

Politeness Strategies in Malay and Indonesian: A Contrastive Analysis of the Standard Registers

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Abstract: This article presents a contrastive, theory-led analysis of politeness strategies in the *baku* (high standard) registers of Malay and Indonesian, focusing explicitly on normative expectations: how politeness is conventionally expected to be realised in formal interaction, rather than how it may be variably enacted in everyday usage. The discussion is grounded in established pragmatic approaches to politeness, while also attending to culturally salient concepts such as face, honour, and shame as organising principles of interaction. In both languages, politeness in the standard register is closely associated with mitigation in face-threatening acts, particularly requests, directives, refusals, and apologies, where speakers are expected to minimise imposition and preserve interlocutors' autonomy. In standard Malay, politeness norms strongly favour indirectness, hierarchy-sensitive address practices, and conflict-avoidant strategies, especially in situations involving refusal or disagreement. Indonesian politeness in formal domains likewise foregrounds mitigation, but typically allows for comparatively greater explicitness, provided that respect and procedural clarity are maintained through appropriate linguistic devices. The article concludes by translating these contrastive insights into pedagogical considerations for tertiary-level instruction in Indonesian and Malay as foreign languages. It argues that politeness should be treated as a central component of communicative competence and cultural literacy, and that explicit instruction in normative politeness strategies can significantly enhance learners' ability to navigate formal interaction in Malay- and Indonesian-speaking contexts.

Keywords: Indonesian as a Foreign Language (BIPA), Intercultural Competence, Malay as a Foreign Language (BMPA), Politeness Strategies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Politeness constitutes a central dimension of communicative competence in many languages, particularly in societies where social harmony and respect for hierarchy are highly valued. In the Malay-

Indonesian linguistic sphere, politeness is not merely an interactional preference but a culturally embedded norm that governs how speakers are expected to address others, formulate requests, express disagreement, and negotiate face-

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threatening acts in private and public contexts. As closely related Austronesian languages with a shared historical (and thus, grammatical / lexical) foundation, Malay (*Bahasa Melayu*) and Indonesian (*Bahasa Indonesia*) exhibit substantial overlap in their politeness systems, while also displaying systematic divergences that have emerged through distinct sociopolitical trajectories and language-planning traditions.

Both languages operate within communicative cultures that prioritise face maintenance, indirectness, and relational sensitivity. Concepts such as *air muka* (face), *malu* (shame or embarrassment), and *budi bahasa* (refined conduct through language) have long structured Malay understandings of appropriate interaction, shaping expectations of deference, modesty, and conflict avoidance (Ningsiha *et al.*, 2021; Jaffar *et al.*, 2025). Indonesian politeness, while drawing from the same Malay heritage, has developed within the context of a postcolonial nation-state characterised by linguistic plurality and a strong emphasis on national cohesion. As a result, Bahasa Indonesia has evolved as a unifying standard language whose politeness norms seek to balance functionality, respect, clarity, and inclusiveness across diverse ethnolinguistic communities (Huszka *et al.*, 2024b; Maskuri *et al.*, 2019).

Despite their proximity, politeness in Malay and Indonesian is not interchangeable. Differences can be observed in preferred forms of address, degrees of indirectness in requests and refusals, and the acceptable explicitness of apologies or disagreement. Empirical studies have shown, for instance, that Malay speakers in formal contexts tend to avoid direct refusals to a greater extent than their Indonesian counterparts, relying instead on layered mitigation strategies such as apologies, justifications, and hedging (Che Ismail & Mohd Nordin, 2025; Raslie & Azizan, 2018). Indonesian speakers, by contrast, are often described as allowing more overt expressions of inability or disagreement, provided these are framed within polite linguistic conventions that preserve interpersonal respect (Adrefiza & Jones, 2013; Tanduk, 2023). Such differences are subtle but socially consequential, particularly in formal settings where pragmatic misalignment may lead to unintended perceptions of rudeness or excessive formality.

From a theoretical perspective, these patterns can be fruitfully examined through established frameworks of linguistic politeness. Brown and Levinson's model of face and face-threatening acts offers a useful analytical lens for understanding how Malay and Indonesian speakers manage deference, solidarity, and imposition through

negative- and positive-politeness strategies. Complementary to this, Leech's Politeness Principle and its associated maxims illuminate culturally valued interactional orientations such as tact, modesty, and agreement, which have been shown to operate prominently in both languages across a range of communicative domains (Johari *et al.*, 2019; Juita *et al.*, 2019). At the same time, locally grounded concepts of face and moral conduct provide an essential cultural layer that prevents politeness from being reduced to a purely universalist model (Jaffar *et al.*, 2025).

The present article adopts a normative rather than descriptive orientation. Its primary concern is not how politeness strategies are variably realised in informal or spontaneous interaction, but how politeness is expected to be realised in the *baku* registers of Malay and Indonesian – that is, in standardised forms of language associated with education, official communication, professional settings, and public discourse. This distinction is particularly important for applied linguistics and language pedagogy, as foreign language learners are typically evaluated against idealised norms rather than against the full spectrum of native-speaker practice variability. In this sense, the article focuses on prescriptive expectations and socially sanctioned patterns, while acknowledging that actual usage may diverge in everyday contexts.

This focus is especially relevant for the teaching of Indonesian and Malay as foreign languages at the tertiary level. In BIPA (*Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing* – Indonesian for Foreign Speakers) and Malay-as-a-Foreign-Language programmes, learners frequently achieve grammatical proficiency while continuing to struggle with pragmatic appropriateness. Difficulties often arise in situations that require careful politeness management, such as addressing lecturers, requesting extensions, refusing invitations, or expressing criticism diplomatically (Noor *et al.*, 2024; Pramesty *et al.*, 2025). Without explicit instruction in normative politeness strategies, learners risk pragmatic failure even when their linguistic forms are otherwise accurate. Recent work on curriculum design and cultural representation in BIPA and BMIPA (*Bahasa Melayu bagi Penutur Asing* – Malay for Foreign Speakers) contexts has therefore highlighted the need to integrate pragmatic and cultural competence more systematically into language instruction (Aini *et al.*, 2025b).

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to provide a contrastive, theory-informed account of politeness strategies in standard Malay and Indonesian, with two interrelated objectives. First, it seeks to identify and systematise key

politeness norms associated with address practices, requests, apologies, refusals, and related face-threatening acts in the *baku* registers of both languages. Second, it aims to translate these contrastive insights into pedagogically relevant observations that can inform curriculum design and classroom practice in tertiary-level foreign language education. By bringing together pragmatic theory, empirical findings from relevant literature, and applied considerations, the article contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how closely related languages encode politeness in distinct yet comparable ways.

The article is structured as follows. The next section outlines the theoretical frameworks that underpin the analysis, focusing on major models of linguistic politeness and their relevance to the Malay-Indonesian context. This is followed by a methodology section detailing the literature-based contrastive approach adopted in the study. The analysis section then presents a systematic comparison of politeness strategies across key communicative domains, supported by summary tables. The discussion interprets these findings in relation to sociocultural and historical factors, while the pedagogical implications section addresses their relevance for foreign language instruction. The conclusion summarises the main contributions of the study and reflects on its scope and limitations.

2. Theoretical Background

The analysis of linguistic politeness has long occupied a central position in pragmatics, providing insights into how speakers manage interpersonal relations and social hierarchy through language. Although politeness is a universal concern, its linguistic realisation is culturally mediated, making it particularly amenable to contrastive analysis. In the context of Malay and Indonesian, theoretical models of politeness must therefore account not only for general pragmatic principles but also for culturally specific understandings of face, respect, and social harmony.

2.1. Politeness, Face, and Normative Interaction

One of the most influential frameworks for analysing politeness is the model proposed by Brown and Levinson, which conceptualises politeness in relation to the notion of *face* – the public self-image that individuals seek to maintain in interaction. Within this model, speakers are assumed to possess both positive face, reflecting the desire for approval and affiliation, and negative face, reflecting the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition. Linguistic interaction is shaped by the need to manage *face-threatening acts* (FTAs), such as requests, refusals, apologies, and disagreements,

which potentially infringe upon either the speaker's or the hearer's face (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

From a normative perspective, politeness strategies are not simply optional stylistic choices but socially expected mechanisms for mitigating these threats. Brown and Levinson distinguish between several broad strategy types, ranging from direct, unmitigated realisations to highly indirect, off-record formulations. Of particular relevance to the Malay-Indonesian context are negative-politeness strategies, which foreground deference, restraint, and non-imposition, and positive-politeness strategies, which emphasise shared identity and interpersonal warmth. Empirical research on both Malay and Indonesian consistently shows a strong preference for negative-politeness strategies in formal settings, especially in situations involving asymmetrical power relations or high social distance (Maskuri *et al.*, 2019; Pujiati *et al.*, 2024).

While Brown and Levinson's model has sometimes been criticised for its universalist assumptions, it remains analytically productive when applied with cultural sensitivity. In Malay and Indonesian contexts, face is not an abstract individual property but a relational construct closely tied to social reputation, morals, conduct, and communal harmony. The relevance of the face concept is thus reinforced rather than undermined by local cultural interpretations, provided that the analysis does not treat politeness strategies as mechanically transferable across cultures.

2.2. Politeness Principles and Interactional Values

Complementing the face-based approach, Leech's Politeness Principle offers an interactional account of how politeness is oriented towards minimising social friction and maximising harmony. Leech proposes a set of conversational maxims – including tact, approbation, agreement, generosity, modesty, and sympathy – that capture culturally valued orientations in polite behaviour. These maxims do not function as rigid rules but as tendencies that guide speakers' pragmatic choices in socially sensitive situations (Leech, 1983).

Studies of Malay and Indonesian discourse have shown that these maxims resonate strongly with local interactional norms. The tact maxim, which encourages minimising cost to others, is reflected in the extensive use of mitigation and justification in requests and refusals, particularly in Malay (Noor *et al.*, 2024; Che Ismail & Mohd Nordin, 2025). The modesty maxim finds expression in the avoidance of self-praise and the downplaying of personal achievement, especially in responses to compliments. The agreement maxim is frequently observed in

conversational practices that prioritise consensus and relational smoothness over overt disagreement, a tendency documented in both face-to-face interaction and mediated communication (Johari *et al.*, 2019; Juita *et al.*, 2019).

Leech's framework is particularly useful for capturing the moral and evaluative dimensions of politeness in Malay and Indonesian, where courteous language use is often framed as a reflection of personal character rather than mere communicative efficiency. In this respect, politeness is closely associated with ethical self-presentation, reinforcing the idea that polite speech is a social obligation rather than a strategic choice.

2.3. Culturally Embedded Concepts of Face and Conduct

Beyond universalist pragmatic models, politeness in Malay and Indonesian is deeply embedded in culturally specific concepts that shape normative expectations of interaction. In the Malay cultural sphere, the notion of *air muka* (face) functions as a key organising principle, encompassing dignity and social standing. Closely related to this is the concept of *malu* (shame or shyness), which denotes not only personal embarrassment but also a moral sensitivity to how one's actions affect others. Avoiding situations that cause *malu* – either to oneself or to one's interlocutor – is a central motivation for indirectness and conflict avoidance in Malay politeness norms (Ningsih *et al.*, 2021; Jaffar *et al.*, 2025).

The emphasis on *budi bahasa* further reinforces this orientation, framing polite language use as an outward manifestation of inner moral refinement. In this view, linguistic politeness is inseparable from broader cultural expectations of proper conduct (*adat*), particularly in formal settings. These values underpin the strong normative pressure to use honorifics, avoid direct refusals, and mitigate disagreement in standard Malay.

Indonesian politeness shares many of these cultural foundations but is shaped by the sociolinguistic realities of a multilingual nation-state. Bahasa Indonesia developed as a unifying standard language intended to transcend ethnic and regional boundaries, resulting in politeness norms that emphasise inclusiveness and procedural clarity alongside respect. While concepts analogous to face and shame are present in Indonesian discourse, they are often articulated through nationally salient values such as *kesopanan* (courtesy) and *tata krama* (proper conduct). These values support mitigation and deference but also permit greater explicitness in formal interaction, provided that linguistic forms

signal respect and goodwill (Adrefiza & Jones, 2013; Tanduk, 2023).

2.4. Normativity, Standard Registers, and Pedagogical Relevance

A central assumption of the present study is that politeness norms in *baku* registers constitute an idealised reference point against which linguistic behaviour is evaluated in formal contexts. Standard Malay and standard Indonesian are not merely descriptive abstractions but codified varieties associated with schooling, governance, professional communication, and public discourse. As such, they carry explicit expectations regarding appropriate politeness strategies, particularly for speakers who are not members of the speech community by birth.

This normative orientation is especially relevant in foreign language pedagogy. Learners of Malay and Indonesian are typically introduced to standardised forms and are assessed according to their adherence to socially sanctioned norms rather than to the full range of native-speaker variability. Research on BIPA and Malay language curricula has shown that insufficient attention to pragmatic norms can result in communicative breakdowns, even when grammatical accuracy is achieved (Aini *et al.*, 2025b; Pramesty *et al.*, 2025). A theoretically grounded understanding of politeness is therefore indispensable for both descriptive analysis and pedagogical application.

By integrating face-based models, interactional principles, and culturally specific concepts of conduct, the theoretical framework adopted in this study provides a robust foundation for analysing politeness strategies in standard Malay and Indonesian. It allows for systematic comparison while remaining sensitive to the moral and social values that underpin normative expectations in each language. This framework informs the contrastive analysis presented in the following sections, where politeness strategies are examined across key communicative domains relevant to formal interaction and foreign language instruction.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design and Orientation

The present study adopts a qualitative, theory-informed contrastive approach grounded in systematic analysis of existing scholarly literature on politeness in Malay and Indonesian. Rather than generating new empirical data, the research synthesises and reinterprets findings from a carefully delimited body of studies in order to identify normative politeness expectations associated with the *baku* (standard) registers of both languages. This design is particularly appropriate given the study's focus on idealised, socially sanctioned forms of

interaction as they are articulated in academic discourse and language pedagogy.

The methodological orientation is interpretive and explicitly normative. The analysis does not seek to document the full range of naturally occurring language use or regional variation, but instead concentrates on patterns that are recurrently described or implicitly endorsed as appropriate in formal contexts. Such an approach reflects the realities of language teaching and assessment, where learners are typically introduced to standardised norms rather than to the entirety of pragmatic variability present among native speakers.

3.2. Data Sources and Scope

The data for this study consist exclusively of peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and scholarly publications addressing politeness and interactional norms in Malay and Indonesian. These sources include works focusing on specific speech acts – such as requests, refusals, apologies, commands, and expressions of gratitude – as well as studies examining broader politeness principles in formal communication. Research on curriculum design and foreign language instruction (BIPA and Malay-as-a-Foreign-Language contexts) is also incorporated to ensure pedagogical relevance (Aini *et al.*, 2025b; Pramesty *et al.*, 2025).

All sources were selected on the basis of their explicit engagement with politeness phenomena in Malay or Indonesian and their relevance to standard language use. Studies dealing primarily with dialectal variation, highly informal interaction, or non-standard registers were considered only insofar as they articulated contrasts with, or implications for, normative usage. No additional sources beyond the original literature corpus were introduced at any stage of the analysis.

3.3. Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeded through a thematic and comparative reading of the selected literature. First, recurrent politeness-related domains were identified across studies, including forms of address, request strategies, apology formulations, refusal patterns, and mitigation devices associated with face-threatening acts. Particular attention was paid to how authors characterised these strategies in evaluative or prescriptive terms, for instance by describing certain forms as preferred, expected, appropriate, or socially sanctioned in formal contexts.

In a second step, findings relating to Malay and Indonesian were systematically juxtaposed in order to identify areas of convergence and divergence. This contrastive phase did not rely on quantitative aggregation but on qualitative pattern

recognition across multiple studies, allowing for the identification of robust tendencies rather than isolated observations. Where possible, distinctions were drawn between strategies that appear structurally similar but differ in frequency or pragmatic force.

Throughout the analytical process, established politeness frameworks – particularly face-based models and interactional principles – served as interpretive tools rather than as rigid classificatory schemes. This allowed the analysis to remain sensitive to culturally embedded meanings while retaining conceptual coherence. Summary tables were developed to consolidate key contrasts and to support analytical clarity, especially in relation to pedagogical application.

3.4. Methodological Limitations

As a literature-based study, the present analysis is necessarily constrained by the scope, focus, approach, and methodological diversity of the existing research. While the selected sources provide substantial coverage of politeness phenomena in Malay and Indonesian, they vary in terms of data types, contexts, and analytical depth. Moreover, normative claims about politeness are often implicit rather than explicitly formulated, requiring interpretive judgement in their synthesis.

Nevertheless, this limitation is also a methodological strength in the context of the study's aims. By drawing on a wide range of empirical and theoretical discussions, the analysis captures shared assumptions about politeness that recur across independent studies and disciplinary perspectives. These shared assumptions form the basis of the normative expectations examined in the subsequent analysis and discussion.

4. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1. Forms of Address and Honorific Usage

Forms of address constitute one of the most salient and immediately recognisable manifestations of politeness in both standard Malay and standard Indonesian. In formal and institutional interaction, address choices function as explicit markers of respect and hierarchical awareness. From a normative perspective, appropriate address usage is not optional but socially obligatory, particularly in asymmetrical relationships such as student-lecturer, subordinate-superior, or citizen-official encounters.

4.1.1. Standard Malay

In standard Malay, politeness norms strongly favour the use of honorific titles and role-based address forms over personal pronouns in formal contexts. Commonly prescribed forms include *Encik* (Mr.), *Puan* (Mrs./Ms.), and *Cik* (Miss), which

are typically followed by the addressee's name. In more deferential or institutional contexts, *Tuan* (Mr.) is employed to signal elevated respect, particularly in formal correspondence or ceremonial discourse. Academic and professional titles such as *Profesor*, *Doktor*, and *Cikgu* (teacher) likewise function as politeness devices by foregrounding institutional role rather than personal identity.

In addition to these general address forms, Malay also employs a set of conferred honorific titles such as *Datuk*, *Dato'*, *Datin*, *Tan Sri*, and *Tun* (no direct equivalents in English), which index officially recognised social status and public distinction. When addressing individuals who hold such titles, their use is normatively expected in formal and semi-formal interaction and functions as a salient marker of respect. (At the same time, these titles differ from general address forms in that they apply only to specific individuals, and therefore do not constitute a *generalised* address repertoire for speakers or foreign language learners.)

A defining feature of Malay politeness in the standard register is the avoidance of second-person pronouns (*awak*, *kamu*) in formal interaction. Direct pronominal reference is frequently evaluated as overly familiar or insufficiently respectful when used outside intimate or peer-level relationships. Instead, speakers are normatively expected to maintain politeness through repeated title use, even within extended interactions. This practice aligns with negative-politeness strategies oriented towards deference, distance maintenance, and non-imposition.

Empirical studies consistently describe this preference as culturally grounded in Malay concepts of *budi bahasa* (refined conduct), *adat* (customary norms), and the protection of *air muka* (face). Addressing others correctly is therefore not merely a pragmatic convention but an ethical and social obligation, failure of which may be interpreted as a deficiency in character rather than a simple linguistic error (Ningsih *et al.*, 2021; Jaffar *et al.*, 2025).

4.1.2. Standard Indonesian

Standard Indonesian likewise places strong emphasis on respectful address, but operationalises politeness through a different set of conventionalised forms. The most salient feature of Indonesian polite address is the widespread use of kinship-based titles, particularly *Bapak* (Sir) and *Ibu* (Madam), which function as default honorifics in formal interaction. These forms are applied broadly to adult interlocutors regardless of precise institutional rank, making them highly flexible and socially inclusive.

In contrast to Malay, Indonesian permits somewhat more frequent use of personal names when combined with appropriate titles (e.g. *Pak Ahmad*, *Bu Sari*), and the repeated use of kinship honorifics is generally sufficient to maintain politeness throughout an interaction. The formal second-person pronoun *Anda* is primarily restricted to written discourse or public announcements, and is less common in spoken interaction, where *Bapak* and *Ibu* fulfil the primary politeness function.

This address system reflects Bahasa Indonesia's development as a national lingua franca intended to bridge ethnic and regional diversity. Politeness norms prioritise accessibility and clarity while retaining respect, resulting in a system that is less stratified than Malay but nonetheless normatively regulated. Studies of Indonesian institutional discourse describe address usage as a key negative-politeness mechanism that signals respect without requiring elaborate hierarchical differentiation (Maskuri *et al.*, 2019; Tanduk, 2023).

4.1.3. Contrastive Observations

From a contrastive perspective, both languages treat address forms as central to polite conduct, yet differ in how politeness is linguistically encoded. Standard Malay exhibits a more differentiated and hierarchy-sensitive address system, with multiple honorific options and a strong tendency to avoid pronominal reference. Standard Indonesian, by contrast, relies on a smaller set of highly generalised honorifics, allowing politeness to be maintained through consistency rather than differentiation.

These differences are normatively significant. An address form considered polite and sufficient in Indonesian may be perceived as overly informal or incomplete in Malay if it lacks appropriate honorific marking. Conversely, the repeated use of elaborate Malay titles may appear unnecessarily formal or distancing in Indonesian institutional interaction. For foreign language learners, mastery of address norms is therefore foundational, as inappropriate address usage is immediately salient and socially consequential.

The findings indicate that while both Malay and Indonesian treat polite address as a normative requirement in formal interaction, they embody distinct politeness logics. Malay address practices prioritise hierarchy, refinement, and explicit deference, whereas Indonesian practices emphasise respectful inclusivity and functional clarity. These differences form a crucial foundation for understanding subsequent contrasts in requests, apologies, and refusals.

Table 1: Normative Address Practices in Standard Malay and Standard Indonesian

Dimension	Standard Malay	Standard Indonesian
Primary polite address forms	<i>Encik, Puan, Cik, Tuan</i> ; academic and professional titles	<i>Bapak, Ibu</i> ; professional titles
Use of personal pronouns	Avoided in formal contexts	<i>Anda</i> mainly in written or instructional contexts
Degree of hierarchy sensitivity	High; multiple titles reflect status distinctions	Moderate; generalised honorifics emphasise inclusiveness
Repetition of titles	Frequent and expected	Frequent but less elaborate
Politeness orientation	Deference and distance	Respect with procedural clarity

4.2. Requests and Directive Speech Acts

Requests and other directive speech acts constitute a central site of politeness negotiation, as they inherently involve an attempt by the speaker to influence the interlocutor's behaviour. In both standard Malay and standard Indonesian, directives are normatively treated as face-threatening acts that require mitigation, particularly in formal or hierarchical contexts. The degree and type of mitigation expected, however, differ systematically between the two languages.

4.2.1. Standard Malay

In standard Malay, requests are normatively expected to be highly indirect, especially when directed upwards in the social hierarchy or towards non-intimates. Direct imperatives are generally dispreferred in formal interaction, except in clearly institutionalised contexts such as written regulations or emergency instructions. In interpersonal settings, politeness is achieved through layered mitigation rather than through syntactic command forms.

Typical Malay request strategies include modalised constructions (*boleh, dapat, sudi* – may, can, kindly), conditional phrasing, and extensive use of preparatory moves that frame the request as tentative or contingent. Requests are frequently preceded or followed by apologies, expressions of hesitation, or justifications that explain the necessity of the request. These grounders function not merely as optional softeners but as normatively expected components of polite directive behaviour.

From a pragmatic perspective, such strategies align closely with negative-politeness orientations. The speaker explicitly minimises imposition by emphasising the addressee's freedom to refuse and by signalling awareness of potential inconvenience. The preference for indirectness is further motivated by the avoidance of *malu*, both for the requester and for the addressee, as an unmitigated request risks placing the interlocutor in an interactionally uncomfortable position (Che Ismail & Mohd Nordin, 2025; Noor *et al.*, 2024).

4.2.2. Standard Indonesian

Standard Indonesian also treats requests as face-threatening and normatively requires mitigation, yet it allows for comparatively greater explicitness in directive formulations, provided that appropriate politeness markers are present. Modal verbs such as *bisa* (can) and *boleh* (allowed) are widely used to soften requests, and expressions of politeness such as *tolong* (please) are conventionalised request markers rather than signals of urgency.

Unlike Malay, Indonesian requests in formal contexts often prioritise clarity and procedural efficiency, particularly in formal settings such as offices or service encounters. While justifications and apologies may be included, they are not always as elaborated as in Malay and may be omitted if contextual factors already justify the request. The politeness of the directive is instead carried by respectful address forms and adherence to expected interactional routines.

Research on Indonesian pragmatics suggests that this balance reflects Bahasa Indonesia's role as a national standard designed to facilitate communication across diverse cultural backgrounds. Politeness norms therefore support mitigation without encouraging excessive indirectness that could obscure communicative intent or hinder institutional functioning (Adrefiza & Jones, 2013; Maskuri *et al.*, 2019).

4.2.3. Contrastive Observations

The contrast between Malay and Indonesian request strategies lies less in the presence or absence of politeness and more in the preferred degree of elaboration and indirectness. Standard Malay normatively encourages extensive mitigation, making indirectness itself a marker of politeness. Standard Indonesian, while still valuing mitigation, places greater emphasis on intelligibility and procedural appropriateness, allowing requests to be phrased more succinctly without being perceived as impolite.

These differences have important normative implications. A request that is considered adequately polite in Indonesian may appear abrupt or insufficiently deferential in Malay if it lacks preparatory moves or justifications. Conversely, a

Malay-style request with extensive hedging may be perceived by Indonesian interlocutors as unnecessarily verbose or interactionally heavy, particularly in formal contexts.

Table 2: Normative Request Strategies in Standard Malay and Standard Indonesian

Dimension	Standard Malay	Standard Indonesian
Preferred request form	Indirect, modalised, often conditional	Indirect or semi-direct with politeness markers
Use of imperatives	Strongly dispreferred in formal interaction	Restricted but acceptable in institutional contexts
Mitigation strategies	Extensive: apologies, grounders, hedging	Moderate: modals, politeness markers, respectful address
Degree of elaboration	High; layered mitigation expected	Moderate; clarity prioritised
Politeness orientation	Non-imposition and avoidance of <i>malu</i>	Respect combined with procedural efficiency

The findings demonstrate that both languages normatively require mitigation in directive speech acts, yet operationalise politeness through different interactional logics. Malay privileges indirectness and elaboration as core indicators of politeness, while Indonesian allows for greater explicitness as long as respect and conventional politeness markers are maintained. These contrasts are particularly salient for foreign language learners, for whom directive speech acts often represent a major source of pragmatic difficulty.

4.3. Apologies and Refusals

Apologies and refusals represent two closely related categories of face-threatening acts, as both involve the management of responsibility, potential offence, and interpersonal discomfort. In the *baku* registers of Malay and Indonesian, these speech acts are normatively governed by strong expectations of mitigation, humility, and sensitivity to social hierarchy. While both languages treat apologies and refusals as interactionally delicate, they differ in the preferred degree of explicitness and the sequencing of politeness strategies.

4.3.1. Standard Malay

In standard Malay, apologies function not only as remedial acts following an offence, but also as preventive politeness strategies that pre-empt potential face threat. Apologetic expressions are therefore frequently embedded in requests, refusals, and even explanations, signalling the speaker's awareness of possible inconvenience. Explicit apology formulas such as *saya minta maaf* (I am sorry) are used, but they are often accompanied – or even replaced – by softer constructions such as conditional acknowledgements (*jika saya tersilap, sekiranya menyusahkan* – if I am wrong, if it causes inconvenience), which allow responsibility to be expressed without overt self-blame.

Refusals in standard Malay are normatively expected to be highly indirect. Direct statements of inability or rejection are generally dispreferred in formal interaction, particularly when directed towards superiors or elders. Instead, refusals are typically realised through extended sequences that include apologies, explanations, and expressions of regret. The refusal itself may remain implicit, conveyed through reasons that render acceptance pragmatically impossible. This strategy protects both the speaker's and the addressee's *air muka* by avoiding explicit confrontation.

Such patterns reflect the strong cultural emphasis on avoiding *malu*. A direct refusal risks placing the addressee in an uncomfortable position by making rejection overt and undeniable. Indirectness thus functions as a moral and interactional safeguard, allowing social harmony to be preserved even in situations of non-compliance (Ningsiha *et al.*, 2021; Che Ismail & Mohd Nordin, 2025).

4.3.2. Standard Indonesian

Standard Indonesian also places considerable importance on apologies and mitigation, yet it allows for greater explicitness in both apology and refusal strategies. Explicit apology formulas such as *saya minta maaf* or *mohon maaf* (very sorry) are widely used and socially unmarked in formal contexts. These expressions are often followed by explanations or offers of repair, particularly in institutional communication.

In refusal contexts, Indonesian speakers may state inability more directly through constructions such as *tidak bisa* or *tidak dapat* (cannot), provided that the refusal is embedded within a polite interactional frame. Apologies, respectful address forms, and justifications are commonly employed to soften the refusal, but the act of refusal itself is

typically made explicit. This explicitness supports clarity and efficiency, especially in professional or administrative settings where ambiguity may hinder procedural outcomes.

Research suggests that Indonesian politeness norms accommodate such explicit refusals as long as they are accompanied by appropriate politeness markers and do not convey dismissiveness or disregard. The preservation of respect, rather than the avoidance of explicit negation, appears to be the primary normative concern (Adrefiza & Jones, 2013; Tanduk, 2023).

4.3.3. Contrastive Observations

The contrast between Malay and Indonesian apology and refusal strategies centres on the relationship between explicitness and face

management. Standard Malay favours implicitness and layered mitigation, treating explicit refusal as interactionally risky in many formal contexts. Standard Indonesian, by contrast, permits explicit refusal as long as it is framed politely and supported by appropriate linguistic devices.

These differences are normatively significant for intercultural and educational contexts. An Indonesian-style explicit refusal may be perceived as abrupt or insensitive in Malay formal interaction, while a Malay-style implicit refusal may be interpreted by Indonesian interlocutors as evasive or unclear. For foreign language learners, the challenge lies not in mastering apology formulas alone, but in understanding how apologies, explanations, and refusals are sequenced and weighted within each language's politeness system.

Table 3: Normative Apology and Refusal Strategies in Standard Malay and Standard Indonesian

Dimension	Standard Malay	Standard Indonesian
Function of apologies	Preventive and remedial	Primarily remedial
Preferred apology forms	Conditional and mitigated expressions; explicit apologies optional	Explicit apology formulas widely used
Refusal explicitness	Strongly implicit; refusal often inferred	Moderately explicit; refusal stated politely
Sequencing of strategies	Apology → explanation → implicit refusal	Apology → explicit refusal → explanation
Politeness motivation	Protection of <i>air muka</i> and avoidance of <i>malu</i>	Respect, clarity, and procedural appropriateness

The findings indicate that both Malay and Indonesian normatively require politeness management in apologies and refusals, yet they differ in how responsibility and non-compliance are linguistically negotiated. Malay prioritises implicitness and face preservation through indirect sequencing, while Indonesian permits explicitness within a respectful interactional frame. These contrasts further reinforce the importance of explicit pragmatic instruction for learners operating in formal contexts.

4.4. *Basa-Basi* and Interactional Framing

Beyond individual speech acts, politeness in both standard Malay and standard Indonesian is shaped by broader interactional practices that frame communication and regulate interpersonal alignment. Among these practices, *basa-basi* – loosely glossed as ritualised small talk or phatic exchange – plays a central normative role in preparing the ground for potentially face-threatening acts. In the *baku* registers of both languages, *basa-basi* is not merely conversational filler but an expected component of polite interaction, particularly in formal or first-encounter contexts.

4.4.1. Standard Malay

In standard Malay, *basa-basi* functions as a crucial politeness buffer that establishes interpersonal equilibrium before substantive business is addressed. Formal interaction is normatively expected to begin with greetings, inquiries about well-being, or neutral observations that signal goodwill and attentiveness. Such pre-sequences are especially important when the subsequent interaction involves a request, refusal, or any form of evaluative judgement.

From a normative standpoint, the omission of *basa-basi* in Malay formal discourse may be interpreted as abrupt or discourteous, even if the propositional content of the utterance is linguistically polite. *Basa-basi* thus serves to reaffirm mutual respect and to mitigate the interpersonal risk associated with direct transactional communication. This practice aligns closely with Malay cultural values emphasising harmony and the gradual negotiation of interactional goals.

The length and elaboration of *basa-basi* in standard Malay are context-sensitive but generally more extended than in Indonesian. In institutional settings, such as academic consultations or official meetings, the framing phase may involve several

turns of polite exchange before the core issue is raised. This interactional rhythm reinforces negative-politeness orientations by avoiding sudden imposition and allowing both parties to maintain *air muka*.

4.4.2. Standard Indonesian

In standard Indonesian, *basa-basi* likewise constitutes a normatively recognised politeness strategy, though it is typically shorter and more functionally bounded. Greetings and brief phatic exchanges are common at the outset of formal interactions, but they tend to transition more rapidly to the main communicative purpose. The emphasis is on signalling respect and cooperative intent without unduly delaying the interaction.

Indonesian *basa-basi* often takes the form of formulaic expressions that are widely shared across institutional contexts, contributing to interactional predictability and efficiency. While the absence of *basa-basi* may still be perceived as brusque, Indonesian politeness norms generally tolerate a more streamlined framing phase, particularly in settings where roles and expectations are clearly defined.

This pattern reflects Bahasa Indonesia's function as a national standard facilitating

communication across diverse cultural backgrounds. Interactional framing supports politeness and rapport, but it is balanced against the need for clarity and task orientation in formal discourse (Maskuri *et al.*, 2019; Johari *et al.*, 2019).

4.4.3. Contrastive Observations

The contrast between Malay and Indonesian *basa-basi* practices lies primarily in their interactional weight and duration. Standard Malay accords greater importance to extended framing as a means of safeguarding interpersonal harmony, whereas standard Indonesian favours concise framing that establishes politeness without excessive elaboration. These differences are normatively salient, as deviations from expected framing conventions may lead to negative pragmatic evaluations even when subsequent speech acts are appropriately mitigated.

For foreign language learners, mastery of *basa-basi* poses particular challenges, as it requires sensitivity not only to linguistic forms but also to interactional timing and cultural expectations. Learners who omit framing sequences risk appearing impolite, while those who overuse them may be perceived as inefficient or socially awkward, depending on the language context.

Table 4: Normative Interactional Framing and *Basa-basi* in Standard Malay and Standard Indonesian

Dimension	Standard Malay	Standard Indonesian
Role of <i>basa-basi</i>	Central politeness buffer	Politeness marker with functional limits
Typical length	Extended, multi-turn	Brief, often formulaic
Placement	Before requests, refusals, evaluations	Primarily at interaction onset
Politeness function	Harmony maintenance and non-imposition	Rapport signalling and interactional clarity
Risk of omission	Perceived abruptness or courtesy	Perceived brusqueness, but more tolerated

Across address practices, directive speech acts, apologies, refusals, and interactional framing, the analysis indicates that standard Malay and standard Indonesian share a broadly comparable orientation towards politeness grounded in mitigation and respect for interlocutors. At the same time, the two languages differ in the ways these orientations are conventionally realised in formal interaction. Standard Malay exhibits a stronger normative preference for hierarchy-sensitive address, extended mitigation, and implicit sequencing, whereas standard Indonesian allows for comparatively greater explicitness, provided that respect and conventional politeness markers are maintained. These patterned differences delineate the contrastive landscape examined in this study and form the basis for further interpretive discussion.

5. DISCUSSION

Taken together, the preceding analysis demonstrates that while standard Malay and standard Indonesian are underpinned by broadly comparable politeness principles, they diverge in the normative calibration of indirectness / explicitness and interactional elaboration across formal communicative domains. These divergences are neither incidental nor purely stylistic; rather, they reflect distinct conventionalisations of shared pragmatic orientations shaped by sociocultural values, language ideologies, and institutional histories associated with each standard variety. The synthesis presented in Table 5 is therefore best understood not as a catalogue of differences, but as an interpretive map of how closely related languages operationalise politeness in systematically different ways.

Table 5: Synthesis of Normative Politeness Strategies in Standard Malay and Standard Indonesian

Politeness domain	Standard Malay	Standard Indonesian
Address practices	Strongly hierarchy-sensitive; extensive use of honorifics and titles; avoidance of pronouns in formal interaction	Generalised kinship honorifics (<i>Bapak, Ibu</i>); limited use of formal pronouns (<i>Anda</i> mainly in written or instructional contexts)
Requests and directives	Highly indirect; extended mitigation and preparatory moves expected, especially in asymmetrical relations	Indirect or semi-direct; mitigation present but often less elaborated, with politeness carried by conventional markers and respectful framing
Apologies	Preventive and remedial; explicit apologies occur but conditional or softened expressions are also normative	Primarily remedial; explicit apology formulas (<i>mohon maaf, minta maaf</i>) widely acceptable in formal interaction
Refusals	Strong preference for implicit refusals; refusal often inferred from reasons, regret, or constraints	Explicit refusals acceptable when framed politely; refusals commonly stated with mitigation and justification
Interactional framing (<i>basa-basi</i>)	Extended and interactionally central, especially before face-threatening acts	Brief, formulaic, and functionally bounded, especially in institutional contexts
Overall politeness logic	Harmony preservation through deference, implicitness, and layered mitigation	Respect maintained alongside clarity and institutional appropriateness

At a theoretical level, the findings reaffirm the analytical usefulness of face-based and principle-oriented models of politeness, while also underscoring the need for culturally grounded interpretation. Both Malay and Indonesian exhibit strong normative pressure to mitigate face-threatening acts, particularly in contexts involving hierarchy or institutional formality. This shared orientation aligns with the prominence of negative-politeness strategies in Brown and Levinson's framework, as well as with Leech's emphasis on tact, agreement, and the minimisation of social friction. However, the analysis also illustrates that these models cannot be applied mechanically. The same pragmatic principles give rise to different preferred strategies, depending on how face, responsibility, and interpersonal obligation are locally construed.

Standard Malay politeness emerges from the analysis as strongly oriented towards restraint, hierarchy sensitivity, and the avoidance of overt interpersonal pressure. Across address practices, requests, refusals, and interactional framing, indirectness and extended mitigation function not merely as optional politeness strategies but as normative safeguards of social harmony. The preventive use of apologies, the preference for implicit refusals, and the central role of *basa-basi* collectively reflect a communicative ethic in which the preservation of *air muka* and the avoidance of *malu* are paramount. Within this system, politeness is closely tied to moral self-presentation; linguistic choices are evaluated not only in terms of appropriateness, but also as indicators of personal refinement and social awareness.

Standard Indonesian, by contrast, displays a pragmatic profile that accommodates greater explicitness within a clearly bounded politeness framework. While mitigation remains obligatory in formal interaction, the analysis shows that politeness norms allow requests and refusals to be stated more directly, provided that respect is signalled through conventional address forms, explicit apology formulas, and adherence to expected interactional routines. This calibration reflects Bahasa Indonesia's sociolinguistic role as a national standard designed to function across a highly diverse linguistic and cultural landscape. Politeness, in this context, supports clarity and inclusiveness rather than hierarchical differentiation, enabling effective communication in institutional settings without sacrificing interpersonal respect.

Crucially, the contrast between Malay and Indonesian politeness norms should not be interpreted as a dichotomy between indirectness and directness, or between harmony and efficiency. Both languages value respect and relational sensitivity; the difference lies in how these values are linguistically prioritised and sequenced. Malay tends to externalise politeness through elaboration and implicitness, whereas Indonesian tends to encode it through conventionalised markers that permit more succinct interaction. These are differences of degree and orientation rather than of underlying principle, yet they are normatively salient and socially consequential.

The findings further highlight the role of standard language ideology in shaping politeness expectations. Both *Bahasa Melayu baku* and *Bahasa Indonesia baku* are products of institutional

codification and language planning, and as such they carry moral and social authority. Politeness norms associated with these varieties function as benchmarks against which communicative behaviour is evaluated in education, administration, and public discourse. Deviations from these norms are often interpreted not simply as pragmatic miscalculations, but as indicators of inadequate cultural competence or improper conduct. This evaluative dimension is particularly relevant in formal interaction, where adherence to standard norms is expected regardless of speakers' regional or social backgrounds.

From a contrastive pragmatic perspective, the Malay-Indonesian case illustrates how closely related languages can diverge meaningfully in their normative politeness profiles despite substantial structural similarity. Mutual intelligibility at the grammatical level does not entail pragmatic equivalence. Address forms, mitigation strategies, and interactional framing practices that are appropriate in one language may be perceived as insufficient or excessive in the other. These findings caution against assumptions of pragmatic transferability and reinforce the need for language-specific analysis even within closely related linguistic systems.

By integrating topic-based findings into a holistic interpretive framework, the Discussion establishes that politeness in standard Malay and Indonesian is best understood as a culturally calibrated system of normative expectations rather than as a set of interchangeable strategies. This insight provides a necessary foundation for examining how such expectations can be made explicit and teachable in foreign language education. The following section therefore turns to the pedagogical implications of the analysis, focusing on how normative politeness strategies can be systematically incorporated into tertiary-level instruction in Indonesian and Malay as foreign languages.

6. Pedagogical Implications

The contrastive analysis of politeness strategies in standard Malay and standard Indonesian carries important implications for the teaching of both languages as foreign languages at the tertiary level. In BIPA (*Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing*) and BMPA (*Bahasa Melayu bagi Penutur Asing*) programmes, learners are typically introduced to standardised linguistic forms that function as benchmarks for academic assessment and institutional-public communication. The findings of the present study suggest that grammatical proficiency alone is insufficient for successful participation in such contexts; learners must also acquire normative pragmatic competence,

particularly with respect to politeness strategies that regulate face, hierarchy, and interactional framing.

A recurring concern in the literature on BIPA and BMPA is that pragmatic norms, including politeness, are often treated implicitly or incidentally rather than as explicit learning objectives. Studies on curriculum design and cultural representation demonstrate that while both programmes integrate cultural elements, they do so with different degrees of explicitness and pedagogical intentionality (Aini *et al.*, 2025b). In BIPA, politeness is frequently embedded within broader cultural narratives and communicative tasks, whereas in BMPA it tends to be presented functionally through situational dialogues and formulaic expressions. The present findings indicate that such approaches should be supplemented by systematic instruction that makes politeness norms visible and open to reflection.

One central pedagogical implication concerns forms of address and honorific usage, which emerged in the analysis as a highly salient and normatively regulated domain. For foreign learners, inappropriate address choices are immediately noticeable and socially consequential, often more so than grammatical inaccuracies. Teaching materials and classroom practice should therefore move beyond simple lexical lists of address terms and instead foreground their pragmatic conditions of use. In BMPA contexts, this involves explicit instruction on hierarchy-sensitive titles such as *Encik*, *Cik*, *Tuan*, and *Puan* as well as the avoidance of second-person pronouns in formal interaction. In BIPA contexts, learners must be guided to understand the normative role of *Bapak* and *Ibu* as generalised honorifics and the restricted distribution of *Anda*. These distinctions align with research emphasising the importance of "little c culture", particularly etiquette and everyday norms, in foreign language curricula (Aini *et al.*, 2025a; Aini *et al.*, 2025b).

The analysis of requests, apologies, and refusals further highlights the need for explicit pragmatic sequencing in language instruction. Learners frequently struggle not with individual politeness markers, but with how speech acts are conventionally structured and combined. The strong preference for indirectness and layered mitigation in standard Malay, especially in refusals, contrasts with the more explicit yet still mitigated strategies accepted in standard Indonesian. Without explicit guidance, learners may transfer pragmatic patterns from one language to the other or from their first language, resulting in utterances that are linguistically correct but pragmatically misaligned. This risk of pragmatic failure has been widely noted in applied linguistic research on Indonesian language learning, particularly in institutional and academic

settings (Adrefiza & Jones, 2013; Maskuri *et al.*, 2019).

Another important implication concerns interactional framing and *basa-basi*. The findings demonstrate that *basa-basi* is not optional small talk, but a normatively expected politeness buffer, especially in Malay formal discourse. Pedagogically, this suggests that learners should be trained not only in sentence-level politeness strategies but also in interactional timing. Classroom activities that simulate office hours, formal requests, or administrative encounters can be used to draw learners' attention to how much framing is expected before a request is made, and how this expectation differs between Malay and Indonesian. Such instruction supports the development of interactional competence, which has been identified as a key component of advanced foreign language proficiency.

The broader cultural grounding of politeness norms also warrants pedagogical attention. Research on metaphor, worldview, and cultural identity in Malay and Indonesian demonstrates that communicative behaviour is deeply embedded in culturally shared conceptual systems (Huszka *et al.*, 2024a; Huszka *et al.*, 2025). Concepts such as *air muka*, *malu*, *budi*, and *adat* are not merely lexical items but reflect underlying moral and social orientations that shape interactional expectations. In Indonesian contexts, metaphorical expressions such as *jam karet* (rubber time) similarly encode culturally specific attitudes towards time and social relations. Integrating such concepts into politeness instruction allows learners to move beyond formulaic politeness towards a more nuanced understanding of why certain strategies are preferred.

From a curricular perspective, the findings support calls for closer integration of language, culture, and pragmatics in foreign language education. Studies on BIPA have shown that culturally rich materials – whether drawn from folklore, cuisine, everyday practices, or digital media – enhance learner engagement and intercultural awareness (Aini *et al.*, 2025a). Politeness instruction can benefit from similar approaches, for example by embedding pragmatic analysis into authentic role-plays or digitally mediated scenarios. The increasing use of digital tools in BIPA instruction offers further opportunities to visualise and contextualise politeness norms through video-based interaction, multimodal materials, and even guided reflection (Aini *et al.*, 2025a).

Finally, the pedagogical implications of this study must be understood in relation to broader questions of language ideology and cultural

representation. As research on language diplomacy and internationalisation suggests, BIPA and BMPA are not neutral instructional enterprises but also vehicles of cultural projection and identity construction (Huszka *et al.*, 2024b). Teaching normative politeness strategies therefore entails a responsibility to present these norms critically and reflexively, avoiding essentialisation while acknowledging their social force. Learners should be encouraged to view politeness not as a fixed set of rules, but as a culturally situated system of expectations that can be analysed, compared, practiced, and negotiated.

In sum, the findings of this study indicate that politeness should be treated as a core component of communicative competence in tertiary-level instruction of Malay and Indonesian as foreign languages. Explicit, contrastive, and culturally informed instruction in politeness strategies can equip learners with the pragmatic sensitivity required for formal interaction and professional communication. By integrating insights from pragmatics and cultural studies, BIPA and BMPA programmes can more effectively prepare learners to navigate the normative demands of Malay- and Indonesian-speaking environments.

7. CONCLUSION

This article has set out to examine politeness strategies in standard Malay and standard Indonesian through a contrastive, theory-informed lens, with particular attention to normative expectations governing formal interaction. Rather than documenting the full range of pragmatic variation observable in everyday language use, the study has focused on how politeness is conventionally expected to be realised in *baku* (high standard) registers, which serve as reference varieties in education, administration, governance, and public discourse. This orientation reflects the realities of foreign language instruction, where learners are typically evaluated against idealised norms rather than against the entirety of native-speaker practice.

The analysis has demonstrated that Malay and Indonesian share a broadly comparable politeness orientation grounded in mitigation, respect for interlocutors, and sensitivity to face-threatening acts. At the same time, the study has shown that these shared principles are calibrated differently across the two languages. Standard Malay exhibits a stronger normative preference for hierarchy sensitivity, extended mitigation, indirect sequencing, and interactional framing, particularly in contexts involving refusal, disagreement, or unequal power relations. Standard Indonesian, while equally concerned with politeness and respect, permits

greater explicitness within a framework of conventionalised markers that support clarity and functionality. These differences are not oppositional but reflect distinct sociocultural and ideological configurations within closely related linguistic systems.

By integrating insights from face-based models of politeness, interactional principles, and culturally embedded concepts such as *air muka*, *malu*, and *budi bahasa*, the article has argued for an understanding of politeness as a normatively regulated system rather than as a collection of interchangeable strategies. The Malay-Indonesian case illustrates how standard language ideologies and historical trajectories shape pragmatic expectations in subtle yet consequential ways. Importantly, the findings caution against assumptions of pragmatic equivalence based on grammatical similarity or shared lexicon, highlighting the need for language-specific sensitivity even within closely related languages.

From an applied perspective, the study has underscored the pedagogical significance of politeness for tertiary-level instruction in Indonesian and Malay as foreign languages. The analysis suggests that pragmatic competence – particularly in relation to address practices, directive speech acts, apologies, refusals, and interactional framing – should be treated as a central component of communicative competence rather than as a peripheral cultural add-on. Explicit and culturally grounded instruction can help learners avoid pragmatic misalignment in formal interaction and better prepare them for academic and professional communication.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the scope and limitations of the present study. The analysis has been based on a synthesis of existing literature and has prioritised normative descriptions articulated in scholarly and pedagogical discourse. As such, it does not claim to provide an exhaustive account of politeness practices across all contexts, registers, or speaker groups, nor does it attempt to capture ongoing change or variation in informal usage. Future research could complement this approach with empirical studies examining how learners acquire and negotiate politeness norms, or how standard politeness expectations interact with regional or / and generational practices.

In conclusion, this article offers a contrastive overview of politeness strategies in standard Malay and standard Indonesian that is intended to inform both theoretical reflection and pedagogical practice. By foregrounding normative expectations and their cultural grounding, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of pragmatic competence in

closely related languages and provides a foundation for further research and curriculum development in BIPA and BMPA contexts.

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