

DIGITAL LITERACY AND LINGUISTIC POLITENESS AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN ACEH TAMIANG

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Received: 2024-09-18

Accepted: 2024-12-13

Published: 2024-12-20

Abstract

This study examines the impact of digital technology on language politeness among teenagers in Aceh Tamiang Regency, highlighting the dual effects of technology and the need for digital literacy. The objectives are twofold: (1) to explore the influence of digital literacy on language politeness among teenagers and (2) to identify the principles of language politeness observed in their interactions. Employing a qualitative approach with descriptive methods, the research was conducted in Seruway and Kejuruan Muda subdistricts. The subjects, aged 12 to 24 years, were selected based on WHO's classification of teenagers and proportional random sampling techniques. Data were derived from the speech of teenagers, collected through observation using a Non-Participant Observation Technique. Analysis involved (1) observing and monitoring relevant speech, (2) recording and noting language use, (3) classifying speech into categories of direct and indirect politeness, and (4) analyzing the classified data. Findings indicate that digital literacy plays a significant role in promoting polite language use among teenagers. It helps counter the growing use of impolite expressions, which can create negative communication habits and risk offending others. This study underscores the importance of digital literacy in fostering respectful and effective communication among the youth in a technologically driven era.

Keywords: *adolescents; digital literacy; linguistic politeness; teen communication*

1. Introduction

The demands of modern development require individuals to continually enhance their ability to process and critically assess information. Unlike the past, where information exchange relied heavily on correspondence, today's digital media offers unprecedented access to vast amounts of information. This capability, defined as digital literacy, involves effectively accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and applying information for specific purposes. Digital literacy also fosters critical and creative thinking, equipping individuals to navigate the digital environment while discerning credible from dubious information. According to data from [Kominfo.go.id](https://kominfo.go.id), 98% of children and teenagers are familiar with the internet, with 79.5% actively using it.

Digital literacy's impact on teenagers is significant, influencing various aspects of their lives, including language politeness. Language politeness refers to expressing thoughts

and emotions respectfully, adhering to social norms, and maintaining ethical communication. Leech and Tatiana (2014) identifies six principles of politeness based on Leech's framework: the maxims of wisdom, generosity, praise, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. These principles are essential for effective communication and reflect an individual's respect and courtesy in social interactions. Notably, language politeness also correlates with broader educational outcomes, such as reading proficiency.

Despite the global relevance of digital literacy, studies examining its local implications in specific cultural contexts remain limited. For example, while Gillen (2014) highlighted the psychological effects of digital literacy on children and adolescents, their work primarily focused on identity formation rather than behavioral aspects like language politeness. Similarly, earlier studies have explored digital literacy's role in media literacy (Udoudom, George, Igiri, & Aruku, 2023) (Nucifera&Hidayat, 2019), local wisdom (Ridho, Wardani, & Saptono, 2021), and language education (Janthapasssa, Chanthapassa, & Kenaphoom, 2024). However, these studies used varied methodologies and subjects, leaving a gap in understanding how digital literacy influences teenagers' language politeness in culturally unique regions such as Aceh Tamiang.

This study seeks to fill the existing research gap by exploring the relationship between digital literacy and language politeness among teenagers in Aceh Tamiang, a district with a population of 287,733, predominantly of Malay ethnicity. The research aims to answer the following questions:

1. How does digital literacy influence the language politeness of teenagers in Aceh Tamiang Regency?
2. What are the underlying principles of language politeness among teenagers in Aceh Tamiang Regency?

The objectives of this study are:

1. To analyze the impact of digital literacy on the language politeness of teenagers in Aceh Tamiang Regency.
2. To identify and outline the principles of language politeness among teenagers in Aceh Tamiang Regency.

By connecting the global significance of digital literacy with the local cultural context of Aceh Tamiang, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how digital literacy affects teenagers' communicative behaviors. It offers valuable insights for promoting respectful and effective communication in digital interactions, especially in regions where cultural values play a significant role.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Digital Literacy

Literacy traditionally refers to the activities of reading, writing, and communication within society (Barton, 2017). However, the basic skills of reading and writing are no longer sufficient for individuals to fully function in modern society. This shift has led to the emergence of digital literacy, which encompasses technical abilities and the intellectual capacity to navigate, evaluate, and produce content in digital environments (Kurnia & Astuti, 2017; Ding, Chen, & Lu, 2023). While Nurjanah, Rusmana, and Yanto (2017) emphasize understanding and applying information from digital sources, Setyaningsih et al. (2019) focus

on the interest, attitude, and capabilities required for effective use of digital tools. These definitions highlight the multidimensional nature of digital literacy, extending beyond technical skills to include critical thinking and the ability to contribute meaningfully to society.

Despite these contributions, most studies on digital literacy lack an in-depth exploration of its contextual application across diverse demographics and cultural settings. For example, the works of Kurnianingsih, Rosini, and Ismayati (2017) largely emphasize general competencies without considering disparities in digital access and literacy levels in underprivileged communities. Additionally, while existing studies underline the intellectual aspects of digital literacy, they rarely examine the ethical implications or the challenges posed by misinformation in digital spaces. This research addresses these gaps by focusing on the interplay between digital literacy, socio-cultural contexts, and ethical considerations, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of digital literacy's role in modern communication.

2.2 Language Politeness

Language politeness refers to the adherence to behavioral norms and linguistic conventions that foster respectful and harmonious communication (Mislikhah, 2014; Gunawan, 2013). Politeness acts as a benchmark for social interaction, guiding speech and behavior to prevent conflicts and promote mutual understanding (Cahyani & Rokhman, 2017). Politeness strategies are often rooted in cultural values, reflecting both verbal and non-verbal elements such as gestures, expressions, and tone (Pramujiono et al., 2020). However, globalization and the rise of digital communication have introduced significant challenges to maintaining traditional language politeness, as noted by Rahadini and Suwarna (2014).

Although the existing literature provides valuable insights into the principles and strategies of politeness, it often neglects the nuances of politeness in digital interactions, where context and non-verbal cues are limited. For instance, studies by Alviah (2014) and Thomson (cited in Pramujiono et al., 2020) discuss verbal and non-verbal aspects of politeness but do not fully account for how these translate into text-based communication on social media. Furthermore, the impact of cultural diversity on perceptions of politeness in multilingual and multicultural online spaces remains underexplored. This study addresses these gaps by investigating the manifestations of language politeness in digital contexts, focusing on cross-cultural differences and the role of online platforms in shaping politeness norms.

2.3 Adolescence

Adolescence is a critical developmental phase characterized by physical, emotional, and social changes (Sumara, Humaedi, & Santoso, 2017). Defined differently across countries, this stage typically involves identity exploration, behavioral experimentation, and the development of autonomy (Diananda, 2019). Adolescence is commonly divided into early, middle, and late stages, each marked by distinct characteristics and developmental milestones (Aisyaroh, Kebidanan, & Unissula, 2010). For instance, early adolescents prioritize peer relationships and physical appearance, while late adolescents focus on abstract thinking and independence.

While the literature provides a robust overview of adolescence's developmental aspects, it often overlooks the influence of digital environments on this critical stage. The works of Saputro (2018) and Sumara et al. (2017) highlight general behavioral trends but fail to address how adolescents navigate identity and social interactions in the age of social media. Research by Putri, Nurwati, and Budiarti (2016) notes the dual impacts of social media—both positive and negative—but lacks a deeper analysis of how these impacts shape adolescents' cognitive and emotional development. Furthermore, Rao and Kalyani (2022) touch upon social media's risks but do not explore its role in fostering digital literacy or language politeness among adolescents.

This research bridges these gaps by examining the intersection of adolescence, digital literacy, and language politeness. It investigates how adolescents engage with social media, develop digital literacy skills, and adapt politeness strategies in digital communication. By focusing on these intersections, this study provides a holistic perspective on the challenges and opportunities faced by adolescents in a digitally mediated world.

3. Research Method

3.1 Methodology

This study investigates the impact of digital literacy on linguistic politeness among adolescents in Aceh Tamiang District, employing a linguistic approach to analyze language use phenomena. This qualitative study interprets and explains how digital literacy shapes linguistic politeness within a social and cultural context, enabling the development of theories grounded in field data. The qualitative method is particularly suitable as it provides an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, thoughts, and actions.

3.2 Participants

The study was conducted in the Aceh Tamiang District, specifically focusing on the Seuruway and Kejuruan Muda sub-districts, which are representative of the district's cultural and linguistic dynamics. The participants comprised 50 adolescents aged 12–24 years, consistent with the WHO definition of adolescence. Proportional random sampling was employed to ensure representation across the two sub-districts based on their population distribution, enabling reliable and generalizable findings. Within each subgroup, a simple random sampling technique, utilizing a lottery system, was applied to finalize participant selection. This approach was chosen to capture regional and cultural diversity while maintaining the study's focus on linguistic politeness. Additionally, demographic variables such as gender and educational background were included to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing adolescents' language use in digital contexts.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through the listening method, a linguistic observation technique that involves passive participation. The researcher used the Free Participation Listening Technique (SBLT) to attentively observe and record adolescents' daily spoken language without influencing the interaction. The main data source consisted of the adolescents' utterances during natural conversations. The tools employed included audio recording devices and detailed note-taking to capture nuanced language use.

3.4 Procedure

The research process was conducted in three distinct stages. During the preparation stage, the necessary tools, such as recording devices, were assembled, and participants from the Seuruway and Kejuruan Muda sub-districts were selected. The implementation stage involved gathering data through observation, audio recordings, note-taking, and interviews with the participants. Finally, in the analysis stage, the collected data were systematically reduced, displayed, and interpreted to draw meaningful conclusions.

3.5 Data Analysis

For data analysis, thematic analysis was utilized to uncover patterns and themes related to linguistic politeness. The process began with data familiarization, where recorded dialogues were reviewed, and notes were examined to identify relevant linguistic features. Next, instances of linguistic politeness were coded based on Leech's politeness principles, including the maxims of wisdom, generosity, and modesty. These codes were then categorized into direct and indirect politeness strategies. In the final step, the categorized data were interpreted within the framework of linguistic politeness to analyze the influence of digital literacy on adolescents' communication practices.

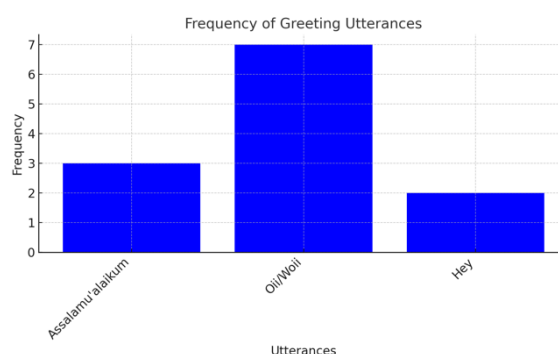
This study bridges the gap between digital literacy and linguistic politeness by examining the phenomenon in a specific cultural setting. By employing a rigorous methodological approach and a robust sampling strategy, the research aims to provide insights into fostering respectful and effective communication among adolescents in Aceh Tamiang.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Result

4.1.1 Linguistic Politeness among Adolescents in Suka Rahmat Village, Aceh Tamiang

1. Greeting Utterances

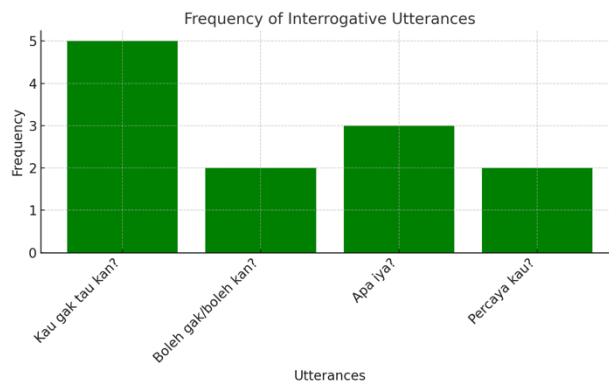


In Suka Rahmat Village, Rantau District, Aceh Tamiang, adolescents frequently use the greeting "oii/woi." This form of address is commonly employed by both male and female teenagers when interacting with their peers, as it is considered more familiar and comfortable. However, it is important to note that the greeting "oii/woi" is deemed less polite, particularly when used with individuals who are older.

Conversely, the phrase "Assalamu'alaikum" is typically used when adolescents visit a friend's home, as a customary greeting upon entering. This expression is employed less frequently in casual encounters or on the street.

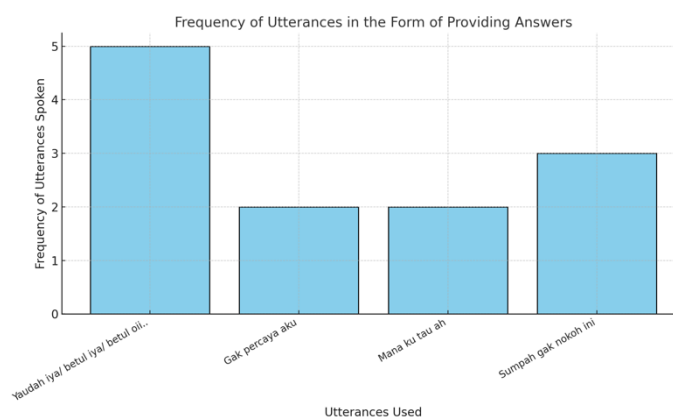
"Assalamu'alaikum" is a greeting that should ideally be used more regularly to address friends or elders, as it carries a prayer for well-being for both the speaker and the listener. Additionally, the use of "hey" is relatively rare among adolescents in Suka Rahmat Village. This greeting is considered impolite when directed at older individuals and is generally reserved for interactions with peers of the same age group.

2. Interrogative Utterances



In the context of Acehnese adolescents, particularly in Desa Suka Rahmat, Kecamatan Rantau, the frequently used interrogative utterance is "Kau gak tau kan?" This expression is commonly employed by teenagers to inquire about or confirm information that their peers may not yet know before providing the information themselves. However, this utterance is considered less polite when directed towards older individuals. Another common interrogative utterance among teenagers is "Boleh gak/bolehkan?" This phrase is used to request permission to borrow an item. It is considered more polite for asking permission from both peers and older individuals, as it offers the listener the choice to grant or deny the request. Additionally, utterances such as "Apa iya?" and "Percaya kau?" are used by teenagers to verify the accuracy of information about matters they are not yet familiar with.

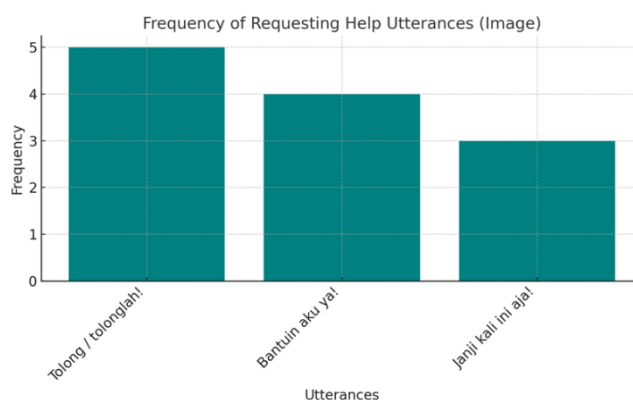
3. Utterances in the Form of Providing Answers



In the context of adolescents in Aceh Tamiang, specifically in Desa Suka Rahmat, Kecamatan Rantau, common responses include utterances such as "yaudah iya/betul iya/betul oii." These responses are considered polite as they are expressed in a gentle manner. Conversely, the phrase "Gak percaya aku" is used to convey disbelief in response to something communicated by the speaker. This expression indicates skepticism or doubt. Another example is "Mana ku tau ah," which falls into the category of less polite utterances.

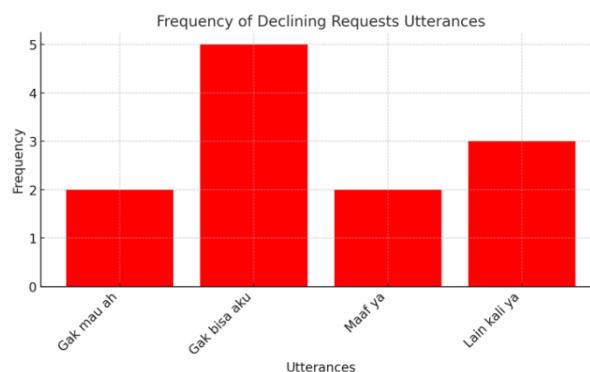
This phrase is perceived as dismissive and unhelpful, as it does not provide a satisfactory answer and appears to disregard the speaker's question.

4. Utterances in the Form of Requesting Help



In the context of Acehnese youth, particularly in Desa Suka Rahmat, the commonly used utterance for requesting assistance is “tolong/tolonglah!” This phrase is considered polite, as it employs the word “tolong” (please) to convey a request. Another common expression, “bantuin aku ya” (help me, okay?), is used to ask for assistance but can come across as somewhat demanding, as the speaker strongly anticipates a positive response from the listener. Similarly, the utterance “janji kali ini aja!” (promise just this time!) is akin to “bantuin aku ya” in that it is used to request help. However, this expression can be perceived as less polite and more coercive, as it involves a degree of insistence that may be seen as impolite.

5. Utterances in the Form of Declining Requests

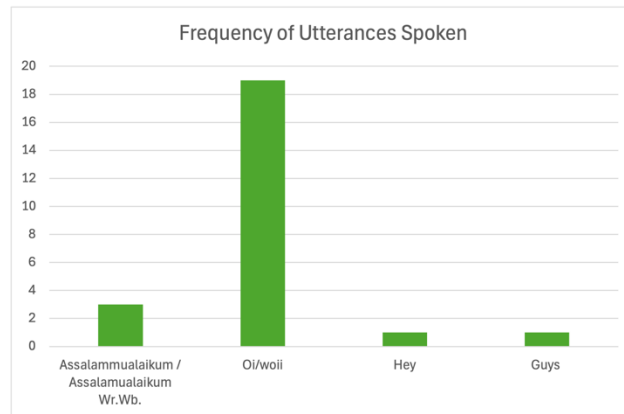


Utterances commonly used by adolescents in Aceh Tamiang, specifically in Desa Suka Rahmat, to decline requests include “Gak bisa aku!” This phrase is perceived as somewhat impolite due to its directness in rejecting a request. Although it provides a straightforward response, it lacks a degree of politeness. Similarly, “gak mau ah” also conveys a sense of rudeness as it rejects the request with a curt tone, though it is occasionally used by adolescents in Desa Suka Rahmat. On the other hand, “maaf ya!” represents a more polite form of declining a request. However, this utterance is not yet widely employed by the adolescents in Desa Suka Rahmat. Another common expression is “lain kali ya!” which is used to defer a request with the promise of a future opportunity to assist or fulfill the request. This utterance, while intended to provide an alternative, is considered somewhat

impolite as it offers an uncertain promise, potentially leading to a lack of clarity in communication.

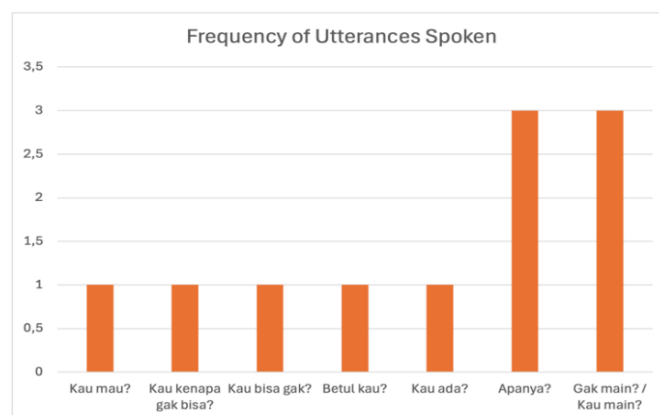
4.1.2 Linguistic Politeness among Adolescents in Desa Kota Lintang, Aceh Tamiang

1. Greeting Utterances



In Desa Kota Lintang, Kecamatan Kuala Simpang, Aceh Tamiang, the commonly used greeting among adolescents is "oii/woi." This form of address is frequently employed by male adolescents when greeting their peers, as it is perceived as more familiar and comfortable. However, the use of "oii/woi" is considered less polite, particularly when addressing older individuals. The greeting "Assalamualaikum" is traditionally used when adolescents visit or enter a friend's home, as a form of salutation. This greeting, however, is infrequently used by adolescents when encountering friends in public spaces or on the street. Ideally, "Assalamualaikum" should be used more frequently when greeting friends or older individuals, given that it conveys a prayer of goodwill both for the greeter and the recipient. The expression "hey" is also rarely used by adolescents in Desa Kota Lintang. This term is considered impolite when used with older individuals and is reserved for peers of the same age. Similarly, "guys" is another term infrequently used by adolescents in this area, as it is deemed inappropriate for addressing those who are older. Like "hey," "guys" is primarily used among peers of the same age.

2. Interrogative Utterances

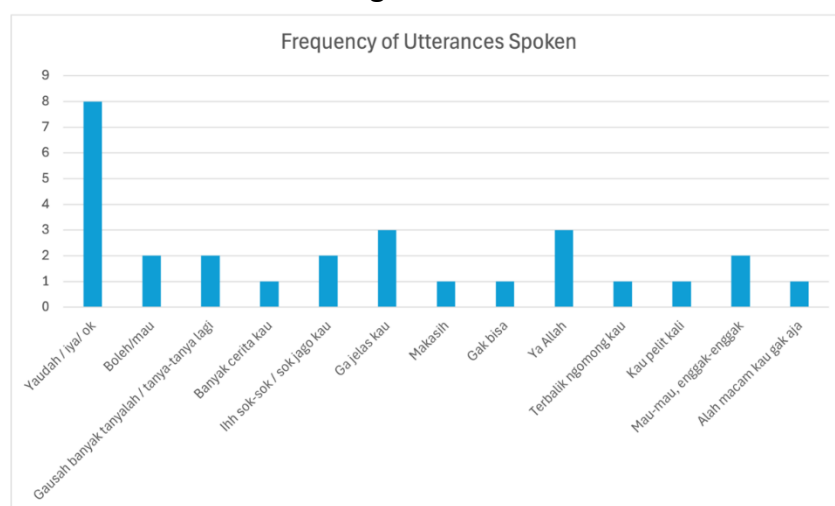


In Desa Kota Lintang, Kecamatan Kuala Simpang, Aceh Tamiang, several question forms are frequently used by adolescents. One common phrase is "Kau mau?" which is used to inquire about something from a peer. However, this expression is considered less polite

when directed at older individuals. The phrase “Kau kenapa gak bisa?” is typically used by adolescents to ask or confirm details regarding an invitation. This form of questioning is also deemed impolite when addressing older individuals.

Similarly, “Kau bisa gak?” is employed by adolescents to question or verify an invitation or capability. This expression, like the previous ones, lacks politeness when used with older individuals. The inquiry “Betul kau?” is used to confirm the accuracy of information. It is perceived as impolite in interactions with older individuals.” Kau ada?” is another common question used by adolescents to ask or confirm details about an invitation. This phrase is considered impolite when used with older individuals. Additionally, “Apanya?” is frequently used by adolescents to seek clarification about a matter from their peers. This phrase is also regarded as impolite in conversations with older individuals. Finally, “Gak main? / Kau main?” is used by adolescents to ask or confirm participation in an activity. This expression, too, is less polite when directed at older individuals.

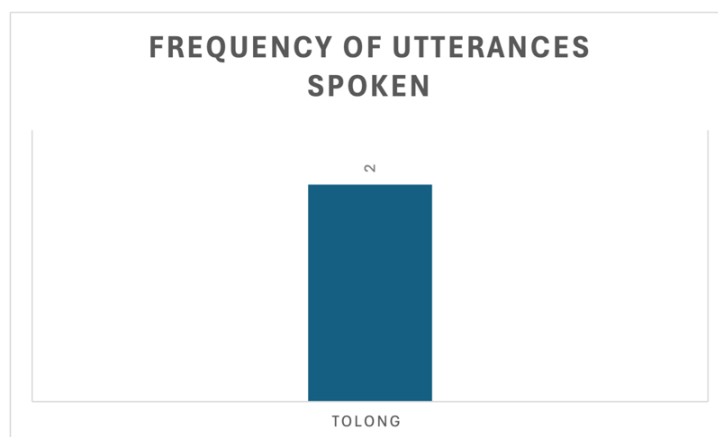
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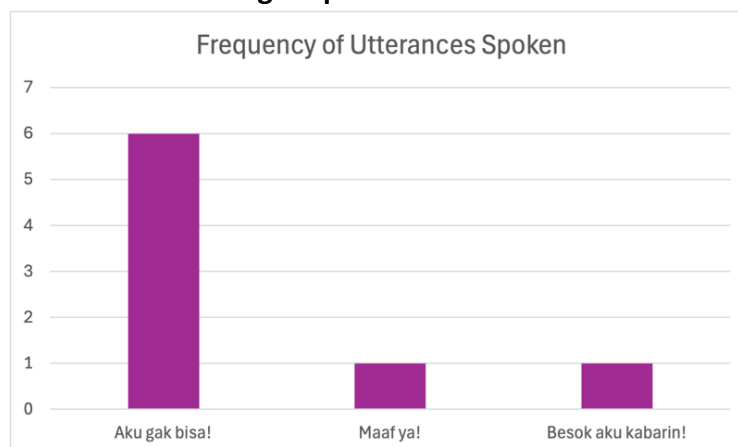
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4. Utterances in the Form of Requesting Help



In Desa Kota Lintang, Kecamatan Kuala Simpang, Aceh Tamiang, adolescents frequently use the term "tolong" to request assistance. This expression is considered polite and is commonly employed in situations where help is needed.

5. Utterances in the Form of Declining Requests



In Desa Kota Lintang, Kecamatan Kuala Simpang, Aceh Tamiang, adolescents often use the expression "Aku gak bisa!" to refuse a request. This phrase tends to be perceived as less polite because it bluntly rejects the request. Although the response is honest, it may come across as dismissive. The phrase "maaf ya!" serves as a more polite way to decline a request. However, this expression is not yet fully embraced by the adolescents in Desa Kota Lintang. On the other hand, the expression "Besok aku kabarin!" is commonly used by adolescents to respond to a request. This phrase is considered polite because it provides a gentle response, indicating that the request will be addressed at a later time.

4.2 Discussion

The findings discussed in the previous section on linguistic politeness among adolescents in Aceh Tamiang align closely with the themes outlined in the literature review, particularly in the realms of digital literacy, language politeness, and adolescence.

While this study does not focus directly on digital literacy in the traditional sense, it touches upon important aspects of adolescents' interactions in both online and offline contexts. Digital literacy, as defined by Kurnia & Astuti (2017) and Ding, Chen, & Lu (2023),

encompasses the ability to navigate, evaluate, and produce content in digital environments. This concept is evident in the adolescents' use of language in digital interactions, particularly when considering the role of informal greetings (e.g., "oii/woii") and requests (e.g., "Kau gak tau kan?"). These forms of communication reflect a certain level of technical ability to communicate digitally and are indicative of the intellectual capacity needed to engage with peers effectively in the online space. The study also highlights the gap in the literature regarding the application of digital literacy in diverse, culturally specific contexts, which this study seeks to address by examining how local cultural norms influence the development of digital communication skills.

The concept of language politeness (Mislikhah, 2014; Gunawan, 2013) is central to understanding the adolescents' communication strategies. The study provides an insightful look into how adolescents balance informal and formal speech forms based on their relationship with the listener (e.g., using "oii/woii" with peers vs. "Assalamu'alaikum" with elders). This behavior reflects the politeness strategies rooted in cultural values, as highlighted by Pramujiono et al. (2020), emphasizing that verbal and non-verbal cues are crucial in shaping respectful communication. However, the shift in communication dynamics due to globalization and the rise of digital platforms—mentioned by Rahadini and Suwarna (2014)—is especially pertinent here, as adolescents may adjust their politeness strategies in response to the limitations of non-verbal cues in digital spaces. This study helps address gaps in the literature by exploring how traditional politeness norms are maintained or altered in digital interactions, particularly as adolescents navigate between offline and online forms of communication.

The study's focus on adolescent communication practices aligns with the literature on adolescence (Sumara et al., 2017; Diananda, 2019). The findings suggest that adolescence is a pivotal time for developing communication skills, both verbal and digital, and for experimenting with different forms of politeness based on social context. This phase of identity exploration and autonomy, as described by Aisyaroh et al. (2010), is evident in how adolescents prioritize peer relationships and adjust their language accordingly. The dual impacts of social media (Putri, Nurwati, & Budiarti, 2016) are also seen here, as adolescents interact with their peers using both informal and formal language, which may differ depending on whether the interaction is mediated digitally or face-to-face. This study further bridges the gap in the literature by exploring how adolescence, digital literacy, and language politeness intersect, providing a more holistic perspective on how adolescents navigate social and communicative challenges in both digital and physical environments

5. Conclusion

This study underscores the dynamic interplay between digital literacy, linguistic politeness, and adolescence, offering valuable insights into how teenagers in Aceh Tamiang navigate the tension between traditional cultural norms and the demands of digital communication. By situating these elements within a specific socio-cultural context, the research enriches the growing body of literature on digital literacy and politeness, particularly in rural settings. The findings highlight the need for a deeper understanding of adolescent communication practices in the digital age, paving the way for future studies that explore these intersections across diverse contexts. Educators are encouraged to integrate culturally relevant digital literacy and netiquette into their teaching to help adolescents engage responsibly in digital environments. Additionally, policymakers should prioritize

equal access to digital tools and support research examining how digital platforms shape adolescent communication. However, the study's generalizability is limited by its small sample size, focus on a single rural community, and the exclusion of non-linguistic factors such as media literacy and non-verbal communication. Future research should address these limitations by incorporating larger, more diverse samples, examining longitudinal effects, and exploring the broader impact of digital platforms on adolescent behavior.

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