

4 METHODOLOGY

As stated in the introductory chapter, this study aims to identify politeness strategies used in Malay to voice intentions which can be considered face-threatening. To achieve this, plays written in Bahasa Melayu were chosen as the data sample. The following section will discuss the reason for this particular choice of data by looking at the characteristics of these plays (e.g. genre, theme, and setting), among others. A description of the speech acts under study, the independent and dependent variables and categorization of data for analysis are also discussed here.

4.1 The Data

4.1.1 *Description of type*

Ten plays, all written in the 1960s, were chosen to form the corpus for this study on the basis of them being representative of modern Malay plays. They are called modern plays because the period setting for these plays is the sixties; the same time as that of the reading public. The term “modern” also alludes to the genre of such plays, i.e. documentation of contemporary Malaysian society (with a special focus on Malay society). The term “realism” has also been used to describe modern plays since they are the “objective representation of contemporary society”. Another characteristic of modern plays and one which determines its

choice as a source of data is the use of dialogue since this study aims to examine colloquial speech in use during the 1960s.

4.1.2 *Description of source*

The plays chosen are written by two prominent Malay writers who have received national awards for their creative works. These plays have garnered accolades from critics and society alike and this type of response suggests that the plays have successfully reflected the realities of the society then; they have, to a certain extent, fulfilled the sampling of social reality. The plays and their writers are listed below:

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| (1) Atap Genting Atap Rumbia (1963) | Mustapha Kamil Yassin @ Kala Dewata |
| (2) Di Balik Tabir Harapan (1966) | |
| (3) Dua Tiga Kucing Berlari (1966) | |
| (4) Tamu di Bukit Kenny (1968) | Usman Awang |
| (5) Malam Kemerdekaan (1968) | |
| (6) Menjelang Takbir (1966) | |
| (7) Serunai Malam (1966) | |
| (8) Dari Bintang ke Bintang (1965) | |
| (9) Gendang Kosong (1965) | |
| (10) Bulan Tetap Bersinar (1965) | |

As mentioned earlier, modern plays present issues faced by Malaysian society with a special focus on the lives of the Malays (*orang Melayu*). In such plays, this depiction of Malay life takes place in a living room. It is here that family members gather for family meetings and it is where they receive friends and other visitors. The nature of conversations which take place here provides ample opportunities for the participants to make offers and requests. This fact is also a primary reason for choosing modern plays to study, in context, the use of politeness strategies in performing these speech acts.

Generally-speaking, the plays by Kala Dewata centre on the dichotomy between the rich and the poor. *Atap Genting Atap Rumbia* tells the story of a girl from a prominent family who wants to marry a poor boy from the village. A conflict arises when the girl's mother disapproves of her daughter's choice of husband. *Di Balik Tabir Harapan* is about a father's wish for his children to become or to be associated with (e.g. by marriage) important people in order to maintain his reputation in the society. This desire soon takes its toll on the children which eventually causes them to rebel. *Dua Tiga Kucing Berlari* shares a similar plot with *Atap Genting Atap Rumbia*. Here, it is the young man who is rich and who wants to marry a poor village girl. This situation is further complicated by the fact that they are from different races. More precisely, this race issue is the root of the problem.

As for the plays by Usman Awang, all the plays listed above, with the exception of *Tamu di Bukit Kenny* and *Gendang Kosong*, deal with relationship issues. These issues include choosing between one's love for one's country/family and one's love for another (in *Malam Kemerdekaan* and *Dari Bintang ke Bintang*), sacrificing for one's love or consenting to his wishes, i.e. in *Bulan Tetap Bersinar* and *Serunai Malam*, respectively and recognizing true love (*Menjelang Takbir*). The other two plays are concerned with the idea of being true to oneself. The main character in *Tamu di Bukit Kenny* practises what he preaches while that in *Gendang Kosong* does not.

4.1.3 Language variety used in the plays

The language variety spoken by the characters in the plays is called *bahasa basahan*. It is the neutral colloquial language where "neutral" refers to the way the language is marked. In this respect, *bahasa basahan* "is not marked by any feature of the three varieties of Bahasa Melayu" (Asmah Haji Omar, 1988:87). Also, it is used only in speech while the other varieties are also used when writing.

The three varieties of Malay mentioned above are *bahasa halus* (refined Malay), *bahasa kasar* (coarse Malay), and *bahasa terpelajar* (educated Malay). These varieties are mainly marked by lexical items, phrases, and syntactic structures. Specifically, *bahasa halus* is marked by words and phrases that suggest "gentility

and good breeding” (Asmah Haji Omar, 1988:86). In contrast, *bahasa kasar* is marked by a phraseology that reflects “coarseness of behaviour and low breeding” (ibid.). The third variety, *bahasa terpelajar*, is also known as *bahasa buku* (the language of books). As these names suggest, this variety is used in academic and professional settings (e.g. schools, colleges, universities, public and private administration, mass-media). This variety is also marked by a distinct lexis and syntax.

According to Asmah Haji Omar (1988), the main factor that distinguishes *bahasa terpelajar* from the other two varieties is “[the level of] *sophistication*, that of its lexis, the morphology of its words and the syntactic structure it chooses” (p. 87, original emphasis). In terms of lexis, highly literary and highly technical terms characterize *bahasa terpelajar*. “These words, as well as the non-literary and the non-technical ones, are marked by their high degree of agglutination, viz. with prefixing, suffixing and compounding” (Asmah Haji Omar, 1988:87). In terms of syntax, most sentences are marked by coordinating and subordinating conjunctions (ibid.).

Returning to *bahasa basahan*, its use can be described as follows:

It ... is used in the context where the speakers involved are not talking about literature or their profession, nor are they constrained by having to conform to the decorum of good breeding but at the same time are not motivated to be coarse or rude (Asmah Haji Omar, 1988:87).

The use of *bahasa basahan* provides information about the speech event. In particular, this variety is used in social settings by speakers who are either familiar or unfamiliar and who may or may not share the same bases of power. In addition, the topic of talk and the mood of the speakers are of a casual nature (Asmah Haji Omar, 1988). Therefore, this language variety lends itself well to this study on how politeness is encoded given the social relationship that exists between the participants in the talk exchange.

4.1.4 Characters in the plays

The characters in the plays can be treated as the subjects in this study. There are eleven families depicted in these plays and the characters/subjects play one or more of the following roles: a parent, a son/daughter, a spouse, a relative, a friend, an acquaintance, a domestic help, or a stranger. These roles mirror the roles that exist in an actual Malay family institution and community. The roles played by these characters/subjects are important since “institutionalized role” is used in this study as the primary base of power(P) (other bases of P are age, social status, and occupation) to determine the value for P.

In addition, having characters that have been clearly developed or described by the playwrights as subjects provides the writer (of this study) with reliable information on a subject’s shared knowledge with, attitude towards, and relationship with the other subjects, among others. This type of information is

useful when interpreting the choice of politeness strategies made by these characters/ subjects.

4.1.5 Rationale for choice of data

In deciding on the choice of data, the obvious answer is to look at naturally-occurring talk in order to find conversations replete with offers and requests. B and L have suggested that “politeness is prototypically exhibited in conversation and other kinds of face-to-face interchange” (1987:41).

Initially, this was attempted by the writer (of the present study) by means of audio-recording conversations which occurred within the confines of the home (the writer’s and other family members’) and in the workplace while at the same time, playing the role of participant observer in these settings. Audio-recording natural spontaneous talk that took place between the members in the writer’s immediate and extended family was not an easy task. This was because they were not comfortable with having their conversations recorded and studied. This reaction seems to typify most average Malay-speaking households who are somewhat conservative in nature.

This was also the problem encountered by Khadijah Ibrahim (1993) who was unable to obtain audio recordings of conversations of the subjects in her study who consisted of her family members and friends. Khadijah described her problem as follows: “The employment of audio facilities seemed not advisable

because participants were unhappy and unwilling to have their conversations on tape. They refused to cooperate, making it impossible to work” (1993:86). Due to this problem, Khadijah had to use pen and paper to record the conversations and this was done with the help of another individual, i.e. two people were required in writing down the conversations.

As for the present study, only a small number of conversations were recorded due to the problem. Also, seeking out and listening for suitable occasions for the speech acts under study to occur were time-consuming since they did not occur as frequently as expected. In addition, there were many types of relationship, i.e. dyads, to look for in order to have a sufficient number of instances for each of the six levels of PxD interaction. Added to these problems were the limited resources (in terms of time, manpower, and money). As a result of the difficulties faced during the process of data collection, the amount of data gathered was insufficient to form a corpus large enough for analysis and study. Thus, the search for ‘real’ conversations was abandoned.

The next step was to search for a viable alternative to ‘real’ data and thus Malay plays were identified as the choice for data. The plays chosen are not contemporary, i.e. they are not those which have been staged or published recently. The selected plays dated back to the 1960s when the genre termed “modern plays” was first introduced. This period represented the height of activity in terms of the number of production and publication of plays by renowned

playwrights of that time (Mana Sikana, 1989). This fact constituted the reason for deciding on 1960s plays as data since most of the best plays of all-time were produced then (Mana Sikana, 1989). Based on this choice of data, the investigation into politeness as motivated by face concerns in Malay language focuses on forms of linguistic politeness in colloquial speech of the 1960s. It is not uncommon to use dramatic texts, plays in this case, for politeness studies. For example, Brown and Gilman (1989) used Shakespeare's plays, Rhodes (1989) used novels and so did Ahmad Mahmood (1998).

4.2 Choice of Speech Acts

Two face-threatening acts were selected to study how they encode politeness. These FTAs are offers and requests and they are chosen because they threaten an addressee's negative face (the focus of this study is on acts which threaten H's negative face). Another reason for choosing offers and requests is because they are easily identified. Also, politeness features are frequently used in making offers and requests and thus, studying these FTAs would provide many instances of linguistic markings for politeness.

In studying the politeness strategies used when making offers, a distinction between "offers" and "invitations" was made, when necessary. When such a distinction was not required, the term "offer" was used to refer to both speech acts. An offer is made when a speaker (henceforth S) offers something to or offers

to do something for the addressee/hearer (henceforth H). An invitation is extended when a speaker invites H to do something with him. In other words, an offer is meant exclusively for the addressee whereas an invitation is meant to include both S and H (Asmah Haji Omar, 1993:Ch. 31). A request is made when a speaker wants the addressee to do something for him. Essentially, a request is an attempt by S to get H to perform an action while an offer is S's attempt to do the said act.

In BM, requests are distinct from orders in terms of syntactic markings. A request is conventionally marked by a request word (see sec. 7.4 for details) whereas an order is marked by an imperative verb. Further, requests are categorized as *perintah halus* (lit.: refined directives) and orders as *perintah kasar* (lit.: unrefined directives) (Asmah Haji Omar, 1993:400).

4.3 Identification and Coding of FTAs

The way in which an FTA is identified and coded is as follows:

- (1) Identifying a stretch of utterance produced by a character in the play that contains the FTA under study.
- (2) Coding the utterance for the P and D variable. The value for these variables is determined by the nature of the relationship between the character who produced the utterance(s) and the intended addressee. P is coded as high, equal or low and D is coded as either high or low.
- (3) Recording the strategy used by the character to encode the FTA.

(4) Comparing it to B and L's list of strategies to determine the nature of this strategy and consequently its conformity to or deviation from the claim of parallels in linguistic realizations of FTAs by different languages and cultures.

It is important to note here that the length of the FTA or the amount of speech recorded for analysis follows that done by Brown and Gilman in their 1989 study. The length of the FTA is understood as "all the text necessary to specify the FTA plus all continuous antecedent and subsequent text that does not belong to a new speech act" (Brown and Gilman, 1989:174).

4.4 Predictor and Dependent Variables

Three variables have been identified by B and L as those which influence the selection of a politeness strategy to perform a face-threatening act. These predictor variables are power(P), distance(D), and degree of imposition of an FTA(R_x). In B and L's terms, P denotes the relative power of the hearer(H) over the speaker(S), D is the relationship distance between S and H and R corresponds to the threat to face of a speech act as rated by a particular culture.

In this study, the dimensions for P, D, and R are specific to Malay culture. Therefore, the relative power(P) of H over S is based on age and "institutionalized role" within a family or community. In most cases, H's relative power is

measured by these bases of power which work independently or together. In other cases, P is determined by H's social position, occupation, and wealth. As for the relationship distance(D) between S and H, this is measured in terms of the participants' level of closeness and familiarity. Thus, S and H are intimates, family members, friends, acquaintances or strangers.

It should be noted here that the base of power used to determine P is, to some extent, related to the social distance(D) between S and H. For example, when H's relative power over S is determined by H's role within a family, he and S will, most likely, share a close relationship. When P is based on social position or occupation, S and H are, in most cases, mere acquaintances or strangers. This study aims to examine the combined effect of P and D on politeness and this is done by looking at levels of PxD interaction. In a particular PxD interaction, the level of P is low, equal, or high while that of D is either low or high.

The degree or rank of imposition of the FTAs (R_x) was determined by taking into consideration the cost-benefit and face-threat factors. Offers are considered beneficial to H while requests are at a cost to H. Both speech acts threaten H's negative face since they impede H's freedom of action. In most situations, H is compelled to accept an offer since it is made to benefit him. This pressure to accept the offer undermines H's freedom to reject the said offer if he so wishes and this "lack of freedom" constitutes a threat to H's negative face. However, the size of this face threat is small when compared to that of a request. This is

because a request is at a cost to H, i.e. it benefits S but not H. When a request is made, H is expected to comply with this request. This usually requires some form of action from H which consequently, impinges on his “want that his actions be unimpeded by others”. Similarly, having to comply with a request threatens H’s negative face.

The two factors discussed above in relation to the level of imposition inherent in each FTA are also present when assessing the seriousness of these FTAs in Malay culture. Therefore, Malays view an offer as generally low in imposition while a request is high in imposition. This study adopts this view.

Once the seriousness of an FTA is determined by the combined value of P, D, and R, an appropriate politeness strategy is chosen to perform the FTA. The dependent variable in this study is the strategy chosen to perform an offer or a request. Each strategy that is identified from the data is compared to B and L’s super-strategies and their corresponding sub-strategies in order to determine its nature.