



## GENDER AND COMMUNICATION: SOME FEATURES OF WOMEN'S SPEECH

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### ABSTRACT

This paper deals with gender and communication in terms of different features of women's speech based on the previous studies done by many sociolinguists. Gender refers to categories that distinguish people based on their socio-cultural behavior, including speech. In their speech, gender-men and women- use different ways to say a similar thing in communication. This paper described women's and men's speeches from several studies in a frame of linguistics perspectives. Some different features were compared with the women's speeches in Minangkabau community that indicates Minangkabau politeness maxims. This paper also describes how Minangkabau culture is different from other cultures in criticizing among native speakers of Minangkabau both direct and indirect. Then, some hedges are used by women as politeness markers to minimize face-threatening acts (FTA), a concept proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987).

**Keywords:** gender, communication, varieties, language and culture

### INTRODUCTION

In any community, women and men talk in different ways. For example, women tend to speak by using high intonation and tag questions. And, they also tend to be more emotional than men in expressing their feeling, sometimes they use various superlatives, metaphors, and generalizations to express their feeling (Holmes, 2013; Romaine, 1994). Several studies described the differences of gender in communication; each culture describes the various forms of linguistic varieties that reflect speech function and social values. The relationships between language and culture can be seen from two views, i.e. universal and Whorf. From the cultural universal view, it is postulated that there are universal elements in a culture. One of them is language, (Gunarwan, 2005). He says that culture influences language. It means that culture consists of values that determine the way of thinking of the members of the society of that culture. The way of thinking influences both of world view and folkways of the society that shape mores of the culture's society and these will shape their behavior. Meanwhile, Whorf postulates that the structure of a language determines the way of thinking of the users,-this refers to the strong version-; it refers to language that influences the way of their thinking. (Kramsch, 1998 in Gunarwan, 2005). Due to the way of thinking can form the world view so that it can shape or color their culture. This concept refers to language that determines culture or the language colors culture. Since culture consists of values that need to be obeyed by the members of its society, it can be inferred that their behavior is determined by their culture.

From the two concepts, we can see the culture both of whether from universal view or Whorfism view. The relationship between culture and language are very close and bound. Culture influences behavior including the behavior of speaking and using language. It is not easy to reject the two views, sometimes they are true and can be accepted in a certain context. This can be seen in the context of the Minangkabau community where the tendency of Minangkabau people to speak

was influenced by culture. For example, in Minangkabau community, people tend to use the address form or given name (GN) of themselves to be more polite while talking to people. They prefer to use *uni*, *uda*, *apak*, *one*, or given name as a reference to themselves instead of Personal Pronouns, i.e. *ambo*, *awak*, *aden* 'I'. (Yanti, 2006). Look at the following example:

(1) a. *Buliah ambo pinjam buku itu, pak?*

'May I borrow the book, sir?'

b. *Buliah Karen pinjam buku itu, pak?* (more polite)

'May Karen borrow the book, sir?'

Example (1b) shows the use of a given name like Karen, as a reference while talking to people or lecturer is more polite than using *ambo*, *awak* 'I' because in this community they are not commonly used. This indicates the relationship between language and culture is close and bound. Other examples can be seen in the way of speaking of Javanese, Sundanese, *Batak*, and *Minangkabau* people is different. To support this opinion, Gunarwan (2006) has researched the way asking not to smoke, he found that Batak and Javanese have different ways, namely Batak ask people not to smoke directly and Javanese ask indirectly.

## INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

The term intercultural communication refers to communication between people from different ethnic, gendered, and social cultures within the boundaries of the same national language. Both terms are used to characterize communication, such as between Chinese-Americans and African-Americans, between upper-class people, working-class, and between gays and heterosexuals, between men and women.

Furthermore, intercultural communication can create a 'culture shock', and it may take place in communication between Minangkabau, Javanese, and foreigners such as American, English, Australian, and Japanese. In Minangkabau community, asking people with private questions like "*Alah bara urang anak?*" (How many children do you have?), *Alah mandi?* (Have you taken bath?), etc. In Minangkabau community, such questions are considered as warm greetings to make a good relationship. But, if those are delivered to foreigners, What will happen? Of course, they are annoyed because of the questions. They may be angry, feel shy/ashamed, or angry. This intercultural communication can make people shock. In studying intercultural communication, we see how people from different cultural backgrounds endeavor to communicate. While communicating with each other, there are several elements involved in the process of communication. This will be described as follow.

## THE PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION

While encoding the idea we have to consider some aspects of sociolinguistic factors or Sociolinguistic consideration. The encoding involves what language/code to be used. The consideration also involves the sociolinguistic consideration that consists of who speaks to whom, where, when, and what topic discussed. We have to consider whether to senior (have power, high status, etc.) or junior, and/or the intimacy. And, we also have to consider whether we will say directly (explicate) or indirectly (implicature).

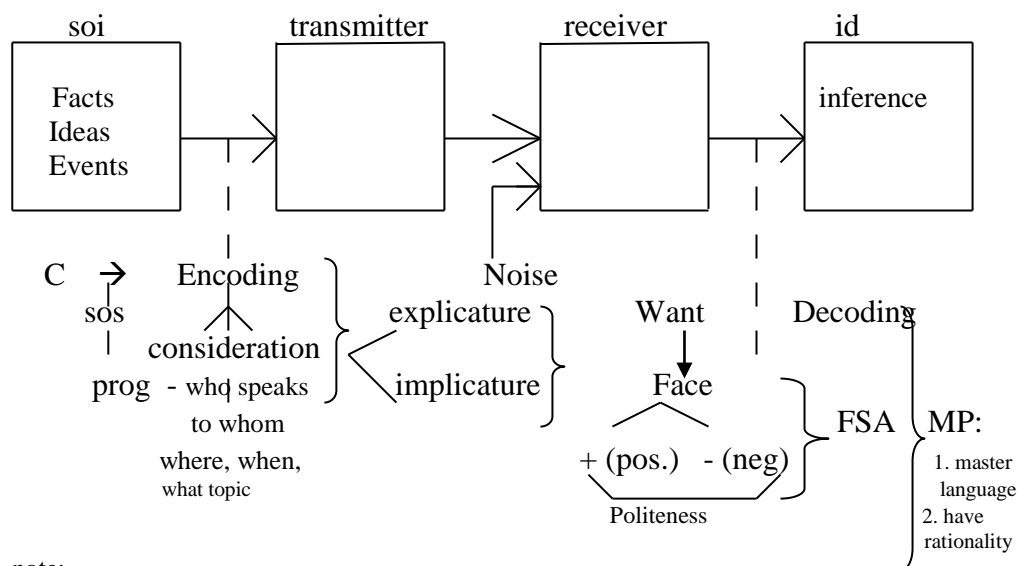
Then, Gunarwan (2006) says that sociolinguistic consideration needs to be extended if it is seen from a pragmatic perspective. From the diagram, we can see that whether the utterances delivered by the speaker will threaten the face, Face threatening Acts (FTA), or the utterances can save the Face (FSA). To make it clear, look at the examples (2-3), in (2) this sentence will be considered as a rude form if it is delivered to our boss, the use of the word *saudara* and criticize him in front of people will make him ashamed, angry and this threat his face. But, in (3) this is a polite form because there is appreciation and seek agreement, the sub-strategies proposed by Brown

and Levinson (1987) to save the face (FSA), then also the use of address form *bapak* instead of *saudara*.

- (2) *Yang saudara katakan itu tidak benar.*  
'What have you said is not true.'
- (3) *Pendapat bapak bagus sekali, kalau boleh saya melengkapinya...*  
'Your opinion (Bapak's opinion) is great, may I complete....'

People use different words and strategies to say the same thing by considering the social factors, to whom they speak, where, what topic being talked, and the function whether as the referential or affective function (Holmes, 2013). There are some elements involved in the process of communication that make people differ in communication. The different choice of words and strategies used to save the face (FSA) or to minimize face-threatening acts (FTA). (see diagram 1).

**Diagram 1. The Process of Communication**



note:  
 C = communication  
 soi=source of information  
 sos =sociolinguistic  
 prog = program  
 id = information destination  
 FSA = Face Saving Act  
 pos. = positive  
 neg. = negative  
 MP = Model Person

If we study the language used by women and men, we can see the differences in how they choose the words or strategies used in speaking. The linguistic's features of them are different because of the cultural and social factors that influence them in speaking. In the following, it will be described in brief the language features of women found by some linguists or sociolinguists.

**FEATURES OF WOMEN'S LANGUAGE**

Several studies show the features of women's language. Lakoff (1975) in Holmes (2001) women's speech is characterized by linguistic features like (a) lexical hedges or fillers, e.g. you know, well, and you see, (b) tag questions, e.g. she's very nice, isn't she?, (c) rising intonation on declarative, e.g. it's really good?, (d) 'empty' adjectives, e.g. charming, cute., (e) precise color terms, e.g. magenta, aquamarine., (f) intensifiers such as just, and so, e.g. I like him so much., (g)

'hypercorrect' grammar, e.g. consistent use of standard verb forms., (h) 'superpolite' forms, e.g. indirect requests, euphemism., (i) avoidance of strong swear words, e.g. fudge, my goodness., (j) emphatic stress, e.g. it was a BRILLIANT performance.

Meanwhile, if we see gender from social class, the linguistic features of them are also different. Some general patterns can be identified. Across all social groups women generally use more standards forms than men and so, correspondingly, men use more vernacular forms than women. In Detroit, Holmes says, multiple negations (e.g. *I don't know anything about it*), a vernacular feature of speech, are more frequent in men's speech than in women's.

Next, Southerland in O'Grady (1997), says other differences between men's and women's language in North American society are seen in women's more frequent use of politeness formulas. There are many ways in which requests (or commands) can be mitigated in English. Instead of simply saying to someone '*Open the window!*' we might say '*Please open the window!*' '*Would you please open the window?*', '*Do you find it stuffy in here?*' and so on. Those are all less direct ways of requesting than is the straightforward imperative and, it is claimed, would more likely be employed by women. Similarly, some studies suggest that women use more *verbal hedges* than men do. The words *perhaps* or *maybe* which are less assertive in conversations than utterances without hedges.

The difference can be seen also in Minangkabau community in which the features of women's language are different. Yanti (2006) found that women also tend to use hedges to start criticizing, such as *maaf* 'sorry', *mohon maaf* 'please apologize', *mungkin salah jika...* 'It may be wrong if...'. In the following, it will be discussed briefly how women and men are different in choosing words and using strategy in the speech act of criticizing in the Indonesian language in the context of Minangkabau community.

In running daily life, some regulations should be obeyed by Minangkabau people. For example in speaking they should consider maxims of *kato nan ampek* "talk/word which four" namely (1) *kato mandata* "leveling talk", (2) *kato mandaki* "honoring talk", (3) *kato manurun* "advising talk", and (4) *kato malereng* "lateral talk" if they want to be said that have good manner.

Besides, there are also four maxims of character/moral to be considered in speaking or acting-*raso*, *pareso*, *malu*, and *sopan*-. It means that Minangkabau people can feel in their hearts what people feel. This is known as Minangkabau philosophy, *sakik dek awak sakik dek urang*, *sanang dek awak sanang dek urang*, *elok dek awak katuju dek urang*.

Talking about speech acts, Brown and Levinson (1987) propose the concept of politeness strategies and four communication strategies as the realization of speech acts. Their hypothesis tells that the social distance of the speaker and the addressee, the relative power of speaker and addressee, and the absolute ranking of imposition in the particular culture indicate the choice of politeness strategies used by the speakers in criticizing things. The speech act of criticizing refers to the utterances or words that consist of negative judgment towards the thing that has been done by someone. The assumption appeared that the utterances delivered to criticize will be different based on some social factors influenced, (1) who is being criticized, (2) where the criticism delivered, (3) How the situation is formal or informal-. By considering these, there will be some strategies used by a speaker in criticizing.

Brown and Levinson (1987) say that there are four communication strategies (CS), (1) bald on record without redressive action (baldly), (2) bald on record with redressive action using positive politeness, (3) bald on record with redressive action using negative politeness, (4) off record; in addition to those, another strategy is (5) silent/not say anything or just criticize in the heart. (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Gunarwan, 1997).

According to Yanti (2003), in Minangkabau community women speak differently from men. The differences can be seen in terms of words or vocabulary, and grammar. Several sub-strategies used by women and men in four communication strategies such as notice, use in-group identity markers, seek agreement, give reasons, be conventionally indirect, question, hedge, be ironic, and rhetorical questions. (Yanti, 2003; 2001) Then, Minangkabau people-women and men- use various

sentences, words, questions, and address forms depend on different situations designed differently, such as formal, informal situations. And, both women and men are still considered to obey the maxims of Minangkabau. It is seen from the sentences they still use more polite forms than impolite ones. Look at the following examples.

#### Women

- (4) *Maaf Pak/ibu, saya tidak setuju dengan uraian yang telah bapak lontarkan karena ....*  
'Sorry Sir/Madam, I disagree with your explanation that you have said because...'
- (5) *Sebelumnya saya minta maaf karena saya turut campur tangan dalam masalah ini, saya pikir pendapat saudara ada benarnya tetapi.....*  
'I apologize in advance that I interfere this problem, I think your opinion could be right, but.....'
- (6) *Mohon maaf, kalau boleh saya membetulkan apa yang baru saudara katakan tadi..*  
'Please apologize, if I may correct what you have said just now...'

#### Men

- (7) *Maaf mungkin anda kurang tepat.....*  
'Sorry, maybe you are not appropriate.....'
- (8) *Saya tidak mengerti maksud dan tujuan pendapat saudara?*  
'I don't understand what you mean and the goal of your opinion?'

From the examples (4-8), there are various sentences and address forms used by them. The variation of address forms used is *pak/bapak, ibu, saudara, anda*. From the data collected many of them use the word *maaf, mohon maaf* to start the criticism. The hedges used implies to minimize the face of threatening acts (FTA).

As the result of the analysis, both women and men use hedges like *maaf, mohon maaf, sebelumnya saya minta maaf*, to start their criticism. But women tend to use hedges more than men and women's sentences are longer than men's. Men tend to criticize bald on record and women tend to criticize bald on record with redressive action with negative politeness. The difference also can be seen from the choice of address forms, men tend to use *saudara* and *anda*, but women tend to use address forms *bapak/pak* or *ibu/bu*.

The various communication strategies used by women and men in *Minangkabau* community were related to the social factors and several maxims of *Minangkabau* principles. Many sub-strategies are used both by women and men in four communication strategies such as notice, use in-group identity markers, seek agreement, give reasons, be conventionally indirect, question, hedges, be ironic, and rhetorical questions (Yanti, 2003).

All of the strategies used depend on the speakers involved, to whom they speak, where, and why they speak. From the data analysis, women tend to use the sub-strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), some of them as mentioned previously they are appreciation, notice/attention, seek agreement as seen in (9-10), and bald on record (11).

- (9) *Pendapat bapak menarik, kalau boleh saya melengkapinya...*  
'Your opinion is great, if I may complete...  
(appreciation/ seek agreement)
- (10) *Maaf kalau boleh saya kritik pendapat bapak/saudara salah, menurut saya....*  
(seek agreement)  
'Sorry, if I may criticize that your opinion is not true, according to me...'



- (11) Yang anda katakan itu tidak benar. (bald on record)  
'What you have said is not right.'

## CONCLUSION

From the brief description, I just talk that the features of women's speech are different from men's speech. The differences can be explained by cultural and social influences while they have communication. Several studies have shown that the differences between women's and men's speech can be seen from the pronunciation, intonation, form of the words, the structure of words and sentences, and the strategies used in speaking or communication.

In the context of *Minangkabau* community, it is seen that women tend to use hedges, polite forms by using sub-strategies, use in group identity markers like address forms (*Bapak/Ibu*), seek agreement, sympathy with the hearer, and give attention or appreciation before they criticize people, although the forms seem to be funny if they are delivered to foreigners or other culture. From the study, those are a reflection of *Minangkabau* philosophy that says "*Minangkabau* people can feel in their hearts what people feel. This is a temporary conclusion because we need more data to do further research to prove it.

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