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Conceptualizing Linguistic Politeness in Light of Age

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Abstract

The role of age in determining speakers' politeness strategy is a crucial aspect of language use, and this paper examines the politeness phenomena in the Luwu Tae' language. This study used a descriptive quantitative approach and a newly developed social relation symmetry model to collect data from 15 respondents and investigate how age influences the use of politeness strategies. The study found that when interacting with older interlocutors, speakers tend to use a more deferential variety and employ a negative politeness strategy. However, when speaking with people of their own age, speakers tend to use a more informal style and employ a positive politeness technique. These findings suggest that age is a significant factor in determining politeness strategies among the Luwu Tae' language ethnic groups, with the local wisdom of treating everyone with respect and behaving nicely being a key factor passed down from generation to generation. Age has become an important social variable of power influencing politeness techniques in the region.

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1. Introduction

Politeness phenomena have been an ongoing subject of study by sociolinguists and pragmatists since the introduction of Goffman's work in 1967 (Goffman, 1967). Researchers from various perspectives aim to develop a more comprehensive and universally applicable framework for investigating politeness, considering its cultural variations. Numerous studies have focused on formulating politeness theories, including works by Lakoff (1973, 1977), Brown and Levinson (1987), Leech (1983), Fraser (1990), and Yassi (1996, 2011). Other studies have explored culture-specific contexts and politeness tactics, as observed in the works of Hill et al. (1986) and Yassi (2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d, 2017a, 2017b, 2018). Additionally, researchers have applied existing frameworks to diverse cultural settings, as exemplified by several studies (Chen, 1993, 2001; Garcia, 1989; Hernandez et al., 2021; Holmes, 1990; Rhodes, 2009; Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Wong & Esler, 2020; Yassi, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d).

Despite the extensive research conducted thus far, to the best of the author's knowledge, there has been no comprehensive exploration of the role of age in shaping speakers' politeness strategies. While Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) theoretical framework has been widely cited worldwide, including in the author's previous works, certain studies have empirically challenged its universality (Blum-Kulka & House, 1989; Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987; Holtgraves & Yang, 1990, 1992; Scollon & Scollon, 1995).

Moreover, some studies argue that Brown and Levinson's framework is rooted in Anglo-Saxon culture, limiting its compatibility with Asian cultures (Gu, 1990; Matsumoto, 1988, 1989). In the major heritage language cultures of the South Sulawesi ethnic groups, included in Luwu Tae' Language, age is considered a crucial indexical social variable that significantly influences speakers' politeness strategies, along with other social variables such as social status, education, and gender. The configuration of politeness techniques varies depending on the ages of the participants involved in social interactions. This complexity is further magnified when speakers of higher status engage with significantly older subordinates, resulting in observable instances

of politeness strategies deviating from the unmarked forms due to age differences.

This study aims to analyze the role of age in shaping the politeness strategies of Luwu Tae' language cultures in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Additionally, it proposes a prospective model for the theoretical framework of politeness, termed the "social relation symmetry model", specifically considering the influence of age on speakers' approach to politeness.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Politeness

In general, politeness is often associated with good behavior or etiquette. Since the emergence of Brown and Levinson's theoretical framework of politeness in 1987 (Brown & Levinson, 1987), it has become a significant subject of study for various disciplines, such as pragmatics, sociolinguistics, social psychology, anthropology, and language acquisition. This has led to numerous research publications exploring politeness from different perspectives. For example, some researchers view politeness as a means to reduce interpersonal friction (Lakoff, 1973), while others see it as a strategy to avoid conflict (Leech, 1983) or practice for forming solidarity (Holmes, 1995; Scollon, 1983; Scollon & Scollon, 1995). Furthermore, politeness has been conceptualized as a behavior that reflects positive attitudes toward others (Holmes, 1995).

Brown and Levinson's politeness framework, despite receiving criticism from some researchers studying politeness in Asian heritage language contexts (Gu, 1990; Ide, 1989; Matsumoto, 1988; Watts et al., 1992), has gained widespread usage and citation worldwide. Their framework, particularly the concept of 'face,' has laid the foundation for studying politeness phenomena (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987). The concept of 'face' was initially introduced by Erving Goffman, a sociologist, in his seminal paper "On Face Work" in 1963.

In Brown and Levinson's framework, 'face' encompasses two dimensions: 'negative face' and 'positive face.' 'Negative face' refers to the individual's desire for autonomy, freedom of action, and freedom from imposition, while 'positive face' pertains to the desire for social approval, understanding, support, and admiration (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987).

These dimensions correspond to what is known as “formal politeness” and a more subtle desire for affirmation and appreciation (Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987).

According to their framework, social interaction involves individuals navigating their own positive and negative face needs in relation to others. Politeness strategies are employed to maintain a delicate balance of these needs, which are constantly negotiated in public communication. Face-threatening acts (FTAs), which endanger the face of either the speaker or the hearer, are common in conversations. Brown and Levinson categorized politeness strategies into five: (1) bald on record, where something is stated straightforwardly; (2) positive politeness, which involves using casual and intimate language; (3) negative politeness, which includes deferential language and social attributes; (4) off record, where something is communicated indirectly; and (5) silence, where nothing is said when the imposition is high.

The interaction in Brown and Levinson’s framework is further classified into two types: symmetrical and asymmetrical relations. In symmetrical relations, such as interactions between strangers, strategies 3, 4, and 5 (negative politeness, off record, and silence) are more likely to be employed due to higher perceived imposition. Conversely, in interactions between intimate friends or colleagues, strategies 1 and 2 (bald on record and positive politeness) are more common, as the imposition is assumed to be lower. In asymmetrical relations, the superordinate or superior individuals tend to use strategies 1 and 2 when interacting with their inferiors or subordinates, while the subordinates predominantly employ strategies 3, 4, and 5 when conversing with their superiors (Scollon, 1983).

Scollon (1983) adapted Brown and Levinson’s framework and further classified politeness systems into three categories: deference, solidarity, and hierarchy. Deference (-P+D) represents interactions where participants are perceived to be of the same rank (-P) but do not know each other (strangers, +D). Solidarity (-P-D) refers to interactions between close friends, colleagues, or intimates who are in the same rank and have a close relationship. Hierarchy (+P -/+D) describes interactions where participants are not of the same rank (+P), with one being superior and the other subordinate

and the social distance or relationship could be either close (-D) or distant (+D) (Scollon & Scollon, 1995).

Overall, Brown and Levinson’s politeness framework and the concept of ‘face’ have had a significant impact on the study of politeness across disciplines, providing a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics of politeness in social interactions.

2.2. Honorifics as a Linguistic Indexical Category of Politeness in South Sulawesi Culture

Cultural and linguistic origins typically go hand in hand, as language serves as the manifestation of human reality, shaping the very fabric through which humanity exists. It is widely recognized that the essence of human life is intertwined with culture. However, it should be noted that language does not create physical reality but rather imparts this reality to society, actively participating in the construction of a collective understanding of the world (Tektigul et al., 2023).

In the culture of ethnic groups of South Sulawesi, honorifics serve as linguistic politeness markers that are affixed to verbs, nouns, and adverbs (Arifin, 2016). Wikipedia defines an honorific as a grammatical or morphosyntactic form that encodes the relative social status of the participants of the conversation. Distinct from honorific titles, linguistic honorifics convey formality, social distance, politeness, humility, deference, or respect through the choice of an alternate form such as an affix, clitic, grammatical case, change in person or number, or an entirely different lexical item.

Furthermore, there are three main types of honorifics, categorized according to the individual whose status is being expressed: Addressee (or speaker/hearer), Referent (or speaker/referent), Bystander (or speaker/bystander). Addressee honorifics express the social status of the person being spoken to (the hearer), regardless of what is being talked about. For example, Javanese has three different words for “house” depending on the status level of the person spoken to. Referent honorifics express the status of the person being spoken about. In this type of honorific, both the referent (the person being spoken about) and the target (the person whose status is being

expressed) of the honorific expression are the same. This is exemplified by the T-V distinction present in many Indo-European languages, in which a different 2nd person pronoun (such as tu or vous in French) is chosen based on the relative social status of the speaker and the hearer (the hearer, in this case, also being the referent). Bystander honorifics express the status of someone who is nearby but not a participant in the conversation (the overhearer). These are the least common and are found primarily in avoidance speech. A fourth type, the Speaker/Situation honorific, does not concern the status of any participant or bystander but the circumstances and environment

in which the conversation is occurring. The classic example of this is diglossia, in which an elevated or “high form” of a language is used in situations where more formality is called for, and a vernacular or “low form” of a language is used in more casual situations.

Adapting Brown and Levinson’s (1987) theoretical politeness framework, the present study develops a newly constructed theoretical framework on politeness called the social relation model, as shown in the following diagram.

2.3. The Proposed Social Relation Symmetry Model of Politeness Theoretical Framework

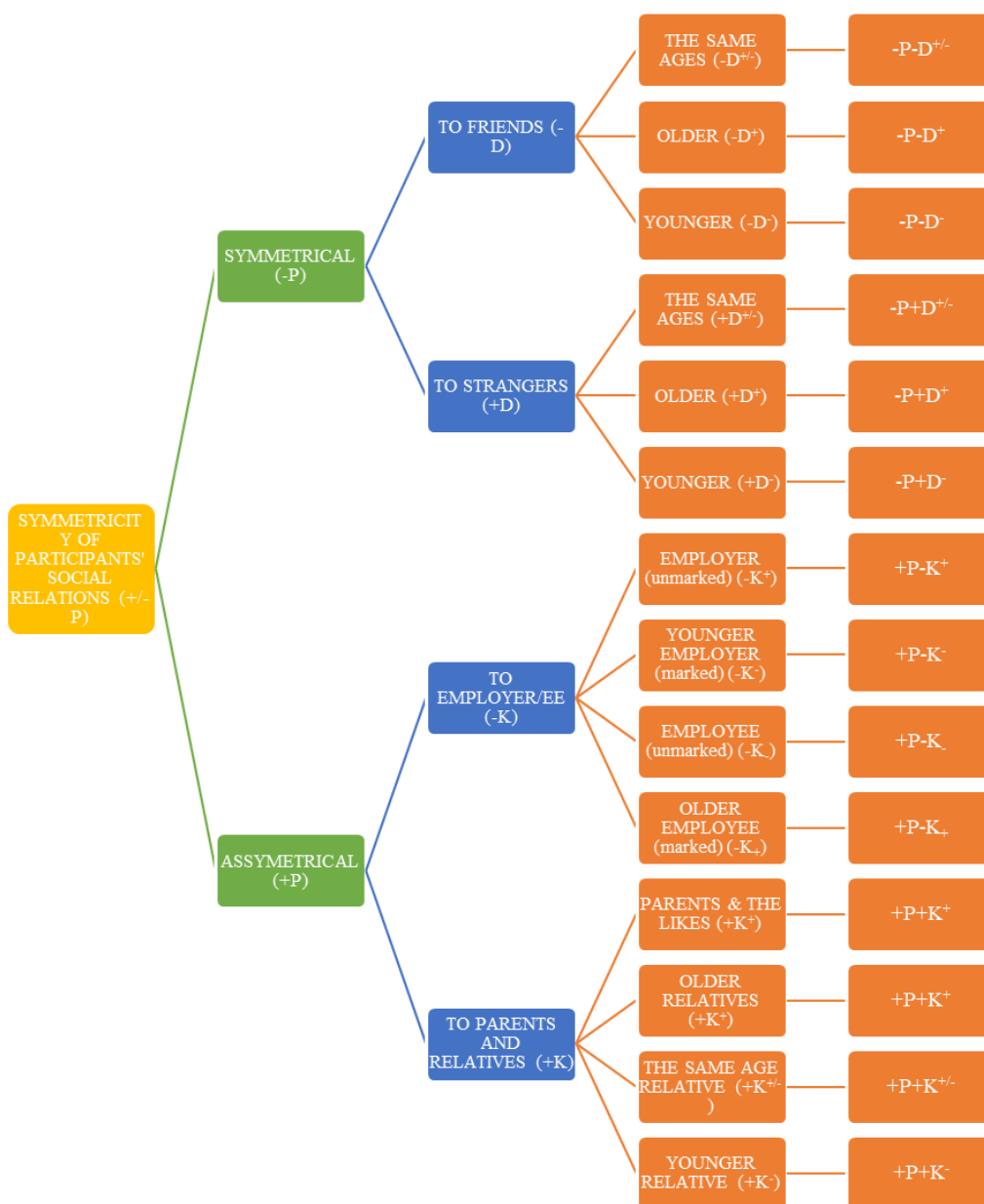


Figure 1
Social Relation Symmetry Model of Politeness Theoretical Framework

As can be seen from the Figure 1, the social relationship of the participants is divided into two: a symmetrical social relation and an asymmetrical social relation (Arifin, 2016). In the symmetrical social relation, which is labeled as [-P], the line goes into two: talking to friends labeled as [-D] and talking to strangers labeled as [+D]. Talking to friends comprises three categories: (1) friends of the same ages, labeled as [-D+/-]; (2) older friends, labeled as [-D+]; and (3) younger friends, labeled as [-D-]. Talking to strangers, labeled as [+D], also generates three categories: (1) strangers of the same ages, labeled as [+D+/-]; (2) older strangers, labeled as [+D+]; and (3) younger strangers, labeled as [+D-].

In the asymmetrical social relation, labeled as [+P], the line goes into two: talking to employers/employees, labeled as [-K], and talking to parents and relatives, labeled as [+K]. Talking to employers/employees comprises four categories: (1) talking to employers of the same ages or older, which is unmarked and labeled as [-K+]; (2) talking to younger employers, which is marked and labeled as [-K-]; (3) talking to employees of the same ages or younger, which is unmarked and labeled as [-K-]; and (4) talking to older employees, which is marked and labeled as [-K+]. Talking to parents and relatives falls into four categories: (1) talking to parents and the likes, labeled as [+K+]; (2) talking to older relatives, labeled as [+K+]; (3) talking to relatives of the same ages, labeled as [+K+/-]; and (4) talking to younger relatives, labeled as [+K-]. Here, [P] stands for power, [D] stands for distance, and [K] stands for kinship.

The following is the complete configuration of the framework:

Symmetry of participants' social relation [+/-P]:

A symmetrical social relation [-P]

1.1 To friends [-D]

1.1.1 Talking to friends of the same ages, labeled as [-P-D+/-]

1.1.2 Talking to older friends, labeled as [-P-D+]

1.1.3 Talking to younger friends, labeled as [-P-D-]

1.2 To strangers [+D]

1.2.1 Talking to strangers of the same ages, labeled as [-P+D+/-]

1.2.2 Talking to older strangers, labeled as [-P+D+]

1.2.3 Talking to younger strangers, labeled as [-P+D-]

An asymmetrical social relation [+P]

2.1 To employers/employees [-K]

2.1.1 Unmarked: talking to employers of the same ages or older, labeled as [+P-K+]

2.1.2 Marked: talking to younger employers, labeled as [+P-K-]

2.1.3 Unmarked: talking to employees of the same ages or younger, labeled as [+P-K-]

2.1.4 Marked: talking to older employees, labeled as [+P-K+]

2.2 To parents and relatives [+K]

2.2.1 Talking to parents and the likes, labeled as [+P+K+]

2.2.2 Talking to older relatives, labeled as [+P+K+]

2.2.3 Talking to relatives of the same ages, labeled as [+P+K+/-]

2.2.4 Talking to younger relatives, labeled as [+P+K-]

Based on this configuration, a formula can be constructed as follows: [+/-] X [+/-] Y [+/-] [+/-], where X denotes the symmetry of the participants (power [P]), Y denotes the distance [D] or kin relationships [K] of the participants, and +/- denotes the presence or absence of the given variables. The superscript or subscript +/- denotes differences or sameness of participants' ages.

Moreover, the five politeness strategies introduced by Brown and Levinson (1987) are subsumed into three categories in the present study. Strategies 1 (bald on record) and 2 (positive politeness) are subsumed under the category of casual variety, abbreviated as [C]. Strategies 3 (negative politeness), 4 (off record), and 5 (do not do FTA) fall under the category of deferent variety, abbreviated as [D]. The mixture of casual variety and deferent variety falls under the category of mixed variety, abbreviated as [M].

3. Methodology

This study employs a descriptive quantitative approach to investigate the role of age in shaping politeness strategies within the Luwu Tae' language culture of South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The research focuses on understanding the politeness phenomena within this specific

cultural and linguistic context. To achieve this, a newly developed theoretical framework called the social relation symmetry model is utilized. This model focuses on the role of age in shaping politeness strategies within symmetrical social relations. It provides a conceptual framework for understanding how different age groups employ politeness techniques when interacting with individuals of similar or different ages.

3.1. Participants

The participants of this study were selected from the Taeness ethnic group, a major heritage language culture in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. A total of 15 participants were recruited through various methods such as community outreach, referrals, and personal contacts. The inclusion criteria required participants to be fluent speakers of the Luwu Tae' language and willing to participate in the study. The participants represented a diverse range of ages within the Taeness community.

3.2. Procedure

3.2.2. Data Collection

Data were collected using a combination of questionnaires and interviews. A structured questionnaire was administered to gather quantitative data on participants' demographic information, language proficiency, and attitudes toward politeness. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain qualitative data, exploring participants' experiences, perceptions, and insights related to politeness within the Luwu Tae' language culture. The interviews were conducted in the Luwu Tae' language and audio-recorded with participants' consent.

3.2.2. Data Analysis

The collected data underwent a mixed-methods analysis approach. The quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of age in shaping politeness strategies within the Luwu Tae' language culture. The quantitative data helped identify statistical relationships and trends, while the qualitative data enriched the analysis by providing participants' lived experiences and nuanced insights.

The quantitative data from the questionnaires were analyzed using statistical software to identify patterns, correlations, and descriptive statistics. The qualitative data from the interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using thematic analysis to extract recurring themes and interpret participants' perspectives on politeness. The analyzed data were interpreted to draw conclusions regarding the influence of age on politeness strategies employed by speakers within the Taeness community. The findings were presented in a cohesive manner, supported by relevant examples and participant quotes. The implications of the findings were discussed, highlighting the significance of age in understanding cultural practices of politeness.

4. Results

4.1. Communication in a Symmetrical Social Relation of the Participants

The following charts indicate the arrangement of the speakers' politeness tactics when chatting with friends.

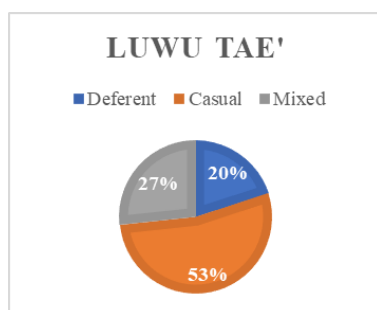


Figure 2
Talking to Friends of the Same Age [-P-D^{+/-}]

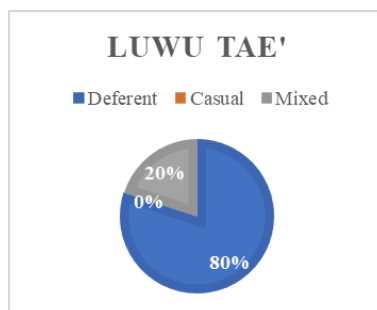


Figure 3
Talking to Older Friends [-P-D⁺]

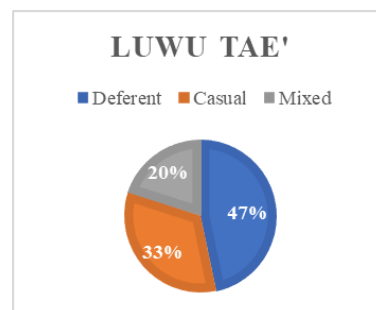


Figure 4
Talking to Younger Friends [-P-D⁻]

As can be seen from the tables above, conversing with friends is labeled as [-P-D], indicating that the participants hold a symmetrical and close social relationship. As such, the employment of a more casual speech variety has been the unmarked politeness strategy of the participants, aiming at creating a more intimate environment in the interaction. When we take a closer look at the tables above, however, they demonstrate a dynamic and distinctive pattern of politeness strategies due to the differences in participants' ages. When conversing with friends of the same ages, the speakers mostly used a more casual variety (Figure 2). It took about 53% of people used casual language when doing a conversation in Tae' Luwu. In contrast, the deferent form was dominantly used by the speakers when talking to older friends (Figure 3); it was dominant in which there were 80% of people used in conversation of Tae' Luwu. Similarly, deferent variety was slightly dominantly employed by the speakers when talking to younger friends

(Figure 4), it occupied 47% of people used deferent language when they had a conversation with younger friends in Tae' Luwu.

Moreover, the analysis of the data also denotes dynamic employment of the three varieties in all observational points. Regardless of its small portion, the employment of casual and mixed varieties in the interaction between the speakers and friends of the same age is undeniably important. When we take a closer look at Figure 2, these varieties even held the most dominant in Taeness. With the same vein, the mixed variety used along with the deferent ones was evenly used in almost all the observational points in the interaction between speakers and the older friends. Similarly, the deferent and casual varieties occupied almost all of the observational points in the interaction between the speakers and the younger friends. Such a configuration of politeness strategies is also shown in the interaction between speakers and strangers, as in the following figures.

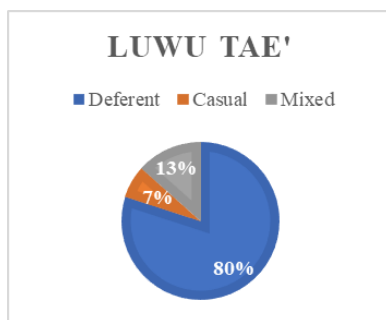


Figure 5

*Talking to Older Strangers
[P+D⁺]*

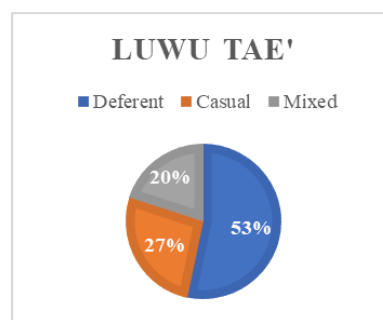


Figure 6

*Talking to Strangers of the Same
Age [P+D^{+/-}]*

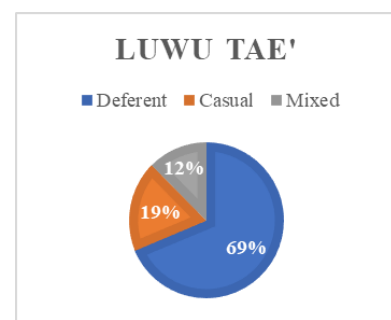


Figure 7

*Talking to Younger Strangers
[-P+D⁻]*

The tables above show that speaking with strangers is denoted by the symbol [-P+D], which indicates that the participants share a symmetrical social relation but are not sufficiently close. As a result, the participants' unmarked politeness technique has been the use of a more deferent variation. When the interlocutors are strangers, the politeness approach appears to take on a more dynamic shape, as seen in the tables above. When speaking with older strangers, the deferent variation becomes the most prevalent politeness strategy observed at all observational points (Figure 5). Despite their modest proportion, the responders nevertheless used the other

varieties, particularly the mixed variety, in this interaction. The mixed variety, on the other hand, occupied more than half of the observational points and was shown to be the most prevalent politeness approach used by the speakers while speaking to both strangers of the same age and younger strangers (Figure 5).

4.2. Communication in an Asymmetrical Social Relation of Participants

The following figures demonstrate the configuration of the politeness strategy when the interlocutors are the employers or the employees.

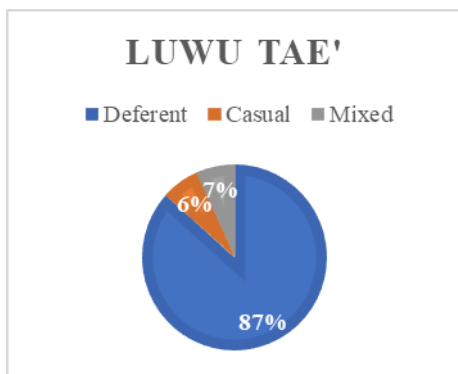


Figure 8

Talking to Employers – Unmarked [+P-K⁺]

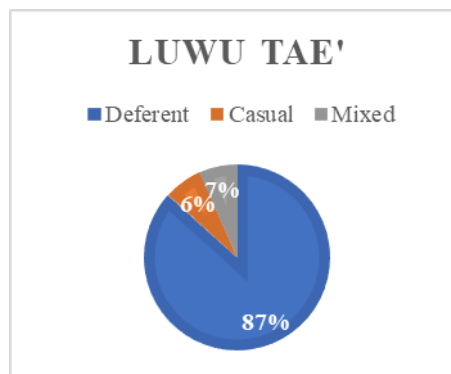


Figure 9

Talking to Younger Employers-Marked [+P-K⁻]

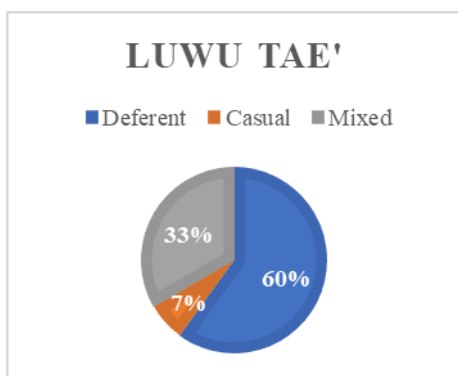


Figure 10

Talking to Employees – Unmarked [+P-K⁻]

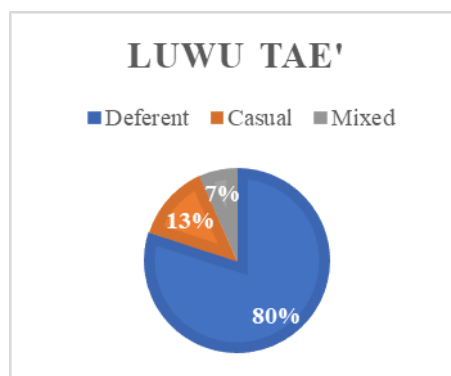


Figure 11

Talking to Older Employees-Marked [+P-K⁺]

Speaking with employers or coworkers is labeled as [+P-K], suggesting that the participants' social relationships are asymmetrical and that they are not related by blood. A distance between the participants is unavoidably created by this arrangement because one has dominance over the others. One is in a superior position, and the other is in an inferior position. It is well known that when communicating with employees, who are considered inferior, employers are more inclined to use an unmarked positive politeness tactic. As a result, while speaking with employees, bosses tend to use a more informal and intimate style of speech. Contrarily, employees consistently deploy a subpar kind of politeness as unmarked politeness, and as a result, while speaking with bosses, they tend to use a more subservient tone of voice.

Due to the individuals' varied ages, the current study has, however, supplied counter data for such an unmarked event. As illustrated in Figure 8. The widely held conclusions described above have been strongly supported by the large employment of deferent variation

in all ethnic groups when speaking to employers who may be older or of the same age. When the employers are significantly younger, however, the situation will be different. Figure 8 illustrates how, despite its modest usage, the use of other speech varieties, like mixed and casual varieties is unquestionably significant because they are used by all the ethnic groups under consideration. The tendency shows that, to some extent, ethnic group members find it more convenient to speak to younger employers in a more casual or mixed variety.

Like Figure 9, the frequent use of a more informal variant when speaking with coworkers who are the same age as you or younger also strongly supports the unmarked phenomena stated above. However, when the employees are significantly older, the circumstances will be different. As shown in Figure 10, when speaking to senior employees, all ethnic groups under research have significantly and predominately used the deferent type as opposed to a more casual variation as the unmarked form of politeness technique. In other words, because they are considerably

younger than their interlocutors, the employers who are in a superior position choose to be employing a more deferent form rather than a more casual one. The present study also discovered that the use of the other kinds, namely the informal and mixed variety, was prevalent as well in all ethnic groups, therefore,

this phenomenon does not necessarily suggest that every employer will utilize a deferent variety while chatting with a much older employee. The kinship relationships between the members of the various ethnic groups are shown in the following graphs.

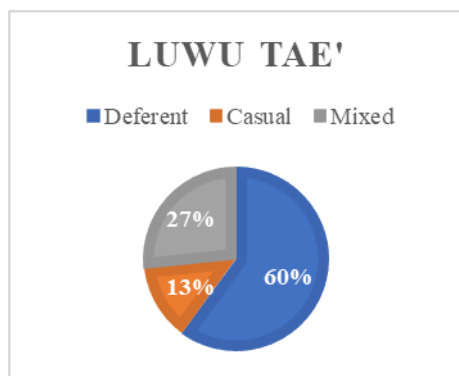


Figure 11

Talking to Parents, Grandparents and the Likes [+P+K⁺]

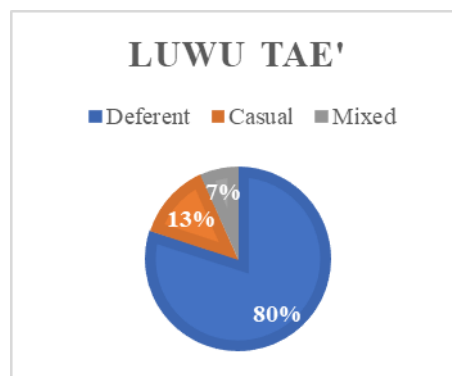


Figure 12

Talking Older Relatives [+P+K⁺]

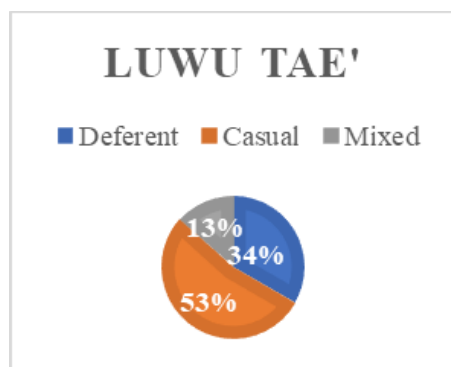


Figure 13

Talking to Relatives of the Same Age [+P+K^{+/-}]

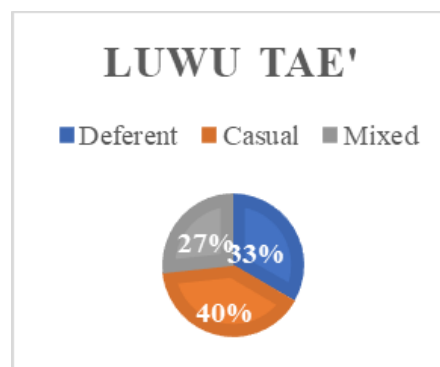


Figure 14

Talking to Younger Relatives [+P+K⁺]

Speaking with parents, grandparents, and other family members is labeled as [+P+K], suggesting that the participants are in an asymmetrical social relationship with one another that is based on kinship. As a result, the players' relationship of power is highly unique, with one having dominance over the others. It is well known that the unmarked politeness approach while speaking to superiors, such as parents, uncles, grandparents, and the like, has been the use of a negative politeness strategy and, as a result, reverting to a more deferent style of speech variety. When speaking to inferiors, however, the conventional politeness technique has been to apply positive politeness and, as a result, to use a more informal style of speech.

As can be seen from the figures above, the significant use of the deferent speech variety in conversations with parents, grandparents, uncles, and others, as shown in Figure 12, as well as conversations with older relatives, has provided strong support for the findings that are widely accepted to have been made above. In the same line, all ethnic groups under research have demonstrated strong support for the unmarked politeness method indicated above by the informal form when speaking to both younger and older relatives, as shown in Figures 13 and 14, respectively.

The present study has shown a dynamic configuration of the employment of other speech varieties in addition to those unmarked

ones in all ethnic groups under study, which is intriguing when we look more closely at the numbers. Members of ethnic groups occasionally use the mixed and casual varieties as well while speaking to parents and other people of a similar caliber. This phenomenon is also evident in the respondents' interactions with their elderly relatives. Like this, individuals of

various ethnic groups use a combination of the mixed variety and the distinct variety when speaking with older and younger relatives.

The following chart shows how the politeness techniques identified in the current study are organized overall.

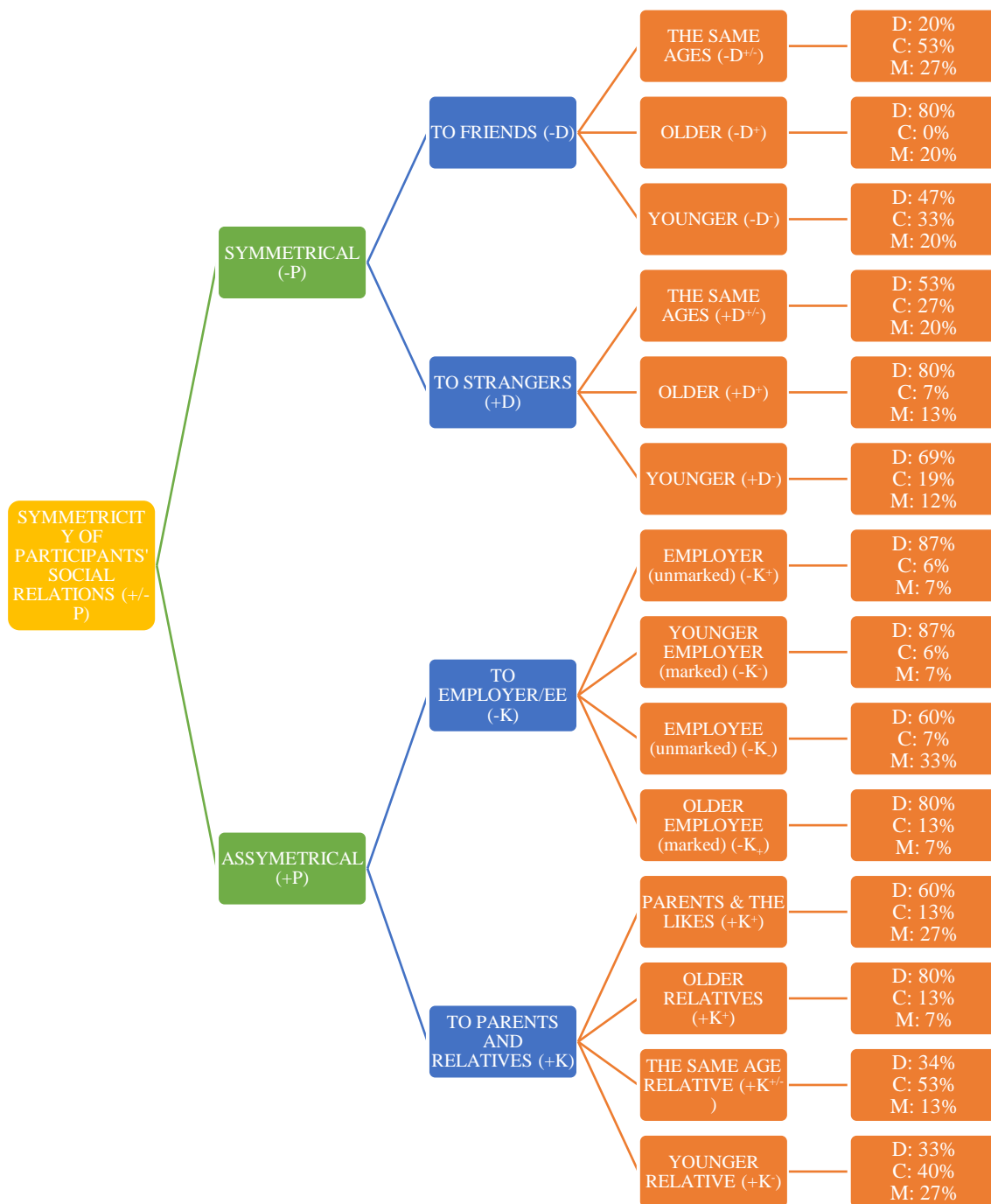


Figure 15

Overall Configuration of Politeness Strategies of Luwu Tae' Language Cultures of South Sulawesi
 (Note: P = power, C = casual, K = kinship, D = deferent, M = mixed)

5. Discussion

The study highlights the significance of age in the Luwu Tae' language, South Sulawesi culture, regarding interlocutors' ages during communication. The findings emphasize the role of age in shaping participants' politeness behaviors across four key areas of dialogue: interactions with friends, strangers, coworkers, and parents or relatives. The investigation reveals that participants exhibit distinct patterns of courtesy based on the age of the individuals they are interacting with, whether they are older, the same age, or younger. These findings shed light on the influence of age on the politeness strategies employed by participants within the South Sulawesi cultural context.

5.1. Communicating to Friends

The age of interlocutors plays a significant role in communication, particularly when friends are engaged in a discussion. In such cases, the social relationships between the parties are considered intimate and balanced, with shared group membership and a sense of social equality. It is not surprising, therefore, that the use of positive politeness strategies, characterized by a more informal speech style, has been widely recognized and documented in the literature (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Hernandez et al., 2021; Nurrahmah et al., 2020; Saputra et al., 2021; Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Wijayanti et al., 2022; Yassi, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d, 2017a, 2017b, 2018). The present study provides further evidence supporting this phenomenon.

However, the findings of this study challenge the widely held conclusions mentioned above, specifically regarding the role of interlocutors' ages. The research demonstrates that only conversations between individuals of the same age can successfully employ the casual speech variety. In contrast, when the interlocutors and speakers belong to different generations, the community tends to adopt a more deferential speech variety. This dominant use of different speech varieties across all ethnic groups examined in this study provides supporting evidence. The data also reveal that interactions with younger friends' interlocutors refute the notion of an unmarked phenomenon. The use of the three speech varieties appears to be more dynamic in such interactions, with the

politeness approach incorporating both deferential and mixed forms.

The age gap between the speakers and younger friends' interlocutors governs the dynamic use of the three speech varieties. The speakers perceive the interlocutors as outsiders in terms of age, not belonging to their in-group. Consequently, when conversing with younger friends, the speakers should employ the more deferential form or, at the very least, a mixed speech variety to save both their own and the addressees' faces.

5.2. Communicating to Strangers

The social relationship between participants in an encounter involving strangers as interlocutors is perceived as symmetrical but distant due to their unfamiliarity. The speakers view the interlocutors as individuals who belong to various groups but do not have a close connection with each other. Consequently, in such situations where the social standing of the interlocutors is unclear, speakers are more inclined to utilize the unmarked form of politeness strategy or the negative politeness strategy, which has been extensively discussed in the literature (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Yassi, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2016d, 2017a, 2017b, 2018). This approach is considered the safest method to avoid being rude and to protect the addressees' faces. It serves as a means of successful communication.

The current investigation provides partial support for these widely accepted conclusions. However, when considering age differences, the dynamics of the politeness strategy configuration become more apparent. The study reveals that all ethnic groups examined in this research employ a deferent speech variation and consequently rely on the negative politeness technique when communicating with older strangers. This finding lends substantial support to the notion of an unmarked phenomenon, as previously discussed. In contrast, when the interlocutors are of similar age or even younger than the speakers, a different pattern emerges. The study demonstrates that in these two speech contexts, mixed speech variety is frequently employed across all ethnic groups, in contrast to the distinct speech variety.

5.3. Communicating to Employers/Employees

In conversations between employers and employees, two distinct communication directions can be identified: bottom-to-up, where employees communicate with employers, and up-to-down, where employers communicate with employees. The social relationships between participants in these interactions are perceived as unbalanced. The power dynamics between the parties play a significant role, as one holds authority over the other, with employers occupying a superior position and employees in a subordinate position. Furthermore, in the present study, the power relationship was further categorized into two groups: [K] indicating a kin relationship among participants, and [-K], indicating the absence of a kin link (Yassi, 1996, 2011).

5.4. Communicating to Parents and Relatives

The power differentials within dialogues involving parents, grandparents, children, and other relatives are readily apparent. As individuals in these relationships hold authority over others and share a blood connection (+K), their social relationships are perceived as asymmetrical. Parents, grandparents, uncles, and other older relatives hold a superior position, while children, nieces, nephews, and other younger relatives occupy an inferior position. This social hierarchy significantly influences the employment of politeness strategies. In upward communication from inferiors to superiors, a negative politeness approach is commonly utilized, while in downward communication from superiors to inferiors, a positive politeness strategy is often employed as an unmarked phenomenon.

The present study provides robust evidence to support this previously unrecognized phenomenon. The investigation of two types of upward communication, specifically communication with older relatives and communication with parents, grandparents, and similar relatives, revealed that the deferent speech variety, accompanied by the use of the negative politeness strategy, was prevalent across all ethnic groups. Similarly, the study found that when speaking to younger relatives or relatives of the same age, the most common approach employed by all ethnic groups was the use of a more informal speech variety, accompanied by the positive politeness strategy.

However, upon closer examination of the data, it was observed that the usage of the mixed and informal speech varieties was evenly distributed across all ethnic groups in upward communication, albeit in smaller proportions. Additionally, in the last two speech situations—communication with relatives of the same age and younger relatives—it was found that all ethnic groups employed the mixed and deferent speech varieties instead of the more casual variant. The authentic dialogic data gathered from Yassi in 2016a, 2017a, and 2018, which represent the South Sulawesi ethnic groups, underscores the significant role played by age in shaping the community's politeness techniques.

According to the study's findings, there is a consistent and distinct pattern of politeness that is influenced by age within the participants' symmetrical social relationships. When engaging with older interlocutors (friends, strangers, coworkers, and family), the speakers exhibit a preference for a more deferential speech variety, resulting in the utilization of a "negative politeness technique." Conversely, when interacting with individuals of their own age (friends and family), the speakers tend to adopt a more relaxed style and rely on the "positive politeness technique." Furthermore, when communicating with younger friends and strangers, as well as when conversing with same-age strangers, the speakers tend to employ a mixed variety, blending informal and deferential elements.

The study also highlights the significance of age in shaping the politeness strategies within asymmetrical social relationships among the participants. While the use of a more informal speech variety as the unmarked form is prevalent, employers may utilize a more deferential or mixed variation when communicating with older staff members. Similarly, senior supervisors occasionally employ a more informal or mixed variant when interacting with considerably younger employees.

Once again, the study demonstrates that age serves as a critical social determinant influencing the politeness strategies employed by speakers of the Luwu Tae' language. This finding can contribute to other societies in general that have similar characteristics to the Luwu Tae' Language community. This

phenomenon can be attributed to the cultural values of the local indigenous people, who emphasize the importance of showing respect and behaving graciously towards others, particularly the elderly. Failure to adhere to these values may result in social isolation within the community. Therefore, this traditional knowledge is passed down from one generation to the next, as it plays a crucial role in fostering peaceful coexistence within society. In addition, for future research, the next researchers can explore more on the contribution of age towards the politeness of society. They can make a more comprehensive study on the variety of linguistics politeness in light of age.

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