Parental Strategies in Shaping Early Childhood Politeness Perception to Maintain Eastern Cultural Values

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ABSTRACT

Globalization and digital media expansion have significantly reshaped social interaction patterns, necessitating a focus on how early childhood politeness is maintained within families. This study aims to analyze how parents shape young children's perceptions of politeness through everyday interaction and to examine how these practices contribute to their understanding of culturally appropriate communication. Employing a qualitative descriptive–interpretive design, data were collected from twelve parents in South Sulawesi through semi-structured interviews, participant observations of daily routines, and document analysis. The results reveal that parental modeling is the primary strategy for instilling politeness, encompassing both verbal expressions and nonverbal behaviors such as respectful gestures and address terms. Furthermore, parents utilize verbal guidance, behavioral correction, and positive reinforcement to internalize politeness as a moral and cultural value. The findings also highlight that parents actively frame politeness to counter external influences from peers and digital media. This study concludes that consistent parental strategies are decisive in internalizing politeness as a culturally grounded social practice that maintains Eastern values like adab, hormat, and siri'.

Keywords: *Early Childhood, Eastern Values, Family Interaction, Parental Strategies, Politeness.*

ABSTRAK

Globalisasi dan perluasan media digital telah mengubah pola interaksi sosial secara signifikan, sehingga diperlukan fokus pada bagaimana kesantunan anak usia dini dipertahankan dalam keluarga. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana orang tua membentuk persepsi kesantunan anak melalui interaksi sehari-hari dan menguji bagaimana praktik tersebut berkontribusi pada pemahaman mereka tentang komunikasi yang sesuai secara budaya. Dengan menggunakan desain kualitatif deskriptif-interpretatif, data dikumpulkan dari dua belas orang tua di Sulawesi Selatan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi partisipan terhadap rutinitas harian, dan analisis dokumen. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa keteladanan orang tua merupakan strategi utama dalam menanamkan kesantunan, yang mencakup ekspresi verbal maupun perilaku nonverbal seperti isyarat hormat dan istilah sapaan. Selain itu, orang tua menggunakan bimbingan verbal, koreksi perilaku, dan penguatan positif untuk menginternalisasi kesantunan sebagai nilai moral dan budaya. Temuan ini juga menyoroti bahwa orang tua secara aktif

membingkai kesantunan untuk menangkal pengaruh eksternal dari teman sebaya dan media digital. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa strategi orang tua yang konsisten sangat menentukan dalam menginternalisasi kesantunan sebagai praktik sosial berbasis budaya yang menjaga nilai-nilai Timur seperti adab, hormat, dan siri'.
Kata Kunci: *Anak Usia Dini, Interaksi Keluarga, Kesantunan, Nilai-Nilai Timur, Strategi Orang Tua.*

INTRODUCTION

Globalization and the expansion of digital media have reshaped patterns of social interaction within families, including how children learn socially appropriate ways of speaking. In many Eastern cultural contexts, politeness is closely connected to values such as respect for elders, social harmony, and sensitivity to social roles. These values are not transmitted through formal instruction alone but are embedded in everyday family interaction. Early childhood is widely recognized as a critical period for language and social development. During this stage, children begin to develop pragmatic competence that forms the foundation for later social communication, including the ability to interpret social norms and expectations (Clark, 2018).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, politeness is not merely a set of linguistic forms but a social practice shaped through interaction and cultural norms. Ochs & Schieffelin (2017) argue that language development is inseparable from socialization processes in which children learn culturally appropriate ways of speaking and behaving. Evidence from developmental pragmatics further suggests that children acquire politeness strategies gradually through repeated interaction with caregivers. Al-Abbas (2023) shows that children's use of politeness in requests develops alongside their growing awareness of social expectations, while Snow (2019) emphasizes that pragmatic development is strongly influenced by social input rather than linguistic exposure alone.

Within this process, parents play a central role as primary agents of language socialization. King & Fogle (2017) highlight that parental language practices provide children with models of acceptable communication and social behavior. Empirical studies in Asian and Indonesian contexts indicate that parents employ strategies such as role modeling, verbal guidance, and correction to foster polite language use. Fitriyanur et al., (2021) report that parental role modeling is central to the development of linguistic politeness, while Wardhana & Noermanzah (2021) demonstrate that children's politeness strategies are shaped by social norms embedded in family and community interaction. Rokhuma et al. (2021) further note that parents' perceptions of politeness education influence how consistently politeness is practiced in daily communication.

Family interaction also serves as a key site for the negotiation of social values. Nguyen (2022) shows that cultural norms are not simply transmitted from parents to children but are actively interpreted through family discourse. Similarly, Paugh (2020) argues that children are active participants in language socialization who construct moral and social meanings through interaction, including norms related to respect and appropriateness. In the Indonesian context, Yudha et al. (2024)

emphasize that close parental involvement supports children's communicative and social development during early childhood.

Building on these conditions, the present study focuses on parental strategies in shaping young children's understanding and use of politeness in everyday interaction as part of maintaining Eastern cultural values. Field phenomena indicate several issues that highlight the urgency of this research, namely: (1) variations in the strategies parents use to teach politeness to young children in daily communication, (2) a tendency to emphasize behavioral modeling and direct instruction without consistently conveying the social meanings underlying politeness as a culturally grounded value, and (3) the strong influence of external factors such as family environment, peers, and surrounding social contexts on children's perceptions of politeness and appropriateness. Based on these issues, this research is directed to address two main questions: what strategies parents use to help young children understand and apply politeness strategies in everyday interaction in order to preserve Eastern values of politeness, and how parental strategies are influenced by cultural, familial, and environmental factors in shaping children's understanding of politeness and appropriateness.

The objectives of this study are: (a) to analyze how parents shape young children's perceptions of politeness through everyday family interaction, and (b) to examine how these parental practices contribute to children's understanding of politeness as a socially and culturally appropriate form of communication. This study is expected to provide a theoretical contribution to sociolinguistic research on language socialization by highlighting politeness as a culturally embedded social practice in early childhood. In addition, it offers practical insights into parental language strategies that may support the development of respectful and appropriate communication in family contexts.

Accordingly, politeness in family interaction is not merely a set of linguistic expressions, but a holistic social practice that connects moral values, social relationships, and cultural norms. The successful development of children's perceptions of politeness depends largely on the consistency of parental language use, the modeling of appropriate communicative behavior, and the ongoing interaction between children and their immediate social environment.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive–interpretive design to explore the use of politeness strategies and their influence on perceived politeness and appropriateness in everyday family interaction. This approach was selected to capture naturally occurring language practices and their sociolinguistic meanings within urban and semi-urban family home settings in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with twelve parents of children aged four to six years, selected via purposive sampling to gain in-depth insights into their communicative practices. Participant observations were performed to document authentic language use across various contexts, including daily routines such as eating, playing, and getting ready to go out, as well as interactions with immediate family, extended family, and guests or individuals

outside the family unit. These findings were further supported by document analysis in the form of detailed field notes and a structured observation checklist to ensure a comprehensive recording of the observed interactions. Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2014) encompassing data reduction, data display, and interpretive conclusion drawing. The trustworthiness of the findings was ensured through triangulation of sources and methods, member checking, and peer debriefing to enhance the credibility and reliability of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Research Results
Based on interviews with twelve parents, participatory observation of child-parent interactions in various family contexts, as well as documentation in the form of field notes and structured observation sheets, it was found that politeness strategies in family interactions in South Sulawesi were formed through diverse but interrelated practices. The strategy is not only manifested in the form of the use of polite language, but also through example, verbal direction, positive reinforcement, as well as associating the value of politeness with cultural and religious norms. These findings suggest that politeness is practiced as part of a process of language socialization that takes place naturally in daily family routines.

a)   Parental Example as the Main Strategy for Instilling Politeness

The findings of this study indicate that parental example is the primary strategy used to instill politeness in early childhood. Based on interview data, parents do not only model basic polite expressions such as *tolong*, *terima kasih*, and *maaf*, but also demonstrate more contextual forms of politeness, including the use of respectful address terms such as *nak*, *dek*, *puang*, *tante*, and *om*. Parents also adjust voice intonation, particularly when speaking to older family members, as a way of demonstrating respect.

Observational data show that parents consistently model polite behavior through nonverbal practices, such as slightly bowing when passing older people, using the right hand when giving or receiving objects, and waiting for one's turn to speak when adults are talking. During interactions with guests, parents frequently use polite expressions such as *silakan masuk*, *dudukki dulu*, and *mari makan*, which are later imitated by children in similar social situations.

Documentation from observational records indicates that children tend to imitate their parents' language and behavior spontaneously, especially in interactions involving people outside the nuclear family. These findings suggest that parental example functions not only as implicit instruction but also as the primary means through which children learn when, how, and to whom politeness should be expressed within social interaction.

b)   Verbal Briefing and Behavior Correction in Instilling Politeness

In addition to modeling, parents also employ verbal briefing and behavior correction as supporting strategies in teaching politeness. Interview data reveal that parents frequently use corrective expressions such as *bicara yang pelan*, *jangan potong pembicaraan*, *itu tidak sopan*, and *coba ulangi dengan cara yang lebih baik* when children

display impolite behavior. These expressions are often accompanied by brief explanations that emphasize social or moral reasons for the correction.

Observational findings indicate that verbal correction is most commonly applied in hierarchical interactional contexts, such as when children speak to grandparents or guests. In such situations, parents tend to adopt a dialogical approach by asking reflective questions like *tadi seharusnya bilang apa?* or *kalau sama orang tua, bagaimana caranya bicara?*. This approach encourages children to reflect on their own behavior rather than merely complying with instructions.

Observational documentation also shows that physical correction is rare and is usually replaced by nonverbal signals such as stern looks, hand gestures, or changes in voice intonation. This pattern suggests that parents prioritize persuasive and communicative strategies over punitive ones, allowing children to learn politeness through interactional cues and contextual understanding.

c)   Positive Reinforcement as an Effort to Maintain Polite Behavior

Positive reinforcement emerged as an important strategy for maintaining polite behavior. Interview data show that parents provide reinforcement through verbal praise, affective expressions, and occasional simple rewards. Common expressions of praise include *bagus sekali caramu bicara*, *Masya Allah*, and *anak pintar*, which are often accompanied by physical affection such as hugging or patting the child's head.

Participatory observation reveals that verbal praise is the most frequently used form of reinforcement and is typically given immediately after the child demonstrates polite behavior, for example after greeting guests, saying *terima kasih*, or speaking politely to older family members. Parents also use symbolic reinforcement such as smiling or nodding to signal approval.

Observational records indicate that children respond positively to reinforcement by repeating polite behavior in subsequent interactions. This suggests that positive reinforcement helps children associate politeness with feelings of acceptance and appreciation, thereby supporting the internalization of politeness as a social value rather than a temporary behavioral response.

d)   The Influence of Social Environment and Media on Children's Politeness Practices

The findings also show that parents are highly aware of the influence of the social environment and media on children's language behavior. Interview data indicate that peers, play environments, and digital media often expose children to language forms that differ from family politeness norms. Parents reported that children sometimes imitate expressions, tones, or behaviors perceived as inappropriate within the family context.

Observational data support this finding by showing noticeable changes in children's language behavior after interacting with peers or being exposed to certain media content. In response, parents often use corrective and balancing expressions such as *di rumah kita tidak bicara begitu, itu tidak sesuai adab*, or *ingat caranya bicara sama orang tua*. These expressions explicitly reconnect politeness practices to family norms.

Observational documentation further shows that parents actively frame politeness using value-based terms such as *adab*, *sopan santun*, and *hormat*. This

indicates that politeness is not treated merely as a linguistic skill but as a moral and cultural value that must be maintained amid ongoing social change.

Discussion

Based on the research findings, it is evident that parental strategies in shaping early childhood perceptions of politeness are not limited to simple linguistic practices, such as the use of magic words, but also involve social interaction practices, the interpretation of Eastern cultural norms, and adaptation to broader environmental influences. This pattern indicates that the construction of politeness within the family is a pragmatic experience formed through repeated interactions between parents and children, while simultaneously being influenced by local sociocultural values deeply rooted in Eastern societies. These findings affirm that politeness is not merely a repertoire of words, but part of a complex language socialization process rich in cultural meaning.

a)   Parental Modeling as the Primary Strategy

Conceptually, the findings of this study demonstrate that *keteladanan* (role modeling) is the primary strategy used by parents to transmit an understanding of politeness to children. Role modeling emerges not only through verbal utterances such as *tolong*, *terima kasih*, and *maaf*, but also through nonverbal expressions, family address terms (*nak*, *dek*, *puang*), and forms of *adab* in social interaction. This role modeling helps children observe how norms of politeness are enacted in real contexts, enabling them to build their pragmatic repertoire within appropriate social settings. This aligns with the findings of Mayrita et al. (2023), who argue that politeness in family interactions consists of various principles that must be practiced consistently for children to internalize both the forms and functions of polite language behavior in everyday life.

Within the context of Eastern culture, such role modeling also reflects strong values of *siri'* and *hormat*, where respect for elders and guests is regarded as a core marker of politeness. Role modeling as a pragmatic strategy is consistent with Kurniawati (2021), who found that address terms and forms of reference function as primary tools of language socialization that reflect cultural values and social positions within Indonesian families.

b)   Verbal Guidance and Correction as Supportive Practices of Politeness

Further findings indicate that, in addition to role modeling, parents apply verbal guidance and behavioral correction when children display language forms perceived as impolite. This verbal guidance typically takes the form of reflective dialogue and explanations of expected social norms, demonstrating that parents aim not merely to correct, but to educate children about why certain behaviors are considered inappropriate. This suggests that politeness learning within the family is not intended as mere control, but as an effort to build children's pragmatic understanding through processes of self-reflection.

These findings support the view that language socialization is a dialogical, rather than one-sided, process, in which children are expected to participate actively in constructing their own concepts of politeness rather than simply imitating patterns without reflection. The role of verbal guidance is consistent with dialogical

approaches found in the literature on social value learning in families, where two-way communication between parents and children strengthens the internalization of social norms (Shafwah et al., 2024). This strategy accommodates Eastern values that emphasize *muafakat* and social harmony in family interactions.

c)   Positive Reinforcement in Maintaining Children's Polite Behavior

This study also found that positive reinforcement is an important strategy for maintaining polite behavior in children. Positive parental responses, such as praise (*pintarki*, *bagus sekali caramu bicara*, *Masya Allah*), hugs, or simple rewards, were shown to encourage children to repeat the same polite behavior in other social contexts. This pattern indicates that children learn politeness not only as a form of compliance, but also associate it with positive emotional experiences that contribute to the stabilization of such behavior within their social structure.

This finding relates to children's pragmatic development, suggesting that positive reinforcement strengthens the association between language behavior and social appreciation, as supported by previous studies showing that praise and affirmative responses accelerate the internalization of social values in children's interactions (Rahmi et al., 2022). In Eastern cultures, positive responses combined with religious expressions or moral values reinforce children's understanding that politeness is not merely a linguistic behavior, but also a moral and spiritual value that should be upheld.

d)   Environmental and Media Influences as Challenges to Eastern Cultural Values

Another finding reveals that social environment and media exposure pose significant challenges to maintaining Eastern cultural values in children's politeness practices. Children often imitate utterances and expressions that conflict with family politeness norms after interacting with peers or engaging with digital media. Parents therefore experience the need to re-explain expected politeness values in contextual ways, using expressions such as *di rumah kita tidak bicara begitu* or *itu tidak sesuai adab*, which serve to realign children with family social norms.

This phenomenon reflects broader challenges of cultural socialization in the modern era, where traditional norms intersect with more egalitarian and informal communication patterns outside the home. Al-Abbas (2023) demonstrates that children's understanding of politeness varies according to social experiences and linguistic exposure, developing alongside age and differing social contexts. Within the framework of strong Eastern values, these findings highlight the necessity for parents to continuously connect children's pragmatic development with local cultural values in order to preserve traditional orientations toward politeness.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that parental strategies in everyday family interaction play a decisive role in shaping early childhood perceptions of politeness as a way of maintaining Eastern cultural values. Through consistent modeling, verbal guidance and correction, positive reinforcement, and responses to social and media influences, children come to understand politeness not merely as the use of expressions such as *tolong*, *terima kasih*, and *maaf*, but as a culturally grounded social practice. Politeness

is internalized as part of moral and relational values, including *adab*, *hormat*, and *siri'*, which guide children in interpreting appropriate behavior across different interactional contexts. This study concludes that parental strategies in everyday family interaction play a decisive role in shaping early childhood perceptions of politeness as a way of maintaining Eastern cultural values. Through consistent modeling, verbal guidance and correction, positive reinforcement, and responses to social and media influences, children come to understand politeness not merely as the use of expressions such as *tolong*, *terima kasih*, and *maaf*, but as a culturally grounded social practice. Politeness is internalized as part of moral and relational values, including *adab*, *hormat*, and *siri'*, which guide children in interpreting appropriate behavior across different interactional contexts. The authors would like to thank all participants who took part in this study for their time and cooperation. Gratitude is also extended to the colleagues and individuals who provided technical support and feedback during the research process. The authors are grateful for the support of their families and loved ones throughout the completion of this work. Finally, the authors acknowledge Al-Zayn: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial & Hukum for the opportunity to publish this research.

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