is expected to contribute to the understanding of a branch of sociolinguistics, namely socio-pragmatics, which in this context focuses on the practical application of politeness strategies in criticism speech acts within the Gorontalo community. The author anticipates that this study will pave the way for new research endeavors related to socio-pragmatics, with a focus on politeness strategies in criticism within other communities.

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