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## Addressing 'requests' in Ambon: Appropriate Way to Ask a Request in Ambonese Community

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### Abstract

*The notion of speech act as words or utterances used to say and do things in communication has been an interesting subject in linguistics field, especially in the cross-cultural communication. Among many speech act labels, request is the one that is commonly found in Indonesia, and even certain communities particularly in the eastern part (Ambonese) have their own way of delivering a request. This paper provides some data relating to request speech act and discusses how a request can affect the face of both speaker and hearer. Simply put in Ambon, the act of requesting something from someone cannot be carelessly carried out since several aspects such as cultural norms, social status, and even age differences must be taken into account. Moreover, politeness also holds crucial part in performing a request, as in a broader sense, when a speaker appears to have an impolite manner towards his/her interlocutor; it might potentially threaten the face of the hearer. And the result of losing a face will lead to a rejection of the request itself. Therefore, it is important to have an insight regarding how to perform a request appropriately in order to save someone's face.*

**Keywords:** cross-cultural communication, cultural norms, social status, age differences,

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### 1. Introduction

Requests is one of the speech acts applied in a condition where one person asks another to perform what he/she asks for. Request is commonly occurred in daily communication. Brown and Levinson have state (cited by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, 1984) that requests "by definition face-threatening acts, by making a request, the speaker impinges on the hearer's claim to freedom of action and freedom from imposition". In Collins COBUILD Dictionary, request means if you request someone to do something, you politely or formally ask them to do it. These definitions pinpoint that even the requests are also concerning face-threatening act and politeness; since a face-threatening condition could potentially appeared in such an impolite requests manner. Moreover, the act of proposing the requests might differ across culture because each culture has its own way of making a request. For instance, in Ambon, one of the regions in the eastern part of Indonesia, the act of request might involve cultural norms, social status, or even age factor which hold important role on the request. Therefore, the aim of the paper is to demonstrate

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how a proper request could minimize the face-threatening or loss of face between the speaker and the hearer with a significant consideration of cultural norms, social status, especially age gap.

## 2. Methodology and Framework

First, all the samples (request) are taken from a popular movie entitled “*Cahaya dari Timur: Beta Maluku*” which is originally from Ambon whose actors and actress are Ambones. Only some interactions which carry out the act of requests are picked, especially the requests between speaker and hearer who are outrageously different by age. Transcription method is used to extract any performed spoken requests in the movie. The data will be collected through several divided scenes which directly relate to the request by a speaker to a hearer which has an age gap. These scenes are later transcribed to find out whether the age differences and the politeness of a request can affect the face between interlocutors. For addition, it must be noted that face is a condition that determine the relationship between people who are entangled in a reciprocal action. In short, it is an element that cannot be separated from the speech act.

According to Goffman (2005), face is a public image that is on loan to individuals from society and that will be withdrawn from them if they prove unworthy of it. Brown and Levinson (1978) even separate face into positive face and negative face, as positive face is either the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants (p. 61) or the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others executors (p. 62). While negative face is the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction --i.e. the freedom of action and freedom from imposition (p. 61) or the want of every competent adult member that his actions be unimpeded by others (p. 62). These two kinds of face could be damaged by face-threatening acts if the speech act in this case 'request' is carried out not in a polite manner, in other words, politeness does hold a crucial part in saving the face. Politeness is the expression of the speakers' intention to mitigate face threats carried by certain face threatening acts toward another (Mills, 2003, p. 6). Furthermore, Brown and Levinson (as cited by S. Song, 2012) developed the face-saving view of politeness theory based on the universal notion of face as the “public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself”. The theory posits that maintaining the face of the speaker or the hearer is the primary concern of politeness strategies. In consequence, a cause and effect are surrounding this 'request' because if addressed with positive politeness strategy, it will able to save the face. On other hand, if delivered with impoliteness, it will absolutely threaten the face or even loosen the face. And the result of a losing face will lead to a conflict or resentment for either speaker or hearer. Therefore, it is important to have an insight regarding how to perform a request appropriately in order to save someone's face. Moreover, it can be argued that each community has its own approach to positive politeness strategy because it appears that Ambonese community have their own way of delivering a proper and polite request in order to maintain the face. And this is the main issue that will be discussed in the next session of this paper.

## 3. Data and Discussion

Based on the transcriptions of film “*Cahaya Dari Timur: Beta Maluku*”, it appears that age variable had an impact upon positive face in the request. Script 1 shows that the Speaker 1 (a matured man) is addressing a request for his Hearers 1 (some children) but with an approach of 'showing respect' in order to be appreciated. As can be seen, this is a

positive politeness strategy that Speaker 1 tries to implement in his request. Based on Collins COBUILD Dictionary, 'respect' means if you have respect for someone, you have a good opinion of them while 'show' means if you show someone how to do something, you do it yourself, so they can watch you and learn how to do it. Derived from these definitions, 'showing respect' means an act of showing or addressing someone you appreciate with respect in hoping that you will also be respected. For instance, Script 1 depicted as follows:

### Script 1.

- Speaker 1:           ade-ade, kamong bisa latihan bola tiap hari ka seng?  
**little brothers – you guys – could – train – football – every – day  
 – or – not**  
 (my fellow little brothers, couldn't you guys train football every day?)
- Hearers 1:           mau kaka, mau!!  
**sure – big brother – sure**  
 (sure big brother, surely!!)
- Speaker 1:           bagus! kalo bagitu katong bakudapa jam 5  
**good – if – so – we – meet – clock – 5**  
 (good! alright see you guys at 5)

As can be observed above, Speaker 1 is asking for a request with a conversational management strategy to address Hearers 1 with polite way by adding a word *ade-ade* (means little brother). This is considered a positive politeness as the action could save the positive face between interlocutors. Speaker 1, to get an approval by Hearers 1, is thinking that he should ask a request by starting with *ade-ade* first because by politely saying Hearers 1 as little brothers, they will react and think that Speaker 1 is a humble person and immediately agreed to the request preceded by responding Speaker 1 as *kaka* (means big brother). These response and agreement are spontaneous feedback given from Hearers 1 to Speaker 1 because they respect him since Speaker 1 previously addressed them as his little brothers even if Hearers 1 are not his actual little brothers and so the vice versa to approve Speaker 1 as their big brother even though Speaker 1 is not their actual big brother.

Now let's see the Script 2 where the situation indicates Speaker 2 as an old man while Hearer 2 is a younger matured man. The interaction and the request condition are different as follows:

### Script 2.

- Speaker 2:           Rafi, tolong siapkan pemain sebaik mungkin, siap atau tidak?  
**Rafi – please – organise – football player – as good – possible – can –  
 or – not**  
 (Rafi, can you please well organise a football team?)
- Hearer 2:           Siap bapa raja!  
**ready – father – lord**  
 (roger that milord!)

As can be seen in Script 2, Speaker 2 asks a request from Hearer 2 just by calling a name 'Rafi' first without any polite address. Speaker 2 probably assumes that together with his higher social grade and age, image as a lord as well as an elder must be approved because that is the 'face wants' of the Speaker 2 himself. On the contrary, Hearer 2 realises that he is just a young man with age and social status differences and should save the positive face by accepting the request while addressing Speaker 2 felicitously with a modest word *bapa* (means father) before accepting the request. As the result, even if Speaker 2 is not the biological father of Hearer 2 but he insists to address him as *bapa*/father as a form of respect to the person who is overly old compared to him.

Next moving into Script 3, where the event occurred here reverse to the Script 2. Speaker 3 (a young teenager) is politely request something from Hearer 3 (a matured man) and unexpectedly accepted by him. The scenario is in the Script 3 below:

### Script 3.

- Speaker 3                    *kaka tolong bali beta spatu bola e? kaya Saiful punya...*  
**big brother – please – buy – me – shoes – ball – like – Saiful – has...**  
 (big brother, buy me a pair of soccer shoes please? Same as what Saiful has...)
- Hearer 3                    *lo sudah, nanti beta pi beli e?*  
**yes – already – will – I – go – buy**  
 (well then, I will buy it okay?)
- Speaker 3                    *ok kaka makasi e?*  
 okay – big brother - thanks  
 (okay thanks big brother)

Regarding the Script, it is obvious that circumstance above could be happened because Speaker 3 is approaching Hearer 3 with some positive politeness strategies such as consider the hearer's feeling, age, or social status as well as make the hearer feels great or confident about himself in hope that these strategies could maintain the positive face of the hearer. So, with show respect by addressing *kaka* (means big brother) to Hearer 3 even if there is no such a blood brother relation between them, Speaker 3 wants to make his hearer feels superior. And then as a countermeasure, Hearer 3 accepts the request with sincerity.

Now let's see Script 4, where the condition is slightly different from the others, since in this event, Hearer 4 is rejecting Speaker 4's request. But since both speaker and hearer are friends and around the same age, Hearer 4 then tries to save Speaker 4's face even though he rejects the request at the same time. The scenario is in the Script 4 below:

### Script 4.

- Speaker 4:                    *beta datang kasini tamang e, beta karja di se kapal jua*  
**I – come – over – here – friend – I – work – in – your – ship – already**  
 (the reason I came here so I can work in your ship)
- Hearer 4:                    *Idih, ale tar mangarti laut mo*

**what – you – not – understand – sea – right?**

(what? But you don't know anything about sailing)

Script 4 above shows that Speaker 4 is making a request from Hearer 4 without showing any positive politeness strategy, as he probably thinks that Hearer 4 is just his friend with the same age and social status. So, in this circumstance, it seems relatively normal for a friend addressing another friend without any 'showing respect' approach. However, the situation is in contrast for Hearer 4, as can be seen he rejected Speaker 4's request which makes him felt guilty, especially when Speaker 4 is his friend. Therefore, in order to save Speaker 4's face, Hearer 4 then responds Speaker 4 with a positive politeness strategy by showing respect to his friend as Hearer 4 is choosing word 'ale' instead of 'se / ose' for addressing *you*. Word 'ale' and 'se / ose' actually mean the same (you), yet the level of politeness is different because if you want to respect someone, it is better to use 'ale'. Since the use of 'se / ose' is considered rude and does not show any respect. Put simply, Hearer 4 who is aware that he is about to reject Speaker 4's request, thus tries his best to avoid any loss of face situation by respectfully respond and reject the request with word 'ale'.

Lastly, move into Script 5 where the condition in is almost the same with Script 5 which is a rejection of a request. However, between speaker and hearer, there is an age gap since Speaker 5 is a matured man while Hearer 5 is a younger matured man. The scenario is in the Script 5 below:

**Script 5.**

- Speaker 5: *antar beta ka pelabuhan do*  
**bring – I – to – harbour – please**  
 (could you drive me to the harbour please)
- Hearer 5: *seng bisa om, beta mau pigi kamuka*  
**not – can – uncle – I – want – go – first**  
 (sorry I can't uncle, I'm in a hurry)
- Speaker 5: *ado beta ada parlu itu di pelabuhan*  
**ouch – I – have – need – that – in – harbour**  
 (oh come on, I have an urgent affair in harbour)
- Hearer 5: *maaf e kaka e*  
**sorry – big brother**  
 (I'm really sorry, big brother)
- Speaker 5: *oh io kalo gitu beta permisi*  
**oh – ok – if – so – I – excuse**  
 (alright then, I will excuse myself)

As can be seen in the Script 5, Speaker 5 makes a request from Hearer 5 without showing any respect, as he presumably thinks that Hearer 5 is younger than himself so there is no need for such a proper and polite manner to address Hearer 5 when asking a request. And it seems reasonable for an older man addressing a younger man without any 'showing respect' approach. However, as the circumstance is in opposite for Hearer 5,

for a reason that he rejected a request which might offend Speaker 5's feeling, especially when Speaker 5 is older, he should thus save Speaker 5's face. One way for saving the face is by responding with a positive politeness strategy that is showing respect. As can be noticed, when rejecting the request, Hearer 5 is responding by addressing Speaker 5 felicitously with a modest word *om* (means uncle). This word *om* (uncle) is a polite way to address someone older than you, even if that person is not the real blood-relative uncle, just by saying *om* (uncle) alone could mitigate the face-threatening effect. Speaker 5 thus insists to accept his request, yet again, in order to save Speaker 5's face, Hearer 5 gives another rejection (sorry) but with a positive politeness strategy by addressing Speaker 5 as *kaka* (big brother) even though he is not Hearer 5's biological brother. Because in Ambon, not only *om*, but also *kaka* can be used as a polite and respectful word to address someone older than you. By doing this, Hearer 5 is able to save Speaker 5's face as there is no any resentment from Speaker 5 towards Hearer 5 even if Hearer 5 has clearly rejected Speaker 5's request for the second time. This can be seen from Speaker 5's last response as he later excuses himself which is a prove that there is no indication of loss of save because of the successful positive strategy from Hearer 5. Overall, based on discussion above, it can be assumed that asking a request in Ambon is not as simple as it seems, since a request involve a face, and a face can be threatened and even be gone if the request is delivered without any positive politeness strategy, in which in this case (Ambon) is by showing respect.

## Conclusion

Correspond to the result of data analysis, in can be concluded that one preferable way to deliver a positive politeness strategy and to save positive face in the requests speech act within Ambonese community is only through understand the approach of positive politeness strategy that is 'showing respect'. This approach represents speaker's polite manner in performing a speech act (request) as he/she will consider someone who is an elder or has the higher social status should be respected due to the cultural norms which embedded in his/her society. Because in Ambon, the more you respect the older ones the more you will be honoured which automatically reduce the loss of face and avoid face threatening act as well as save the positive face between interlocutors. Additionally, by knowing such implications, one can finally comprehend that certain speech acts (requests) cannot be simply implemented universally, as each community has its own positive politeness approach of executing the speech acts (e.g. in Ambonese by showing respect). Unfortunately, since there is no other data concerning request in the other communities (besides Ambonese) which can be useful for the data comparison, thus a future research is necessary to strengthen the assertion about differentiation of the speech acts' approach.

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