“BAHASA PASAMBAHAN” IN MINANGKABAUNESE:
Politeness Strategy or Stylistic Language?

Havid Ardi
Universitas Negeri Padang
havid_a@yahoo.com

Introduction

It has not been questioned anymore that language is the reflection of socio-cultural features of human beings as the speakers of one particular language. Accordingly, language cannot be formally separated from speakers' cultural factors in most cases. Linguists have been coming to an “empirical postulate” that language is a part of culture and they are in complex interrelationship each other. There is no language without cultural interference and some cultural items are generated and spread out by means of language. Language development occurs in line with those cultural development possessed by its speakers in dynamic ways. Language forms and functions, as a matter of fact, are parts of human cultures which are static phenomena (see further Foley, 1997; Duranti, 1997; Kramsch, 2001; Jufrizal et.al., 2013).

Minangkabaunese is the main local language originally used by Minangkabaunese people in West-Sumatera, Indonesia; it is one of local languages which belong to Malay language family. The native speakers of Minangkabaunese have been developing their cultural features, properties, and values in such a way that those may influence the forms and uses of the language. One aspect of cultural factors which can be directly seen is the fact that Minangkabaunese has the cultural-traditional style which is called in this paper as “*bahasa pasambahan*” (hence shortly called BP). The BP of Minangkabaunese is the stylistic forms and uses which are mostly influenced by the cultural-artistic forms and values developed by Minangkabaunese people. Consequently, BP sounds “more artistic” and more stylistic than formal and daily used styles.

This paper, which is further derived and developed from a part of research result conducted in 2013 ‘*Hibah Kompetensi*’ (Jufrizal et.al., 2013), discusses the phenomena of BP whether it is the language style as a politeness strategy or just a stylistic language in Minangkabaunese. The data were collected through a field research and library study and the data were analyzed by means of the related theories of anthropological linguistics. The discussion and explanation on this topic give us opportunity to know and see deeply the interrelationship between language and culture, as a further verification on Sapir-Whorf hypothesis.

Brief Review of Related Theories

1. “Bahasa Pasambahan” as a Cultural Style in Minangkabaunese

That language is a main part of human culture has been becoming the shared understanding among sociologists, anthropologists, and linguists. Therefore, linguists in particular are in serious attention to know more and further how and to what degree there is interrelationship between language and culture. This is one focus of macro-linguistic studies which allow us to have better understanding on language and culture. More specifically, linguists in anthropological linguistics are seriously concerned with the studies on language style and cultural features. It may give further linguistic data and information for the development of theories and practical uses of humanistic enculturation through language (see Foley, 1997; Kramsch, 2001; Jufrizal et.al., 2006).

According to Scupin and DeCorse (1998:200), culture is a shared way of life that includes values, beliefs, and norms transmitted within a particular society from generation to generation. For such purposes, it is highly believed that language has a very important role as a means of verbal communication. Language cannot be away from cultural learning and social life in any group of people; language is one thing that makes humans as humans. Scupin and DeCorse (1998:243), in this sense, add that language allows humans to communicate with one another about what they are experiencing at any given moment, what they have experienced in the past, and what they are planning for the future. Like culture, the language of any particular individual exists before the birth of the individual and is publicly shared by the members of a society.

Art and style, among the others, are two cultural values and norms, as well in particular societies. They are naturally grown and built by the members as their cultural features and values to show their identities and ways of life. In accordance with this, Morphy and Perkins (in Morphy and Perkins (eds.), 2006:1) state that art is associated almost equally with the two senses of the word “culture” – culture as a way of life or body of ideas and knowledge, and culture as the metaphysical essence of society,

incorporating standards by which the finest products of society are judged. Art in the first sense is associated with bodies of knowledge, technologies, and representational practices that provide insights into the whole lifeworld of a society. Art in second sense has been seen as the product of a particular stage of enculturation.

The key point of the relationship between language and cultural items is that how the existing generations communicates those values, norms, and practices to the next generation through communication in general viewpoints. As it has been already known, language is a main tool of communication which differentiates between human communication and animals do. Communication is the processes of transferring ideas, messages, or information from a sender to a receiver by means particular media. Verbal communication uses language as medium and in any other forms of communication media at present time. In addition, successful linguistic communication does not only focus on language forms, but also depends on many other supporting norms and values, such as culture, style, art, and metaphysical rewards (see Darbyshire, 1971; Scupin and DeCorse, 1998; Jufrizal et.al., 2006).

Different societies may have different ways of communications and different style of language forms and uses. In Minangkabaunese, for instance, the stylistic forms and uses of language play important roles in successful communication. The stylistic-artistic forms and uses of Minangkabaunese is culturally called *bahasa pasambahan* (BP). *Bahasa Pasambahan* is a cultural-traditional style of Minangkabaunese which is full of metaphorical utterances, proverbs, and idiomatic expressions. This language style is used for ritual and traditional speeches and it has high cultural-ritual values and norms, as well (see Jufrizal et.al., 2006). In this paper, the writer discusses whether BP in Minangkabaunese has the linguistic properties as such stylistic language or not.

2. Language Politeness and Stylistic Language

It is not easy to differentiate between language politeness and cultural politeness as the cultural norms and values. As mentioned by Yule (1998:60), it is possible, however, to treat politeness as a fix concept, as in the idea of ‘polite social behavior’, or etiquette, within a culture. By this way, language politeness naturally relates with socio-cultural norms and values of given speech community. Then, Yule (1998) says that politeness, in an verbal interaction (language politeness), can be defined as the means employed to show awareness of another person’s face. Face itself is the public self-image of a person. It refers to that emotional and social sense of self that everyone has and expects everyone else to recognize (see also Brown and Levinson, 2000).

Yule (1998:60 – 61) explains that politeness can be accomplished in situations of social distance or closeness. Showing awareness for another person’s face when that other seems socially distant is often described in terms of respect or deference in any communicative events. Showing the equivalent awareness when the other is socially close is often described in terms of friendliness, camaraderie, or solidarity in particular moments of speaking. It seems that language politeness again is in mutual interactions with socio-cultural norms and values.

Language politeness, according to Brown and Levinson (2000:41 – 42), is naturally prototypically exhibit in conversation and other kinds of face to face interchange. In addition, language politeness is socio-culturally performed and observed as well in ways of speaking, such as in stylistic forms and uses of language. Furthermore, language politeness is also performed as ritual and religious speech. Even though the norms and values of language politeness are various cross-linguistically, but the politeness itself is universal. All normative and cultural people believe that those who are speaking politely may have positive rewards and they are highly accepted in communicative events.

Foley (1997:270 – 275) argues that politeness is a battery of social skills whose goal is to ensure everyone feels affirmed in a social interaction or in any forms of verbal communication. Linguistic politeness is basically the redressing of the affronts to face posed by face-threatening acts to address. In addition to inter-cultural communication, politeness is also essential in cross-cultural linguistic interaction. Therefore, language politeness and politeness strategies are socio-culturally necessary in verbal communication, both in the forms of face to face communication and written one. It can be highly stated that language politeness and stylistic language are in mutual interaction in having successful communication and high value of linguistic expressions.

“Bahasa Pasambahan” in Minangkabaunese: Politeness Strategy or Stylistic Language?

Based on linguistic data and cultural information collected, it can be argued that there are, at least, five main specific-characteristics of BP which make it different from formal or casual style of

Minangkabaunese. Firstly, BP dominantly uses traditional-cultural metaphors, idioms, and proverbs as its bases. Therefore, most of utterances and sentential constructions are “old-fashions” rather than new creations. Secondly, most of the utterances in BP are naturally memorized by the (native) speakers, both in forms and practical uses. Thirdly, most of dictions and oral productions of BP are culturally stylistic and artistic. Then, BP in Minangkabaunese seems to communicate something indirectly rather than in direct ways. Lastly, most of the utterances and linguistic constructions of BP are regarded as ritual speech, polite language, and they have high-normative values. It does not mean, however, to say that no new forms of BP; in some cases the native speakers of Minangkabaunese are creative enough to have new metaphors and diction contextually.

The focus of discussion presented in this paper is on two characteristics only, namely to see whether BP belongs to politeness strategy or stylistic language in nature. But, it needs to remind also that the BP in Minangkabaunese is not only determined by linguistic factors, but also by supra-segmental features and socio-cultural factors. Let’s see firstly the following examples!

- (1) *Dangalah malah dek Mak Pandeka.*
listen would by uncle warrior
‘Would you please listen Uncle Warrior!’
- (2) *Tibo lah surek dari darek.*
arrive please letter from high land
‘A letter from the high-land of Minangkabau has just arrived’
- (3) *Adiak kanduang ba- baliak malah.*
small-sister dear PREF-turn back please
‘You have to please turn back my dear sister!’
- (4) *Minum lah sajuak, makan lah kanyang.*
drink has been fresh eat has been enough
‘We have just drunk and eaten fine enough’

These four examples are those of polite command (as in (1) and (3)) and statement (as in (2) and (4)). The style used in the expressions above is different from those of formal and casual style. The use of lexicon *malah* ‘would’ (as in (1) and (3)) and *lah* (particle means ‘please’ as in (2) and (4)) can be categorized as the way of having both politeness strategy and stylistic language. As the comparison, the formal or casual style for the examples above can be shown as the followings.

- (1a) *Danga sabanta Mak Pandeka!*
listen a moment uncle warrior
‘Please listen sir!’
- (2a) *Surek alah tibo dari darek.*
letter has been arrive from high land
‘A letter has just arrived from the high land of Minangkabau’
- (3a) *Adiak kanduang baliak lah.*
small sister my turn back
‘Please turn back my younger sister!’
- (4a) *Kami lah minum jo makan.*
we have been drink and eat
‘We have just drunk and eaten’

It can be seen that the stylistic language of BP is created and performed by specific dictions and sentential constructions which are slightly different from the formal-casual one. It is highly argued here that the examples above show the choice of linguistic expressions and ways of communication in order to be more polite and to have stylistic language. Thus, BP is a politeness strategy and stylistic language, as well.

The use BP in Minangkabaunese linguistically indicates that the speakers socio-culturally need polite expressions and stylistic language as it is conditioned by communicative contexts. The following examples are further examples of BP which are commonly used in cultural-traditional events in Minangkabaunese society.

- (5) *Baa lah nyo tu kini, disusun jari nan sapuluah, ditakuakka kapalo nan satu.*
how about at moment, arrange fingers REL ten node head REL one
‘For this valuable moment, I honorably arrange the ten fingers and node my head’
- (6) *Iyo baitu mah angku datuak, nagari bapaga undang, kampuak bapaga buek.*
yes as please lord datuak, country fenced rules, kampong fenced convention
‘That is all right Lord Datuak, country is fenced by rules, kampong is fenced by social-convention’

- (7) *Kok iyo bak nantun, rundiangan lah buliah kito antian.*
 if yes like this, negotiation has been may we stop
 'If everything is all right, we may stop our negotiation'
- (8) *Maagak ari nan lah laruik, rundiangan raso lah patuik kito bulati.*
 due to late night, negotiation feel may we conclude
 'Due to late night, it is time for us to conclude our negotiation'

The examples of BP above are the polite expressions and stylistic sentential constructions which naturally appear in cultural-traditional negotiation among cultural leaders in a *balai adat* 'cultural conventional hall'. The diction and sentential constructions are specific and commonly followed by unique rhythm and suprasegmental contour as Minangkabaunese. They are all different the style of formal-casual speech as they are used in daily life. Lexical meanings are not the main ideas or messages communicated to the partners. Some expressions do not have real-lexical meanings, but they are full of stylistic meanings and used as politeness strategy. The followings are those of stylistic expressions which do not have "clear" lexical meanings, but they are naturally involved in BM of Minangkabaunese.

- (5a) *Baa lah nyo tu kini* 'how about that point in this moment'
 (6a) *Iyo baitu mah* 'yes like that in fact'
 (7a) *Kok iyo bak nantun* 'if yes as if like this'
 (8a) *Maagak ari nan lah laruik* 'considering the day which is late'

The "unclear" lexical meanings packed by the expressions above cannot be communicatively understood based on lexical meanings. They should be culturally understood as the expressions commonly appear as a politeness strategy; by having such kinds of expressions, the messages or information are politely communicated in the communication events. In addition to a strategy of politeness, such kinds of expressions may have stylistic ways of speaking. Therefore, BP in Minangkabaunese is both a politeness strategy and stylistic language.

Concluding Remarks

All human languages have specific and unique ways of having politeness strategy and stylistic ways of speaking. The specific and unique ways of politeness strategy are not only determined by linguistic factors but also supported by non-linguistic factors. Therefore, the phenomena of politeness strategy and stylistic language should be observed through micro-linguistic and macro-linguistic viewpoints. This paper has tried to see the phenomena based on related theories of anthropological linguistics. By this way, it is reasonably argued that *bahasa pasambahan* in Minangkabau is a way of speakers to have polite and stylistic language. Socio-cultural background of Minangkabaunese implies that in many communicative events, particularly in negotiation, delivering a speech, or in having advice, BM may have important role to have successful communication and humanistic verbal interactions.

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