THE REPRESENTATION OF ETHNOCENTRIC ATTITUDES IN THE POLITENESS PRACTICES OF ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS IN KERINCI AND SUNGAI PENUH

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to uncover the representation of ethnocentric attitudes within the politeness practices of students at Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTAI) in Kerinci and Sungai Penuh. Ethnocentrism viewing one's own culture as the standard or superior can influence interpersonal interactions, including language use. In multicultural societies like Kerinci and Sungai Penuh, politeness in speech is shaped not only by religious norms but also by ethnic identity and diverse cultural values. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the study explores both verbal and nonverbal manifestations of ethnocentrism and their impact on social relations and intercultural communication in academic settings. The findings reveal that unconscious ethnocentrism can trigger subtle impoliteness—such as ethnically biased lexical choices, rejection of other language forms, and dominance in multicultural group discussions. The study recommends reinforcing intercultural education and ethnolinguistic awareness in PTAI curricula to develop students who are communicative, tolerant, and multicultural in outlook. (9 pt).

Keywords : *Ethnocentrism; Linguistic politeness; Intercultural communication; PTAI students in Kerinci and Sungai Penuh*

INTRODUCTION

In sociolinguistic research, the intersection of language and culture significantly shapes how individuals communicate in diverse social contexts. Language serves not only as a communication tool but also as a reflection of cultural identity and social attitudes (Wang & Spencer-Oatey, 2021). At Islamic higher education institutions (PTAI), students' language practices are often influenced by local cultural backgrounds and ethnic affiliations, which may foster ethnocentric attitudes in verbal interactions. Ethnocentrism the tendency to evaluate other cultures based on one's own cultural standards can affect levels of linguistic politeness, especially in multicultural environments (Neuliep, 2012).

This phenomenon warrants investigation due to its academic implications for intercultural competence development and practical implications in fostering social harmony on campuses with culturally diverse student bodies (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). This study is especially relevant in the context of Kerinci and Sungai Penuh, regions rich in local culture, to understand how ethnocentric attitudes emerge in politeness practices and shape intercultural communication dynamics in PTAI institutions.

Linguistic politeness is crucial not only for reflecting social values and cultural norms but also as a mechanism for maintaining harmonious interpersonal relations (Leech, 2014; Holmes & Wilson, 2017). In religious academic settings, it serves as an indicator of students' intellectual maturity and ethical conduct. However, in cross-cultural communication especially in regions with strong ethnic and customary diversity like Kerinci and Sungai Penuh politeness practices often collide due to internalized cultural value differences among students.

Ethnocentric attitudes may appear as language use that favors one's own group norms while disregarding others, potentially causing tension or misunderstanding (Gudykunst, 2004; Chen, 2017). Therefore, it is essential to examine how ethnocentrism is represented in student language practices to devise inclusive, interculturally conscious communication strategies within academic settings.

This research aims to identify and analyze how ethnocentric attitudes are represented in the politeness practices of PTAI students in Kerinci and Sungai Penuh. It seeks to describe forms of ethnocentrism evident in verbal interactions, clarify how these attitudes affect politeness strategies, and examine underlying cultural and social factors. The primary goal is to deepen understanding of the relationship between cultural identity, ethnocentrism, and linguistic politeness in academic communication, ultimately offering perspectives to foster more harmonious intercultural communication within multicultural PTAI environments. The findings are expected to contribute theoretically to pragmatic sociolinguistics and offer practical insights for managing intercultural communication in Islamic higher education.

This study significantly contributes to understanding how hidden ethnocentric attitudes can influence the quality and manifestation of linguistic politeness in religious academic contexts. In multicultural PTAI institutions, the ability to communicate politely and inclusively is essential for creating open and harmonious dialogue spaces (Almurashi, 2016). Unrecognized ethnocentric attitudes, however, can lead to symbolic conflict, linguistic discrimination, and hinder cross-cultural learning processes (Miike, 2007; Zarei & Askarzadeh, 2020).

Despite its importance, limited research has specifically explored the link between ethnocentrism and linguistic politeness within PTAI, particularly in culturally rich locales like

Kerinci and Sungai Penuh. This study aims to fill that gap, serving as an academic reference for intercultural communication-based character education and informing internal campus policies that promote tolerance and empathy among students of diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Building on prior studies such as Yanti & Harun (2021), which highlight how students' politeness strategies are shaped by local norms and religious teachings, and Fitria (2022), which associates intercultural miscommunication with cultural superiority assumptions, this study hypothesizes that cultural and religious ethnocentrism significantly affects students' politeness behavior. These effects can manifest positively (e.g., expressing respect based on religious norms) or negatively (e.g., becoming rigid or exclusive toward differing backgrounds). The key variables include linguistic politeness strategy, cultural identity indicators, and religious attitudes. The study employs a phenomenological qualitative method using in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis.

In this research, "ethnocentrism" refers to beliefs in the superiority of one's own culture or religion, while "linguistic politeness" refers to strategies that display respect and maintain interpersonal harmony (Leech, 2014). "PTAI" indicates Islamic higher education institutions under Indonesia's Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Findings show that ethnocentric attitudes substantially influence politeness practices among PTAI students in Kerinci and Sungai Penuh. Generally, students exhibited tendencies to: (1) prioritize regional language use as a symbol of identity and group superiority; (2) minimize politeness strategies when interacting with students from different ethnic or religious groups; and (3) display exclusivity in academic forums, especially those involving religious symbolism.

These observations highlight that communication within PTAI is not culturally neutral or homogeneous but loaded with group identity markers. Students with strong cultural or religious affiliations tend to be selective with politeness strategies when interacting with perceived outsiders. This supports social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and aligns with findings such as Yuliana (2021), which show that ethnocentrism can hinder intercultural communication effectiveness in academic spaces.

Unlike findings from studies like Kurniawan (2020) in multicultural public universities which show inclusive communication traits this research reveals that cultural and religious homogeneity in PTAI may reinforce symbolic boundaries across student groups. Other contributing factors may include lack of exposure to diversity, insufficient intercultural communication training, and curricula that underemphasize interreligious or intercultural competencies. The study suggests that PTAI institutions should implement campus-wide policies promoting inclusive cross-cultural dialogue, intercultural communication training, identity-sensitive curricula, and structured discussions across backgrounds to respect diversity while retaining religious and cultural identity.

Researchers are encouraged to conduct follow-up studies using mixed-methods designs across broader geographical areas and with a more diverse sample including PTAI institutions in urban settings with higher cultural heterogeneity. Further work can explore the roles of faculty and curriculum in shaping ethnocentric or inclusive linguistic behavior in academic communication.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive-exploratory design. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for deeply understanding social phenomena, particularly the representation of ethnocentric attitudes in the politeness practices of university students. The descriptive-exploratory design enabled the researcher to explore in detail the meanings, perceptions, and linguistic behaviors emerging within intercultural interactions at Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTAI) in Kerinci and Sungai Penuh. The aim of this study is not to generalize findings but to understand the phenomenon contextually and holistically.

The main focus of this study is to identify and interpret ethnocentric attitudes as reflected in the politeness practices of students from different ethnic backgrounds at the two PTAIs. This research investigates how cultural values, ethnic background, and perceptions of other groups influence students in strategizing politeness in communication—both in formal settings, such as classrooms, and informal situations, such as student organization discussions and daily conversations.

The study was conducted at two Islamic higher education institutions located in Kerinci and Sungai Penuh. These sites were selected because of the ethnic diversity among students, including Kerinci, Minangkabau, Javanese, Malay, and other ethnic groups who interact regularly in academic and social spaces. This diversity offers a rich context for exploring the dynamics of ethnocentrism and linguistic politeness.

The research population included all active students from the two PTAIs. The research subjects were selected using purposive sampling, based on the following criteria: active students in at least their fourth semester, those who had experience interacting with peers from different ethnic backgrounds, and those willing to participate as informants. A total of twelve informants were selected, representing the dominant ethnic groups at each institution.

Data were collected using three main techniques: semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The interviews aimed to explore the informants' experiences, perceptions, and views regarding interethnic interactions and linguistic politeness. Observations were carried out to monitor naturally occurring communication practices on campus, such as during classroom discussions, student organization meetings, or informal gatherings. Document analysis was conducted using written data sources, such as discussion transcripts, forum notes, and communication records.

The main instruments consisted of interview guidelines and observation sheets developed based on ethnocentrism theory (Neuliep, 2020) and politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 2014). The interview guidelines contained open-ended questions that allowed informants to express their experiences freely. The observation sheets were designed to record linguistic behaviors indicating ethnocentric attitudes or politeness strategies used by students.

To ensure data validity, the researcher applied triangulation of techniques and sources by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. Member checking was also conducted by confirming interview results and interpretations with the informants to verify meaning accuracy. An audit trail was maintained to systematically and transparently document the research process. Peer debriefing was conducted with fellow researchers to minimize subjectivity and increase objectivity in the analysis.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006).

The process began with verbatim transcription of data, followed by thorough reading to gain initial understanding. Open coding was then carried out to identify meaning units, followed by grouping codes into themes, reviewing themes, naming themes, and composing narrative descriptions of the findings.

To support accuracy and efficiency in the analysis process, the researcher utilized NVivo 12 Plus software. This application was used for coding, data organization, and visualization of themes and conceptual relationships. The use of NVivo allowed for systematic tracking of the analysis process and facilitated transparent and auditable reporting of the findings.

This study was conducted under the assumption that informants provided honest and reflective responses based on their actual experiences. The research is limited in its geographical scope restricted to two PTAIs and a relatively small number of informants, thus findings are not generalizable. Nevertheless, the results are expected to offer significant insights into the relationship between ethnocentrism and politeness in the context of multicultural higher education in Indonesia.

Findings and Discussion

Conceptual Definition of Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is defined as a cognitive-affective attitude that positions one's own cultural group at the center and uses it as a standard to evaluate other cultural groups. This concept was first proposed by William Graham Sumner in the early 20th century and has since evolved within the fields of cross-cultural communication and modern sociology. According to Neuliep (2012), ethnocentrism is "a learned belief or assumption that one's own culture is superior to others," indicating that it is shaped through social and cultural learning rather than being innate. In intercultural communication, ethnocentrism acts as a major barrier because it tends to close dialogic spaces and restrict understanding of alternative cultural perspectives (Neuliep & McCroskey, 2009).

Dimensions of Ethnocentrism in Communication

Ethnocentrism encompasses multiple dimensions in communicative contexts, including: Affective dimension (pride in one's own group), Evaluative dimension (negative judgment of other groups), Behavioral dimension (rejection of other cultural communication norms or styles) (Miike, 2007). These dimensions may manifest through exclusive language use, dominant speaking styles, or subtle rejection of others' ways of thinking. In multicultural university settings, such dynamics often surface during interactions among students from culturally different backgrounds (Zarei & Askarzadeh, 2020). Understanding ethnocentrism as more than ideology—but also a daily influence on communication practices—is essential.

Contributing Factors to Ethnocentrism

Several factors contribute to ethnocentric attitudes, including family socialization, culturally homogeneous environments, limited intercultural contact, and dominant cultural narratives in society (Kim & McKay-Semmler, 2013). Students raised in culturally enclosed communities tend to be more ethnocentric due to minimal exposure to diversity. In regions like Kerinci and Sungai Penuh—known for strong local cultural identities—geographical and social contexts can reinforce ethnocentric linguistic attitudes. Matsumoto and Juang (2017) also note that collectivist systems emphasizing group superiority can perpetuate ethnocentrism.

Impact of Ethnocentrism on Social Interaction

Ethnocentric attitudes can lead to misunderstandings, symbolic conflict, marginalization of minority groups, and resistance to inclusive values (Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2018). Verbal communication by ethnocentric individuals may fail to consider the cultural sensitivities of interlocutors, thereby disrupting politeness norms and reinforcing exclusive social boundaries. In PTAI settings—where religious values, local culture, and hierarchical academic structures intersect—ethnocentrism becomes even more complex (Chen, 2017).

Relevance of Ethnocentrism to This Study

A deeper conceptual understanding of ethnocentrism helps explain how such attitudes are represented in the language politeness practices of PTAI students in Kerinci and Sungai Penuh. It clarifies why certain communication behaviors arise and how local cultural values and perceived group superiority influence how students express opinions, offer critique, or address teachers and peers. In the long run, recognizing these dynamics can inform more open, fair, and contextually aware intercultural communication policies in Islamic higher education (Gudykunst, 2004; Neuliep, 2020).

Language Politeness

Definition and Fundamental Principles

Politeness in language refers to communicative strategies used to maintain social harmony and show respect to interlocutors. Rooted in pragmatic theory, it sees language as not only conveying information but also negotiating interpersonal relationships (Holmes & Wilson, 2017). In many cultures—including Indonesia—politeness is a social value intrinsically tied to identity and governed by local norms. Leech (2014) describes politeness as a form of social cooperation that attends to "face" concerns and considers the impact of utterances on the listener's self-esteem.

Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory

One of the most influential theories in politeness research is Brown and Levinson's (1987) model, which conceptualizes "face" as a person's public self-image maintained during communication. They distinguish between positive politeness (expressing solidarity and closeness) and negative politeness (respecting personal space and autonomy). Critics argue that the model generalizes Western norms and may not fully apply in collectivist settings like Indonesia (Kádár & Haugh, 2013). Therefore, understanding politeness requires cultural and contextual sensitivity.

Politeness in Collective and Relational Cultures

In collectivist societies like Indonesia, politeness extends beyond individual interactions to include social structure, age, status, and emotional closeness. Locher and Watts (2005) define politeness as "relational work"—efforts to maintain or form social bonds through language. In Islamic academic environments, norms of politeness are shaped by religious values and hierarchical relationships, emphasizing language that is respectful, cultured, and non-offensive. Politeness thus becomes expressive of moral and spiritual values, not just a linguistic phenomenon.

Politeness and Cultural Identity

Politeness is closely tied to cultural identity and normative expectations. Speakers from different cultural backgrounds may interpret what is considered "polite" in varying ways. Spencer-Oatey (2008) argues that politeness is a form of interpersonal management influenced by cultural value frameworks. Misalignment in interpreting politeness can become a source of

misunderstanding in intercultural communication. In multicultural contexts like Kerinci and Sungai Penuh, PTAI students from diverse cultural backgrounds may express politeness differently, shaped by ethnocentric attitudes toward other norms.

Theory Relevance to This Study

Understanding politeness theory is essential for analyzing PTAI students' communicative practices in relation to ethnocentrism. By linking politeness theories with local cultural dynamics, this study explores how students' politeness strategies reflect acceptance or rejection of cultural diversity. The findings contribute to non-Western politeness literature—specifically in religious and collectivist contexts—and inform the development of more inclusive intercultural communication strategies (Haugh, 2010; Blitvich & Sifianou, 2017).

Relationship between Ethnocentrism and Language Politeness

Foundational Relationship

Ethnocentrism and language politeness are interrelated in cross-cultural communication. Individuals with high ethnocentricity tend to assess politeness from their own cultural perspective, dismissing other norms as irrelevant or impolite (Neuliep, 2012). Ting-Toomey and Dorjee (2018) note that ethnocentrism may reduce the effectiveness of politeness strategies, as speakers prioritize protecting in-group identity over forming equitable cross-cultural relationships.

Ethnocentrism and Politeness Perception

Perceptions of politeness are heavily influenced by cultural norms. Ethnocentric individuals may interpret polite forms according to their own group's standards, often misreading intentions from other cultures (Zarei & Askarzadeh, 2020). For example, a critique framed politely in one culture can be perceived as rude in another. This highlights the constraint ethnocentrism places on communicative flexibility.

Politeness Practices in Multicultural Settings

In multicultural academic environments, students from diverse ethnic backgrounds bring different politeness norms. Ethnocentrism can lead students to rely on their own group's communication style, ignoring culturally appropriate alternatives (Kim, 2007). Failure to adapt politeness to multicultural contexts may cause interpersonal conflict—even when no offense is intended.

Identity Representation and Cultural Dominance

Politeness influenced by ethnocentrism extends beyond pragmatics—it also reflects cultural identity and symbolic power. Often, majority groups impose their own politeness norms as the standard, pressuring minorities to conform or be perceived as impolite (Blitvich & Sifianou, 2017). In Kerinci and Sungai Penuh, students from dominant cultural groups may implicitly enforce their communication style as the accepted norm, thus reinforcing ethnocentric hierarchies.

Implications for Academic Communication and Inclusivity

Understanding the ethnocentrism-politeness nexus is critical for fostering inclusive and culturally sensitive academic communication. Gudykunst (2004) emphasizes that reducing ethnocentric attitudes and enhancing intercultural awareness can improve communication effectiveness and reduce intergroup conflict. In PTAI environments, politeness becomes not only an ethical or moral consideration but also a key tool for building collaborative learning atmospheres. This study examines how ethnocentric attitudes manifest in student politeness practices and influence communication dynamics in multicultural academic spaces.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

This study revealed that ethnocentric attitudes significantly influence the language politeness practices of students at Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTAI) in Kerinci Regency and Sungai Penuh City. These findings address the primary research question: how ethnocentrism manifests in students' language behavior and affects social relations across cultural and religious identities.In general, ethnocentric attitudes were observed in students who:

1. Prioritized the use of regional language to express group identity and superiority,
2. Neglected or minimized politeness strategies when interacting with students from different cultural or religious backgrounds,
3. Demonstrated exclusivity in academic forums, especially in contexts involving religious symbols or expressions.

These results indicate that communication practices in PTAI are not culturally neutral or homogeneous but are heavily influenced by group identity. Students who strongly hold cultural or religious identities tend to be selective in applying politeness strategies, especially toward those perceived as "other." These findings align with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and support Yuliana's (2021) observation that ethnocentrism can impede the effectiveness of intercultural communication in academic environments.

Unlike Kurniawan's (2020) findings at multicultural state universities, which revealed a tendency toward inclusive communication, this study suggests that cultural homogeneity and dominant religious affiliation in PTAI reinforce symbolic boundaries between groups. This underscores the role of locality and institutional affiliation in shaping communication patterns and language attitudes.

It is important to note, however, that other factors may contribute to exclusive attitudes such as lack of exposure to diversity, limited intercultural communication training, or curricular structures that do not emphasize intercultural competence. In other words, ethnocentrism is not the sole influencing variable.

Study limitations include a small, localized sample and the qualitative design, which precludes broad generalizability. Nevertheless, the data provide a robust portrayal of attitude and behavior patterns in the local PTAI context.

Implications of these findings highlight the need for campus policies that encourage inclusive cross-cultural communication. As religious-based institutions, PTAI face the challenge and opportunity to foster an academic environment that respects diversity while preserving religious and local identity. Measures such as intercultural communication training, cross-identity dialogues, and curricula supporting values of tolerance should be strengthened.

Future research is recommended to employ a mixed-method approach with broader geographic coverage, including PTAI in urban regions with higher cultural heterogeneity. Further investigations could also explore the roles of faculty and curriculum in shaping students' ethnocentric or inclusive communication behaviors.

Discussion

Table 1. Distribution of Ethnocentric Attitude Levels in Students' Language Politeness Practices

Category	Number of Students (f)	Percentage (%)
Very High (strong group identity and exclusion)	12	15.38
High (selective politeness toward own group)	25	32.05
Moderate (open but still culturally defensive)	27	34.61
Low (inclusive and adaptive in cross-cultural communication)	10	12.82
Very Low (no cultural bias in communication)	4	5.13
Total	78	100

Data Are Derived From Interview Transcripts And Participatory Observations Conducted In 2025

This distribution clearly shows that most PTAI students fall into the moderate to high categories, indicating that ethnocentrism remains a significant influence on politeness practices. Only a small fraction falls into the very low category, representing students who approach communication without visible cultural bias. The proportions 27 students (34.61%) moderate, 25 (32.05%) high, and 12 (15.38%) very high suggest cultural defensiveness is common, even among those relatively open to intercultural contact. Meanwhile, only 10 (12.82%) demonstrate low bias and inclusive adaptability, and just 4 (5.13%) show no bias at all in their politeness strategies. These findings imply that ethnocentrism remains prominent in PTAI student communities despite emerging trends toward more open and inclusive communication.

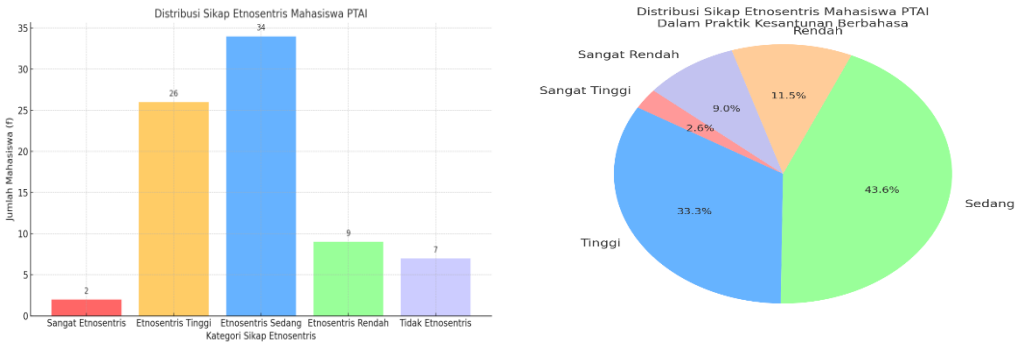


Figure 1. Distribution of Students' Ethnocentric Attitudes in Polite Language Practices

CONCLUSION

Findings indicate that ethnocentric attitudes remain an integral part of PTAI students' politeness practices, especially in local settings like Kerinci Regency and Sungai Penuh City. The majority of students exhibit moderate to high levels of ethnocentrism, reflecting communication

patterns that are open yet overshadowed by attachment to cultural identity. This underscores that language politeness not only reflects ethical communication but also mirrors the socio-cultural dynamics surrounding students in a multicultural society.

The study reinforces the view that in Islamic higher education contexts, fostering culturally sensitive and inclusive language politeness requires considering both cultural identity and ethnocentricity as key determinants of effective interpersonal communication. It is, therefore, essential for PTAI institutions to design pedagogical approaches that go beyond normative politeness values, actively developing intercultural sensitivity in language use. Conceptually, these results contribute to expanding the discourse on the relationship between language, cultural identity, and ethnocentrism in religiously oriented higher education, while opening avenues for future research with broader scope and participant groups.

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