

## Adaptive Politeness and Hierarchical Negotiation: A Sociopragmatic Study of Bugis and Konjo Speech Communities in South Sulawesi

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the realization of adaptive politeness and hierarchical negotiation in the speech of Bugis and Konjo speakers in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. While politeness in Indonesian regional languages has often been described through hierarchical norms, this study demonstrates that politeness is better understood as an adaptive and relational process. Using a qualitative descriptive design with a sociopragmatic approach, natural conversations were collected from Bone and Bulukumba in 2023 through observation, recording, and semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using Culpeper (2021) pragmatic framework and Locher & Larina (2019) relational pragmatics model to identify linguistic markers of respect, empathy, and social harmony. The findings reveal that Bugis speakers maintain structured hierarchy through indirect and respectful forms that reflect the moral principle of *siri' na pacce*, while Konjo speakers demonstrate greater flexibility through humor, familiarity, and contextual adaptation. Both groups exhibit adaptive politeness, balancing hierarchical awareness with social solidarity in everyday communication. These findings indicate that politeness in South Sulawesi is not a fixed linguistic system but a dynamic moral and pragmatic practice. The study contributes to the broader understanding of Southeast Asian pragmatics by showing how moral values and cultural identities are linguistically enacted in multilingual societies.*

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### 1. Introduction

Politeness is one of the central mechanisms through which individuals negotiate respect, social balance, and moral responsibility in communication. It is not simply a linguistic formula but a culturally grounded expression of interpersonal values. In multilingual societies such as Indonesia, politeness manifests as a flexible and adaptive practice that reflects shifting social dynamics and moral orientations (Sukmawaty et al., 2022; Kaharuddin et al., 2024). How speakers adjust language to express deference or solidarity is shaped by contextual awareness and deeply rooted cultural principles.

The Bugis and Konjo communities of South Sulawesi offer a rich perspective on these dynamics. Although they share a common linguistic and cultural ancestry, their pragmatic behaviors differ significantly. Among Bugis speakers, communication reflects the moral principle of *siri' na pesse*, emphasizing dignity, compassion, and the maintenance of social order. Konjo speakers, while culturally connected to the Bugis, exhibit a more relational and flexible interactional style, where humor, empathy, and contextual sensitivity often replace strict linguistic hierarchy (Rahman et al., 2022; Andini et al., 2021). Understanding these contrasting tendencies is essential for revealing how politeness operates as a moral and adaptive system in regional Indonesian discourse.

Previous studies on politeness in Indonesia have primarily emphasized hierarchical structures and speech levels as the basis for linguistic respect, particularly within South Sulawesi cultures. Such frameworks have contributed significantly to understanding how honorific systems and moral values shape communication. However, many of these approaches remain static in orientation, assuming that politeness behavior is predetermined by fixed social hierarchies and power relations. Contemporary language use, however, demonstrates greater flexibility. Speakers increasingly adjust their politeness levels in response to situational context, interpersonal familiarity, and generational change. This shift highlights the need for a renewed analytical perspective that recognizes politeness as an adaptive and relational practice.

Rather than being bound by rigid social ranking, politeness in present-day South Sulawesi operates through context-sensitive negotiation, where linguistic choices reflect both respect for tradition and responsiveness to social dynamics.

Recent developments in relational pragmatics reinforce this perspective. Politeness is viewed as emerging through social alignment, where meaning is co-constructed by interlocutors rather than dictated by convention (Taguchi & Kádár, 2025). It functions as a process of interactive meaning-making, continuously shaped by moral stance and contextual (Liddicoat & Derivry-Plard, 2024). In the Indonesian context, politeness involves balancing hierarchical values with the egalitarian tendencies of modern discourse (Jumriani et al., 2024; Puput Handriani et al., 2025). These studies reveal a broader sociolinguistic transformation in which communicative behavior adapts simultaneously to traditional norms and contemporary social change.

Despite the growing body of research on Indonesian politeness, most existing studies continue to treat politeness as a fixed system of honorifics and speech levels that mirror social hierarchy. Such approaches overlook how politeness is dynamically negotiated in real discourse and how moral values are enacted through everyday linguistic practice. In particular, studies of South Sulawesi languages have often examined *siri' na pacce* as an ethical or philosophical concept rather than as an interactive process manifested in communication. Comparative investigations between closely related speech communities such as Bugis and Konjo remain limited, even though their shared linguistic ancestry and differing social orientations offer valuable insight into regional variation. Furthermore, empirical evidence capturing how speakers adapt politeness across distinct settings such as familial and market interactions is scarce. This gap highlights the need for a relational, discourse-based analysis that explains how speakers in multilingual societies construct respect and hierarchy through contextual and adaptive communication.

The significance of this study lies in its dual contribution. Theoretically, it advances the study of Southeast Asian pragmatics by conceptualizing politeness not as a static rule system but as a dynamic moral practice shaped by situational and relational awareness. Empirically, it documents authentic speech practices from Bone and Bulukumba, providing valuable data on how moral values such as *siri'* (honor) and *pacce* (empathy) are realized in daily communication. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how local languages preserve traditional values while adapting to the demands of modern communication. Therefore, this study investigates how Bugis and Konjo speakers negotiate hierarchy, respect, and social harmony through adaptive politeness and hierarchical negotiation. It focuses on how speakers employ linguistic strategies, pragmatic markers, and code-mixing to construct relationships in both familial and market domains. Through this approach, the study demonstrates that politeness in South Sulawesi is a living, negotiated practice, grounded in moral philosophy yet responsive to contemporary communicative realities.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Research Design and Data Collection

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design with a sociopragmatic approach to analyze the realization of politeness strategies and their moral implications in Bugis and Konjo daily communication. The research was conducted in 2023 across two regencies of South Sulawesi: Bone, representing the Bugis community, and Bulukumba, representing the Konjo community. The study focuses on how speakers express respect, manage hierarchy, and negotiate social relations through linguistic and pragmatic choices.

Participants were native speakers who actively use their local languages in daily life. They were selected through purposive and snowball sampling to represent variation in age, gender, and social background. The data consist of natural conversations and spontaneous discourse collected through observation, recording, and semi-structured interviews. The listening and free-conversation techniques were used to capture authentic interaction. All speech events were recorded with informed consent and later transcribed in local orthography, with Indonesian and English glosses. Triangulation was carried out through member checking and expert consultation to ensure cultural validity and analytical reliability.

### 2.2 Analytical Procedure

Data analysis follows the interpretive tradition of Levinson, emphasizing the contextual relationship between linguistic form, pragmatic function, and sociocultural meaning. This framework allowed the researcher to identify how politeness markers and hierarchical indicators operate in real conversational settings. The analytical process was further informed by the relational pragmatics model, which highlights the adaptability of politeness to situational and interpersonal factors. (Locher & Larina, 2019). This combined approach provides a comprehensive understanding of how Bugis and Konjo speakers negotiate social meaning and moral alignment through interaction.

### 2.3 Overview of Politeness in South Sulawesi

The analysis of conversational data from Bugis and Konjo speakers reveals that politeness in South Sulawesi operates as a dynamic and contextually adaptive system rather than a fixed hierarchical code. Although both communities share linguistic ancestry and moral principles, their strategies for expressing respect, solidarity, and distance differ in distinctive ways.

Bugis speakers maintain structured forms of deference grounded in the moral principle of *siri' na pacce*, where honor and compassion guide linguistic behavior. Their speech patterns are characterized by indirectness, restraint, and the use of respectful markers that reinforce hierarchy while maintaining harmony. In contrast, Konjo speakers display a more relational and flexible orientation. They rely on humor, empathy, and contextual adjustment to navigate interpersonal relations. The alternation between formal and casual forms reflects an adaptive politeness style that values emotional connection and cooperation over rigid deference.

### 2.4 Theoretical Alignment

This study is grounded in the framework of relational pragmatics, which conceptualizes politeness as a socially co-constructed and context-dependent process rather than a fixed linguistic system (Locher & Larina, 2019; Taguchi & Kádár, 2025). Within this perspective, communicative meaning emerges through alignment, empathy, and moral sensitivity shaped by situational context. The analysis also draws on Culpeper's (2011) interactional model of politeness which explains how speakers manage respect and interpersonal face through linguistic choice and conversational tone. To connect linguistic form with sociocultural value, the study applies pragmatic model of componential utterance analysis Levinson's (1983), integrating micro-level linguistic observation with macro-level interpretation of cultural meaning.

## 3. Result and Discussion

### 3.1 Adaptive Politeness Strategies

Previous approaches to politeness in South Sulawesi have tended to view politeness strategies as fixed and hierarchically determined. However, the present study finds that Konjo and Bugis speakers often adjust their politeness levels dynamically based on context rather than strictly adhering to hierarchy. Politeness is a context-sensitive and interactionally emergent phenomenon. (House & Kádár, 2022). Politeness is not a fixed linguistic system but a fluid social practice negotiated through discourse. (Culpeper, 2011). In the Indonesian multilingual context, interactional style and politeness are shaped by social positioning and speaker identity, showing that speakers continuously calibrate their level of formality and deference to sustain social harmony (Djenar et al., 2018).

Konjo and Bugis speakers exhibit context-sensitive adaptation that varies according to power relations, familiarity, and social proximity.

- Speaker 1 : *Ngura intu lamenu intu?* "How are those potatoes?"  
Speaker 2 : *Nuballoi langganange.* "All good, customer."  
Speaker 1 : *Sikura sipakunni urang?* "How much if I take this many?"  
Speaker 2 : *Anampulo lima. Nampami isse rie.* "Sixty-five thousand. Just arrived."  
Speaker 1 : *Pataralleminjo.* "I'll take it."

This interaction demonstrates that Konjo politeness relies less on hierarchical structuring and more on informal friendliness. From the opening line, the buyer's casual inquiry establishes a relational rather than transactional footing. The seller reciprocates with *langganange* ("customer"), an affiliative term that simultaneously conveys recognition and equality. This lexical choice transforms the exchange into a socially cooperative act rather than a mere economic negotiation.

The linguistic pattern here reflects positive politeness, minimizing distance and emphasizing common ground. Conceptualizes politeness as a contextually co-constructed process through which interactants negotiate alignment and rapport. (Culpeper, 2011; House & Kádár, 2022). In the Konjo exchange, the implicit goal is not only transactional success but also the maintenance of social harmony, an interactional priority consistent with the relational approach to politeness. (Locher, 2013). Even when prices are negotiated, the absence of deferential markers such as *-ki* or kinship-based honorifics (e.g., *daeng*, *puang*) shows that social relations are preserved through tone and empathy rather than formal linguistic markers.

These features correspond to recent findings that in Indonesian multilingual contexts, solidarity and intimacy are often indexed through pragmatic flexibility and informal interactional cues. (Djenar et al., 2018). The use of humor, casual lexical choices, and a relaxed rhythm of exchange collectively signal shared community identity, reflecting as “discursive empathy” in everyday politeness practices. (Wu & Roever, 2025)

Furthermore, the Konjo market exchange reveals subtle code-mixing tendencies that index bilingual identity. Indonesian numerals such as *anampulo lima* coexist with Konjo grammatical structures, representing pragmatic borrowing. (Doğruöz et al., 2021). Such insertional code-mixing is not random but serves a functional role in indexing modernity and promoting communicative efficiency in multiethnic market interactions. The integration of Indonesian elements into Konjo speech represents a form of linguistic accommodation, model of interactional adaptability, in which bilingual speakers flexibly shift codes to achieve mutual understanding and solidarity. (Chen & An, 2022)

Similar interactional patterns were also observed in other market exchanges, where speakers employed affiliative terms and minimized honorifics to emphasize friendliness and social equality. In these contexts, politeness emerges as a socially negotiated performance, dynamically reconstructed through linguistic choice, relational tone, and pragmatic understanding.

#### Excerpt (Bugis Market Interaction – Structured Politeness)

- Speaker 1 : *Siaga boluta?* “How much is the milkfish?”  
Speaker 2 : *Iye', sipulo sebbu sikaju.* “Ten thousand per fish.”  
Speaker 1 : *Masuli di, pale mapputui' sibawa raung jaku.* “Can you lower the price a bit?  
Speaker 2 : I'm also buying vegetables.”  
Speaker 1 : *Iyaro na pale, duapulo na tellu.* “Alright then, twenty for three.”  
*Iye, Jokka jari.* “Okay, wrap them up.”

This dialogue illustrates the Bugis preference for maintaining hierarchical respect even in ordinary bargaining contexts. The consistent use of *iyé* instead of the casual *iyo* signals attentiveness and deference, marking negative politeness. Although both the buyer and seller share similar social positions, the continued use of politeness markers reinforces the moral foundation of *siri' na pacce*, which embodies the Bugis principles of dignity, compassion, and mutual respect. (Upe et al., 2025). *Siri'* continues to shape Bugis linguistic behavior, demonstrating that politeness remains a form of moral discipline rather than a purely linguistic feature. (Nashruddin et al., 2020)

Unlike the Konjo interaction, Bugis speakers employ politeness as a symbolic reinforcement of social hierarchy. Linguistic politeness works as a safeguard for maintaining personal and collective dignity, especially in public interactions. Nevertheless, this formality is not rigid. The dialogue reveals adaptability and cooperation, where both participants negotiate politely to reach an agreement, and interactional accommodation, where politeness is adjusted to context without losing its hierarchical essence. (Mahmud, 2011)

The Bugis exchange also shows relational alignment. Both interlocutors mirror each other's level of formality to preserve equilibrium in conversation. Pragmatic alignment in Southeast Asian multilingual contexts involves maintaining shared norms of respect while engaging in mutual linguistic adaptation. (Rosa Anjani et al., 2024). The Bugis speakers' ability to integrate adaptability within hierarchy reveals that politeness functions as contextual formality, balancing deference and cooperation.

Taken together, these findings indicate that adaptive politeness in Bugis speech is not the rejection of hierarchy but a reconfiguration of it. The principle of *siri'* remains central, but it is expressed through flexible negotiation. In contrast, Konjo speakers tend to reduce hierarchical distance and foreground solidarity through informal strategies. Both linguistic systems display social intelligence by calibrating politeness based on power, familiarity, and interactional goals.

Indonesian multilingual speakers balance respect and equality by shifting between formal and informal codes depending on situational expectations. (Agus et al., 2025). Politeness among Eastern Indonesian communities is a dynamic process that combines moral values and pragmatic adaptation. Bugis politeness, therefore, represents a contextualized form of adaptive communication that preserves hierarchy while fostering relational balance. (Pangestu et al., 2025)

While adaptive politeness highlights flexibility in language choice and interactional tone, hierarchical negotiation explains how such adaptation operates within systems of social power. The following section deepens this analysis by examining how Bugis and Konjo speakers linguistically manage hierarchy across different communicative settings.

However, the degree and mode of adaptation differ considerably, as summarized below.

**Table 1. Comparison of Politeness Features in Konjo and Bugis Speech**

Aspect	Konjo Speakers	Bugis Speakers
Orientation	Community closeness and casual solidarity	Hierarchical awareness and structured formality
Honorific Use	Minimal, only for elders or respected figures	Frequent, even in casual settings
Tone	Friendly, affiliative	Polite, restrained
Politeness Markers	Rarely used (-ki, -ta avoided)	Consistently used (-ki, -ta common)

The table summarizes the main pragmatic distinctions between Konjo and Bugis speakers, focusing on orientation, honorific use, tone, and politeness markers as indicators of adaptive and context-driven politeness.

### 3.2. Hierarchical Negotiation in Politeness Strategies

Hierarchical negotiation refers to the ways speakers manage social distance and power relations through linguistic and pragmatic choices. Among Bugis and Konjo speakers, hierarchy is not a fixed or static construct but a social reality that is constantly redefined through everyday interaction. The findings reveal two complementary tendencies. Bugis speakers sustain hierarchy through structured deference and linguistic restraint, while Konjo speakers recalibrate hierarchy situationally, balancing respect with relational familiarity.

#### 3.2.1 Bugis Speech: Maintaining Respect through Structured Hierarchy

Bugis speech patterns reflect a cultural orientation toward *siri'*, a moral code that emphasizes self-respect, dignity, and social harmony. The act of speaking politely is not merely linguistic etiquette but a manifestation of moral integrity.

##### Excerpt (Bugis Family Interaction – Structured Hierarchical Politeness):

- Speaker 1 : *Tegaki' melli bo'bo a gurung?*  
“Where did you buy your school book?”
- Speaker 2 : *Ku sekolah e' disuroki' melli ku ibu guru, ellinna dua pulo sebbu.*  
“At school, the teacher told me to buy it for twenty thousand.”
- Spekaer 1 : *Purani' magurui, kammai mu elli bawa de' to na' engka mu bacai.* “Have you studied it? Don't just buy it without reading.”

The exchange demonstrates how hierarchy in Bugis interaction is preserved through pragmatic restraint rather than overt authority. The aunt's tone is firm yet softened by care, while the nephew's avoidance of informal particles such as *iyu* reflects a conscious awareness of deference. This style aligns with negative politeness, as described by Brown and Levinson (1987), where speakers reduce imposition and signal respect through indirectness.

However, Bugis speakers today employ adaptive honorifics, modifying their speech based on social context while maintaining cultural. (Sunnuraini & Yassi, 2022). In contemporary Bugis communities, politeness involves emotional calibration, combining linguistic moderation with empathetic engagement. (Tamra, 2018). The interaction above exemplifies this emotional politeness, where authority is asserted with warmth and relational care.

This negotiation sustains the hierarchical structure while allowing interpersonal closeness. It demonstrates that hierarchy in Bugis society is performative and relational, it must be enacted through linguistic subtlety to remain legitimate. Bugis hierarchy persists not because it is imposed but because it is mutually maintained through discursive respect. (Lukman, 2015)

#### 3.2.2 Konjo Speech: Adjusting Hierarchy through Contextual Flexibility

In contrast, Konjo speakers approach hierarchy with greater flexibility. Hierarchical relations are shaped by situational context, relational closeness, and shared intent rather than fixed speech conventions.

**Excerpt (Konjo Family Interaction – Flexible Hierarchy):**

- Speaker 1 : *I nai isse areng lengkapna i Fajar?*  
“Who else is named Fajar?”
- Speaker 2 : *Iyo desa Batang, tempat lahirna iya Bulukumba.*  
“Yes, Batang village, but he was born in Bulukumba.”
- Speaker 1 : *Iye, iye. Nampami kusuro ketik rolo.*  
“Yes, yes. I already told them to type it.”
- Speaker 2 : *O Ita, rurungko ammaknu kalau ri Cuki ka injo bede SMA nubiasa bede anda terima...*  
“Oh Ita, you and your mother should meet Cuki; the school principal might refuse new students unless through the committee.”

The alternation between *iye* and *iyo* in this conversation signals dynamic adjustment in formality. *Iye* conveys attentiveness and subtle deference, while *iyo* indexes familiarity and closeness. Addressing by name without an honorific, as in *O Ita*, emphasizes relational solidarity. Respect is not expressed through rigid markers but through cooperative tone, empathetic phrasing, and mutual engagement. This interaction aligns with positive politeness strategies, where rapport is prioritized over deference. Yet, the relational tone still acknowledges hierarchy implicitly. Konjo speakers therefore practice what term “contextual mitigation,” balancing power and solidarity based on situational relevance. (Andini et al., 2025). Konjo speakers employ pragmatic empathy, adjusting their politeness level through emotional alignment rather than formal linguistic codes. (Ansar et al., 2023)

The two linguistic systems reveal different cultural logics of hierarchical negotiation. Bugis politeness operates within a hierarchy-preserving model, where language reaffirms social order through restraint and moral formality. Konjo politeness reflects a hierarchy-adjusting model, where respect is relational and situationally negotiated. Bugis speakers value distance as respect, while Konjo speakers value closeness as respect. This distinction illustrates what is called “contextual formality,” in which Southeast Asian speakers calibrate politeness not through fixed honorific rules but through adaptive relational cues. (Liddicoat & Derivry-Plard, 2024). Hierarchical negotiation in Indonesian regional languages is a process of balance between generational change and cultural continuity. (Syam et al., 2023)

Both Bugis and Konjo speakers demonstrate that hierarchy in South Sulawesi communication is not a rigid structure but a living social practice. Politeness functions as the mediating force that transforms traditional authority into interactive harmony, showing that cultural values of *siri'* and solidarity remain relevant yet adaptive in modern linguistic behavior. The comparison highlights two distinct models of hierarchical negotiation:

**Table 2. Comparative Models of Hierarchical Negotiation in Bugis and Konjo Speech**

Aspect	Bugis	Konjo
Orientation	Hierarchy-preserving	Hierarchy-adjusting
Strategy	Indirectness, restraint, honorific use	Familiarity, empathy, name reference
Tone	Formal and deferential	Relational and flexible
Cultural Basis	<i>Siri' na pacce</i> (honor and compassion)	Relational solidarity and situational adaptation

The table outlines the key pragmatic orientations and cultural bases of hierarchical negotiation among Bugis and Konjo speakers, highlighting contrasts between formal deference grounded in *siri' na pacce* and relational flexibility shaped by solidarity and contextual adaptation. Both speech communities display awareness of hierarchy, but they perform it differently. Bugis speakers reinforce hierarchy through linguistic control, while Konjo speakers reinterpret hierarchy through relational warmth. In both cases, politeness serves as a negotiation tool that maintains social cohesion while reflecting generational and contextual shifts.

The findings demonstrate that both groups employ adaptive politeness, strategically balancing hierarchical awareness with social solidarity. Within this framework, hierarchy is not eliminated but dynamically renegotiated according to context, age, familiarity, and setting. Interactions from both family and market domains reveal that politeness among Bugis and Konjo speakers operates as a moral and relational negotiation rather than as a fixed convention. These results indicate that younger speakers increasingly shape their politeness practices through relational adaptability and co-constructed meaning in intercultural interaction (House & Kádár, 2022; Liddicoat & Derivry-Plard, 2024). Overall, politeness

in Bugis and Konjo discourse constitutes a living system of moral adaptation in which speakers continually balance respect, empathy, and equality to sustain harmony within evolving social realities. This finding underscores that hierarchy in South Sulawesi communication is not a fixed structure but a living, negotiated social practice, balancing traditional authority with evolving patterns of interaction in contemporary life.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study examined adaptive politeness and hierarchical negotiation in Bugis and Konjo speech communities in South Sulawesi. The findings show that politeness among both groups is contextually adaptive rather than fixed, shaped by social relations, situational awareness, and cultural values. Bugis speakers maintain hierarchy through structured deference and linguistic restraint that reflect the moral principles of *siri' na pacce*. In contrast, Konjo speakers adjust hierarchy dynamically through relational tone and contextual familiarity, using politeness as a flexible social strategy. Together, these two orientations illustrate that politeness in South Sulawesi communication balances respect and solidarity, allowing tradition and modernity to coexist in everyday interaction.

Overall, this research demonstrates that politeness is a living social practice rather than a rigid formula. It functions as a means of sustaining harmony, reaffirming identity, and negotiating power through culturally embedded moral awareness. This research advances the understanding of politeness as moral pragmatics in Southeast Asia, where cultural identity and interpersonal adaptation intersect as dynamic forces in language use. Future studies may extend this work by exploring how these strategies evolve in digital or institutional contexts where generational and linguistic shifts continue to reshape communicative norms.

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