

MAKING A MORE HOSPITABLE PUBLIC NOTICE

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Abstract: This article explores the nature of public notice in Indonesian community. My aim in the first place is to describe the nature of public notices as to explain why some of them sound inhospitable or even impolite. The very apparent factors are due to the presence of words that imply writer's exercise of power and thus a subordination to the readers occurs. In addition, I also try to propose some pragmatics recommendations for the writer of public notice in order to compose an effective, yet still polite, public notice through the accounts of context and politeness theory.

Keywords: *public notice, politeness*

Socially, a public notice is needed to be posed on public space as to ensure that public affairs can run smoothly, and no body would feel disadvantaged or even discriminatively treated in terms of his social rights. As a text, a public notice typically contains an directive act, namely command or request which is addressed to the readers. Thus, its writer must be aware of its impositive force, which potentially makes the readers' feel inconvenient as he must be forced to comply with the notice.

Since a public notice is publicly consumed, its writer must be prudent enough in composing its wording. He or she should balance its communicative effectiveness and its politeness. By the former, I mean that in producing noticing lines, a writer has to make sure that the readers can grasp the message of the notice and, in turn, they may be aware of the importance of abiding the notice for the sake of public harmony. By so doing, the communitative purpose of the notice will be achieved. Meanwhile, the latter means that the writer of the notice should ideally attempt to make the notice sounds amiable to the readers. The writer must realize that the notice definitely contains impositive act, which potentially threatens the readers' negative face, i.e. a want of being free from one else's impingement.

In the case of public notices our public spaces, I frequently came across with such a notice as, 'SELAIN PETUGAS DILARANG MASUK'. To my first impression, as a reader, such a notice sounds not only unfriendly but also discriminative. Reading this notice, I suddenly felt 'being suspected' as a bad guy or a sort of unwelcome outsider. In another occasion, we commonly found an even more 'threatening' notice like 'NGEBUT BENJUT' as we passed through a small alley of a campong. Crossing such a cautious zone, I feel like entering a jungle where wild animals readily attack me anytime in case I misbehave

myself. If these are our ways of ruling out people publicly, do we still deserve the recognition of being polite Indonesian society, who are culturally being nice, hospitable, helpful to others?

Through this paper, I would like to share my opinion as to how to mitigate the impositive force inherently occurring in our public notices. I attempt to explicate the politeness aspect of public notices commonly found in Indonesian community. Besides, it also sets a criticism to several ones which sounds impolite and thus needs to be pragmatically reformulated. For whatever reasons, our ability in constructing a public notice would, to a certain extent, depicts what our society culturally and even morally looks like. The more amiable our noticing lines are, the more positive the public image of our society we reap. All this is supported by empirical data of public notices collected from several offices and public facilities around us.

REQUEST DEFINED

As previously mentioned, a public notice contains directive acts, commonly a request. Blum-Kulka (1989) defines request as a pre-event act which expresses the speaker's expectation of the hearer to do a prospective action, verbal or nonverbal, for the speaker's interest. This act intrinsically generates an FTA effect on both interlocutors. For the hearer, a request could make him/her lose negative face because of its potential intrusive impingement on his/her freedom of action. Therefore, such an act calls for a redressive action in order to compensate the occurring impositive effect on the part of the hearer. On the part of the speaker, a request may put the requester in an awkward situation, in which the speaker may fear of exposing a need or risking the hearer's loss of face.

So far, several studies on request have focused on the different aspects. Some scholars like Ervin-Trip, 1976 and Blum-Kulka et al. (1985) focused their studies on revealing the sociopragmatic system of a particular society. Other scholars such as Clark and Schunk (1980) as well as Gibbs (1985) focused on discovering the process of its interpretation while Dascal (1983) discussing the basic issues of indirectness of requests in discourse. The present study focuses on the use of the request case to study politeness phenomena, like what have been conducted by Brown & Levinson (1978); Leech (1983); House and Kasper (1981); Blum-Kulka (1987).

In this paper I analyze the aspect of requestive content of the public notice, especially concerning with the encoding of politeness, i.e. the modification of the impositive force of a directive act. Also, I examined the linguistic politeness encoding that corresponds to such a notion as conversational mitigation, that is the modification of a speech act in such a way that the degree of particular unwelcome effect of a request can be reduced on the part of the hearers or the readers. According to Fraser (1980), 'mitigation entails politeness, and it occurs only if the speaker is polite'. Hence, it suggests that the speakers's use of mitigation markers in conveying a request reflects his communicative efforts to behave politely toward the interlocutors.

THE CONCEPT OF POLITENESS

So far, the concept of politeness has been variously framed by the experts. One well-known theoretical framework is proposed by Leech (1983), who conceives politeness as forms of behavior that establish and maintain comity, i.e. the ability of participants to keep an atmosphere of relative harmony in conducting social interaction. The polite behavior is possible to form if the interlocutors attempt to observe the politeness principle, that is a series of maxims explaining how politeness operates in conversational exchanges. Each maxim is accompanied by a sub-maxim. If politeness is not communicated, we can assume that the speaker's polite attitude is absent.

Leech's maxims can cover (1) Tact maxim, i.e. minimize cost to other and maximize benefit to other; (2) Generosity maxim, i.e. minimize benefit to self and maximize cost to self; (3) Approbation maxim, i.e. minimize dispraise of other and maximize praise of other; (4) Modesty maxim, i.e. minimize praise of self and maximize dispraise of self; (5) Agreement maxim, i.e. minimize disagreement between self and other as well as maximize agreement between self and other; and (6) Sympathy maxim, i.e. minimize antipathy between self and other and also maximize sympathy between self and other. As a speaker formulates his utterances based on either one of those maxims will earn a credit as a polite one. Another most influencing concept of politeness is advanced by Brown and Levinson (1978/87). This most thorough account theory defines politeness as redressive action, functioning to counter-balance the disruptive effect of face-threatening acts (FTAs), i.e. acts that infringe on the hearers' need to maintain his/her self-esteem, and be respected. In other words, they formulate politeness as a strategic behavior, that is showing the awareness of another's public self image, which technically termed as face, that is 'the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself'.

The notion of face is then categorized into two related aspects. The first aspect is positive face, defined as the positive consistent self-image that people have and want to be appreciated and approved of by at least some other people. It is all about one's need or want to be connected or to belong to a group. The other aspect is negative face, defined as the rights to territories, freedom of action and freedom from imposition, that is wanting your actions not to be constrained or inhibited by others. Simply put, it refers to one's right to be set free or not to be imposed on. In short, in their framework if we want to be polite, we must demonstrate an awareness that someone else need to be respected and socially accepted to our group as well as that he or she has freedom and thus needs to be freed or not to be imposed on.

The rational actions aimed to preserve both kinds of face, for themselves and the people they interact with, increase the degree of politeness. These experts also argue that in human communication, either spoken or written, people tend to maintain each other's face progressively. In everyday conversation, we adapt our conversation to different situations. Among friends we take liberties, saying things that would seem discourteous among strangers to enhance solidarity and to avoid over-formality. In both situations we try to avoid making the hearer embarrassed or uncomfortable.

Communication is also seen as potentially dangerous and antagonistic. Any speech act may potentially impose someone on and is therefore face threatening.

Hence, the speakers must have strategies for mitigating or redressing the threat. To sum up, being polite means showing positive politeness, that is a form of behavior that shows solidarity, being complimentary and gracious to the addressee as well as showing negative politeness, a form of behavior of finding ways of mitigating the imposition.

Brown and Levinson sum up human "politeness" behavior in four strategies, which correspond to these examples: bald on record, negative politeness, positive politeness, and off-record-indirect strategy. In a real communication, those politeness strategies are manifested in the way in which messages are hinted, hedged, made differentials, embedded in discourse structures.

- a. The bald on-record strategy does nothing to minimize threats to the hearer's "face"
 - 1) An Emergency: MOVE OUT!!! (when there is an earthquake)
 - 2) Task oriented: Give me the screwdriver! (when repairing a car)
 - 3) Request: Put your shoes off. (when entering mosque)
 - 4) Alerting: Turn your headlights on! (When alerting someone to something they should be doing)
- b. The positive politeness strategy shows you recognize that your hearer has a desire to be respected. It also confirms that the relationship is friendly and expresses group reciprocity.
 - 1) Attend to the hearer: "You must be thirsty. How about some drink?"
 - 2) Avoid disagreement: A: "What is she, tall?" B: "Yes, yes, she's tall, um, but not too tall."
 - 3) Assume agreement: "So, when are you going to drop by?"
 - 4) Hedge opinion: "You really should sort of try harder."
- c. The negative politeness strategy also recognizes the hearer's face. But it also recognizes that you are in some way imposing on them. Some other examples would be to say, "I don't want to bother you but..." or "I was wondering if..." Negative politeness are linguistically encoded in such following forms:
 - 1) Be conventionally indirect: "Could you please open the door?"
 - 2) Minimize imposition: "Could use your computer for a while?"
 - 3) Pluralize the person responsible: "We should clean the kitchen together'.
 - 4) Hedging: Er, could you, er, perhaps, open the door?
 - 5) Pessimism: I don't suppose you could open the door, could you?
 - 6) Indicating deference: Excuse me, sir, would you mind if I asked you to open the door?
 - 7) Apologizing: I'm very sorry to disturb, but could you open the door?
 - 8) Impersonalizing: 'The rule of this school requires all students must wear shoes' (Pronoun you is not explicitly used in the utterance so that it implies that as if the hearer were not the one being required to wear shoes in the office).
- d. Off-record indirect strategies take some of the pressure off of you. You are trying to avoid the direct FTA of asking for a beer. Instead you would rather it be offered to you once your hearer sees that you want one.
 - 1) Give hints: "The weather is so cold in here." (in fact the speaker want the window to be closed)

- 2) Be vague: "Perhaps someone should have been more responsible."
- 3) Be sarcastic, or joking: "Yeah, he's a real Habibie!"

TYPES OF PUBLIC NOTICE

A text is produced for communication and thus it is subject to interpretation, in which context is indispensable. The concept of context in this paper refers to Hymes' context which is often specified as an acronym, SPEAKING, where the letters respectively stand for *setting*, *participant*, *end*, *act*, *key*, *instrument*, *norm*, and *genre*. However, for the practical reason, I only utilize two components of Hymes' context, namely *setting* and *participant* to base my analysis on as to make a distinctive category of our public notices. Especially for the latter, I also consider the framework of Brown and Gilman (1968), by which they state that:

'The dimension of solidarity is potentially applicable to all persons addressed. Power superiors may be solidary (parents, elder siblings) or not solidary (officials whom one seldom sees). Power inferiors, similarly, as may be as solidary as the old family retainer and as remote as the waiter in strange restaurant' (Brown and Gilman, 1968, p.257).

Based on its context, we can roughly categorize a public notice into three types. First, viewed from its power relation between the participants involved in a communication occurs within it, a public notice can be first categorized as a *law-based notice*. Such a category is characteristically made by a power-superior writer. It means that the notice is produced by authorized parties and it is meant to warn or to prohibit the addressee not to do an action as regulated by the law. It includes, for example, police-made notice like 'DILARANG MELINTAS' (Do not Cross) as written in a police line.

The second category is an *emergency-based notice*. This category is a sort of benefited-readers notice. It means that the notice is produced by authorized parties in order to save the readers from a potential danger that may arise. It includes, for example, notices like 'BERBAHAYA! JANGAN BERENANG DI SINI', 'DAERAH RAWAN LONGSOR', 'TEGANGAN TINGGI', 'SILAKAN PECAHKAN KACA BILA TERJADI KECELAKAAN' and the like.

The last category is a *public service-based notice*. This category is produced by service agents either governmental or private institution to make the service activities smooth and convenient to the readers or customers they serve. Thus, it is customer satisfaction-oriented like 'SILAKAN ANTRI' or MAAF SETIAP PENUMPANG HARAP BERKARCIS.

In terms of politeness, those three previously mentioned categories should be differently treated. The first category, i.e. *law-based notice*, is considered to be always in a normal appropriacy within the public judgement. Every lawful subject must be inherently repressive. Therefore, the public notice of such a category must contain a blatant impositive force, to which people would take it for granted without feeling of being impinged. Likewise, the second category, i.e. *emergency-based notice*, also barely raises an objection on the part of readers despite their lust of being politely treated. The very reason that such a category always sounds polite is due to its tendency of granting a benefit on the part of

the readers or hearers. However, the third category is indeed relevant to be theoretically accounted. A public service-based notice deals with people's satisfaction and thus it is prone to be impolite if its wording is not wisely composed.

To sum up, a notice of the first two categories are beyond the discussion of this present paper since they are usually considered as socially proper. It implies that everybody must be law-subordinated or safety-entitled. Eventhough they are normally formulated in imperative forms, containing *command*, they are socially acceptable by its nature. My pragmatic account focuses on discussing the third category, in which the discussion of politeness is so relevant. It contains an illocutionary act of *requesting* which may be either politely or impolitely addressed to the readers.

A CASE OF IMPOLITENESS AS FOUND IN A PUBLIC SERVICE-BASED NOTICE

Impoliteness in this paper refers to the verbal formulation in a public service-based notice which does not comply with either (1) the proper linguistic encoding of the relative interpersonal distance and power between the speaker (S) and the hearer (H); (2) Leech's politeness maxims; or (3) Brown Levinson's notion of face. From those prespectives, I attempt to explain why a particular wording of the notice is considered impolite, in a sense that it may not encode the proper social distance and power that should exist between the interlocutors, may not observe the politeness maxims, or may not be in line with the politeness strategies that satisfy the positive as well as negative face.

To my scrutiny, there are particular words which potentially generate impoliteness as they are used in the wording of a noticing line. The following notice is pragmatically improper due to its linguistic encoding, namely the use of the words DILARANG 'prohibited' and SELAIN 'except'. The former is irrelevant with the relative interpersonal distance and power between the speaker (S) and the hearer (H) while the latter is non-observing to Leech's polite maxim and discontents the positive face of the readers. 'SELAIN PETUGAS DILARANG MASUK 'Except the officer, one is prohibited to enter (the room)'

Pragmatically, the notice above is considered impolite for several reasons. First, the presence of the word 'DILARANG' in the text is incongruent with our knowledge on our cultural norm in our society. As we know that the word *melarang* 'prohibiting' is normally used by an S which is superior to H in terms of power. Hence, such a word is considered socially *acceptable* if it is used by, for examples, the government to the folk, the parents to their kids, the boss to employess, etc. On the contrary, in a case of public service, the current concept of service places the customers higher than the serving officers. Therefore, if the word *dilarang* is used in this context, it then opposes the our cultural norm since it implies that the readers are positioned lower than the producer of the notice. As a result, the readers would feel subordinated by the writer of the notice and thus an impoliteness is generated.

Another problem that makes a notice sounds improper is due to the fact that its proposition does not observe Leech's sympathy maxim. This maxim encourages us to give as much sympathy as possible to our interlocutor in order

to behave politely. Being sympathetic implies a social openness; being inclusive other than exclusive to others, regardless their social status or conditions. By contrast, the presence of the word 'SELAIN' in the text suggests exclusiveness to the readers instead of inclusiveness. Besides, the presence of the word SELAIN would make the readers feel treated as an outsider. Thus it readily discontents the readers' positive face, that is a need or want to be connected or to belong to a group.

SOME RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FORMULATING POLITE PUBLIC NOTICE

Learning from the fore-mentioned politeness theory, we can set some recommendations for producing polite notice. First, we have to avoid using words that might raise subordination to the readers. For example, using the word MOHON instead of DILARANG is advisable in a public service-based notice, which characteristically requestive. By using a word like MOHON or HARAP, by which the readers are treated superior, we can comfort the readers. Presenting the word *mohon* 'Please' within a requestive notice, it would bring about 'softness feeling' on the part of the readers since it can reduce the degree of imposition or coerciveness. Our cultural norm teaches us that the word *mohon* is properly used by a speaker who is inferior to H. Therefore, using this word would give twofold implications. At the first place, in term of power, such a word could make the readers socially heightened, that is being treated as socially higher in power than the writer of the notice. In short, as the word MOHON is employed, the writer will humble himself in the perception of the readers. Hence, the produced noticing line will sound more hospitable and socially more acceptable. Secondly, the word MOHON would imply a strategy of deference which redresses the readers' negative face due to the FTA effected from the request within the notice. Thus, instead of writing 'SELAIN PETUGAS DILARANG MASUK', it will be more hospitable if we write 'MOHON TIDAK MASUK APABILA TIDAK BERKEPENTINGAN' for a particular noticing line.

The next recommendation is using an expression of apology, for example by employing the word MAAF 'sorry' in writing a noticing line. As suggested by Brown and Levinson, strategy of apologizing implies an implicature that the speaker can indicate his being reluctant to impinge the readers' wants of freedom and thus can reduce the degree of coerciveness and redress the impingement as effected by the inherently existing FTA of request within the notice. If the writer of the notice employs the expression of forgiveness, s/he will at least ask the readers for 'acquittal', that is they might cancel the debt implicitly yielded from the committed FTA of the writer. The reluctant attitude shown by the notice writer will imply a respectful treatment to the readers. Thus, 'MAAF, RUANGAN KHUSUS PETUGAS' will sound more polite than 'SELAIN PETUGAS DILARANG MASUK'.

The subsequent recommendation to make our public notice more amiable is by using a strategy of nominalizing, that is by using *gerund* instead of verb within the noticing line. By this strategy, a notice writer can increase the degree of politeness, which goes along with the degree of formality. Meanwhile, the formality will increase along with the increase of nouniness. According to Ross

(1972), the facts of syntax suggests a category squish', that is a continuum from verb to adjective to noun, which corresponds to the continuum from syntactic volatility to syntactic inertness. Therefore, a notice like 'NO SMOKING' is more socially acceptable than 'DO NOT SMOKE'. In our Indonesian syntax, we have no such a concept of gerund. Instead, to nominalize noticing line could be done by positioning a verb as the subject, instead of positioning it as the predicate of a sentence. For instance, 'MEROKOK TIDAK BAIK BAGI KESEHATAN' sounds more hospitable than 'JANGAN MEROKOK DI SINI'.

The next tip to make our noticing line sounds polite is by using a syntactic down-grader, that is a syntactic choice made by the speaker to modify the requestive act internally in such a way that it mitigates its impositive force within the line. The most appropriate syntactic form to use is a *conditional clause*, which is introduced by such a clause marker as *apabila ...*, meaning 'If ...'.

(1) MOHON TIDAK MASUK.

(2) APABILA TIDAK BERKEPENTINGAN MOHON TIDAK MASUK.

If we compare the two notices above, (1) is vividly more amiable than (2) since the presence of a *conditional clause*, *APABILA TIDAK BERKEPENTINGAN*. Such a clause implicates a meaning that the speaker is aware of the fact that the success of his/her request execution by the hearer depends on a conducive condition in which the hearer is situated. Thus, in case the readers do not follow the notice, they are not to blame since their disobedience is due to the fact that the condition is not fulfilled. Thus, viewed from the framework of Brown and Levinson (1987), *conditional clause* marker *apabila* is in fact a strategy of hedging, which belongs to negative politeness. Therefore, the notice expressed in such a conditional clause will be perceived as containing higher degree of politeness than the one expressed in *imperative* or *performative* form.

At last, to make a public notice sound polite can be done by presenting a *grounder*, i.e. a linguistic unit in the requestive utterance conveying the speaker's reason, explanation, or justification for the committed request. According to Brown and Levinson, by giving an overwhelming reason, the writer of a notice will honestly tell the readers that the request he did is so compelling because of his incapacity or his being powerless. By so doing, he implies that normally he would not dream of infringing the readers' freedom of action. In turn, it will generate an understanding on the part of the addressee as s/he reads it. Including a reason in a public notice may imply that the readers' action as requested in the notice is of primary importance to achieve an expected situation that might comfort all stick-holders or related parties. Compare the following notices.

(3) PELAN-PELAN.

(4) PELAN-PELAN BANYAK ANAK KECIL

(5) HARAP TENANG

(6) HARAP TENANG ADA UJIAN

It is apparent that (4) is less coercive than (3) while (6) is less coercive than (5) since the presence of reasons, respectively BANYAK ANAK KECIL in (4) and ADA UJIAN in (6).

CONCLUSION

At last, the paper results in some conclusions as follow. First, based on the its context, public notice can be roughly categorized into three types, namely law-based notice, emergency-based notice, and public service-based notice. The first two categories are normally consist of *command* and to be considered as socially proper because they are characteristically law-enforcing and public safety-oriented while the third pragmatically contains a *request* which needs smart formulation in order to balance its aspects of communicativeness and its politeness. Secondly, impoliteness in the public service-based notice may occur because of the presence of such words as DILARANG or SELAIN. Both respectively imply that the readers are positioned lower than the writer of the notice and thus make the readers feel treated as an outsider. Theoretically, this means the notice threatens the readers' positive face, that is a need to be connected or to belong to a group. Finally, public service-based notice can be politely constructed by (1) avoiding using words that might raise subordination to the readers; (2) using an expression of apology; (3) using an expression of nominalization; (4) using a syntactic form of *conditional clause*; and (5) presenting reason, explanation, or justification. Our ability to compose a polite public notice, thus more hospitable to the readers, will somehow contribute our international recognition of being polite Indonesian.

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