



## Speech Acts and Pragmatic in Multilingual and Multicultural Settings

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Article history:</b></p> <p>Received</p> <p>Accepted</p>	<p>This study investigates speech acts and pragmatics in Indonesia's multilingual and multicultural settings, focusing on how linguistic diversity and cultural norms influence communication strategies. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews, ethnographic observations, and discourse analysis involving participants from various cultural backgrounds, including Bataknese and Sundanese communities. The study examines requests, apologies, and refusals, exploring how these speech acts reflect cultural values and adapt to different social hierarchies and contexts. The findings highlight that Bataknese speakers often use direct language, emphasizing clarity, while Sundanese speakers prefer indirectness and elaborate politeness to maintain harmony. Code-switching emerged as a significant strategy, allowing participants to navigate linguistic and cultural boundaries effectively, often shifting between Indonesian, local languages, and English depending on the audience and context. Additionally, in digital communication, pragmatic strategies evolved with the use of emojis, formal expressions, and explanations to ensure clarity and respect. These results underscore the dynamic and adaptable nature of pragmatic competence in multilingual and multicultural contexts, offering insights into the interplay of language and culture. This research contributes to the broader understanding of communication in diverse settings, providing valuable implications for intercultural interactions in education, business, and social integration</p>
<p><b>Keywords:</b></p> <p><i>Speech act</i></p> <p><i>Pragmatic</i></p> <p><i>Multilingualism</i></p> <p><i>Cultural Norms</i></p>	

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## INTRODUCTION

In multilingual and multicultural settings, effective communication often transcends literal meanings to convey nuanced intentions, emotions, and social dynamics. This complexity is encapsulated within the domain of pragmatics and speech acts. Pragmatics investigates the relationship between language, context, and meaning, while speech act theory delves into the ways speakers perform actions through utterances (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). Multilingual and multicultural communities, characterized by diverse linguistic and cultural norms, present fertile ground for examining how these theories manifest in real-world communication scenarios.

In the past, language learning was primarily associated with mastering linguistic rules and structures, while the cultural aspect was largely overlooked (Alfge & Mohammadzadeh, 2021) even though culture greatly affects language especially speech act. The significance of studying speech acts in multilingual contexts lies in understanding how speakers navigate and negotiate meaning across linguistic boundaries. For example, multilingual speakers often switch between languages to signal shifts in formality, solidarity, or authority. In such settings, speech acts like requests, apologies, or compliments are often interpreted differently depending on cultural norms, highlighting the interplay between language use and sociocultural context (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). These interactions underscore the need to investigate how pragmatic competence is developed and deployed in multilingual communities.

Nanda et al., (2021) emphasize local languages and cultures significantly influence language politeness in Indonesia, contributing to the development of positive character. Linguistic evidence shows that polite use of Indonesian is shaped by regional languages and cultural values, therefore, what one culture considers polite may not be viewed the same way by another. While the Indonesian language may not have established formal rules for politeness, certain markers of politeness can still be recognized (Rangkuti & Lubis, 2018). Multicultural settings further complicate the dynamics of speech acts by introducing varying cultural norms and expectations regarding politeness, directness, and power distance. Thus, studying speech acts in such settings sheds light on the cultural underpinnings of communication and their impact on interpersonal relationships.

Moreover, recent technological advancements have broadened the scope of pragmatic research, enabling more nuanced analyses of speech acts in diverse settings. For instance, digital communication platforms provide rich data on how multilingual speakers perform speech acts in real-time, often blending written and spoken modes of expression (Herring, 2019). These developments open new avenues for exploring how technology-mediated interactions influence pragmatic behavior in multilingual and multicultural contexts.

Despite these advancements, existing research often overlooks the dynamic interplay between multilingualism and multiculturalism in shaping speech acts. Many

studies have focused on either linguistic or cultural factors in isolation, leaving a gap in understanding how these dimensions intersect in complex social interactions (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010). Addressing this gap requires interdisciplinary approaches that integrate insights from linguistics, sociology, and anthropology.

The growth of pragmatics is closely linked to the study of speech act theory and communication postulates. Different approaches exist for classifying and subclassifying speech acts, primarily due to varying interpretations of the types of communicative effects (Vlasenko & Naumov, 2022). This research explores the intricate relationship between speech acts and pragmatic competence in multilingual and multicultural settings, with a specific focus on how linguistic and cultural diversity influences communication strategies. The study delves into the ways speakers from diverse backgrounds navigate sociolinguistic norms when performing speech acts such as requests, apologies, refusals, and compliments. By examining these interactions, the research aims to uncover patterns of pragmatic adaptation and miscommunication that arise in multilingual communities, where cultural expectations and linguistic resources intersect.

Leech (2016) explains that pragmatics focuses on understanding meaning in connection with the speech situation. This suggests that the relationship between language use and context or the speech situation forms the foundation for interpreting language, requiring inferences that link what is spoken to what is implied. This approach helps resolve communication issues between speakers and listeners, particularly regarding differing perspectives.

Furthermore, this study also contributes to the broader field of sociolinguistics by examining the social functions of language in diverse contexts. By analyzing how speech acts are used to build, maintain, and negotiate social relationships, it provides a deeper understanding of language as a tool for social cohesion and identity formation (Holmes, 2013). This perspective underscores the role of language in bridging divides and fostering mutual respect in multicultural societies.

## **METHOD**

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to explore the pragmatic use of speech acts in multilingual and multicultural settings in Indonesia. The qualitative method is chosen for its ability to capture the nuanced interplay between linguistic practices and cultural norms. The research focuses on naturally occurring communication within diverse Indonesian communities, where multiple languages and cultural influences intersect. The data were gathered through ethnographic observation, semi-structured interviews, and discourse analysis, allowing a comprehensive understanding of how speech acts are performed and interpreted across different cultural and linguistic contexts (Creswell, 2013). These methods ensure a rich and contextually grounded analysis of pragmatic competence in multilingual environments.

### **Data Collection**

The data for this research were collected from three distinct multilingual and multicultural settings in Indonesia: urban areas, rural communities, and educational institutions. A total of 60 participants were purposefully sampled to include speakers of Indonesian, Javanese, Sundanese, Bataknese, and other local languages, alongside those fluent in English or other international languages. Ethnographic observations were conducted during public and private interactions, capturing real-life examples of speech acts like greetings, requests, and refusals. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were carried

out to gather participants' reflections on their language use and cultural norms. The interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed for analysis. To enhance data diversity, the study also included communication examples from online platforms, reflecting how digital interactions influence speech acts in multilingual contexts.

### **Data analysis procedures**

The data analysis for this study utilized both discourse analysis and thematic coding to explore how speech acts are performed in multilingual and multicultural settings in Indonesia. Discourse analysis, in particular, enabled the research to focus on the contextual dimensions of language use, such as how cultural norms, power relationships, and social roles influence pragmatic decisions. Each interaction was examined to understand how speakers navigate their sociocultural environments, employing different strategies for politeness, assertiveness, or solidarity. For example, in some contexts, speakers may use more indirect or formal language when addressing elders or authority figures, while adopting a more informal tone with peers or younger individuals. The analysis also considered code-switching practices, where speakers shifted between languages, such as Indonesian, Javanese, or English, based on social context or the perceived expectations of their interlocutors.

This allowed the study to capture how multilingual individuals adjust their language to align with the social and cultural norms of the environment. Furthermore, the analysis also looked at the role of non-verbal cues, such as body language or facial expressions, that might accompany speech acts in these settings, enhancing the understanding of pragmatic meaning beyond mere words. The analysis of power relations was particularly important, as it provided insights into how speech acts like requests or refusals were influenced by hierarchical structures in the community, such as the distinctions between senior and junior family members or between teachers and students in educational settings. These cultural influences were crucial to understanding the subtleties of pragmatic communication, where the same speech act could carry different meanings depending on who was speaking, to whom, and in what context.

In addition to discourse analysis, thematic coding was employed to systematically categorize and identify recurring patterns in the data. The coding process began with open coding, where initial themes emerged through repeated review of the transcripts and field notes. Themes were organized into broader categories that reflected the primary research questions, such as the impact of local cultural practices on politeness strategies, the role of multilingualism in shaping speech acts, and the significance of language choice in different contexts. These categories were then refined through axial coding, linking them to specific instances of speech acts observed in the data, such as apologies, requests, compliments, and expressions of gratitude.

The coding process also involved identifying contradictions or unexpected findings, such as cases where speakers consciously violated cultural norms of politeness or engaged in what might be considered impolite speech acts in certain settings. Such instances provided critical insights into the complexity of language use in multicultural environments. The Atlas.id software was instrumental in managing the data, allowing for efficient organization of codes and easy retrieval of specific examples for comparison. Triangulation was key in ensuring the reliability and validity of the findings. By cross-referencing the data from interviews, observations, and digital communications, the analysis was able to capture a broader range of pragmatic

behaviors, making it possible to identify both common patterns and exceptional cases that may challenge established norms. This process also highlighted the fluid nature of pragmatic competence in multilingual settings, where speakers often shift between languages and adjust their speech act strategies to navigate cultural expectations and social dynamics. The overall goal of the analysis was to produce a nuanced understanding of how multilingual speakers in Indonesia perform speech acts in ways that are deeply influenced by both their linguistic repertoires and the cultural values that shape their interactions.

## **FINDINGS**

This study uncovered several key patterns in the use of speech acts within Indonesia's multilingual and multicultural settings, revealing how linguistic and cultural diversity shapes pragmatic behavior. The findings demonstrate that speech act performance, such as requests, apologies, and refusals, is deeply influenced by the interplay of linguistic repertoire, cultural expectations, and social context. Participants displayed significant pragmatic adaptation when communicating across different languages and cultural norms. These adaptations were observed in both face-to-face and digital interactions, showcasing the dynamic nature of communication in multilingual settings.

Additionally, the findings highlight the role of cultural values in determining the perceived politeness and appropriateness of speech acts. Regional cultural norms and traditional practices heavily influenced participants' language use, particularly in hierarchical contexts such as interactions between elders and younger individuals. The data also revealed how code-switching serves as a tool for navigating diverse linguistic and social expectations, with speakers shifting between languages to accommodate their audience and context. This section is organized into two main subtopics:

### **Politeness Strategies in Multicultural Settings**

Politeness emerged as a critical factor influencing speech acts, with participants consistently tailoring their language to reflect cultural expectations of respect and formality. In interactions involving hierarchical relationships, such as those between students and teachers or younger individuals and elders, participants employed honorifics and indirect language forms. For example, Javanese speakers often used high-register forms when addressing elders, while Sundanese speakers incorporated respectful terms rooted in local traditions. This adaptation was consistent across both rural and urban settings, suggesting that cultural norms remain a strong influence despite urbanization.

Interestingly, the study also identified variability in politeness strategies depending on the context. In formal settings, such as workplace meetings or academic discussions, participants tended to favor more indirect and formal speech acts, reflecting their awareness of power dynamics. However, in informal settings, such as interactions among peers, directness and humor were more prevalent. These findings underscore the flexibility of pragmatic competence, as participants adjusted their strategies to maintain harmony and achieve their communicative goals in diverse situations.

Furthermore, digital communication platforms introduced unique challenges to traditional politeness strategies. Participants noted that expressing politeness in text-

based interactions, such as emails or messaging apps, required additional effort, such as using emoticons or elaborate phrasing, to avoid misunderstandings. For instance, an apology delivered via text was often accompanied by an explicit explanation to ensure clarity and sincerity. This finding highlights the evolving nature of politeness in the digital age, where cultural expectations intersect with the constraints of written communication.

### **Code-Switching and Pragmatic Adaptation**

Code-switching was a prominent feature of speech acts in multilingual interactions, serving as a pragmatic tool to bridge linguistic and cultural divides. Participants frequently switched between Indonesian and local languages, such as Javanese or Bataknese, depending on their audience's linguistic background and the formality of the context. For instance, in mixed-language conversations, participants used Indonesian to establish a neutral ground but shifted to their local language to signal intimacy or solidarity. This pragmatic adaptation reflects the participants' ability to navigate complex linguistic landscapes effectively.

The findings also revealed that code-switching was not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a reflection of cultural identity and belonging. In interviews, participants reported that they often switched to their local language to emphasize shared cultural values or to express emotions more authentically. For example, a participant from Bali described using Balinese terms during family gatherings to convey respect and familial bonds, even when the primary language of conversation was Indonesian. This demonstrates how code-switching functions as both a communicative strategy and a marker of cultural identity.

Moreover, the use of English as a global language introduced additional dimensions to code-switching. Participants in urban and educational settings frequently integrated English terms into their speech acts, particularly in professional or academic contexts. This practice was often motivated by the desire to convey modernity, competence, or alignment with global norms. However, participants also noted challenges in maintaining pragmatic appropriateness when using English, as cultural norms for speech acts like requests or apologies sometimes conflicted with local expectations. This underscores the complexities of multilingual communication in multicultural contexts, where speakers must constantly balance linguistic and cultural considerations.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study shed light on the intricate interplay between speech acts, linguistic diversity, and cultural norms in Indonesia's multilingual and multicultural settings. The discussion will focus on specific examples of speech acts: requests, apologies, and refusals that highlight how speakers navigate their linguistic repertoires and cultural expectations to achieve effective communication. These examples underscore the importance of pragmatic competence in fostering mutual understanding across diverse communities.

### **Request in Multilingual Contexts**

Requests were found to be highly sensitive to cultural norms and social hierarchies. For instance, during an ethnographic observation in a Javanese rural community, a young

speaker addressing an elder made a request using indirect language: "*Nuwun sewu, menawi pareng, sagedkah panjenengan ngijini kula ngagem pados ingkang sanes?*" ("Excuse me, if I may, could you allow me to use something else?"). This use of high-register Javanese demonstrated respect for the elder's authority and reflected the speaker's awareness of local politeness norms. In contrast, when the same speaker interacted with a peer, they switched to casual Indonesian: "*Boleh pinjam sebentar?*" ("Can I borrow this for a moment?"). This shift illustrates the speaker's ability to adapt their request strategies based on the relationship and context, a hallmark of pragmatic competence in multilingual environments.

Digital communication also influenced request strategies. In messaging apps, participants often softened their requests with emojis or additional politeness markers, such as "😊 *Mohon bantuannya untuk file ini ya, terima kasih banyak sebelumnya!*" ("😊 I kindly request your help with this file, thank you so much in advance!"). This example highlights how speakers compensate for the lack of non-verbal cues in digital settings, ensuring their requests are perceived as polite and non-imposing.

In Batakese communities, requests often reflect directness, a characteristic rooted in the cultural value of straightforward communication. For example, a Batakese speaker might say: "*Tolong ambilkan itu untuk saya, ya?*" ("Please get that for me, okay?"). The direct nature of the request is softened by the use of "ya," which adds a polite and relational tone. This contrasts with the Javanese or Sundanese style, which tends to prioritize indirectness.

In Sundanese settings, requests are typically more indirect and deferential, reflecting the cultural emphasis on politeness and respect. For instance, a Sundanese speaker might phrase a similar request as: "*Kumaha upami tiasa nyandakkeun ieu ka abdi?*" ("Would it be possible to bring this to me?"). This phrasing uses polite markers like "kumaha" (how) and "tiasa" (could), highlighting the speaker's intention to minimize imposition. These contrasting examples underscore how cultural values shape the pragmatics of making requests in multilingual communities.

In mixed interactions involving both Batakese and Sundanese speakers, code-switching was observed as a strategy for achieving pragmatic alignment. A Batakese participant interacting with a Sundanese peer might begin with Indonesian to establish neutrality: "*Boleh minta tolong ambilkan buku itu?*" ("Could you please help get that book?") and then adapt based on the response, reflecting their sensitivity to cultural expectations.

### **Apologies Across Cultures**

Apologies demonstrated significant variability based on cultural expectations and situational context. For instance, in an educational setting, a student apologizing to a teacher for a late submission used a formal and elaborate structure: "*Mohon maaf yang sebesar-besarnya atas keterlambatan ini, saya akan memastikan kejadian seperti ini tidak terulang kembali.*" ("I deeply apologize for this delay, and I will ensure this does not happen again."). This response reflected the hierarchical relationship and the speaker's effort to maintain face and respect.

Conversely, in peer-to-peer interactions, apologies were often informal and concise. One participant apologized for being late to a meeting with friends by saying, "*Sorry ya, tadi macet banget!*" ("Sorry, the traffic was terrible!"). Here, the use of English ("sorry") signaled

a casual tone, while the mention of traffic served as an explanation to mitigate the severity of the offense. This contrast illustrates how speakers adjust the formality and content of their apologies depending on their audience and the social dynamics involved.

Additionally, in digital contexts, apologies were frequently accompanied by written explanations or emojis to convey sincerity. For example, "🙏 *Maaf banget, aku baru lihat pesan ini. Gimana kalau kita reschedule?*" ("🙏 I'm so sorry, I just saw this message. How about we reschedule?"). The inclusion of an apology emoji and a proposed solution indicates the speaker's effort to maintain a positive relationship despite the delay.

In Bataknese culture, apologies are often straightforward, reflecting the cultural value of honesty and directness. For example, a Bataknese speaker apologizing for a mistake might say: "*Maaf ya, aku salah tadi. Itu tanggung jawabku.*" ("Sorry, I made a mistake earlier. That's my responsibility."). The direct acknowledgment of fault and responsibility is characteristic of Bataknese communication.

Conversely, Sundanese apologies are typically more elaborate and imbued with expressions of humility. A Sundanese speaker might say: "*Punten pisan, abdi salah. Hapunten bilih ngaganggu.*" ("I deeply apologize for my mistake. Please forgive me if it caused any trouble."). This apology includes multiple polite markers like "punten pisan" (deeply sorry) and "hapunten" (forgive), reflecting the Sundanese cultural value of maintaining harmony and showing respect.

In multilingual contexts, digital interactions provided examples of how apologies from these cultural groups adapt to broader expectations. A Bataknese speaker apologizing to a group chat might write: "*Maaf semuanya, aku salah info tadi. Akan saya perbaiki segera.*" ("Sorry everyone, I gave the wrong info earlier. I'll fix it immediately."). A Sundanese speaker in the same situation might say: "*Punten sadayana, abdi gaduh kasalahan dina nyebarkeun informasi. Hapunten pisan.*" ("I apologize to everyone for my mistake in sharing information. I deeply apologize."). These examples show the influence of cultural norms on apologies in digital communication.

### **Refusals and Cultural Sensitivities**

Refusals were particularly challenging in multicultural settings, as they often required balancing politeness with assertiveness. In one observed interaction, a participant refused an offer from a superior using a carefully phrased response in Indonesian: "*Terima kasih banyak atas tawarannya, tetapi saya belum bisa menerima saat ini. Mungkin di kesempatan lain.*" ("Thank you very much for the offer, but I cannot accept it at this time. Perhaps another time."). The use of gratitude and an alternative suggestion softened the refusal, reflecting the speaker's sensitivity to cultural norms of politeness and respect.

In contrast, refusals among peers were more direct. During a casual conversation, a participant refused a friend's invitation with: "*Aduh, maaf banget, aku nggak bisa. Lain kali ya.*" ("Oh no, I'm so sorry, I can't. Maybe next time."). The informal tone and brevity of the refusal reflected the egalitarian nature of the relationship.

Code-switching also played a role in refusals, particularly in settings involving multiple linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In one instance, a speaker began their refusal in English to address an international colleague: "*I really appreciate the invitation, but I'm afraid I have prior commitments.*" They then switched to Indonesian to speak to a local participant: "*Makasih banyak ya, tapi aku nggak bisa hadir.*" ("Thank you so much, but I



can't attend.”). This strategic use of language demonstrated the speaker's effort to maintain rapport and accommodate the linguistic preferences of their audience.

## CONCLUSION

This study highlights the dynamic interplay between language, culture, and social context in shaping speech acts within Indonesia's multilingual and multicultural settings. Through the analysis of requests, apologies, and refusals, it becomes evident that linguistic diversity and cultural values play a crucial role in determining pragmatic strategies. Speakers adapt their communication styles based on the cultural norms of politeness, respect, and directness, demonstrating the complexity of navigating linguistic and cultural boundaries.

The findings underscore the importance of pragmatic competence in fostering effective communication across diverse contexts. In Batakese culture, directness is valued, while Sundanese norms emphasize politeness and indirectness, reflecting distinct cultural ideologies. The use of code-switching further illustrates how speakers manage social relationships, switching languages to convey solidarity, authority, or cultural identity. These practices reveal not only the functional aspect of language but also its role in maintaining social harmony and cultural connections.

Digital communication adds another layer of complexity, where traditional norms are adapted to new mediums. The use of emojis, formal structures, and clarifications in text-based interactions reflects the evolving nature of politeness and pragmatic expression in the digital era. These findings highlight the adaptability of language users in reconciling traditional values with modern communicative demands.

This study contributes to the understanding of pragmatics in multilingual and multicultural settings by offering insights into the intersection of linguistic practices and cultural norms. It also emphasizes the need for further research into the pragmatic challenges faced by speakers in increasingly globalized and digital communication environments. By exploring the nuances of speech acts in Indonesia, this research underscores the value of recognizing and respecting cultural diversity in communication. These insights are not only academically significant but also practically relevant for improving intercultural interactions in education, business, and social integration contexts.

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