

Asymmetric use of ngoko and krama

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1 Asymmetric Use of *Ngoko* and *Krama* Speech Levels In Javanese: Sociolinguistics Perspectives

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Abstract

This paper aims at describing, analyzing, and interpreting asymmetric use of low and high codes of the language of Java, *ngoko* and *krama*. Observation and document study methods were applied to provide data aided by recording and field note techniques. Recorded data of spoken form was then converted into written forms by the process of transcription. The use of a pair of speech levels *ngoko* 'low' and *krama* 'high' by two different speakers shows a unique communication pattern: asymmetric communication. Finding showed that well-patterned uses of speech levels of Javanese are not merely reflection communication strategies but it could be interpreted as communication contracts in which using a certain code of speech levels of Javanese are based on speakers' rights and obligations in order to keep social harmony. Asymmetric use of *ngoko* and *krama* is called, as it is one of the findings, code-crossing in which superior uses low code downwardly to address subordinate and on the one hand subordinate employs high code upwardly to superior in return. Seen from politeness point of view asymmetric use of *ngoko* and *krama* by superior and subordinate participants reflects hierarchical politeness. Asymmetric use of *ngoko* and *krama* indexed inequality and hierarchy.

Keywords: *asymmetric communication, communication contract, code-crossing, hierarchical communication*

1. Introduction

Discussing the language of Java will be unattainable without discussing the existence of its speech levels. Numerous researchers mentioned three speech levels co-exist in it: *ngoko* 'low', *madya* 'middle', and *krama* 'high' many researchers statements. The existence of *madya* 'middle' speech level is nearer to the existence of *krama* 'high' than to *ngoko* 'low'. Here in this discussion, the researcher will consider *madya* 'middle' speech level as high speech level. In this case, *madya* 'middle' speech level is merged into high speech level, *krama*. That is the reason why the researcher is eager to put *madya* into *krama* than to *ngoko*. That is why, in this paper there are only two fundamental speech levels: *ngoko* and *krama*. The question is what is meant by speech levels? Speech level is a kind of speech act which could be categorized by its level, from low to high level of word. Speech level can be consisted of only one word (*wengi* 'night' for low form, *ndalu* 'night' for high form), two or more words or phrase (*arep nang endi* 'where will you go' for low form, *badhe tindak pundi?* for high form), and one sentence (*aku uwis mangan* 'I have already eaten' in low form, *kula sampun nedha* 'I have already eaten') form high form. It is important to define here that speech level is a system of speech that can be used to show intimacy or equality, deference, and hierarchy or inequality among or between participants involved in a speech event in a speech situation both formal or informal, both in spoken or written forms based on their rights and obligations.

The study how language speech levels, *ngoko* and *krama*, of the language of Java are used by its speakers in daily communication is really interesting. Researching the language of Java will become more important to know how the speech levels of Java are used in daily communication by its speakers. It has been stated that there are three communication patterns using low and high speech levels of the language of Java (Wajdi, 2013). The first is symmetrical use of *ngoko*, in which two or more participants involved in a speech event use *ngoko*. The second, the symmetrical use of *krama*, in which two or more participants use *krama* to speak to each other. The third is asymmetric use of *ngoko* and *krama*, in which two or more participants use *ngoko* and *krama* in a non-reciprocal way.

Since speech level is a system of speech, what we have to underline here is the word 'system'. Cambridge Advanced Learner Dictionary (CALD, 2003) defines a system in a simple and easy way to understand, especially for the researcher. A system is interrelated items that work together. Again that we have to underline the word 'interrelated items that work together'. Talking about a system of speech, what items that have to be interconnected that they work together? Why do we have to discuss more about it? It is urgent to note here that when we are talking about a system of speech, it is not about a form of speech only. The items in speech levels are forms of speech or utterance, participants involved in a speech event, context situation both formal and or informal situation, and the last that cannot be neglected is the effect of speech or utterance on the participants. Discussion about speech level as a system, it is important to look at how the level of speech is used by its speakers to express their daily wishes and ideas. A form of utterance will be nothing then when it is not seen from its users in a certain context. Discussion about speech level system means that we have to know who are involved there, who are using it for daily communication. The formula of 'who speaks what language speech levels, to whom, when and where' is part of discussion about level of speech in the language of Java. Low and high speech levels will be nothing when they are not seen from who are speaking or using them. Is it all? No. We have to continue questioning 'to whom, where, and when?'

As it was stated above that it is customary for the speakers to use low speech level or high or speech level reciprocally or non-reciprocally in every day use of the language of Java for the sake of expressing ideas and wishes. All word categories in the language of Java can be expressed in low and high levels. Terms of address or second pronoun in the language of Java is an integrated part of speech levels, since all word categories are expressed in low and high speech levels in the language of Java. *Ngoko* is used between or among closed friends, whether they are children or adults. Among closed friends of the same age, *ngoko* will be a familiar speech level to use in daily communication. When two or more persons are familiar enough and they know each other well, they will use *ngoko* to communicate to each other. If two or more persons are familiar enough but they are not the same age, they will use *ngoko* in general, but the younger will use high terms of address (*panjenengan* or *sampeyan* 'you') to older person and the older one will use low terms of address (*kowe* 'you') to the younger. Here, partial hierarchical communication occurs. An older person will always use *ngoko* every time he or she speaks to a younger person. Conversely, a younger person will use *krama* to older one. It will appear the formula or communication pattern: the older speaks *ngoko* to the younger; and the younger will use *krama* to the older. It means that there are four communication patterns using *ngoko* and *krama*. *Firstly*, two or more closed friends will use *ngoko* to each other in their daily life. *Secondly*, an older person will always use *ngoko* to speak to a younger person.

Thirdly, a younger person has to use *krama* to speak to an older person. Fourthly, two unfamiliar persons, whether they are of the same age or not, whether they are young or old, they will use *krama* to each other. It means that they need to defer to each other.

METHODOLOGY

Observing the members of a social community when using their language with its speech levels is the main activity in this research. The data of the research is collected in the form of observation. Recording technique is applied to gather the spoken data by using the following step. The first speaker is obligated to call second speaker using a cell phone in which recording facility in the cell phone is activated. The second speaker is answering phone call using a cell phone in which recording facility is ready to record phone conversation. The data is also gathered in the form of short message facility on cell phone and WhatsApp. The short messages are re-written (transcribed) in order to get a short dialogue done by two speakers. The transcription is then grouped into symmetrical use of *ngoko*, symmetrical use of *krama*, and asymmetric use of *ngoko* and *krama*.

The data also collected by using document study, i.e. a novel of Java and it is done by following the next steps: The researcher read the whole text by applying scanning technique. While reading, the researcher makes a note on the dialog by marking ng (*ngoko*, a dialog in *ngoko*), kr (*krama*, a dialog in *krama*), ng-kr (*ngoko-krama*, a dialog in *ngoko* vs. *krama*). The researcher rewrites (transcribes) the dialog between the first and the second speakers to become data of the research.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

The speakers of the language of Java are provided by two language codes, low and high code, within their language, the language of Java. During their daily routines, the speakers of the language of Java may choose a proper code to whom they want to speak. The speakers of the language of Java are the members of their social community as well as the members of speech community (Wajdi and Paulus Subiyanto, 2017). As members of social community, they have to build social relationship based on their social status. They have to build three social relationships among the members of the social community: symmetrical and asymmetrical relationships since they live in an asymmetrical society. The members of social community of Java practice social class based on their own perception and term. They are practicing social class by building it themselves. The term 'priyayi', high class in the society, and 'tiyang alit', low social class, will never fade away to discuss. Although they are the members of asymmetrical society, but they also have to build symmetrical relationship among the members of the community. Their social relationship will be realized in their communication activity using their language with its speech levels.

Of course they have to consider first which code they have to use before speaking to others. They have to evaluate themselves who they are and who are their interlocutors. They have to consider their social status between or among the members of their social community as well as their speech community. Therefore they have to put themselves as a social member, a member of their social community as well as a member of speech community. They have to relate their social relationship between or among them and relate it in their communication

activity using their language with its speech levels. As a member of society, he/herself has to build social relationship between or among the other members and the have to relate it when speaking using their local language.

It is normal for intimate speakers, familiar participants, and or two or more speakers of the language of Java to use *ngoko* to speak to each other in their life. Low speech level (*ngoko*) has become basic speech level in the language of Java. It is not a kind of non-standard language, but the existence of *ngoko* has become an integrated part of the language of Java as *krama* speech level. Superior speaker will always use *ngoko* when speaking to inferior. The superiority here will be due to the age difference. The position of parents and children is a simple example of how superiority of age difference is easily seen and identified. In a house consists of parents (a father and a mother) and children in a the language of Java family will become customary to use two different speech levels of the same language, the language of Java, in their daily life of communication. A child will always use high speech level (*krama*) when communicating with his or her parents, mother and or father. On the other hand his or her parents will always use low speech level (*ngoko*) in responding to their children. A child and his or her friend of the same age will normally use low speech level to speak to each other. Of course, they live with two distinct speech levels, low and high speech levels of a single language, their first language as well as their mother tongue. In their own home, they have and practice two distinct speech levels of the same language. Of course, they live with two different speech levels in their home and in the society or community. It is unavoidable for the members of the same family to practice symmetrical and asymmetric communication in their daily life at home. Seniority and age difference has become the basic consideration to have in the language of Java daily life. An elder brother or sister is a senior figure for his or her younger sister or brother. Although they normally practice the same speech level, in this case low speech level, but because of age difference, a younger sister or brother will not be free to communicate with their senior, elder brother or elder sister. They will have to use two different terms of address, a kind of *tu* and *vous* if refer to Brown and Gilman's terms (1960). An elder brother or sister will address his or her younger sister *kowe* 'you' or the language of Java *tu*, while a younger brother will respond to it using *panjenengan* or *sampeyan* 'you' or the language of Java *vous*. They may use low speech level in general for the other words, but they have to use two different terms of address *kowe* 'you/tu' and *panjenengan* or *sampeyan* 'you/vous'. Superior (elder brother or sister) will use low terms of address *kowe* 'you/tu' and he or she will receive *panjenengan* or *sampeyan* 'you/vous' from inferior (younger sister or brother). An older speaker of the language of Java will become superior while the younger one will become subordinate. Superiority and seniority are showed and practiced in language use, whether it is completely or partially. Partially in the meaning of using only two distinct terms of addresses and completely in the meaning of using low and high speech levels, not restricted in terms of the address only. When two participants treat them equally but not an intimate relationship, they will use the same speech level, namely high speech level to speak to each other.

The asymmetric use of low and high speech levels has become one of three patterns of use of speech level in the language of Java. It is absolutely normal for the speakers of the language of Java to communicate asymmetrically in their daily life. Even, at home in one family, there will be two speech levels used in daily life. It is normal for parents, father or mother, to use low speech level of the language of Java when speaking to his or her children and their children will respond their father's or mother's talks in high speech level in return. This social agreement has become a pattern of asymmetric communication in a speech

community of Java. A father or a mother compared to his or her children are of course, different in term of their ages. In terms of responsibility, a father is responsible for his children life. A father or a mother has complete rights to use low speech level of the language of Java when speaking to his or her children, and the children has an obligation to respond or to communicate to their parents in high speech level of the language of Java. It is a kind of obligation, as well as their rights, for the children to use high speech level of the language of Java every time they communicate and express their wishes and ideas to their parents. The pattern of communication between parents and their children finally becomes asymmetric communication pattern. Relationship pattern between absolute older person and absolute younger person has to be realized in asymmetric communication using two distinct language speech levels: *ngoko* and *krama* in the language of Java. A young speaker is obligated to use *krama* speech level as much as they can every time he or she meets an older member of the speech community Java, whether he/she knows him/her well or not. On the one hand, an older has a certain rights to use and speak using low speech level to communicate to a younger.

Is it the use of low and or high speech level done purposively or randomly? Every language use in the language of Java is not a random way but it is a purposive way of speaking. Even, language use activity in the language of Java is a kind of social contract or social agreement when it is seen from social relationship between the participants. Every member of the language of Java community realized that who is he himself or she herself and who is his or her addressee. What language speech level they will use to speak to his or her interlocutors. hen it is seen from the language speech levels used in a speech event it is necessary to use the term 'communication contract' or 'communication agreement' to identify the language use in the language of Java (and also the language use in speech communities of Sunda, Bali, Sasak and Madura, because they have speech levels too). Because the language use in stratified languages is not merely a kind communication strategy, but a kind of social contract or social agreement or communication contract or communication agreement in more specific sense, there will be rights and obligations between or among the participants involved in a speech event. When there are two speech levels, low and high speech levels, there will be a kind of low and high speakers or users or participants seen from the speech level of speech level used for communication. What labels are suitable to name low and high speakers of the language of Java in asymmetric communication? Superior, superordinate, senior or older participants to name high speakers or users of the language of Java speech levels, and inferior, subordinate, junior or younger participants to label low speakers of the language of Java.

Superiority and or inferiority are based on speakers or participants' age. Of course, age has become a neutral variable to note here. Seniority and or juniority comes into being because of age differences. It is important to note that in the language of Java society age plays an important role or variable in language use of Java. Becoming senior or junior participants and using low and or high speech level is because of social agreement between or among the participants. It is a speaker rights and obligations to use a certain speech level and it is the addressees' rights and obligations also to use a certain speech level in return. When one of the participants breaks the rule by using another speech level which is not mentioned in their social agreement, it can be concluded that the communication breakdown will certainly take place.

Between or among the children in one family, there will not be exactly in the same status. An elder brother or sister is not equal to his or her younger

brother or sister. Although it is usual for children in one family to communicate to each other in low speech level of the language of Java, but in fact they have to face different status because of their ages. A younger has to address his or her elder sister or brother using distinct terms of address. An elder brother or sister is allowed to use *kowe* 'you', low terms of address in the language of Java, to his/her younger brother/sister. On the one hand, a younger has to respond it in high terms of address in the language of Java *panjengan* or *sampeyan* 'you'. This is an asymmetric communication between an elder brother or sister and his/her younger brother or sister in a family of the speech community of Java. If parents are right to use low speech level totally to their children, and the children have to speak in high speech level, *krama*, totally to their parents. A total asymmetric communication is shown between an older and a younger. But communication between or among children is partially asymmetric. They are allowed to use low speech level, *ngoko*, in general, but they have to use two distinct terms of address: *kowe* 'you' and *panjenengan* or *sampeyan* 'you' asymmetrically. Superior, superordinate, senior, older are to use *kowe* 'you' to inferior, subordinate, junior, younger but they have to use *panjengan* or *sampeyan* 'you' to superior in return. This is an asymmetric communication between or among children in the community of Java.

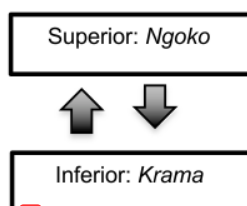
The explanation above shows how low and high speech levels of the language of Java are used asymmetrically by two asymmetric participants in a speech community of Java. The question is why do they use two distinct language speech levels asymmetrically to communicate during their daily life? Why they do not use low or high speech level reciprocally and symmetrically? What factor do drives them to use two distinct speech levels asymmetrically? If we look at how they use two distinct speech levels asymmetrically, it seems that they use them purposively, not randomly. They really use them consistently and purposively in order to show who they are before their interlocutors. They realize each other their positions before the other. The speaker who uses low speech level knows his or her position and on the one hand, the speaker who uses high speech level realizes also his or her position. Why does one speaker always use low speech level consistently before the other, and why does the other speaker also use high speech level consistently before his interlocutor? What factor drives them to do so? They are driven by power difference to use two distinct speech levels consistently and regularly.

Power

difference is symbolized by (+P) 'plus power' (Scollon and Scollon, 2001). A speaker who uses low speech level is superior before the high speech level user, and the high speech level speaker is inferior or subordinate. Superior, superordinate, senior will tend to use low speech level before the inferior, subordinate, and or junior. On the one hand subordinate will use high speech level before superordinate. What is the function of the use of two distinct speech levels by two speakers? Here, the use of low and high speech levels is to mark hierarchy between the first and the second participants. The speaker who always uses low speech level is a powerful speaker before the high speech level user. The speaker who always uses high speech level is less powerful before low speech level user. Hierarchical marker is shown through the use of two distinct speech levels.

If we have decided that the use two distinct speech levels is because of power difference (+P), the next question is that what is the meaning of the use low and high speech levels asymmetrically? It means that they have unequal status. Inequality between the first and the second speaker will drive them to use two distinct speech levels within a single language. Power scale or status scale refers to vertical relationship between unequal participants involved in a speech event that will determine the speech level choice.

Superior with his or her status in the social and speech community of Java will determine what speech level he or she will use when speaking to subordinate with low status. On the other hand, subordinate with low status will determine what speech level will be used to speak to superior with high status. Superior of Java with his power (status) of course will use *ngoko* while subordinate will use *krama* in return. Superior of Java with his or her power will send *ngoko* to subordinate, and conversely the superior will receive *krama* from the subordinate. This is asymmetric communication pattern using language speech levels of a single language of Java in the social community of Java.



Picture 1

Asymmetric Use of Speech Levels in the language of Java

Communication behavior in the language of Java is not merely communication strategy but it is a kind of social contract or social agreement between the members of society or community in a wider sense. In more specific one, communication behavior in the language of Java is a kind of communication contract or communication agreement. The speakers, as part of member of social community, have already made a kind of agreement to define themselves who they are and what language suitable code to use every time they communicate to each other. Each participant involved in a speech event in a speech community of Java has already made an agreement by defining themselves who they are and who their interlocutors are and what speech levels are acceptable to use to communicate to each other. Because it is communication contract, there will be rights and obligations for them to use a certain language speech level in the language of Java.

Back to asymmetric communication done by two unequal participants using two distinct language speech levels, is part of communication behavior as well as communication contract. These two unequal participants have already made an agreement by defining who they are and what speech levels are to use to communicate to each other. It is their rights and obligations to use suitable language levels: superordinate participant's rights and obligations are to use low speech level when speaking to subordinate and on the other hand the subordinate participant's rights and obligation is on the use of high speech level in return. They are socially unequal and this inequality is labeled by (+P) 'plus power'. Superior participants is the owner of power (+P) in this case, and he or she has right to use low code as a mean of communication with subordinate. Power is only present in one side, it is only owned by one person between two. Power will never exist in two or more figures. Social community of Java practices independently what it is generally as well as specifically called social class by social scientists. They create and name their social class by creating their own local terms *priyayi* for high class and *wong cilik* or *tiyang alit* for their lower social class. These two terms, *priyayi* and *wong cilik* or *tiyang alit* are factually well-known and widely used in the society of Java. The terms *ngoko* and *krama* to name the speech levels in the language

of Java and *priyayi* and *wong cilik/tiyang* alit to name their social class are not social scientists' construct.

1 CONCLUSION

Communication in the language of Java whether it is symmetrical intimate communication, symmetrical non-intimate communication, and asymmetric communication are not merely kind of communication strategies but they are best identified as social contracts or social agreements in wider meaning. In more specific meaning, communication in the language of Java using low and high speech level is a kind of communication contract or communication agreement between the participants involved in a speech event. Since it is communication contract or communication agreement, there will be rights and obligations between the participants. They agree to use the same low speech level symmetrically in intimate and symmetrical communication, high speech level symmetrically and used two difference speech levels asymmetrically. It is a speaker's rights and obligation to use low speech level in symmetrical and intimate communication. It is also based on the participants' rights and obligations to use high (*krama*) speech level symmetrically. Even it is participants' agreement to use low (*ngoko*) and high (*krama*) speech levels asymmetrically in asymmetric communication. It is superior's rights as well as obligation to use low speech level (*ngoko*) and the use of *krama* speech level is on subordinates' rights and obligations. Communication routines in social community of Java is not merely a kind of communication strategy, but it is best described as communication agreement or communication contract between superior and subordinate. It is superior's right to use low code when speaking to subordinate, while subordinate applies high code in return. When one of the participants involved in a speech event breaks the rule of the agreement, it means that communication breakdown will take place. Of course, communication disharmony will run smoothly, in this case.

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