CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Background

This study investigates how native speakers of Bahasa Indonesia perform requests in everyday situations. It is a pragmatic study because it investigates both language use and language usage in a cultured-society in a certain social situation.

Request phenomena by their nature are reflected in language. Societies everywhere, no matter what their degree of isolation or their socioeconomic complexity, shows these same principles at work; yet what counts as polite requests may differ from one group to another group, from situation to situation, or from individual to individual. If we can find some underlying grammatical and social regularities which account both for this type of variation and recurrent patterns, we will have taken a major step in demonstrating and not just claiming the basically social nature of human language.

Part of the meaning of an utterance is its intended social function. It seems clear that learning to communicate in a language involves more than acquiring the pronunciation and grammar. We need to learn how to ask questions, make suggestions, greet and thank other speakers. In other words, we need to learn the uses to which utterances are conventionally put in the new language community and how uses are signaled, if we are to use the language in a realistic way. Similarly, as hearers, part of understanding of an utterance is known whether we

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have been asked questions, invited to do something, etc. In a terminology introduced by J.L. Austin (1975), such functions of language are called speech acts.

Politeness principles are reflected in linguistic universals that are in many ways equivalent to those discovered by grammarians. However, the methods by which these universals are derived constitute a significant departure from current practice. Grammarians rely on informants' responses to systematic elicitation procedures to deduce abstract rules, which are then related to the hypothesis about the human mind. Brown and Levinson's work, in contrast, takes its source data primarily from situated conversational exchanges, and generalizations are made with reference to empirically testable universal of discourse and interaction. By so doing, while using new kinds of data, they are also able to draw on and integrate a long tradition of research in social anthropology, conversational discourse analysis and in pragmatics.

According to Crystal (1991), Pragmatics in modern linguistics has come to be applied to the study of language from the point of view of the users, especially of the choices they make the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction, and the effects of their use of language has on other participants in an act of communication. The field focuses on 'an area' between semantics and sociolinguistics, but the boundaries with these other domains are as yet incapable of precise definition. Pragmatics is mainly concerned with aspects of deixis, conversational analysis, presupposition, discourse structure and speech acts.

Speech act as one of pragmatics is mainly concerned refers to a theory, which analyzes the role of utterances in relation to the behavior of speakers and hearers in interpersonal communication. It is not 'an act of speech' in the sense of Parole, but a communicative activity (elocutionary act) defined with reference to the intention of speakers while speaking; the illocutionary force of their utterance, and the effects they achieve on listeners (perlocutionary effect of their utterances).

Theoreticians Gordon & Lakoff (1971) have asserted that essential principles for performing speech acts are universal. Some empirical researchers support this claim, such as Brown and Levinson (1978) and Fraser (1978), Both observed a close formal correspondence in how speech act strategies are realized across certain languages. Fraser and Nolan (1981) who claim that the relative level of difference conveyed by each strategy is also essentially the same across languages. However, other empirical evidence disputes strong claim on the universality of speech act performance. Blum-Kulka's (1983) two studies on a large corpus of requests by speakers of a number of languages are especially convincing in this regard. Blum and Kulka found that certain request strategies were not shared by languages, that significant differences existed between languages within shared strategies as well, and that social meaning carried by the same strategy sometimes differed. In another study Blum-Kulka (1983) specifically found Gordon and Lakoff (1971) claim for universal conversation postulates to be disconfirmed, and concluded that an essential similarity in speech act strategies is illusory and tend to disappear on close analysis.

While many studies have examined the requests as an important part of speech act as performed by English native speakers, the range of language is still relatively small. Requests by native speakers in English are the most frequently described such as Blum-Kulka & House (1989), Bilbow (1995), and Aijimer (1996). However, relatively few studies of requests in Asian languages have been published in English. Of these, almost all focus on either Japanese by Miyagawa (1982) or Mandarin by Lee-Hong (1994). Importantly, some empirical descriptions of requests also exist in Bahasa Indonesia such as Hassal T (1997). He did his research through observation and role-play technique while the writer focuses merely on the observation done on request occurence. Based on the phenomena and universals of the speech act as mentioned above, the writer investigates the request strategies in Bahasa Indonesia that are performed in everyday situation. It is a pragmatic study since it investigates both language use and language usage in a cultured society in a certain social situation.

1.2 The Problems

Based on the background of the study above, the writer proposes two main problems to be investigated in this study:

1. What strategies are used to perform requests in Bahasa Indonesia?

2. Which request strategy is more dominantly used in Bahasa Indonesia?

1.3 The Scope of the Study

The study deals with request strategies used by native speakers of Bahasa Indonesia. The analysis of strategies is merely based on the level of directness. This study identifies three levels of directness for request. The first level is 'direct'. This includes forms, which convey requistive force by purely syntactic means such a grammatical mood or an explicit performative verbs. The second level is 'conventionally indirect'. This comprises indirect formulas that are conventionalized in the language as a means of requesting. The last level is 'non-conventionally indirect' (i.e. hints). A hint is an indirect requests from which is not conventionalized in the language, and hence requires more inference activity for the hearer to derive the speaker's requestive intent. The subject of the study will be the native speakers of Bahasa Indonesia; a half will be male, while another half will be female, living in Medan, north Sumatra.

1.4 The Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as the followings:

1. To find out what strategies are used in performing requests in Bahasa Indonesia.

2. To find out which strategy is dominantly used in performing requests in Bahasa Indonesia

3. To find out whether or not universal theories of request strategies are applicable in Bahasa Indonesia; both by male and female.

1.5 The Significance of the Study

This study is significant:

1. To help us understand how requests are performed across a wider range of language, and hence to what extent strategies for performing requests-and speech acts generally-are common across languages.

2. To facilitate cross-cultural communication between native speakers of Bahasa Indonesia and of English.