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Polite Silence and Silent Politeness

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Silence is a multifaceted and complex linguistic phenomenon. This article explores two phenomena of silence, they are: polite silence and silent politeness. Polite silence is the speaker's silence as an intention to be polite, while silent politeness is the hearer's interpretation of silence as politeness strategy. In Western societies, silence has been the focus of the studies in the last two decades. However, it has not been studied to such an extent in Indonesian language. The purpose of the current study is to describe: 1) how silence is practiced as a politeness strategy in terms of the speaker's intention; 2) What type of silence is evaluated as polite by the hearer's interpretation. One of the significant finding emerged from this study is that silence as a politeness strategy is intended by the speaker in parallel way as evaluated by the hearer. Non-linguistic devices referred to as the clue for the speaker and hearer is eye contact, facial expression, and body gesture.

Introduction

Inspite of the fact that silence is one of the cultural value of Indonesia - research on silence especially of its interconnectedness with politeness - has not been satisfyingly conducted. A Study on whether or not 'silence is golden' is still applicable to represent modern Indonesia is interesting to do. This is due to the fact that the era of reformation has brought new ways of public communication. The parliament meetings, for example, at least those shown on television, have been one of the most controversial setting for its frank and openness. Jakarta Lawyers Club - shown weekly on TV One - is another setting where public communication is held with similar characteristics. Some people believe - even are proud - of this new ways of communication, since the era of Soeharto has been regarded as the era of silence where voices and 'other' opinions were not encouraged (Kuipers, 1999).

Polite silence and silent politeness, both are recognized as culturally rooted in a language. Tannen (1985) writes that silence is an 'extreme manifestation of indirectness.' Asian students, for example, have been known widely as more silent than western students. The silence of an Asian, which is intended to be polite, can be misunderstood as face-threatening to western lecturers and classmates. This happens because what is considered as politic behavior (normative) and polite behavior (Watts, 2003) are different among different cultures. Silence can be both politic and polite behavior.

Nakane (2007) writes that researchers have indicated that silence is not simply an absence of noise but constitutes a part of communication as important as speech. Researchers have also argued (Al-Harashsheh, 2012) that 'silence is a multifaceted and complex linguistic phenomenon because its interpretation is ambiguous'. Thus the interpretation of silence 'relies heavily on the socio-cultural norms of a certain society and the context of situation.' Since it concerns with the context of situation, the study of silence is done under pragmatics. However, semantic definition will help a researcher to identify silence, such as soundlessness or quietness. As a pragmatic means, silence conveys meaning in the same way as speech does.

Silence takes various forms. In Nakane's research, he focuses on silence which takes the forms of: inter-and intraturn pauses, general non-participation or lack of participation in conversation, lack of speech on specific topics/matters, or lack of speech specific to interactive situations. He writes that silence of each form conveys specific messages.

Linguistic politeness has long been considered as simply face-saving act (Brown and Levinson, 1978). However, recent researches have shown deeper concerns about what is considered as polite (Kecskes, 2011). Linguistic politeness, for example, is seen as consisting language choices which negotiate the indexing of social status. It is also considered as an attempt to include or exclude members of social groups. In the same reference, linguistic politeness is also regarded as an attitude, the activation of the attitude, as well as the actual description of 'particular evaluative beliefs about particular behaviours in particular social contexts.'

Recent researches also suggest the focus of study of linguistic politeness which is on four concerns. Firstly, the study of what the language used means to the participants, including both speaker's intention and hearer's evaluation. Secondly, the study on whether the participants themselves classify the utterances as polite or impolite. Thirdly, the study on how they come to make those judgements. Fourthly, the study on what information and cues inform those decisions about whether someone has been polite and impolite (Kecskes, 2011).

Silence has been found as one of strategy of being polite. One of the more significant findings emerged from Al-Harashsheh's (2012), for example, is that silence is used as a positive politeness strategy by Jordanian university students. In this study, silence in its relation with politeness, is defined as quietness which is evaluated by both speaker and hearer as an attempt to include or exclude someone from the social group.

Methodology

This study is aimed at describing how silence is used by Indonesian people to show politeness (speaker's intention). Other objective is to describe what type of silence is considered as polite (hearer's interpretation). In this study, silence is defined as lack of speech specific to interactive situations.

The data is taken from 16 subjects with different occupational background and aged ranged between 17-65 years old; 8 males and 8 females. The two main questions they are asked to answer are: 1) Have you ever chosen silence as an attempt to be polite? If yes, describe the situation; 2) what type of hearer's silence do you consider as polite? The data then analyzed by firstly describing the speaker's lack of speech specific to interactive situations is intended to be polite. Secondly by describing the clues used by the hearer's interpretation on the speaker's politeness.

The study was conducted by sending the questioner to respondents through text messages, blackberry messangers, and emails. The respondents are from various academic background: senior high school students to Ph.D. Their occupations are also varied: teachers, lecturers, businessmen, project leaders, and so on.

Results

1. How silence is practiced by different individual to show politeness (speaker's intention)

Despite the fact that modern Indonesian enjoy frank speaking and openness, silence is still used to show politeness (silent politeness). Based on the data, it is found that silence is mostly used as an index to someone social status (56,3%). A granddaughter chooses to be silent when she has different opinion about the movie they are watching with her grandfather; A lecturer prefers to keep silent in a meeting with a Rector when the later decides something which she does not agree with; A teacher keeps silent when her headmaster is speaking with the headmaster of the school they are visiting in Japan; A master degree student chooses to be silent when his/her father gives him an advice which he/she actually finds not applicable to himself. This shows that seniority (age and social status has been the main consideration for this people. However, when I crossed check the data to a boss, he also chooses to be silent when he finds out that his staff perform very poorly. He does this with three reasons: to be polite, to control emotion, and to keep good relationship.

Silence is also empowered in the relationship between a husband and a wife. Instead of seniority reason (wife widely considers a husband a respectful position), silence is practiced to avoid conflicts in home setting (25%). The wife or the husband keep silent to control emotion and to reduce conflict.

Silence is also considered as politeness practice when someone meets a stranger (18,7,5%). Not saying something but smile is the means to be polite to someone they do not know or do not know well.

How silence is practiced as a politeness strategy is seen in tabel 1 below:

Table 1

The context when silence is performed as an attempt to be polite

NO	NAMA	USIA	PEKERJAAN	Diam ketika ...
1.	Nida	24 tahun	Mhs S2	Tidak ngotot kepada Kakek tentang sesuatu yang diyakini benar, biar Kakek faham sendiri akhirnya.
2.	Mira	21 tahun	Mhs Si	Ketika bertemu orang baru , saya merasa cukup tersenyum saja sebab menurut saya kalau berbicara terasa tidak santun.
3.	Adelila	41 tahun	Dosen	Diam ketika Rapat dengan Rektor dan saya tidak menyetujui kebijakan Rektor waktu itu. Saya memilih diam saja karena kalau dibantah atau dikomentari efeknya jadi panjang.
4.	Yusni Hati	35 tahun	Mahasiswa S2	Ketika pergi ke Jepang dengan Kepala Sekolah, saya cukup diam dan menyimak pembicaraan Kepala Sekolah saya dengan Kepala Sekolah di Jepang itu. Saya hanya berbicara ketika diminta.
5.	Citra	26 tahun	Mahasiswa S2	Ketika berbicara dengan Ayah dan beliau mendominasi pembicaraan. Ketika beliau selesai berbicara, saya menanggapi tetapi beliau memotong. Saya diam karena bersikap santun kepada ayah yang memotong pembicaraan saya.
6.	Khairun Nasir	27 tahun	Mahasiswa S2	Ketika dirasihati/ditegur orangtua . Tidak boleh menyela. Harus mendengar seluruhnya terlebih dahulu.
7.	Dedy	33 tahun	Mahasiswa S2	Ketika berada di arisan keluarga saya cenderung lebih banyak diam sambil tetap berproses dan memberikan atensi pada kegiatan tersebut.

				Alasannya mereka pada umumnya lebih tua dari saya. Ketika mereka berbicara, saya lihat dan dengar. Ketika mereka tanya, saya jawab.
8.	Masniari	65 tahun	Pensiunan PNS	Ketika berbeda pendapat dengan suami , pada saat meminta suami menjual 1 mobil yang sudah tua agar mobil yang 1 lagi tidak susah keluar masuk garasi, suami menolak. Akhirnya diputuskan diam untuk menghindari pertengkaran.
9.	Syafiq	27 tahun	Mahasiswa S2	Ketika seorang teman senior menceritakan teman lain yang juga senior, saya tidak menyetujui isinya. Namun karena usianya lebih tua dan cara berceritanya menggebu-gebu, serta karena ingin menjaga nama baik sesama senior, maka saya memilih diam. Seterusnya saya memilih menghindar daripada mendengar isi pembicaraan yang sama.
10.	Hairani	42 tahun	Dosen	Ketika belum tahu jalan cerita, belum kenal orang di sekitar, tidak suka kepada yang sedang berbicara karena terkesan sombong.
11.	Solin	55 tahun		Ketika atasan sebagai seorang pejabat publik menyampaikan suatu informasi yang sesungguhnya tidak akurat. Saya memilih diam agar beliau tidak malu di depan umum.
12.	Thareq	17 tahun		Ketika berkumpul dengan orang yang kurang dekat saya cenderung diam atau hanya mengikuti saja percakapan dan menanggapi sekedarnya, tidak menggagasi topik percakapan sama sekali. Ketika tidak suka kepada guru, saya memilih diam dan menjawab seperlunya.
13.	Adi	20 tahun	Mahasiswa S1	Saat seseorang (yang lebih tua) memberi nasihat kepada saya dan nasihat itu terdengar tidak terlalu bagus untuk diaplikasikan ke diri saya. Daripada memberikan umpan balik ke orang tersebut, lebih baik saya diam agar dinilai orang lain santun.
14.	Hidayat	52 tahun	Wiraswasta	Ketika terjadi perselisihan pendapat antara saya dengan lawan bicara, saya memilih diam.

15.	Kemala	47 tahun	Guru	Ketika sangat marah melihat keputusan yang tidak saya sukai.
16.	Agus		Project leader	Ketika berkomunikasi dengan seseorang yang maunya dominan .

Bold words and phrases are the keys used to identify and categorize the intention of being polite. Kakek (grandfather), rector (Rector), atasan (Boss), ayah (father), and orang yang lebih tua (senior) are those who are considered in an attempt to include or exclude from the social group. When a speaker is being polite to the hearer by considering his social status such as the above illustration, it implies that she or he has to do that in order to include himself/herself in the social group. Similar phenomena is also seen in husband and wife relationship. Politeness through silence is used to keep the relationship go well even in an emotional situation.

2.The types of silence which are considered as polite (hearer’s interpretation)

Although silence conveys meaning as speech does, the interpretation of silence (polite silence) needs support from non-linguistic devices such as facial expression, eye contact, and body *gesture*.

Silence is interpreted or evaluated as politeness under some characteristics. The dominant criteria of silence of this kind is if the silence comes simultaneously with attention and focused expression while listening to the speaker (50%). Attention and focus are realized through eye contact and smile.

Silence is also evaluated as polite if the hearer is regarded as keeping silent to avoid conflict. In this case, the speaker realizes that the conflict is very potential to occur. When the speaker realizes that the hearer chooses to be silent in order to avoid conflicts, the hearer is judged to be polite. There are 25% of the respondent recognize the polite silence of this case. Silence is also considered as polite with clues such as smile and honest facial expression (25%). Though this is not linguistic devices but they convey messages as well as speech and silence.

Similar with speaker intention, the hearer interpretation on silence also consider seniority. Silence, for example is judged as polite by a father, when silence (of his son) is aimed at comprehending and conducting the advice given to him. Silence is polite when it

accompanies listening with attention and focus. Non-linguistic device used as a clue is also facial expression and body gesture.

The type of silence which is considered as polite is seen in tabel 2 as follows:

Tabel 2

The context when silence is perceived as polite

NO	NAMA	USIA	OCCUPATION	Seseorang yang diam hanya dinilai santun (bukan yang lain) apabila	Faktor
1.	Nida	24 tahun	Mhs S2	dia bertemu orang baru , dia cukup tersenyum.	
2.	Mira	21 tahun	Mhs S1	Dia diam ketika mendengarkan dosen menerangkan. Sesi tanya jawab baru bertanya.	
3.	Adelila	41 tahun	Dosen	Dia diam karena sedang menyimak pembicaraan orang lain. Dia juga tidak memotong.	
4.	Yusni Hati		Mahasiswa S2	Dia diam tapi mimik mukanya tersenyum sambil menyimak pembicaraan.	4.
5.	Citra		Mahasiswa S2	Dia diam karena sedang menuunggu lawan bicara selesai berbicara	5.
6.	Khairun Nasir	27 tahun	Mahasiswa S2	Dia diam demi kebaikan. Bila dia menilai berbicara/menyela hanya akan memperkeruh suasana.	
7.	Dedy	33 tahun	Mahasiswa S2	Dia diam tapi tetap memberikan atensi kepada orang lain, melihat, dan memperhatikan apa yang orang lain lakukan.	
8.	Masniari	65	Pensiunan PNS	Dia diam karena	8.

Bold words and phrases are also the keys used to identify and categorize the interpretation of being polite. Silence which is accompanied with paying attention, silence while for waiting his/her turn to speak, silence while listening and comprehending are considered as polite silence. Other polite silences are accepting the way things are and not responding when the response will arise conflict (conflict avoidance).

It is very interesting to see that silence as intended by the speaker is in line with the ones interpreted by the hearer. For example, when silence is intended by a junior speaker to a senior hearer, the senior hearer also expect similar attitude from his junior. So seniority (of age and social status) is still considered as the main consideration for being polite. The main concern is keeping good relationship by including the speaker and hearer as in-groups.

Discussion

Silent conveys meaning as speech does. Previous researches on the interconnection between silent and politeness have found that silence is realised as politeness strategy. Al-Harashsheh's (2012) found that silence is used as a positive strategy by Jordanian.

The study found that speaker's intention of silence is to establish relationship and to avoid conflict. Mostly silence is practiced by junior to senior. It is also practiced in different setting such as school, university, home, and at work.

The study also found that silence as intended by the speaker is in line with the ones expected by the hearer. Seniority is one of the important concerns. Junior is silent as an intention to respect and avoid conflict with the senior. On the other hand, senior interpret silent as politeness if it is evaluated as conflict avoidance and obedient. So from this viewpoint, silence is more to negative strategy rather than positive strategy.

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