

Politeness in Bugis Family Discourse: An Ethnolinguistic Study on the Influence of Education

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Abstract: This study examines linguistic politeness in Bugis parent-child interaction from an ethnolinguistic perspective. It focuses on parents' use of polite and casual pronouns and particles when addressing their children, particularly in relation to the children's educational attainment. The data consist of naturally occurring Bugis utterances collected through observation and semi-structured interviews in Amali Village, Bone Regency, South Sulawesi. Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is employed to identify politeness strategies, which are subsequently interpreted within an ethnolinguistic framework to uncover their cultural meanings. The findings demonstrate a systematic contrast between polite forms (idi, -ta, -ki) and casual forms (iko, -mu, -ko) in Bugis family discourse. Polite forms are used by parents to express respect and to acknowledge children's symbolic status associated with higher education, whereas casual forms index intimacy and traditional age-based hierarchy. These patterns indicate that linguistic politeness in Bugis families is not fixed but dynamically negotiated through socio-cultural factors. The study concludes that education functions as symbolic capital that reshapes politeness practices in parent-child interaction while preserving core Bugis values of intimacy, hierarchy, and respect.

Keywords: Ethnolinguistics, Linguistic Politeness, Bugis Language, Family, Education

I. INTRODUCTION

Language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a reflection of the values, norms, and knowledge systems within a society. From an ethnolinguistic perspective, language is understood as a cultural practice through which speakers construct social relations, hierarchy, and respect (Duranti, 1997; Rahman & Weda, 2019). One salient manifestation of this cultural practice is linguistic politeness, which plays a crucial role in shaping everyday interaction, particularly within the family domain (Bachriani et al., 2018; Suma et al., 2023).

In Bugis society, politeness in language use has traditionally been closely associated with age, kinship relations, and degrees of intimacy. Within family interactions, parents commonly employ casual forms such as iko, -mu, and -ko when addressing their children, reflecting both emotional closeness and age-based authority (Andini et al., 2021; Sukmawaty et al., 2022; Abbas et al., 2024). However, recent practices reveal a notable shift: parents increasingly use polite forms such as idi, -ta, and -ki when addressing children who have attained higher levels of education. This phenomenon suggests that politeness in Bugis families is dynamic and responsive to social change.

Previous studies on Bugis politeness have largely relied on Western theoretical frameworks, particularly Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness. While this theory offers valuable analytical tools, its application often underrepresents local cultural values that shape linguistic behavior. Consequently, key Bugis concepts such as sipakatau (mutual humanization) and siri' (honor and dignity) have not been sufficiently examined from an ethnolinguistic perspective, especially within the intersecting contexts of family interaction and education.

In response to this gap, the present study investigates linguistic politeness in Bugis parent-

child interaction in Amali Village, Bone Regency, South Sulawesi. The study focuses on how children's educational attainment influences parents' choice of pronouns and politeness particles, and how these choices reflect a negotiation between age hierarchy, intimacy, and educational legitimacy. This study adopts Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory to identify politeness strategies, while situating the analysis within an ethnolinguistic framework to foreground Bugis cultural values. The objectives of this study are to (1) describe forms of politeness in Bugis family discourse and (2) explain the cultural meanings underlying these practices, particularly in relation to education.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Ethnolinguistics and Language as Cultural Practice

Ethnolinguistics views language as an inseparable part of culture and the social life of a community. Language not only represents social reality but also actively shapes, maintains, and negotiates cultural values (Duranti, 1997; Foley, 1997). From this perspective, linguistic practices are understood as social actions imbued with cultural meaning; therefore, language analysis must always be situated within the social and cultural context of its speakers.

Ethnolinguistic studies emphasize the importance of natural utterances that emerge in everyday interactions, such as within family settings, rituals, or domestic activities (Rahman et al., 2019; Paiting et al., 2025). The family environment—particularly the extended family—is regarded as a primary space for the transmission of cultural values and social ideologies through language, including values of politeness, respect, and social hierarchy. Consequently, changes in linguistic practices within the family may reflect broader shifts in a society's cultural values and orientations (Dalyan et al., 2025).

B. Linguistic Politeness from the Perspective of Brown and Levinson

The politeness theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) conceptualizes politeness as a set of linguistic strategies used to maintain face in social interaction. Face is divided into positive face, referring to an individual's desire to be appreciated and approved of, and negative face, referring to the desire to be free from imposition. In selecting politeness strategies, speakers consider three main variables: power (P), social distance (D), and rank of imposition (R).

Within this framework, family relationships are typically characterized by low social distance and relatively clear power distribution based on age and kinship roles. Such conditions allow for the frequent use of direct speech strategies (bald on-record), particularly by older family members toward younger ones, such as aunts and uncles addressing nieces and nephews. However, Brown and Levinson also emphasize that power is contextual and may shift depending on the values recognized within a given society.

A number of studies have shown that Brown and Levinson's theory cannot always be applied universally without considering local cultural contexts. In many non-Western cultures, concepts of face and power are closely tied to collective values, family honor, and symbolic legitimacy, which are not determined solely by age or formal status.

C. Linguistic Politeness in Bugis Culture

In Bugis culture, linguistic politeness is closely associated with local values such as sipakatau (mutual humanization), sipakalebbi (mutual respect), and siri' (honor). These values are reflected in lexical choices, pronouns, and forms of address used in everyday interaction. Traditionally, age hierarchy and kinship have been the primary factors determining levels of linguistic politeness.

The use of pronouns such as iko and -mu within the family—especially by older family members toward younger relatives—is understood as a form of casual speech that may be considered impolite normatively but is culturally acceptable due to age hierarchy and emotional intimacy. In contrast, pronouns such as idi and -ta represent higher levels of politeness and are generally used

toward individuals positioned as deserving respect.

Nevertheless, several studies indicate that politeness practices in Bugis society are dynamic and may shift in response to social change. Education, as a form of cultural capital, has begun to play an important role in reshaping relations of respect and social legitimacy. However, studies that specifically position education as a factor influencing politeness practices within Bugis extended family interactions remain very limited.

D. Education as Symbolic Capital in Linguistic Practice

From a sociocultural perspective, education is understood not only as an academic process but also as a source of social legitimacy and symbolic honor. Higher educational attainment is often associated with knowledge, wisdom, and intellectual capacity that are collectively recognized. Such recognition is then reflected in linguistic practices, including within the family (Ilham & Rahman, 2024; Tahir et al., 2020).

In this context, the shift in forms of address from *iko*/-mu to *idi*/-ta can be understood as an adjustment of politeness strategies to acknowledge a niece's or nephew's new symbolic status within the family. This change demonstrates that power in interaction is not determined solely by biological age but also by the cultural value attached to education. Thus, linguistic politeness becomes a site of negotiation between traditional hierarchy and contemporary social values.

E. Theoretical Framework

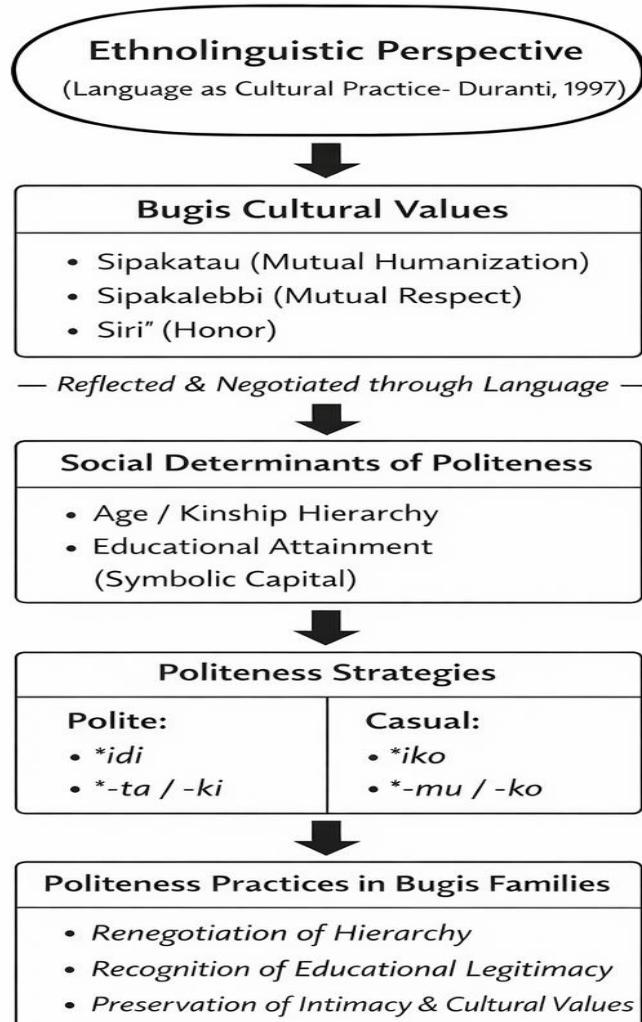


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

The figure illustrates a simplified ethnolinguistic theoretical framework that explains how

linguistic politeness practices in Bugis families are shaped by cultural values and changing social factors. At the foundation of the framework are Bugis cultural values, particularly **sipakatau** (mutual humanization) and **siri'** (honor and dignity), which function as the core ideological principles governing interpersonal communication within the family.

These cultural values interact with a key social factor, namely **educational attainment**. Education operates as symbolic capital, granting individuals—specifically **nieces and nephews who have achieved higher levels of education**—recognized intellectual authority within the extended family. This social recognition does not eliminate traditional age-based hierarchy but reshapes and negotiates it. The interaction between cultural values and education influences linguistic politeness strategies, especially the use of polite pronouns and particles in Bugis, such as **idi**, **-ta**, and **-ki**. These linguistic forms index respect, inclusion, and acknowledgment of authority in family discourse.

The outcome of this process is a **negotiated family hierarchy**, in which **aunts and uncles continue to hold traditional authority**, yet nieces and nephews with higher educational status are positioned as legitimate participants in family discussions and decision-making. This demonstrates that politeness in Bugis family interaction is dynamic and context-dependent. From an ethnolinguistic perspective, the figure shows how language functions as a cultural resource that reflects, maintains, and adapts social values in response to social change. The framework therefore situates the study within ethnolinguistics, as it connects linguistic forms, cultural meanings, and social practices within a specific community context (Bone, South Sulawesi).

III. METHODS

A. Research Approach and Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with an ethnolinguistic perspective, viewing language as a cultural practice imbued with social and cultural meaning. This approach is chosen because the study aims to understand the meaning of linguistic politeness in Bugis within the context of extended family interactions, particularly in relation to changes in the educational status of younger family members such as nieces and nephews.

B. Research Site and Context

The study was conducted in Amali Village, Bone Regency, South Sulawesi. This location was selected because the community actively uses the Bugis language in daily interactions, especially within extended family settings, and maintains local cultural values in social and domestic structures. The family environment is viewed as the primary space for linguistic practices that reflect power relations, intimacy, and culturally embedded politeness values.

C. Data and Data Sources

The data of this study consist of Bugis-language utterances that naturally occur in family interactions. The data sources are everyday conversations among family members, particularly aunts' and uncles' speech toward their nieces and nephews, both before and after the younger family members attain higher levels of education. The data focus on the use of personal pronouns, particles, and forms of address that represent levels of politeness, such as **iko**, **-mu**, **idi**, **-ta**, and **-ki**.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

The findings of this study reveal a systematic distinction between polite and casual forms in the use of Bugis pronouns and particles within the family setting. Polite forms such as **idi**, **-ta**, and **-ki** are used to mark respect and acknowledge symbolic status, particularly in relation to educational attainment, while casual forms **iko**, **-mu**, and **-ko** reflect intimacy and age-based hierarchy. This pattern confirms that linguistic politeness in Bugis families is dynamic and negotiated through socio-

cultural factors.

Table 1. Polite and Casual Forms in the Bugis Pronoun and Particle System

No.	Polite Forms	Casual Forms
1.	<i>idi</i>	<i>iko</i>
2.	<i>-ta</i>	<i>-mu</i>
3.	<i>-ki</i>	<i>-ko</i>

The table above illustrates the opposition between polite and casual forms in the Bugis pronoun and particle system. The forms **idi**, **-ta**, and **-ki** represent politeness strategies used to express respect, maintain a respectful distance, and mitigate utterances, whereas the forms **iko**, **-mu**, and **-ko** reflect intimacy and age hierarchy commonly found in family interactions. From an ethnolinguistic perspective, the choice between these two sets of forms is not neutral but is influenced by social factors such as age, kinship relations, and, most notably, educational status. In the context of this study, **aunts' and uncles' use of polite forms when addressing their nieces and nephews** indicates a shift in politeness values, in which education functions as a source of social legitimacy that encourages the renegotiation of hierarchical relations without eliminating family intimacy.

Data 1

Uncle : *Nak, tabacangekka jolo iye buku e, nasaba' de sedding namanessa pakkitakku!*

Nephew : *Iyye, Pak.*

Uncle : Please read this book for me first, son, because my eyesight is no longer very good.

Nephew : Yes, uncle

The interaction takes place inside the house in the late afternoon. An uncle asks for help from his nephew, who has attained a higher level of education, to read a book due to the uncle's declining eyesight. Although the relationship is based on kinship and age hierarchy, the uncle's utterance reflects trust in and recognition of the nephew's educational competence and intellectual ability.

In Data 1, the uncle's linguistic politeness toward his nephew is marked through the use of the prefix **ta-** in the verb *tabacangekka* ('please read [it] for me'). In the pronominal and affixation system of the Bugis language, **ta-** functions as a marker of politeness and respect toward the interlocutor. Traditionally, in Bugis family interactions, elders—such as parents, uncles, or aunts—tend to use casual forms like *iko* or the possessive suffix *-mu* when addressing younger family members, reflecting age-based hierarchy and intimacy. Therefore, the use of a polite linguistic form toward a nephew constitutes a culturally significant phenomenon.

From an ethnolinguistic perspective, language represents a community's system of values and social knowledge (Duranti, 1997). The use of **ta-** in this context indicates a shift in the uncle's perception of the nephew's position within the family's social structure. Although the uncle–nephew relationship remains hierarchically organized by age, the nephew's higher educational attainment functions as **symbolic capital**, influencing the choice of linguistic forms. This observation aligns with Sibarani's (2004) argument that local linguistic practices are inseparable from living cultural values that continuously adapt to social change.

Within the framework of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, the uncle's utterance can be categorized as a **positive politeness strategy**, as it aims to maintain the interlocutor's positive face by expressing appreciation and acknowledgment of the nephew's competence. The request is conveyed in a polite manner to minimize the potential face-threatening act (FTA), while simultaneously reinforcing solidarity grounded in respect. In this interaction, the power

(P) relationship is renegotiated—not solely based on age and kinship, but also on educational achievement and intellectual authority.

Furthermore, this phenomenon supports the findings of Rahman (2018) and Pelras (1996), who emphasize that politeness in Bugis culture is closely linked to the values of **sipakatau** (mutual respect) and **siri'** (honor). The nephew's higher level of education provides social legitimacy that encourages older family members, such as uncles or aunts, to employ more polite linguistic forms, even within intimate family settings. Thus, Data 1 illustrates that politeness in Bugis extended families is dynamic and contextual, serving as a site for negotiating values related to age, kinship, intimacy, and educational status.

Data 2

Aunt	:	<i>Jokka mani jolo molli emmak ta, engka lo ufedang i</i>
Niece	:	<i>Oiye puang, cinnampeq.</i>
Aunt	:	Please call your mother, I have something to tell her
Niece	:	Okay, just a moment

The interaction takes place in the morning in a domestic setting. An aunt asks her niece to call the niece's mother because she has something important to convey. The niece has not yet attained a higher level of education, and the interaction reflects everyday family communication within an extended Bugis family. Despite the age-based hierarchy between the aunt and the niece, the aunt employs a polite linguistic form when referring to the niece's mother.

In Data 2, linguistic politeness in Bugis family interaction is reflected in the use of the form **emmak ta** ("your mother") instead of the more casual form **emmak mu**. Grammatically, both expressions refer to the interlocutor's mother; however, pragmatically, they carry different politeness values. In Bugis, the suffix **-ta** functions as a marker of respect, whereas **-mu** is commonly used in casual and intimate speech, particularly by elders when addressing younger family members.

Although the niece has not yet attained a higher educational status, the aunt's choice of **emmak ta** is not primarily oriented toward elevating the niece's social position. From an ethnolinguistic perspective, this linguistic choice reflects respect toward the **referent**—the niece's mother—rather than toward the immediate interlocutor. As Duranti (1997) argues, politeness operates not only within speaker–listener relations but also in the way social actors are represented through language.

Within Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework, the use of **-ta** in *emmak ta* can be interpreted as a form of **negative politeness strategy**, aimed at maintaining social distance and acknowledging the respected social position of the referent. Even though the aunt and niece share close familial ties, the polite reference to the niece's mother functions to preserve the mother's face as an authoritative and respected figure within the family. This demonstrates that the power (P) variable in politeness is not always attached to the interlocutor, but may instead be associated with a third party mentioned in the interaction.

Furthermore, this phenomenon reflects core Bugis cultural values such as **sipakatau** (mutual respect and humanization) and **siri'** (honor), as discussed by Pelras (1996) and Rahman (2018). By using respectful linguistic forms when referring to another family member, the aunt implicitly transmits cultural norms of respect to the younger generation. Thus, Data 2 illustrates that politeness in Bugis extended families is shaped not only by age and education, but also by the linguistic construction of honor toward other family members within everyday interaction.

Data 3

Aunt	:	<i>Tegaki iyye nak?, Idi mi tu ditajeng jokka appabottingenna sappisengta.</i>
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Niece : *Tajengna puang, lona lettu'e.*

Aunt : Are you ready? You are the one we are waiting for to go to our relative's wedding.

Niece : I'm ready, I'll be there soon.

The utterance occurs in a domestic setting when an aunt reminds her niece, who has attained a higher level of education, to get ready to attend a family event, namely a relative's wedding celebration. Although the aunt and niece share close familial ties and an age-based hierarchy, the aunt employs polite linguistic forms that reflect respect for the niece's educational status and social competence.

In Data 3, linguistic politeness in Bugis family interaction is manifested through the combined use of the particle **-ki**, the polite pronoun **idi**, and the possessive suffix **-ta**. These linguistic elements jointly construct an utterance that signals respect, despite occurring within an intimate family domain. Their use is particularly significant because the interlocutor—a niece—occupies a lower position in terms of age, yet has acquired symbolic authority through higher educational attainment.

The particle **-ki** in *tegaki* functions as a politeness marker in interrogative constructions. In Bugis, **-ki** is commonly used to soften questions and to convey a respectful stance toward the interlocutor. Pragmatically, this particle reduces the degree of directness and minimizes the potential face-threatening act (FTA). Within Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, the use of **-ki** can be categorized as a **negative politeness strategy**, as it acknowledges the interlocutor's autonomy and avoids imposing pressure.

The use of the pronoun **idi** further reinforces politeness. **Idi** is a respectful form of address that replaces casual pronouns such as *iko*. The aunt's choice to use **idi** when addressing her niece reflects a shift in symbolic relations within the family. From an ethnolinguistic perspective, this choice indicates recognition of the niece's educational status as a form of non-biological authority. This observation supports Duranti's (1997) view that language not only reflects social structure but also functions as a medium for negotiating social meaning and status in everyday interaction.

In addition, the possessive suffix **-ta** in *sappisengta* ("our relatives") serves an inclusive function. Rather than merely indicating possession, **-ta** constructs a sense of shared identity and collective involvement between the aunt and the niece. From Brown and Levinson's perspective, this usage represents a **positive politeness strategy**, as it emphasizes solidarity, common ground, and emotional closeness. Thus, the aunt's utterance simultaneously employs both negative and positive politeness strategies, illustrating the layered and dynamic nature of politeness in Bugis extended family interactions.

Data 4

Aunt : *Idi nak, agana pendapatta tentang rencana na anrintta lo difakkulia? Jurusang aga magello*

Nephew : *Ye, Idi bawang puag, kedokteran aga magello*

Aunt : In your opinion, what do you think about the plan to send your cousin to university? What major is suitable for him?

Nephew : It's up to you, medical is also good

The utterance takes place during a family discussion concerning plans for a younger relative's higher education. An aunt asks for the opinion of her nephew, who has attained a higher level of education, as a form of acknowledgment of his intellectual competence and symbolic authority within family decision-making. Although the aunt holds an age-based senior position, she explicitly involves the nephew in discussing an important educational matter.

In Data 4, linguistic politeness in Bugis family interaction is realized through the use of the polite pronoun **idi** and the possessive suffix **-ta**, both of which signal respect and recognition of the nephew's symbolic authority. This interaction occurs in the context of family decision-making—specifically, planning a younger relative's education—which is traditionally managed by older family members such as parents, uncles, or aunts. However, the aunt's request for the nephew's opinion indicates a shift in the distribution of discursive authority within the family.

The use of **idi** in the opening address (*Idi nak*) functions as a marker of politeness and respectful distance. In Bugis, **idi** replaces casual pronouns such as *iko* and indexes respect toward the interlocutor. From an ethnolinguistic perspective, this choice reflects a transformation in family relations, where higher education grants the nephew legitimacy to be positioned as a knowledgeable participant in decision-making processes. This finding aligns with Pelras's (1996) argument that in Bugis culture, honor (*siri'*) is not determined solely by age or kinship, but also by socially recognized achievements.

The suffix **-ta** in *pendapatta* ("your opinion") and *anrintta* ("our sibling/relative") functions not only as a polite possessive marker but also as a strategy of inclusivity. By using **-ta**, the aunt frames the educational plan as a shared concern rather than a unilateral decision. Within Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, this constitutes a **positive politeness strategy**, as it emphasizes solidarity, shared responsibility, and the interlocutor's involvement in a joint activity. At the same time, asking for the nephew's opinion reduces imposition and respects his negative face by avoiding authoritative directives.

The nephew's response, *Ye, idi bawang puang*, demonstrates reciprocal politeness through the consistent use of **idi**. Although the nephew ultimately defers the final decision to the aunt, his participation confirms that his educational background has repositioned him within the family's interactional hierarchy. Thus, Data 4 illustrates that in Bugis extended families, higher education plays a crucial role in reshaping politeness practices and opening space for younger members' involvement in family decision-making, without fully dissolving traditional age-based hierarchies.

B. Discussion

Based on the research findings, linguistic politeness in Bugis families cannot be understood solely through the framework of age hierarchy and intimacy, as is commonly assumed in family interactions. The data show that the use of polite pronouns and particles such as **idi**, **-ta**, and **-ki** by **aunts and uncles toward their nieces and nephews** reflects the influence of another significant social factor: education. These findings challenge the assumption that politeness in Bugis families is static and entirely determined by kinship relations, and instead affirm that linguistic practices are dynamic and contextual.

From an ethnolinguistic perspective, language is viewed as a reflection of cultural values and a society's knowledge system (Duranti, 1997). In the context of Bugis extended families in Amali Village, Bone, the use of polite forms toward **nieces and nephews who have attained higher education** indicates a shift in local politeness values. Education functions as symbolic capital that reconstructs the younger family member's social position within the family. The nephew or niece is no longer positioned merely as a hierarchically subordinate party but also as an individual with intellectual authority and knowledge capacity that is collectively recognized by older family members.

Data 1 and Data 3 illustrate how polite forms are used directly toward nieces and nephews through the prefix **ta-**, the pronoun **idi**, and the particle **-ki**. These linguistic choices signal recognition of the interlocutor's competence while simultaneously building a more egalitarian relationship without eliminating respect. Within Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, these practices represent a combination of **positive politeness** and **negative politeness** strategies, whereby aunts and uncles maintain the interlocutor's positive face through appreciation while respecting their negative face by softening utterances and avoiding an authoritarian tone.

Meanwhile, Data 2 demonstrates that politeness in Bugis families is not directed solely toward the immediate interlocutor but also toward third parties referred to in the utterance. The use of **emmak ta** instead of **emmak mu** indicates respect toward the mother as a socially respected family member. This phenomenon confirms that politeness in the Bugis language operates at the level of social representation, not merely within speaker–listener relationships. This reinforces the ethnolinguistic view that language functions as a medium for transmitting cultural values such as **sipakatau** and **siri'** (Pelras, 1996; Rahman, 2018).

Data 4 further clarifies the role of education in shifting politeness practices into the domain of family decision-making. The use of **idi** and **-ta** when asking for a nephew's opinion indicates that education grants legitimacy for younger family members to participate symbolically in family discourse. Thus, the power (P) factor in Brown and Levinson's theory is no longer determined solely by age but is negotiated through socially recognized achievements, particularly educational attainment.

In reference to the research objectives, these findings successfully describe forms of politeness in Bugis extended family discourse and explain the cultural values underlying these practices. This study also addresses the limitation of directly equating Bugis politeness with Western politeness theories. The analysis demonstrates that Bugis politeness has its own cultural logic, rooted in values of honor, respect, and social recognition, and is expressed through a meaningful system of pronouns and particles.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that linguistic politeness in Bugis families is not determined solely by age hierarchy and kinship relations. The use of polite pronouns and particles such as **idi**, **-ta**, and **-ki** by aunts and uncles when addressing their nieces and nephews indicates a shift in linguistic practices influenced by educational factors. Education functions as symbolic capital that provides social legitimacy to younger family members, thereby shaping how they are positioned in verbal interactions within the family.

From an ethnolinguistic perspective, these findings confirm that language reflects living cultural values that continuously adapt to social change. Politeness in the Bugis language represents local values such as **sipakatau** and **siri'**, which are not static but are negotiated according to social context. Thus, this study demonstrates that politeness practices in Bugis extended families constitute a meeting point between traditional kinship-based values and contemporary social realities shaped by education.

This study also shows that Brown and Levinson's politeness theory can be applied to analyze Bugis language data, provided that it is interpreted within the local cultural framework to avoid obscuring indigenous meanings of politeness. Therefore, this research contributes to ethnolinguistic studies by emphasizing the importance of cultural context in understanding linguistic politeness practices, particularly in the domains of family interaction and education.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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