

Politeness in Addressing and Requesting Used by the Salespersons to the Customers at *UMC E-commerce*

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ABSTRACT

This study examines politeness in addressing and requesting used by salespersons to customers at *UMC E-commerce*. This study used the first-order politeness theory by Watts (2003), supported by Indonesian (Javanese) politeness theories by Suseno (2003) and Kuntjara (2012). This qualitative study analyzed salespersons' utterances in the conversations with their customers when delivering promotions. The findings showed that salespersons adhere to Indonesian (Javanese) politeness principles, namely respect and harmony. They employed various address terms, whether to address or as second-person pronouns, which showed politeness. In request, they showed politeness by using words or adverbs of possibility, apologies, asking for permission, and asking for help. Two possible reasons behind the use of politeness were the salespersons as the company representatives and the need to fulfill sales targets. However, for several reasons, some findings were not in accordance with Indonesian (Javanese) politeness principles. Overall, the findings indicated that politeness depends on cultural contexts.

Keywords: address terms, customers, politeness, requests, salespersons

INTRODUCTION

Communication plays an important role in daily life as it can transmit information and messages between individuals. Nowadays, due to technological development, it is easier for people to communicate through smartphones and social media. However, people should carefully consider their words before delivering messages to others to avoid misunderstanding. Therefore, appropriateness in delivering the messages is needed. One manner that can be used to deliver an appropriate message is by employing politeness. Politeness fosters harmonious communication by creating and maintaining good relationships, especially in the workplace. By employing politeness, people can prevent miscommunications and conflicts internally and externally in the business context, thereby promoting productivity and expanding professional networks.

In this study, the writers aim to analyze the politeness used by the salespersons to the customers at *UMC E-commerce*. This study examines how the salespersons of *UMC E-commerce* address and request their customers, which shows the concept of politeness.

The writers chose *UMC E-commerce* because it is the newest branch of *PT. United Motors Centre* (or *UMC*). *UMC* is known as a car dealer that always maintains good relationships and communication with its customers (Y. Angelia, personal communication, February 14, 2022). *UMC* itself has been around for decades as the main dealer for *Suzuki*'s cars in East Java and has received various awards (United Motors Centre, n.d.).

In addition, *UMC E-commerce* adopts a unique approach to selling by primarily utilizing social media, specifically *WhatsApp*, to promote and sell their products online (Y. Angelia, personal communication, February 14, 2022). The salespersons should deliver a

message to inform their customers if there are any promos or events. Thus, they must carefully select utterances to avoid miscommunication with customers, especially when they address and request their customers. Besides, the salespersons also represent the company which means they should act politely with their customers.

The main theory of this study is the politeness theory from Watts (2003). Watts (2003) proposes two concepts of politeness: first-order politeness and second-order politeness. First-order politeness refers to ways in which polite behavior is evaluated and commented on by lay members of a language community (Watts, 2003). The writers focused on first-order politeness because this study analyzed politeness which needs more cultural explanations related to Indonesian (Javanese) culture.

Therefore, the writers also used supported theories from Suseno (2003) and Kuntjara (2012) about Indonesian (Javanese) politeness. According to Suseno (2003), there are two principles of politeness in Indonesia: *rukun* [harmonious] and *hormat* [respect]. The first principle, *rukun* [harmonious], aims to maintain harmonious social interactions or conversations by eliminating anything that could lead to arguments and anxiety, which will disrupt the harmonious relationship (Suseno, 2003). Second, *hormat* [respect] means people should show respect to others based on their level and societal position (Suseno, 2003). People can show respect through their language and behavior based on the hierarchical order in Indonesian (Javanese) culture to make the society organized by making people know their status, role, and position in society (Suseno, 2003).

METHODS

In this study, the writers used a qualitative method. The source of data was the conversation from the four salespersons of *UMC E-commerce* via *WhatsApp* calls, as the most frequently used media for communication between the salespersons and customers. The writers took all the data from the four salespersons of *UMC E-commerce*: Mrs. S, Mr. A, Mr. T, and Mr. D. The data analyzed was the utterances in the conversation from the salespersons to the customers when delivering promotions. In addition, due to privacy, the names of salespersons and customers were only written with their initials. The writers recorded the conversation when the salespersons and their customers had a telephone conversation via *WhatsApp* calls. Then, the writers transcribed the conversations after she got the data. In the next step, the writers analyzed the utterances that contain address terms and requests by using the politeness theory from Watts (2003) and supported theories from Suseno (2003) and Kuntjara (2012).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section is divided into two sections. First, section 4.1 discusses how the salespersons of *UMC E-commerce* address their customers which shows the concept of politeness. Second, section 4.2 discusses how the salespersons of *UMC E-commerce* request their customers which shows the concept of politeness.

The Use of Address Terms by Salespersons to Their Customers

First, the writers discuss the use of *bapak; pak* [Mr. or Sir] and *ibu;bu* [Mrs.], as seen in the examples below:

1. *Halo pagi Bu Har.* (1.2)
[Hello, good morning, Mrs. Har.]

- [Hello, sir. Sorry for bothering you. I am S***ri** (*salesperson's name*) from Suzuki.]
2. *Halo selamat pagi, Pak Cat** (customer's name).* (3.1)
[Hello, good morning, Mr. Cat** (*customer's name*).]

The salespersons used kinship terms *bapak;pak* [Mr. or Sir] and *ibu; bu* [Mrs.] to address their customers because they have not known and met their customers in person. *Bapak;pak* [Mr. or Sir] and *ibu;bu* [Mrs.] are the safest and most polite terms for addressing adult people they have never known or met, especially in formal business situations (Kuntjara, 2009). In addition, *bapak;pak* [Mr. or Sir] and *ibu; bu* [Mrs.] as general kinship terms can be used to address anyone of any descent in Indonesia, such as either from Javanese or Chinese descent (Kuntjara, 2009).

In addition, before the salespersons and customers have a call, they usually have exchanged information via chat, such as name, age, and other personal data related to the need to purchase a product. Therefore, the salespersons usually use kinship address terms followed by the customers' names or personal names. Personal names can indicate a close relationship between the speaker and the hearer (Manns, 2015, as cited in Wahyudi, 2022).

Second, the writers discuss the use of address terms *koko* [older brother] and *cece* [older sister] by salespersons to address the young adult customers of Chinese descent, as seen in the examples below:

3. *Halo selamat siang Ko Sat*** (customer's name).* (1.43)
[Hello, good afternoon, Ko Sat*** (*customer's name*).]
4. *Halo selamat siang Ce Lin** (customer's name).* (4.3)
[Hello, good afternoon, Ce Lin** (*customer's name*).]

The salespersons used Chinese Indonesian kinship terms, such as *koko* [older brother] and *cece* [older sister], to address customers of Chinese descent. These terms have evolved and are influenced by the adaptation of Chinese Indonesians to the local culture and community (Putri, 2018). Furthermore, these kinship terms can be used to address non-family members, as it shows respect and politeness towards individuals who are not relatives, regardless of their age or gender (Zhang, 2011, as cited in Ngo, 2017). Although the salespersons may not be of Chinese descent, they can identify customers' ethnicity because salespersons and customers have exchanged personal data, or the salespersons may receive guidance from their boss. Then, the salespersons used address terms followed by customers' names, such as using personal names after kinship terms in *bapak;pak* [Mr. or Sir] and *ibu;bu* [Mrs.].

Moreover, the writers found another function of *bapak;pak* [Mr. or Sir], *ibu;bu* [Mrs.], *koko* [older brother], and *cece* [older sister], which are categorized as third-person pronouns, to substitute second-person pronouns. This can be seen in the examples below:

5. ... *Kalau bapak untuk anggurannya yang GX manual ya pak?* (1.81)
[... For the installments, you want the GX manual, right, sir?]
6. ... *ke lokasi njenengan begitu nggak papa kalau kalau ibu kalau ada waktu atau besok lusa atau kapan untuk menjelaskan promo tersebut. ...* (3.42)
[... if you have time, I can come to your place today, tomorrow, or whenever to explain the promo.]
7. ... *Bisa jadi koko dapet diatas 300.* (1.37)
[... It seems you can get over 300.]
8. ... *jadi cece mau itu ya untuk All New Ertiga nya yang tipe sport matic ya?* (4.3)
[... so, is it fixed that you want All New Ertiga in type sport matic?]

Calista; Kuntjara: Politeness in Addressing and Requesting Used by
the Salespersons to the Customers at *UMC E-commerce*

According to the examples, two persons were in the call conversation: the salesperson and the customer. The salespersons' position in the conversation was the speaker and the customers' position was the hearer. Based on the position, the customers' position is the second person, which means the salespersons can directly address their customers with you. However, the salespersons were likely to avoid using second-person pronouns because they might think those terms were not polite for addressing their customers. Thus, they chose to use *bapak;pak* [Mr. or Sir], *ibu;bu* [Mrs.], *koko* [older brother], and *cece* [older sister] as the appropriate second-person pronouns.

However, the writers found that some salespersons used second-person pronouns *njenengan* [you] and *awakmu* [you] to address their customers. This may contrast with the habits of Indonesian (Javanese) people, who usually tend to avoid using second-person pronouns. The examples can be seen below:

9. ... *awakmu misalkan ya toh dapat harga piro, itu awakmu kasih info ke aku ya.* (2.7)
[... for example, if you already have the exact price, you can inform me.]
10. ... *Untuk njenengan DP di angka berapa tadi? 10 nggih?* (3.9)
[... What number do you want for the DP earlier? Is it 10?]

The salesperson used *awakmu* [you] to address his customer, a second-person pronoun in Eastern Javanese. The address term *awakmu* [you] is usually used to address younger people or people of the same age (Sukesti, 2000). It can also be used to address people with the same social status or the hearer has lower social status and close relationships (Sukesti, 2000). In this context, the salesperson used *awakmu* [you] to address his customer because he and his customer are close friends and coincidentally, this salesperson's friend became his customer. Besides, the salesperson's age and status with his customer are equivalent. The use of *awakmu* [you] by the salesperson does seem impolite and disrespectful, especially when the conversation happens during working hours. However, *awakmu* [you] refers to a customer who has been friends for a long time with the salesperson so they can use informal address terms (Kuntjara, 2012).

Then, *njenengan* [you] is from the word *panjenengan* [you] from Javanese *krama*. This address term is usually used to address older people, who have higher social status, and/or are used in formal situations as a sign of politeness and respect. However, in Javanese, *njenengan* [you] can be used between the participants in the conversation who have a close relationship (Sukesti, 2000). In this context, the salesperson tries to build a close relationship with the customer yet still be respectful so that the customer could feel more comfortable in the call conversation. The use of *njenengan* [you] shows the impression of solidarity but still respects the customer. The writers also found that the salesperson is inconsistent with using *njenengan* [you] and *ibu;bu* [Mrs.] as second-person pronouns. He shifted without hesitation. However, *njenengan* [you] and *ibu;bu* [Mrs.] are both still in the category of polite address terms as second-person pronouns. The use of *njenengan* [you] and *ibu;bu* [Mrs.] alternately may be a variation for second-person pronouns.

Last, the writers discuss the use of *bro* [brother] as an address term, as seen in the example below:

11. *Halo bro, piye kabare?* (2.1)
[Hello, bro, how are you?]

The address term *bro* [brother] is usually used to address a male friend or acquaintance to show a friendly or solidarity relationship (Pradestania & Mintowati, 2021). In this context, the salesperson and his customer have a close relationship. They have been friends for a long

time so they usually call each other *bro* [brother]. Coincidentally, this salesperson's friend also became his customer so the language and address terms used were not formal during a call conversation. This is indeed the impression of being impolite and not respecting the customer. However, this is also in accordance with what is explained by Kuntjara (2012), that people can use informal address terms because they have known each other closely regardless of status and age.

In conclusion, the salespersons use several address terms that show politeness, whether to address their customers or as second-person pronouns. This is in accordance with the Indonesian (Javanese) principles, *rukun* [harmonious] and *hormat* [respect]. The use of various address terms shows that the salespersons are aware that the customers are older and/or have higher status. Besides, they respect their customers by adjusting the address terms used for customers from different backgrounds and ethnicities. They also want to make a comfortable conversation and maintain a good relationship with the customers.

The Use of Requests by Salespersons to Their Customers

First, the writers discuss the use of the adverb of possibility in performing requests to their customers, as can be seen below:

1. *Mungkin dipertimbangkan lagi Ko Jo** (customer's name), ini Ri** (salesperson's name) masih pegang Ertiga Sport yang 2022 diskon 42 juta nanti tak ajukan spesial ...* (1.41)
[Maybe you can reconsider it, Ko Jo** (customer's name), I still have Ertiga Sport 2022 products. The discount is 42 million and I will propose it, special for you ...]
2. *Hahaha be'e, ko be'e butuh Pick Up ya juga ya. Tak kasih diskon spesial soale kan enak PTS e kan—* (1.66)
[Hahaha, maybe ko, if you also need a Pick Up. I will give a special discount because the PTS —]

Before performing a request, the salesperson uses the adverb of possibility, which is *mungkin* [maybe] and *be'e* [maybe] to soften the request. Based on the previous study by Wahyudi (2022), it is explained that “the request given does not seem like a compulsion because there is an adverb of possibility: “mungkin” [maybe]” (p. 37). Thus, by using the adverb of possibility, the salesperson's request will not seem coercive. This can mean that the salesperson is unsure and worried that her requests to the customers might be a mistake. Since buying a car requires a lot of consideration and costs, the salesperson worried that her request to reconsider, as in example (1), can give the customers the impression of coercion. Therefore, when the salesperson requested her customer to reconsider, she also explained the discounts and special offers or prices.

Moreover, in example (2), although this utterance is in the form of an informative statement, this can be interpreted as an indirect request. An informative statement can be interpreted as an indirect request based on a particular situation (Kuntjara, 2009). In this situation, using an informative statement rather than a requestive statement may be more polite. Rather than directly stating the request, the salesperson used *be'e* [maybe] and informed the customer about the special discounted price. This aims to balance pragmatic clarity and avoiding coercion (Kulka 1987, as cited in Kuntjara, 2009), as the salesperson is uncertain if the customer currently needs the Pick Up but hopes he will contact her when he does.

Second, the writers discuss other examples the salespersons used to request their customers.

Calista; Kuntjara: Politeness in Addressing and Requesting Used by
the Salespersons to the Customers at *UMC E-commerce*

3. ... *Atau kalau boleh Di** (salesperson's name) untuk main ke lokasi njenengan begitu nggak papa kalau kalau ibu kalau ada waktu atau besok lusa atau kapan untuk menjelaskan promo tersebut. ... (3.42)*
[... Or if it is allowed, if you have time, I can come to your place today, tomorrow, or whenever to explain the promo. ...]

The salesperson asked for permission before uttering his request by using *kalau boleh* [if it is allowed] and explained his purpose in visiting the customers' houses. This is because visiting the customer's place can make an impolite impression. The position of the salesperson and the customer have never even met in person before. Thus, the salesperson feels *sungkan* [reluctant] when visiting people he does not know because it can be considered as violating someone's privacy. The customers might also feel afraid of being visited by strangers suddenly.

Another example of a request that also uses *kalau boleh* [if it is allowed] is seen in the utterance below:

4. ... *kalau boleh Ri** (salesperson's name) bantu ini kalau ibu nggak keberatan saya dikirimkan KTP sama KKnya Bu Har dulu. ... (1.13)*
[... if it is allowed for me to help you, if you do not mind, you can send me your ID and family card first ...]

The salesperson used *kalau boleh* [if it is allowed], and even she used *kalau nggak keberatan* [if you do not mind] before uttering the request. The function of *kalau boleh* [if it is allowed] and *kalau nggak keberatan* [if you do not mind] before uttering the request show that the salesperson respects her customer. Asking for personal documents can be considered impolite because of privacy, especially from those who never knew or met before. The customer might also be afraid of sending her personal documents because she might think the documents could be misused.

Then, some salespersons used sorry in Indonesian and Javanese *krama* language before uttering their requests. Below here are examples of the utterances:

5. ... *Ngapunten sebelumnya, ibu sudah pernah ada history perbankan seperti itu? (1.11)*
[... Sorry before, have you ever had a banking history like that?]
6. *Ngapunten, ini untuk kegiatan bapak sehari-hari apa pak? Di kantor apa ada usaha sendiri atau gimana pak? Wiraswasta sendiri? (1.87)*
[Sorry, what is your daily activity, sir? Is it in the office, or do you have a business, or how? Self-employed?]

Before uttering her requests, the salesperson used *ngapunten* [sorry]. The word *ngapunten* [sorry] is from Javanese *krama*, which is a variation from *nyuwun pangapunten* [sorry] (Fauziah et al., 2019). *Ngapunten* [sorry] from Javanese *krama* means saying sorry very politely. It is usually used by younger to older people or people of lower status to a higher status.

The use of *ngapunten* [sorry] before uttering the requests here shows politeness (Chintawidy & Sartini, 2022). According to example (5), the salesperson might feel *sungkan* [reluctant] to ask her customers because she was aware that asking for banking history can be considered impolite due to privacy that people are usually reluctant to discuss with others. The customers might also feel uncomfortable if other people know the history of their bank.

In addition, according to example (6), asking or requesting to know someone's occupation can be a sensitive and private question. Therefore, the salesperson used *ngapunten*

[sorry] at the beginning, and she asked her customer “apa kegiatan sehari-harinya bapak? [what is your daily activities?]” rather than directly saying “bapak kerjanya apa? [what is your occupation?]”. This shows that the salesperson is aware if asking someone’s occupation is a sensitive or private question. Then, she adds several occupations, hoping that the customer understands that she wants to know the customer’s occupation.

Another example of saying sorry before uttering a request in Indonesian can be seen in this utterance below:

7. *Untuk, mohon maaf, domisilinya di mana?* (3.15)
[Sorry, where do you live?]

Based on example (7), the salesperson asked his customer where he lived, which means he wanted to know the customer’s address. *Mohon maaf* [sorry] is a very polite phrase to say sorry in Indonesian. He might feel that asking for the customer’s address is impolite because it is private information, even though it is for data purposes.

Next, the writers found a salesperson used *minta tolong* [please] in uttering a request, as seen in this utterance below:

8. *Oh iya itu nanti minta tolong ada koko sekalian ya ce.* (4.7)
[Invite *koko* also, please, *ce*.]

In this context, the salesperson wanted to invite *koko* [older brother], who refers to the customer’s husband, for a test drive. At that time, the salesperson only communicated with the female customer, so he requested the customer to take her husband along one day before the test drive so that her husband could spend time. The use of *minta tolong* [please] here can help reduce the effect of giving commands (Jeanyfer & Tanto, 2018).

Another similar example as in example (8) can be seen in this utterance below:

9. *... Nomor saya mohon disimpan ya pak, ...* (1.100)
[... please save my phone number, sir. ...]

In example (9), the salesperson used *mohon* [please] to request the customer to save her phone number. This can be interpreted as the salesperson requesting her customer to save her phone number in the hope the customer could remember her when she contacted the customer. The use of *mohon* [please] shows politeness because it lessens the command intention to the customer (Jeanyfer & Tanto, 2018).

Next, the writers discuss the other example of a request, as seen below:

10. *... keep contact ya ko. ...* (1.74)
[... keep contact *ko* ...]

This request might mean maintaining a relationship with her customer. The salesperson might think that her customer is a potential customer, so she did not want to lose contact. In addition, she hopes that when the customer needs to buy a car, he can remember to contact the salesperson in the future. However, the use of “keep contact” here can be considered polite but as lip service. “Keep contact” is usually used in Western culture. This can be said that the salesperson adopts or imitates another’s culture because it is very rare for Indonesian (Javanese) people to say “*sering-sering berkabar* [keep contact or keep in touch]”. The salesperson also switched her request to English for formality and professionalism.

Last, the writers discuss another example of a request from the salesperson below:

11. ... *itu awakmu kasih info ke aku ya. Kasih info ke aku Jadi gak popo nek misalkan awakmu bisa dapat harga piro awakmu kasih info ke aku gitu ya. (2.7)*
[... you can inform me. Give me the information ... So, it is okay if you can get a better price, inform me.]

This example is an impolite direct request because it is too blunt and rude. The salesperson said *kasih info ke aku* [inform me] to his customer might mean commanding the customer to accept his request. This is in contrast to the Indonesian (Javanese) culture, which values more people speaking softly and not being too direct in requesting others (Kuntjara, 2012). However, in this context, the salesperson and the customer are close friends and coincidentally, the salesperson's friend becomes his customer. Therefore, when uttering his requests, the salesperson tends to be more straightforward. Although the request gives an impression of commanding or forcing the customer to accept the request, the customer will understand and not be offended.

In conclusion, the salespersons show politeness in uttering requests. Before uttering the requests, they always try to put themselves in the customers' position, which is called *tepa selira* (Poedjosoedarmo, 2017, as cited in Wahyudi, 2022). This can be seen from using words or phrases when conveying requests to customers, which begin with an adverb of possibility, apologizing, asking for help or please, and asking permission. This shows that salespersons are aware that the requests they convey tend to be sensitive and privacy requests which can trigger conflicts. They are also aware that their position or status is lower than the customers. This is in accordance with the principle of *hormat* [respect] and *rukun* [harmonious] of Suseno (2003). The salespersons always try to respect their customers in conveying their requests. Since they respectfully utter requests and avoid conflicts, the salesperson and the customer can maintain a harmonious relationship. The customers might also get a chance to accept or decline the requests without feeling pressured or embarrassed.

Furthermore, the writers found two possible reasons behind the use of politeness in addressing and requesting used by salespersons to their customers. The first possible reason is that the salespersons are the company's representatives, which means they should have good manners in accordance with the company's vision and mission. They should also maintain harmonious relationships with the customers as a form of respectful and polite service. The second possible reason is that salespersons need to meet sales targets. Therefore, when there is an interested customer, they try to offer promos and discounts in various ways to make the customer immediately purchase. The salespersons should utter their requests politely and avoid discomfort or conflicts.

The use of address terms by salespersons is a way to show respect to customers and build positive relationships. Despite the difficulty of determining customers' backgrounds, salespersons are aware of the importance of respecting customers regardless of age or social status. This increases trust and establishes comfortable communication during conversations. Besides, being polite is also important when making requests, as salespersons often ask for personal data and sensitive information. By choosing the appropriate and polite words, salespersons can minimize conflicts and command, also increase the chance of customers accepting the requests.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the writers found that a specific theory or formula cannot measure politeness. This is in accordance with Watts's (2003) theory of first-order politeness, which is that politeness can be evaluated based on the culture and behavior of a community. The standard of politeness may differ from one culture to another. As in this study, the salespersons of *UMC E-commerce* valued politeness based on the principles of *hormat* [respect] and *rukun* [harmonious], as stated by Suseno (2003). They relied a lot on the idea of appropriateness, as long as in accordance with the principles of *hormat* [respect] and *rukun* [harmonious], in particular contexts to determine whether an action is polite or not. The most important things for salespersons about politeness are to respect and maintain harmonious relationships with customers regardless of age and social status.

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