

'Your daughter' instead of 'My Wife'
The Third Person's Reference in Indonesian Linguistic Politeness:
A Case of North Sumatera Province

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Abstract

Researches on linguistic politeness have found that self reference and terms of address are one among other linguistic devices used to realise politeness. However, the exploration on the third person's reference to realise politeness has not been discovered sufficiently. Researches also have proven that L1 interference occurs in the realisation of linguistic politeness in L2. However, how it operates in Indonesian linguistic politeness system is not sufficiently discovered either. This article presents how linguistic politeness used by Indonesian speakers speaking Indonesian is interfered by the linguistic politeness assigned by their mother tongue especially in the way the speakers talk about the intimate third parties. Cases in ethnic languages in North Sumatera Province show that the third person's reference is a sensitive area where politeness and/or impoliteness might occur. The more intimate the relation between the speaker and the third person, the more sensitive the area will be. A husband, for example, never uses 'my wife' to refer to his wife when he is speaking about her to his relatives. He uses the term 'your daughter-in-law' as the reference of his wife when talking about her to his parents. For Westerners this might indicate face threatening for the speaker, the hearer, and the third person as well. However, in Indonesian, when the 'distance' between the speaker and the intimate third person is impressed, it is a face-saving act for the speaker, the hearer, as well as the third person herself. It, for one reason, indicates that the hearer is warmly welcomed in the family since the hearer's comfortability is the main reason for this face saving act. This article presents the system of Indonesian linguistic politeness in referring to an intimate third person in North Sumatera Province and the map of the realisation of the strategy on the kinship web. It is found that the use of the third person's reference is limited only to close relatives or those considered as close relatives. Other strategy is used to refer to the intimate third person for non-relatives participants as well as to refer to the non-intimate third person for relatives.