

NEGATIVE POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN ANDREA HIRATA'S NOVEL *LASKAR PELANGI*

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Abstract

This research delves into the intricate portrayal of negative politeness strategy in Andrea Hirata's novel *Laskar Pelangi*. Employing linguistic politeness theory by Brown and Levinson and a structuralism approach, the study aims to elucidate the connection between linguistics and literature within the novel's context. Utilizing a qualitative research methodology, the text is analyzed, focusing on instances of negative politeness strategies employed by characters in various social interactions. Through a descriptive qualitative approach, 53 instances of negative politeness strategies are identified in the novel. The literature review underscores the significance of negative politeness for maintaining rapport and respect in social interactions, particularly in contexts prone to imposition or conflict. Extracted examples from the novel illustrate how characters utilize negative politeness to navigate complex social dynamics and preserve harmonious relationships within their community. The findings reveal cultural nuances embedded in politeness strategies, reflecting Indonesian societal norms and values. Characters in *Laskar Pelangi* employ indirect speech acts, hedging language, and deferential expressions to mitigate threats to others' autonomy or comfort, contributing to the narrative's tone of warmth and sincerity. Overall, this research highlights the integral role of negative politeness strategies in shaping character interactions and reflecting cultural values in *Laskar Pelangi*. By employing these strategies, characters negotiate social hierarchies and navigate interpersonal relationships while demonstrating respect and consideration for others.

Keywords: *Indonesian societal norms and values; negative politeness strategy; politeness strategy; speech act*

1. Introduction

Language serves not only as a medium of communication but also as an essential instrument for navigating complex social situations, including defending one's social image and reputation during debates or discussions (Goffman, 1967; Brown & Levinson, 1987). Language operates as an indispensable link between individuals, facilitating the exchange of emotions, opinions, and multifaceted identities, making human communication inconceivable without it (Wierzbicka, 1991). As a socio-cultural construct, language reflects and shapes human relationships by embodying cultural

norms and communicative strategies unique to each community (Halliday, 1978). Wang (2010) underscores that effective communicators are those who employ a broad repertoire of communication strategies to foster meaningful connections and maintain harmonious interactions. Such communicative proficiency demands sensitivity to social context, reinforcing the significance of language as a tool for both meaning-making and relationship-building.

The study of language, therefore, gains paramount importance in unraveling the nuanced ways individuals navigate social interactions and convey meanings across diverse contexts (Hymes, 1972; Fishman, 2000). By exploring how language is used to articulate identity and negotiate interpersonal relationships, linguistic research reveals deeper insights into the underlying social and cultural fabric that defines human interaction (Blommaert, 2010).

This research takes as its focal point *Laskar Pelangi* (The Rainbow Troops), a highly influential novel by Indonesian author Andrea Hirata, first published in 2005. This semi-autobiographical narrative chronicles the author's childhood experiences on Belitung Island, where he attended a modest village school with ten classmates from impoverished backgrounds. Through the protagonist Ikal, the story captures a vivid portrait of life on Belitung Island, offering readers a profound sense of place, resilience, and cultural identity (Hirata, 2005). This specificity of setting, however, does not limit the novel's reach; rather, the themes of perseverance, educational aspiration, and respect for authority resonate universally, allowing *Laskar Pelangi* to connect with readers worldwide (Fauzia, 2017; Anwar, 2018).

Moreover, *Laskar Pelangi* serves as a compelling text for examining the intricate interplay between language, culture, and identity. Hirata's work highlights the role of education as both a transformative force and a vehicle for socio-economic mobility, urging readers to pursue knowledge despite obstacles (Purwarno, Supian, & Manugeran, 2022). The novel's dedication to Hirata's teachers and childhood friends, including figures like Ibu Muslimah Hapsari and Bapak Harfan Effendi Noor, adds a layer of personal and cultural homage, grounding the narrative in the author's lived experience and Indonesian heritage (Supian, Manugeran, & Purwarno, 2022).

This study examines *Laskar Pelangi* using the negative politeness strategies outlined by Brown and Levinson (1987), which detail ways in which individuals navigate potentially face-threatening acts to maintain social harmony. Such politeness strategies, particularly relevant in Indonesian social contexts, offer a framework for analyzing character interactions within the novel. Additionally, a structuralist approach complements this analysis by deconstructing the narrative's structure to illuminate how cultural values are woven into the text (Saussure, 1983; Levi-Strauss, 1963). By applying these theoretical lenses, this research seeks to uncover how Hirata's characters employ language and behavioral strategies that reflect broader cultural attitudes and social norms, making *Laskar Pelangi* an ideal subject for this study on the intersection of linguistics and literature.

In sum, *Laskar Pelangi* not only stands as a culturally significant literary work within Indonesian literature but also provides rich material for examining politeness strategies and narrative structures. The dual application of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory and a structuralist perspective enables a comprehensive exploration of how language in *Laskar Pelangi* conveys meaning, establishes relationships, and reinforces cultural identities. This study thus contributes to broader discussions on the role of language in literature, particularly within Southeast Asian contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Politeness strategy

The concept of politeness in verbal communication, as elucidated by Brown and Levinson (1987), provides a valuable framework for comprehending the ethos of scientific writing. Politeness strategies, expressed through speech acts, serve as a vehicle for conveying courteous sentiments within a narrative, particularly evident in works like Andrea Hirata's novel *Laskar Pelangi*. This analysis primarily draws upon the milieu of educated life as the basis for delineating politeness strategies. Brown and Levinson (1987) delineate four types of politeness strategies—Bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record politeness. In this study, the focus is solely on analyzing the negative politeness strategy within Andrea Hirata's *Laskar Pelangi*.

2.1.1 Negative Politeness Strategy

Negative politeness is a strategic approach wherein the speaker addresses Face Threatening Acts by employing methods aimed at mitigating potential threats to the hearer's negative face. This involves reassuring the hearer that the speaker acknowledges and respects their negative face wants, thereby affirming the hearer's autonomy and freedom of action. Such strategies are instrumental in demonstrating respect for others' autonomy while maintaining appropriate social distance and displaying politeness. This section delineates effective strategies for implementing negative politeness across diverse social contexts.

The primary objective of employing this strategy is to preempt any potential imposition on the hearer or encroachment upon their personal space. Consequently, it presupposes the existence of a certain level of social distance or unease in the situation. The following examples illustrate the application of negative politeness:

1. Be conventionally indirect: "Could you pass the salt?"
2. Minimize imposition: "I just want to ask you if I would use your computer?"
3. Be pessimistic: "Could you jump over that five foot fence?"
4. Impersonalize speaker and hearer: "Give it."

3. Research Method

The researchers used a qualitative approach because this study focuses on the analysis or interpretation of the written material in context. The material of this research is the novel *Laskar Pelangi* by Andrea Hirata (2005). Creswell (2009) describes qualitative research as a method that is typically used to establish the importance of the central idea and to explore the problem and develop an understanding of the perspectives of individuals or groups in a social situation. Qualitative research is research that has the limitation of a specific context and uses data that is not numerical. Instead of providing a superficial account of a large sample of a population, qualitative research seeks to gain a deep insight of a particular organization or event. It attempts to provide a rich description of the structure, process, and patterns among a group of participants. Qualitative research can be conducted in the social and behavioral sciences, with an emphasis on the topic of human behavior. This research may be used to investigate an organization, a group, or an individual. It can also be conducted by a research team, a group of people, or an individual. In this study, the politeness strategy in the novel *Laskar Pelangi* by Andrea Hirata (2005) is selected as the primary source of data.

4. Discussion

The discussion of negative politeness in *Laskar Pelangi* by Andrea Hirata underscores how characters adeptly navigate social interactions, aiming to minimize imposition, discomfort, or conflict. This concept, often articulated through deferential language, tentativeness, and indirect expressions, enables characters to respect the listener's autonomy while still articulating their needs or concerns. Such strategies become particularly salient in contexts involving social hierarchies, personal limitations, or sensitive topics.

In Chapter 1, Ikal expresses sympathy for his father with the line, "Kasihlah ayahku..." (Hirata, 2005: 3). This utterance reflects Ikal's profound respect for his father's struggles while subtly avoiding an overt emotional burden on the listener. His careful choice of words demonstrates an acute awareness of social boundaries, conveying empathy without demanding attention or eliciting a response.

Ikal's internal conflict surfaces when he contemplates leaving school to assist his family, saying, "Barangkali sebaiknya aku pulang saja..." (Hirata, 2005: 3). This hesitant phrasing exemplifies his struggle to reconcile personal ambitions with familial obligations. By employing tentative language, he minimizes the potential impact of his statement on others, thereby preserving rapport by avoiding direct imposition or confrontation.

In Chapter 3, Pak Harfan asserts his authority while maintaining politeness, directing Ikal with, "Baiklah ini kesempatan terakhir untukmu mengenalkan diri..." (Hirata, 2005: 27). This directive allows Ikal the option to introduce himself without coercion, exemplifying a delicate balance between authority and respect. Pak Harfan's employment of negative politeness subtly alleviates any potential tension, honoring Ikal's autonomy within a hierarchical framework.

Later, in Chapter 9, Ikal communicates discomfort regarding his appearance through the self-deprecating remark, "Tapi sandal dan bajuku buruk begini" (Hirata, 2005: 66). By focusing on his own perceived inadequacies, Ikal sidesteps imposing on others or prompting judgment, utilizing negative politeness to express unease without seeking reassurance from those around him.

In an effort to mitigate potential embarrassment, Lintang advises Ikal gently, stating, "Jangan kau bikin malu aku..." (Hirata, 2005: 66). This indirect expression hints at possible embarrassment without a direct accusation, diplomatically conveying expectations for Ikal's behavior while blending concern with subtlety.

Chapter 10, Bu Mus critiques Ikal's taste in reading material with a light-hearted tone, exclaiming, "MasyaAllah! Dengar, Anak Muda..." (Hirata, 2005: 76). This humorous comment about a children's story softens her critique, allowing her to share her opinion in a manner unlikely to offend. Her playful tone ensures the exchange remains light, steering clear of confrontation.

Ikal's expression in Chapter 13, "Aku tak bisa melintas..." (Hirata, 2005: 87), presents his predicament without directly soliciting assistance. By framing his statement this way, Ikal respects others' autonomy, permitting them the choice to help without feeling obliged.

Subsequently, he questions the significance that fellow villagers place on the wind's direction, asking, "Apa, sih yang di pusingkan orang-orang kampung ini dengan arah angin itu?" (Hirata, 2005: 102). This indirect inquiry conveys curiosity rather than criticism, and by employing a colloquial tone, he avoids defensiveness, maintaining harmony by presenting his observation as a casual query.

In Chapter 17, Ikal's urgency is subtly communicated to his mother when he states, "Tak mau Ibunda..." (Hirata, 2005: 111). Here, Ikal emphasizes his refusal due to encountering a crocodile. His use of negative politeness validates his choice while refraining from pressuring her to accept his decision, thus respecting her agency even in a tense situation.

In Chapter 20, Ikal humorously queries the logic of love in a rhetorical manner, asking A Kiong, "Hei, anak Hokian, sejak kapan cinta masuk akal?" (Hirata, 2005: 255). The informal tone and rhetorical framing express Ikal's skepticism playfully, inviting A Kiong to reflect on love without imposing a definitive stance. This humorous approach sustains rapport by minimizing confrontation and preserving a friendly atmosphere.

This analysis illustrates how Hirata's characters employ negative politeness to thoughtfully manage social interactions, respecting boundaries and nurturing relationships even when confronting challenging topics or navigating social hierarchies. For instance, Ikal candidly states:

"Aku malu, A Kiong. Nyaliku lumpuh kalau berada satu meter darinya. Aku adalah seorang pria yang kompulsif, jika ceroboh aku takut ketahuan bapaknya....." (Hirata, 2005: 255).

Here, the speaker reveals personal vulnerability and self-awareness, taking responsibility for their actions without attributing blame to others. By openly discussing feelings of intimidation and caution, the speaker minimizes confrontation and cultivates empathy from the listener. The use of "aku" and candid self-reflection highlights a focus on internal experiences, softening the tone and avoiding direct conflict.

Additionally, when expressing ambition, the speaker reflects:

"Ya Allah, cita-citaku adalah menjadi seorang penulis atau pemain bulu tangkis, tapi jika gagal jadikan aku apa saja kalau besar nanti, asal jangan jadikan aku pegawai pos. Dan jangan beri aku pekerjaan sejak subuh." (Hirata, 2005: 278).

This expression of ambition is coupled with humility, acknowledging the possibility of failure and maintaining a flexible mindset regarding future outcomes. By framing a specific hope—avoiding a postal job—as a modest request, the speaker conveys preference without imposing demands. The mention of avoiding early morning work indicates a desire for balance, resulting in a polite articulation of personal hopes and preferences without burdening the listener.

The speaker's urgency becomes apparent when stating:

"Surat ini untukmu, rambut ikal, cepat tanda tangan di sini, tak 'kan kuhabiskan waktuku di sekolahmu ini, masih banyak kerjaan, sekarang musim bahyar pajak, masih ratusan SPT pajak harus diantar, cepatlah...." (Hirata, 2005: 280).

Here, the direct language conveys urgency while the affectionate address of "rambut ikal" (curly-haired one) softens the request slightly. Emphasizing their workload and the pressing nature of tax season justifies the need for expediency without appearing overly demanding.

Further, the speaker inquires, ".....Ia berkeras dengan kilat khusus, begitu pentingkah urusanmu belakangan ini, ikal mayang?" (Hirata, 2005: 280). This indirect

challenge questions the urgency of the listener's recent activities without overt disapproval. The familiarity conveyed through "ikal mayang" maintains a casual tone, suggesting skepticism about the listener's priorities in a non-confrontational manner.

Contrastingly, when addressing frustration, the speaker exclaims, "Itu kelenteng, bodoh!" (Hirata, 2005: 289). This statement is direct and lacks any softening, employing a confrontational tone that emphasizes the speaker's irritation with the listener's lack of awareness.

The speaker further highlights inappropriate behavior by stating, "Tiga anak jin tersinggung karena kau kencing sembarangan di kerajaan mereka dekat sumur sekolah...." (Hirata, 2005: 307). The blunt attribution of offense underscores the inappropriateness of the listener's actions, addressing the criticism directly without mitigation.

Conversely, the line "Mereka yang membuatmu demam panas," (Hirata, 2005: 307) exemplifies a shift in blame, attributing the fever to an external group. This strategy softens the critique by suggesting that the listener's condition stems from outside influences, thus avoiding direct accusation.

In a hypothetical criticism, the speaker posits, "Kalau dia bisa berubah menjadi burung bayan, tak perlu susah-susah kita mencari seperti ini," (Hirata, 2005: 321). Here, indirect phrasing implies discontent with the current situation without overt accusations, effectively minimizing confrontation.

Similarly, the query "Apa kau sudah gila?" (Hirata, 2005: 324) adopts a direct and accusatory stance, emphasizing disbelief towards the listener's actions while lacking any polite mitigation.

Nevertheless, the speaker softens their critique when they state, "Mari aku jelaskan ke kepalamu yang dikaburkan asap kemenyan sehingga tak bisa berpikir waras." (Hirata, 2005: 325). The inclusion of "Mari" introduces a degree of politeness, suggesting a willingness to explain rather than directly accuse the listener, framing the lack of rationality as a result of external factors.

Finally, the speaker articulates a shared disappointment:

"Lagi pula mana mungkin anak perempuan kecil itu dapat mencapai tempat ini. Batu ini adalah dinding utara terakhir. Kita telah mendatangi puluhan gubuk ladang yang ditinggalkan, hasilnya nol, mendatangi satu gubuk pencuri timah hasilnya akan tetap sama, ayolah pulang, Kawan, terimalah kenyataan bahwa Tuk telah menipu kita, ayolah pulang, Kawan...." (Hirata, 2005: 325).

By employing phrases like "Lagi pula" and "ayolah pulang", the speaker mitigates criticism through collective frustration, emphasizing a shared experience rather than individual failure, thus fostering a sense of camaraderie even amid disappointment.

Overall, Hirata's nuanced portrayal of negative politeness not only enriches character interactions but also mirrors broader cultural values, highlighting the importance of social harmony and respect in Indonesian society.

5. Conclusion

The exploration of negative politeness in *Laskar Pelangi* by Andrea Hirata reveals the intricate ways in which characters navigate their social environments, skillfully balancing the need for expression with respect for others' autonomy. Through

the use of deferential language, indirect expressions, and tentativeness, Hirata's characters demonstrate an acute awareness of social dynamics, particularly in contexts of hierarchy and sensitive issues. Ikal's interactions illustrate a profound respect for familial obligations and personal boundaries, while Pak Harfan's authoritative yet polite directives reflect the complexities of maintaining authority in a respectful manner. Additionally, instances of self-deprecating humor and indirect communication serve to minimize potential discomfort or conflict, reinforcing the theme of social harmony. Moreover, the varied expressions of urgency and frustration throughout the narrative showcase how characters manage emotional vulnerability without imposing their feelings on others. The nuanced strategies employed highlight the cultural emphasis on preserving relationships and nurturing a sense of community, making the analysis of negative politeness not only relevant to character development but also reflective of broader Indonesian societal values. Ultimately, Hirata's narrative invites readers to appreciate the subtleties of communication that underpin human interactions, emphasizing the significance of empathy and respect in fostering understanding and connection.

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