

**Research Article**

# The Rising Vulnerability of Indonesian Language Culture: Analyzing the Encoded Politeness in the Use of Plural Second-Person Pronouns

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**Abstract.**

This article explored the use of Indonesian pronouns by young people in Indonesia. The way in which they use pronouns erodes Indonesian culture encoded in Indonesian pronouns. They use the pronouns *kamu* (you, second-person singular pronoun), *kalian* (you, second-person plural pronoun), *kita* (we (you and me), first-person plural pronoun), and *kami* (we (not including you), first-person plural pronoun) that do not comply with Indonesian grammar. The data was collected by observing language used among the younger generation online and in everyday speech. The data was analyzed using a book on Indonesian grammar by A. M. Moeliono et al. The results discovered that Indonesian pronouns express politeness, particularly in the use of *kamu* and *kalian* (you, second-person plural pronouns), and the differences between first-person plural pronouns *kita* (we (you and me), first-person plural pronoun), and *kami* (we (not including you), first-person plural pronoun).

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## 1. Introduction

Language and culture are two inseparable aspects of human life since humans use language to express their culture [2],[3],[4]. Fundamentally, language has two primary functions, namely linguistic and cultural functions. In linguistic function, language is deployed by the speakers to communicate in their community. Each community member can deliver thoughts, feelings, and ideas to the interlocutor using their language. As a linguistic function, the language has rules or principles in terms of phonological, morphological, syntactical, and semantical systems. Therefore, language can be a practical communication tool when it follows the rules or principles of the language. The


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obedience of language users to grammar becomes the subject of research showing how language is practically responded to by the users [5], [6].

Nevertheless, language can be positioned as a cultural function of the speakers' social and cultural system, for instance, in the Javanese language [7]. It causes each culture constructed by a community to be encoded in their language vocabulary. One culture related to the use of language is politeness culture.

At starting a conversation, anyone needs to determine and choose honorific words that the speaker would use with his interlocutor. Does the speaker use pronominal or term of address? As stated by Wardhaugh (2006), some languages have diversity in using personal pronouns, like *tu* and *vous* in French, in which the user is specified by the interpersonal relationship of the speaker and his interlocutor. The speech community tends to construct and maintain their social relationship, vertical and horizontal, using pronouns since pronouns encode the interpersonal relationship between the speaker and his partner [9]. The pronouns used can portray the power relationship, subordination, solidarity, intimacy, and solidarity between the speaker and his interlocutor. The relationship is depicted as a non-reciprocal one. Verbal superiority also inclines to be attached to women [10]. Thus, in language history, it is perceived that parents are the first upper position of an individual. The subordinative experience of children and their parents is not symmetrical. The power relation continues prevailing politeness norms in the language community [11]. linguistic study with paradigm cultural studies reveal the power relation encoded in speech uttered [12].

The Indonesian nation has *a polite* culture of greetings. The politeness in Indonesian culture, generally, requires a friendly and solid attitude towards the interlocutor. Politeness becomes one of the striking characteristics of the Indonesian people that is necessary to preserve and maintain. The loss of it also means the decency of culture.

The question is whether the politeness culture in greetings that becomes of Indonesian national character remains well maintained and manifested by the young generation. Based on a brief observation of the use of the Indonesian language by the young generation, there is the trend that the young generation does not understand the concept of politeness culture encoded in the pronouns *kamu* (you, second-person singular pronoun), *kalian* (you, second-person plural pronoun). The young generation prefers to shift the pronouns *kamu* and *kalian* incorrectly and violate the politeness principle in Indonesian culture. The mistake of using both pronouns will lead to less smooth communication between the speaker and his interlocutor. It occurs since using

incorrect *kamu*, and *kalian* with politeness norms will offend the interlocutor because the speaker disrespects him. Such a thing needs to be anticipated to keep alive the politeness culture.

In English, the second-person singular and plural pronouns greet the higher social status interlocutor than the speaker. It happens because using pronouns does not relate to politeness in western culture. While in the Indonesian language, the pronouns *kamu* and *kalian* cannot be used to greet the higher social status interlocutor than the speaker. It is considered impolite.

In the globalization era, the potential of foreign acculturation to Indonesian culture is very high. Therefore, it should be concerned that the use of Indonesian vocabulary and national encoding characters does not disappear. Also, based on observation, the *younger generation often messes up using kita and kami* pronouns in Indonesia. It drives the writer to suspect that the young generation does not understand the concept implied by both pronouns. Perhaps the mistake of both pronouns is caused by the background of the young generation's first language (mother tongue). The writing discusses them, focusing on the pronouns *kita* and *kami*, *kamu* and *kalian*.

## 2. The Use of Kamu and Kalian Pronouns

The young Indonesian generation tends to use *kamu* and *kalian* pronouns to greet the older interlocutor than the speaker. It violates the politeness norm in Indonesian culture as conveyed by A. M. Moeliono et al. [1] that the Indonesian nation has a politeness norm in greetings. Culturally, the younger generation is expected to honour the elder. On the contrary, the elder is expected to tolerate the younger. Using personal pronouns in the Indonesian language reflects such a common element.

Further, A. M. Moeliono et al. [1] cite that manners in social life demand harmonious rules in terms of each other dignity. Generally, three parameters are applied as guidance: 1) age, 2) social status, and 3) intimacy. Social status\_ either in society or in official institution\_ also influence the use of pronouns [13],[14].

Therefore, the incorrect use of *kamu* and *kalian* pronouns will cause unsmooth communication between the interlocutor and the speaker. It can be prevented when the younger generation understand cultural concept implied in the pronouns. One of the general instances is when the young generation greets their parents. He uses *kalian* pronoun. The *kalian* pronoun is similar to *kamu sekalian* (you all). Consequently, in the

politeness norm, the word *kalian* may not be used to greet the higher social status interlocutor than the speaker.

In *Indonesian Idol* and *Dangdut Academy*, when the contestants are questioned by the presenter about their feeling when showing on the program, they often use the *kalian* pronoun. They frequently answer and state, "*Ini untuk kalian semua* (this is for you all)". The statement is referred to the family presenting to watch their performance. The use of *kalian* pronoun pointed to the parents, uncle and aunt, younger brother, and others are not polite since it violates the politeness norm in Indonesian culture. The impolite act is actual and happens in front of online and offline audiences. It is also broadcasted on television and watched by millions of young people. It cannot be ignored. The Indonesian children will imitate the use of incorrect *kalian* pronouns. Also, the contestants use *kamu* pronoun to greet the older interlocutor than the speaker.

### 3. The Use of Kita and Kami Pronouns

The Indonesian language has two first-person plural pronouns, namely *kita* (we (you and me), a first-person plural pronoun), and *kami* (we (not including you)). The concept contained in the *kita* and *kami* pronouns is very discrete. The word *kami* contains an exclusive context. The first-person plural pronoun involves the speaker and others on the speaker's side. However, it does not involve the interlocutor and others on the interlocutor's side.

On the contrary, the first-person plural pronoun *kita* is inclusive. The first-person plural pronoun includes the speaker, the interlocutor and others. Therefore, the use of both pronouns cannot be reversed.

Unfortunately, the use of *kita* and *kami* pronouns is frequently messed up for the younger generation. For example, a one-afternoon program broadcasted by a television program holds interactive service. At the event, the presenter uses the first-person plural pronoun *kita* to refer to the speaker (presenter). He said "*Para pemirsa dapat menghubungi kita ke nomor telepon* (The viewers can contact us to the phone number)...". According to Indonesian grammar, using the *kita* pronoun in the sentence is incorrect. It is not correct in context. The presenter should not use *kita* but *kami*.

In addition, the word *kita*, in which the concept refers to *kami*, also appears in the everyday conversation of the young generation. It seems natural, but it is not true based on Indonesian grammar. The following sentences show different meanings.

(1a) \**Para pemirsa dapat menghubungi kita ke nomor telepon* (The viewers can contact us to the phone number)....

(1b) *Para Pemirsa dapat menghubungi kami ke nomor telepon* (The viewers can contact us to the phone number) ....

Using *kita* in sentence (a) makes the sentence unreasonable caused by the concept of *kita* covers not only the speaker but also the viewers at home. Therefore, the sentence's meaning contradicts the aim intended by the presenter. Implicitly, the viewers are requested to contact themselves.

The change of the word *kita* in sentence (a) to *kami* in a sentence (b) makes the sentence reasonable caused by the concept implied refers to the presenter and interviewees presenting in the interactive event. Thus, in the word in a sentence (1b), the presenter asks the viewer to contact them (the presenter and interviewees) to propose questions or responses about the program. A similar case also happens in the examples (2a) below.

(2a) *Pak, kita akan menikah bulan depan* (Sir, we will get married next month).

(2b) *Pak, kami akan menikah bulan depan* (Sir, we will get married next month).

The sentence (2a) is uttered by a woman who comes with her beloved one to meet her supervisor. When speaking to the supervisor, she said the sentence exemplified by sentence (2a) to inform that they will get married next month.

The word *kita* in context (2a) refers to the speaker and interlocutor. The speaker is the woman, and the interlocutor is the supervisor. Thus, sentence (2a) implied meaning that the woman would get married to the supervisor next month. When the woman gets married to the supervisor, why must she say the sentence caused by the supervisor must have known that they will get married next month? In the sentence, the woman wants to inform the supervisor that she and her beloved one will get married next month.

In sentence (2a), the incorrect use of *kita* in the sentence uttered by the speaker can be seen. The message sent by the woman cannot be received comprehensively by the interlocutor. Even when the supervisor understands the concept of *kita*, the interlocutor will deny the sentence since he never plans to get married to the woman.

The lack of Indonesian younger generation understanding of *kita* and *kami* pronouns is influenced by the first language. The use of *kita* and *kami* in the local language differs from the Indonesian language. For example, in Jambi and Bengkulu City, the younger generation uses the *kami* pronoun to refine speech or lower the speaker's

ego. In Sulawesi, the first-person plural pronoun *kita* is the pronoun of I to honour the interlocutor.

Besides, the writer also suspects that English's first person plural pronoun is *we*. The word *we* can be referred to as the concept *kita* (we (you and me), first-person plural pronoun), and *kami* (we (not including you), first-person plural pronoun) Indonesian language. The writer assumes that the messing of *kita* and *kami* use is due to western cultural influence that only has *we* for *kita* and *kami* concepts. As known, some younger Indonesian artists are the product of a mixed marriage between Indonesian and western people. They have spoken English since they a child. When they become an artist in Indonesia, they force themselves to speak the Indonesian language. The culture constructed since childhood is western does not differentiate between *you* and *us*. Therefore, when acting in Indonesian cinema, they use the words *kamu*, *kalian*, *kita* and *kami* in western culture since they understand them more than in Indonesian culture. Indeed, the use of *kamu*, *kalian*, *kita* and *kami* indicate specific cultural aspects owned by the Indonesian nation.

Meanwhile, the young Indonesian generation considers the Indonesian language used by cinema artists fabulous. Therefore, they imitate them. They do not realize that the language used by the artists erodes Indonesian culture caused by it does not fulfil politeness norms and Indonesian grammar.

## 4. Conclusion

The language use dynamic can change the encoded concept in Indonesian pronouns. Indonesian speakers should use language concerning the grammar and concepts encoded in pronouns. The pronouns are one of the parts of speech. The use is closely related to the personal relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor. Nevertheless, the speaker should choose the correct pronouns to greet the interlocutor. It makes the communication runs well. The misapplication of encoded concept in pronouns causes the Indonesian culture erodes. Therefore, teaching the Indonesian language needs additional materials in terms of cultural teaching, especially politeness culture. It can be one of the Indonesian language's contributions to realizing national character building.

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