

Politeness Strategies in Buyer-Seller in Interaction: A Speech ACT Analysis in Namlea Market

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ABSTRACT

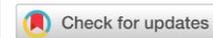
This research aims to analyze 1) Politeness strategies in speech acts between buyers and sellers in Namlea Market; 2) Contextual factors that influence the use of politeness strategies in the interaction of buyers and sellers in Namlea market. This type of research is descriptive qualitative with pragmatic approach. The method in this research is the observation method with data collection techniques, namely participatory observation, interviews, and documentation. The theories used are speech act theory (Austin and Searle) and politeness theory (Brown and Levinson). The results showed 1) There are three main strategies used in speech acts between buyers and sellers in Namlea Market, namely positive politeness, negative politeness, and impoliteness; 2) The use of politeness strategies in the interaction of buyers and sellers in Namlea market is influenced by four contextual factors, namely culture and social norms, social relations, emotional situations, and religious values. In conclusion, politeness strategies in buying and selling are influenced not only by the interests of the transaction, but also by the socio-cultural context of the local community.

Keywords: *politeness strategy, speech act, traditional market, buyer-seller, pragmatic*

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1. Introduction

Language is an essential means of communication that functions not only to convey information but also to maintain social relationships and reflect cultural values. In social interaction, particularly in face-to-face communication, the use of politeness strategies plays a significant role in creating harmonious and effective communication. Politeness is closely related to how speakers respect the feelings, rights, and social status of others, making it an important aspect of pragmatic studies (Prihandoko et al., 2019; Suheri et al., 2025; Faisal et al., 2025). Moreover, the appropriate use of politeness strategies helps prevent misunderstandings and potential conflicts in everyday interactions. Therefore, the study of politeness contributes to a deeper understanding of how language is used to negotiate meaning and social relationships in various contexts.

One social setting where politeness strategies are frequently employed is the traditional market. Traditional markets are public spaces where buyers and sellers interact directly through bargaining, information exchange, and casual conversation (Faisal et al., 2025; Andini et al., 2021; Dalyan et al., 2024). These interactions involve various speech acts that require careful linguistic choices to maintain mutual respect and avoid potential conflict. As a result, traditional markets offer a rich context for examining language use in natural social interactions.

Namlea Market in Buru Regency represents a traditional market environment with distinctive communication dynamics. The diversity of local products and the involvement of individuals from different social and cultural backgrounds create varied patterns of interaction between buyers and sellers. In the bargaining process, sellers tend to use polite and persuasive expressions to attract buyers, while buyers employ specific strategies to negotiate prices without threatening the seller's dignity. Such interactional practices highlight the importance of politeness strategies in maintaining good social relations and ensuring successful transactions.

Politeness theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) explains that speakers use politeness strategies to protect face, which consists of positive face and negative face. In buyer-seller interactions, these strategies are evident when participants attempt to minimize face-threatening acts and maintain interpersonal harmony. Furthermore, speech act theories introduced by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) provide a framework for understanding the types of utterances commonly used in market interactions, such as requests, offers, refusals, and compliments.

In the context of Indonesian society, politeness is a highly valued cultural norm that influences daily communication practices. Politeness in traditional market interactions is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but is also shaped by social and cultural factors, including local values, familiarity between interlocutors, and situational context. In Namlea Market, politeness strategies reflect the cultural identity and social

values of the Buru community, particularly in the use of respectful expressions and attitudes during transactions.

Despite the importance of politeness in traditional market communication, studies focusing on politeness strategies in local market interactions in eastern Indonesian contexts remain limited. Therefore, this study aims to identify politeness speech act patterns in buyer–seller interactions in Namlea Market and to analyze the factors influencing the use of politeness strategies in such interactions. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to pragmatic studies, particularly in understanding language politeness within local cultural contexts in Indonesia.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Previous Studies

Studies on politeness strategies in buyer–seller interactions have been widely conducted in both traditional and modern market contexts. Wahyuni and Setiawan (2020) investigated politeness strategies in traditional markets using qualitative methods and found that polite expressions, friendly greetings, and respectful attitudes contributed significantly to buyer satisfaction. Their study emphasized the functional role of politeness in maintaining harmonious commercial relationships.

I.K. and Setyadi (2023) examined speech acts and politeness in modern market interactions to understand how language functions in transactional settings. Using observation and in-depth interviews, the study revealed that strategic speech acts such as greetings, requests, and expressions of gratitude were essential in creating positive interactional environments. These speech acts helped maintain mutual respect and smooth communication between sellers and buyers. The findings highlighted the pragmatic functions of speech acts in shaping interpersonal relationships within market discourse.

Wijayanti and Susanto (2018) focused on politeness strategies in traditional markets and found that sellers predominantly employed positive politeness strategies to establish familiarity, while buyers tended to use negative politeness strategies to maintain respect and social distance. Their findings demonstrated the balance between solidarity and politeness in buyer–seller interactions.

Although these studies share similarities in terms of qualitative approach and research focus, they differ in research context and analytical emphasis. Previous research mainly examined politeness strategies in general or their effects on buyer satisfaction. In contrast, the present study focuses on politeness strategies as realized through speech acts in buyer–seller interactions in Namlea Market, providing insights into a local cultural context that has received limited scholarly attention.

2.2 Pragmatics and Speech Act Theory

Pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning in context and how language is used in social interaction (Levinson, 1983). One of the core theories in pragmatics is speech act theory, introduced by Austin (1962) and further developed by Searle (1969). Austin classified speech acts into locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, while Searle categorized illocutionary acts into assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations. In buyer–seller interactions, speech acts such as requesting, offering, refusing, and negotiating are central to communication. These acts are often accompanied by politeness strategies to maintain interpersonal harmony and achieve transactional goals.

2.3 Politeness Theory and Strategies

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory explains how speakers manage face in social interaction. Positive face refers to the desire to be appreciated, while negative face relates to the desire for autonomy. Politeness strategies are used to reduce face-threatening acts, with positive politeness emphasizing solidarity and negative politeness emphasizing respect and distance (Sukmawaty et al., 2022; Hidayat et al., 2023).

Contemporary views on politeness, as proposed by Culpeper (2017) and Watts (2019), argue that politeness is dynamic and highly context-dependent. Politeness is not merely a set of fixed linguistic forms but is negotiated through interaction between speakers. In traditional market settings, politeness strategies are influenced by social relationships, cultural values, and situational factors. These strategies play an essential role in maintaining effective and harmonious communication between participants. Therefore, understanding politeness requires careful attention to the social and cultural context in which interactions occur.

2.4 Conversational Principles and Cultural Context

Grice's (1975) cooperative principle and conversational maxims explain how implied meanings are constructed in interaction. In market discourse, buyers and sellers frequently rely on implicature and indirect expressions to negotiate and convey intentions politely. Leech's (1983) politeness principle and Sperber and Wilson's (1986) relevance theory further emphasize the role of social harmony and contextual relevance in communication.

Buyer–seller interaction is also influenced by cultural context. Goffman (1959) viewed social interaction as a form of performance in which individuals manage impressions. Traditional markets, as noted by Geertz (1973), function as symbolic spaces that reflect local values and social norms. In Namlea Market, politeness strategies are closely related to the cultural identity and social values of the Buru community.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) and politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 1983) to analyze buyer–seller interactions in Namlea Market. The framework integrates pragmatic analysis with social and cultural factors such as age, social status, familiarity, and situational context. Through this framework, the study aims to reveal how politeness strategies are realized in speech acts to maintain harmonious interaction in a traditional market setting.

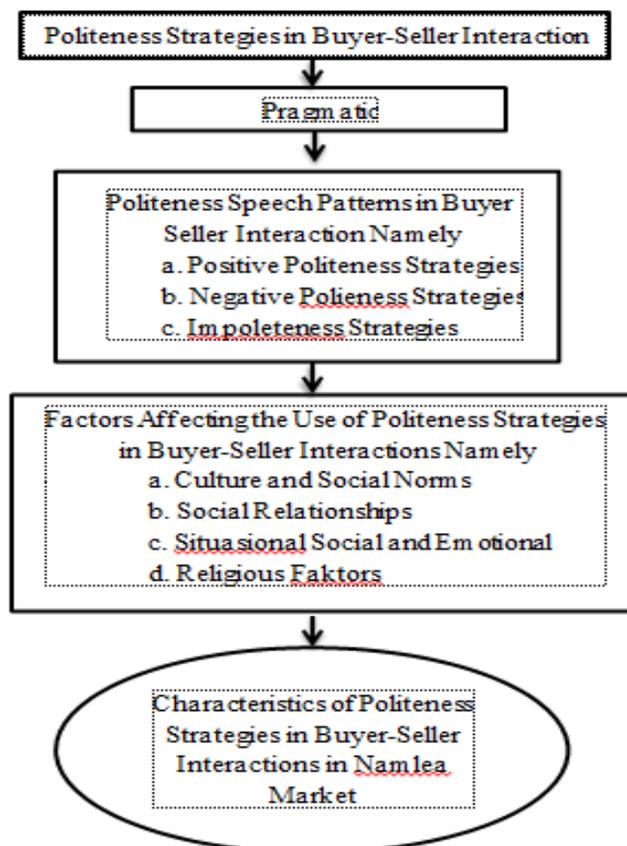


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Politeness strategies in buyer–seller interactions are studied within pragmatics and include positive politeness, negative politeness, and impoliteness. It also explains that these strategies are influenced by cultural norms, social relationships, situational emotions, and religious factors, which shape how politeness appears in the Namlea market.

3. Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design aimed at describing and interpreting politeness strategies in buyer–seller interactions. A qualitative approach

is chosen because it allows the researcher to examine speech acts and politeness strategies that naturally emerge in everyday social interactions.

The research was conducted at Namlea Market, Buru Regency, Maluku. This location was selected because it serves as a center of economic activity and intensive social interaction between sellers and buyers. The research subjects were sellers and buyers directly involved in buying and selling activities, with a focus on verbal utterances that reflect politeness strategies in offering, requesting, bargaining, and negotiating.

The primary research instrument was the researcher, supported by audio recording devices and field notes. The data consisted of oral utterances produced by sellers and buyers, collected through direct observation and conversation recordings, as well as interviews conducted to strengthen the understanding of the social context and interactional norms.

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis employed thematic analysis, which included data transcription, data reduction, categorization based on types of politeness strategies, analysis using Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, and interpretation to reveal the social and cultural meanings of politeness strategies in the context of Namlea Market.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Result

4.1.1 Positive Politeness Strategy

Positive politeness strategy refers to a communication strategy used by speakers to express closeness, familiarity, and solidarity with the interlocutor. This strategy is oriented toward fulfilling the interlocutor's positive face, namely the desire to be appreciated, accepted, and valued in social interaction (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In buyer-seller interactions at Namlea Market, positive politeness strategies frequently appear in greetings, compliments, friendly address terms, and offers of price reduction.

Buyer : *Ibu, cili segar-segar e... bisa kasi kurang harga sadiki ka seng?*

(Mom, the chili is very fresh... can you reduce the price a little?)

Seller : *Iyo, ambel yang bagus e, beta kasi kurang saribu.*

(Yes, take the good ones, I'll give you a thousand less.)

In Data, the buyer employs positive politeness by addressing the seller as *Ibu* and complimenting the freshness of the chilies. This strategy functions to create familiarity and reduce social distance before making a request. The utterance *bisa kasi kurang harga sadiki* represents a directive speech act delivered politely. The seller

responds using friendly language (*iyu, ambel yang bagus e*) and agrees to reduce the price, indicating a commissive act that reinforces solidarity and mutual goodwill.

4.1.2 Negative Politeness Strategy

This strategy reflects an effort to maintain social distance and to respect the rights of speech partners. It is usually used with a more cautious style of language so as not to cause insecurity or annoyance.

Buyer : *Sebelumnya beta minta maaf ,mama. Bisa ka seng kasih kurang harga soalnya beta bali banya?*

(I apologize in advance, Ma'am. Would it be possible to get a discount since I'm buying in bulk?)

Seller : *Eh, tergantung berapa banyak. Tapi nanti beta coba lihat bisa kurang brapa.*

(Well, it depends on how much you're buying. But I'll try to see how much I can reduce the price.

In the conversation, the buyer employs a negative politeness strategy by beginning the request for a discount with an apology "Sebelumnya beta minta maaf, Mama" and expressing the request indirectly "bisa ka seng kasih kurang harga...". This reflects politeness and respect for the seller's autonomy. The seller responds cautiously with phrases like "tergantung berapa banyak" and "nanti beta coba lihat" which also indicate a negative politeness strategy considering the request without making a direct commitment. Both parties maintain social harmony through polite and non-threatening communication.

4.1.3 Situational Social and Emotional

Social and emotional conditions also influence the form of politeness used to background an interaction, greatly influencing the choice of politeness strategies used by buyers and sellers. These factors include mood, time pressure, market density, the number of buyers, and the interpersonal relationship between buyers and sellers during the conversation.

"Kadang kalo pembeli datang marah-marrah, beta cuma senyum saja. Nanti dia tenang, baru katong bicara bae-bae."

("Sometimes if a customer comes in angry, I just smile. After he calms down, then we talk nicely").

Choosing not to respond directly when the buyer is angry, but instead just smiling, is a form of negative politeness strategy that avoids confrontation and gives the

buyer emotional space. This shows self-control and respect for the buyer's feelings to avoid escalating the situation.

4.1.4 Religious Factors

Religious factors influence the use of politeness strategies, especially in the form of positive politeness strategies, where speakers show a sense of solidarity, empathy, and respect for the religious beliefs and practices of speech partners. In addition, religion also encourages the formation of closer relationships between buyers and sellers through the value of mutual respect and upholding ethics in interaction.

“Biasanya kalo mau tutup jual, beta bilang ‘Alhamdulillah hari ini rezeki lancar’. Kadang pembeli juga jawab, ‘Amin, semoga berkah’. Jadi bukan cuma jual-beli, tapi saling doakan.”

("Usually, when I close my shop, I say, 'Alhamdulillah, today's sustenance went well'. Sometimes the buyer also replies, 'Amen, hopefully a blessing'. So it's not just a transaction, but also praying for each other.")

Mutual gratitude and prayers reflect an intimate and spiritually supportive relationship. It contains praise and solidarity that strengthen harmony in social-transactional interactions.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Politeness Speech Act Patterns in the Interaction between Buyers and Sellers in Namlea Market

Politeness speech act patterns in the interaction between buyers and sellers in Namlea market reflect social dynamics that are closely related to cultural context, personal relations, and transactional goals. Based on the research results, three main forms of strategies used in their communication were found, namely positive politeness strategies, negative politeness strategies, and impoliteness strategies. Positive politeness strategy is a form

of speaker's effort to show familiarity, closeness, and mutual respect to speech partners. In the context of traditional markets, this strategy is often used by sellers and buyers to create a comfortable atmosphere and strengthen social relations. This is in accordance with the concept of positive face explained by Brown and Levinson (1987), namely a person's need to be appreciated and accepted in a social group. For example, in data 1, the buyer starts the conversation with the compliment "Ibu cili segar-segar e" which is an expressive speech act as well as a positive politeness strategy to build a familiar atmosphere. The request "bisa kasih kurang harga sadiki ka seng" is delivered politely as a directive speech act, and the seller responds with the commissive speech act "beta kasi kuramg saribu", which shows the willingness to maintain good relations. A similar phenomenon is seen in data 2 and 3, where familiar greetings such as "kak", "nak", and offers of discounts and bonuses are used as a form of solidarity and

persuasive approach. This strategy also reflects the principles of generosity and tact in Leech's (1983) politeness theory, and fulfills the principles of relevance and clarity in Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature.

Meanwhile, the negative politeness strategy aims to maintain autonomy and respect the freedom of speech partners. This strategy is usually used with indirect speech styles, the use of pleading words, formal greetings, and the avoidance of coercion. In the market context, buyers and

sellers both use this strategy to keep a polite distance and show respect. In data 1 and 2 in this category, buyers use phrases such as "Maaf", "kalu bisa", and "kalua bole tau" as a form of non-threatening directive speech acts, to convey requests subtly. The seller responds with logical reasons and still maintains a polite tone, such as by saying "maaf, harga segitu sudah paleng murah". This pattern shows an effort to mitigate potential threats to negative face, and this is in line with Searle's (1969) speech act theory which places requests as a type of illocution that functions socially.

The incivility strategy appears in tense or emotionally charged interaction situations, especially when the buyer feels the price is not fair or when the seller feels offended. This strategy aims to attack or demean the face of the interlocutor directly or implicitly, and is contrary to the principles of politeness in communication. In data 1 and 2 In this category, buyers deliver sharp criticism in a high tone, such as saying "ini pasar bukan toko mewah", which is a negative expressive form that directly attacks the seller's prices and policies. The seller responds with defensive speech and tends to attack back, for example "kalo seng mau bali pigil!" which is a form of rejection without mitigation. This speech violates the principles of cooperation and politeness according to Grice (1975), and falls into the category of face-threatening acts that are not mitigated, as categorized by Culpeper (2017) in the theory of impoliteness strategies. This phenomenon shows that politeness in market interactions is not always constant; in

certain situations, speech can turn into a form of emotional expression or self-esteem defense, depending on situational dynamics. This confirms Watts' (2019) view that politeness is contextual and socially negotiated in everyday practice.

4.2.2 Contextual Factors That Influence the Use of Politeness Strategies in Buyer and Seller Interactions in Namlea Market

This study has a number of similarities and differences with previous studies that discuss politeness strategies in buyer and seller interactions. Research by Wahyuni and Setiawan (2020), I.K. and Setyadi (2023), and Wijayanti and Susanto (2018), all three used a qualitative approach and data collection methods through observation and interviews, just like the approach used in this study. The focus of all these studies is to analyze how politeness strategies are used in buying and selling interactions. This strengthens the validity of the approach used in the research at Namlea market.

Theoretically, all of these previous studies and this study are based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategy theory which emphasizes the importance of maintaining face through positive and negative politeness strategies. Positive politeness strategies, such as friendly greetings, compliments, and the creation of intimacy, were found in seller interactions in Namlea market, in line with Wijayanti and Susanto's (2018) findings that sellers tend to use positive politeness to build relationships. Negative politeness strategies, such as indirect requests, the use of pleading expressions, as well as subtle refusals also emerged, especially on the part of buyers who wanted to keep their distance or be polite when bargaining, as also noted by Wijayanti & Susanto's research.

In terms of speech acts, this study is also in line with Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1969) theories regarding illocutionary speech acts, where sellers and buyers not only say something, but also perform actions such as requesting, offering, or refusing. The findings of this study also corroborate

I.K. and Setyadi's (2023) research which shows that the use of polite speech acts plays an important role in creating a positive atmosphere of interaction. Sellers in Namlea market, for example, use subtle requests or open offers as a form of speech acts that contain politeness and persuasive strategies.

The main difference between this research and previous research lies in the local context and focus of analysis. This research was conducted in Namlea market, a traditional market in the Maluku region, which has its own cultural characteristics. The culture of the Buru people, which upholds family values, mutual respect, and religiosity, provides a different color in the practice of politeness. This is not found in depth in the research of Wahyuni & Setiawan (2020) or Wijayanti & Susanto (2018) which discuss traditional markets in general. In addition, this study adds one contextual factor that is not explicitly discussed in previous studies, namely the influence of religion. In interactions in Namlea market, it was found that politeness strategies were also influenced by religious teachings, such as the use of expressions "Puji Tuhan", "InsyaAllah", or patient and honest behavior for religious reasons. This has not been the main concern in previous studies, so it is the uniqueness and new contribution of this study.

In addition, this study emphasizes more on contextual factors that influence the selection of politeness strategies, namely: social relations (Brown & Levinson, 1987), social and emotional situations (Leech, 1983), and religion (based on local religious values). This broadens the perspective of politeness theory and confirms that politeness strategies are not universal, but are highly dependent on the social, cultural, and spiritual context in which the speech takes place.

5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of conversational data between buyers and sellers at Namlea market using the politeness strategy theory of Brown and Levinson (1987),

several conclusions can be drawn: The interaction between buyers and sellers at Namlea market reflects the use of three types of politeness strategies: positive politeness, negative politeness, and impoliteness strategies.

Positive politeness strategies are predominantly used to build social relationships and create a friendly atmosphere, for example through warm greetings, compliments, and offers. Negative politeness strategies are mainly employed in situations involving price requests or more formal negotiations, often marked by the use of apologies and more cautious tones to show respect. Meanwhile, impoliteness strategies tend to appear in situations of conflict, such as price disagreements or when one party feels disturbed or dissatisfied during the interaction.

Contextual Factors Influencing the Use of Politeness Strategies in These Interactions: 1) Local Culture and Norms, which demand politeness in language use, including the use of respectful terms such as “Nak” (child), “Ibu” (mother), and “Pak” (sir), reflecting respect and closeness. 2) Social Relations between sellers and buyers play an important role in determining the politeness strategies used in interactions at Namlea market. The closer the social relationship between the two parties, the more likely they are to use positive politeness strategies, such as familiar greetings (“kaka,” “adik”), casual speech styles, and flexibility in choosing items. This closeness fosters a friendly and open communication atmosphere, strengthens solidarity, and facilitates the bargaining process. 3) Social and Emotional Situations also influence communication styles, such as tension during price negotiations or the busy atmosphere of the market. 4) Religious Factors, which influence values such as patience, honesty, and courtesy in interactions.

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