

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter consists of the introduction, which covers the background of the study, research questions, objectives, significance, and scope and limitation of the study. It provides an overview of the rationale and context that frame this research..

1.1 Background of the Study

Human interaction fundamentally depends on the ability to use language as a medium of thought, expression, and social connection. Through linguistic communication, people exchange ideas, express emotions, and negotiate social relationships. Linguistics, as the scientific study of language, explores how meaning and structure operate across different levels such as phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics (Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 2018). Each branch contributes to understanding how humans use linguistic systems effectively within their cultural and social environments. In this regard, linguistics not only describes language structure but also examines how it functions as a reflection of human cognition and social life.

Within the field of linguistics, pragmatics investigates how meaning is shaped by context rather than linguistic form alone. According to Yule, (1996), pragmatics studies how speakers and listeners interpret utterances based on shared knowledge, intentions, and situational factors. It emphasizes that what people mean often goes beyond what they literally say. This makes pragmatics highly relevant to real-life communication, where social relationships, politeness, and appropriateness play essential roles. Pragmatic competence knowing how to use language appropriately in context is therefore a key aspect of effective communication (Leech, 1983).

One of the central concepts in pragmatics is politeness, which concerns how individuals express respect and consideration toward others during interaction. Politeness theory, developed by Brown & Levinson, (1987), explains that people use linguistic strategies to protect the interlocutor's "face" or self-image. Politeness

strategies can be positive, showing friendliness and solidarity, or negative, showing respect for personal space and autonomy. They are often realized through direct or indirect expressions depending on cultural values and situational factors (Culpeper, 2021). In Indonesian culture, indirectness is a hallmark of politeness, reflecting the value of maintaining harmony and avoiding confrontation (Prayitno et al., 2018). For example, speakers frequently soften refusals or disagreements with apologies, explanations, or alternative suggestions (Waluyani, 2017). For example, instead of directly refusing by saying “*Aku tidak bisa*” (“I cannot”), Indonesian speakers often use expressions such as “*Maaf, sepertinya saya belum bisa ikut*” (“Sorry, it seems that I cannot join yet”) to soften the refusal and reduce potential face threat. Similarly, Javanese expressions such as “*Kayane durung iso saiki*” (“It seems that I cannot do it now”) function as indirect refusals that reflect politeness and consideration for the hearer.

In pragmatic interaction, politeness becomes especially crucial when speakers perform face-threatening acts (FTAs). Brown and Levinson (1987) define face as an individual’s public self-image that consists of positive face and negative face. An FTA refers to any communicative act that potentially threatens these face wants. Among various speech acts, refusal is considered a highly face-threatening act because it involves rejecting a request, offer, or invitation that the hearer expects to be accepted. Previous studies have shown that Indonesian speakers typically employ indirect strategies such as expressing regret or giving reasons to maintain politeness (Siregar et al., 2023; Dwiana & Syahri, 2024). However, the ways in which speakers perform refusals may vary across social groups and generations, reflecting differences in communicative norms and cultural adaptation.

In recent years, a notable shift has been observed among Generation Z (Gen Z), individuals born between 1997 and 2012, who have grown up in a highly digital and globally connected environment. Gen Z tends to value openness, equality, and informality in their communication styles (Indarwati et al., 2025). Their interactions often mediated by technology and social media are characterized by brevity, directness, and creativity, which may contrast with traditional norms of indirect

politeness in Indonesian society. This generational shift raises important questions about whether Gen Z still uphold conventional politeness norms when performing delicate acts such as refusals.

Given these considerations, this research focuses on examining politeness strategies in refusal expressions among Generation Z students at Universitas Trunodjoyo Madura as reflected in their naturally occurring daily conversations. This study employs Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory to analyze the politeness strategies used in refusal expressions and Hymes' (1974) SPEAKING model to identify the contextual factors surrounding each interaction. Furthermore, the contextual findings are interpreted by considering Brown and Levinson's sociological variables, namely Distance (D), Power (P), and Rank of Imposition (R), to explain why particular politeness strategies are selected in specific communicative situations.

Previous studies on refusal and politeness strategies have extensively examined refusal expressions in cross-cultural communication, educational settings, and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Most of these studies have relied on elicited data, such as Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs), interviews, questionnaires, or classroom interactions. Consequently, relatively little attention has been given to naturally occurring refusal expressions produced in authentic face-to-face conversations among Indonesian Generation Z speakers. Furthermore, previous studies have generally focused on identifying either refusal strategies or politeness strategies, with limited discussion of how contextual factors influence speakers' selection of particular politeness strategies in actual interactions.

Therefore, this study seeks to address these gaps by investigating politeness strategies employed in naturally occurring refusal expressions among Gen Z students at Universitas Trunodjoyo Madura. By combining Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory with Hymes' SPEAKING model and interpreting the findings through the sociological variables of Distance, Power, and Rank of Imposition, this study provides a more comprehensive explanation of not only what politeness

strategies are employed but also why those strategies are chosen in different communicative contexts.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background presented above, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What types of politeness strategies are used by Gen Z students in expressing refusals during daily conversations?
2. What contextual factors influence Gen Z students' use of politeness strategies in expressing refusals during daily conversations?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

In accordance with the research questions, the objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To identify the types of politeness strategies used by Gen Z students in expressing refusals during daily conversations.
2. To describe contextual factors influence Gen Z students' use of politeness strategies in expressing refusals during daily conversations.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Theoretically, this study contributes to the field of pragmatics and sociolinguistics by expanding the understanding of how politeness is realized in refusal expressions among younger generations. It also contextualizes Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory in a contemporary, digital, and generational framework and the theory of Hymes (1974) to analyze the contextual elements of politeness strategies.

Practically, the findings may assist educators and linguists in promoting pragmatic competence among students, particularly in teaching culturally

appropriate ways of expressing refusals in both English and Bahasa Indonesia. It can also be valuable for intercultural communication programs that address generational differences in language use.

Culturally, this study sheds light on how Gen Z negotiates politeness and interpersonal harmony in modern Indonesia, reflecting broader shifts in language norms shaped by technology, globalization, and youth identity.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

This study focuses on the politeness strategies used by Gen Z students in expressing refusals within daily conversations. The data are collected from students at Universitas Trunodjoyo Madura, refers to individuals representing speakers aged approximately 18–25 years.

The study is limited to refusal expressions that occur in response to requests, offers, invitations, and suggestions in natural daily interactions, especially face-to-face. The research employs recordings and interviews as data collection methods to capture authentic communicative behavior. The refusal expressions analyzed in this study may be expressed in Indonesian or Javanese. All non-English data are provided with English translations to maintain clarity and analytical consistency.

This study does not analyze grammatical structures or psychological traits but rather emphasizes the pragmatic and sociocultural dimensions of refusal strategies. As the sample focuses on a specific university context, the findings may not represent all Gen Z speakers in Indonesia but are expected to provide valuable insight into the evolving nature of politeness in everyday communication among young Indonesians. This study uses the theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) to analyze the types of politeness strategies and the theory of Hymes (1974) to analyze the contextual elements of politeness strategies.