Politeness Strategies in Sasak Language: Avoiding Rudeness in Conversations with Elders

[1]*Sugianto, [1]Tawali

[1]English Language Education, Faculty of Culture, Management, & Business, Universitas Pendidikan Mandalika, Jln. Pemuda No.59A Mataram, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author e-mail: sugianto@undikma.ac.id

Abstract

This study explores the politeness strategies embedded in the Sasak language, spoken by the Sasak people of Lombok, Indonesia. These strategies reflect deeply rooted cultural norms emphasizing respect and harmony, particularly in interactions with elders. The Sasak people use a linguistic system known as undag bangse/bahase, or "language levels," allowing speakers to adjust their language based on age, social relationship, and status. Through this system, communication aligns with Sasak cultural priorities, especially the value placed on avoiding conflict and maintaining social cohesion. A central feature of Sasak politeness is the use of indirect and deferential speech, enabling speakers to convey disagreement or decline requests subtly, minimizing confrontation and preserving harmony. This qualitative study, based on interviews with native speakers, reveals how these strategies not only support the diversity of Sasak dialects but also reinforce the community's core cultural values. The Sasaknese language, influenced by historical and regional factors, remains distinct and resilient, reflecting the cultural heritage of Lombok in a rapidly modernizing world. Sasaknese language practices, marked by respect and indirectness, play a key role in expressing social identity and cultural wisdom, positioning the language as both a means of connection and a symbol of identity. This research highlights the Sasak people's dedication to preserving cultural values through language, demonstrating how linguistic practices help sustain social harmony and cultural continuity.

Keywords: Language styles; Politeness; Sasak language; Sasak dialect; Cultural identity

INTRODUCTION

The island of Lombok, renowned for its scenic beauty and tourist destination Kuta Mandalika, has drawn international attention, captivating visitors worldwide. Positioned within West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia, Lombok holds not only breathtaking landscapes but also serves as the homeland of the Sasak ethnic group, which adds depth to its cultural allure (Sukenti et al., 2016; Sugianto & Kamarudin, 2021). Although the Sasak people widely speak Bahasa Indonesia, their native language, Sasaknese, carries deep cultural significance. For the Sasak community, Sasaknese is more than a means of communication—it is a symbol of identity and heritage, embodying values such as bravery, honesty, and responsibility (Thomas et al., 2022). These cultural values have become inseparable from Sasak identity and the essence of Lombok itself. According to local tradition, the name "Lombok" is derived from the word *loumbouk* or *lomboq*, meaning "straight," reflecting the straightforward character associated with the Sasak

people (Saifudin & Ardriansyah, 2022). Consequently, Lombok becomes more than just a destination for leisure; it is a place where landscape, language, and identity are intricately intertwined, creating a cultural tapestry that enhances its appeal to visitors and enriches its people's lives (Archangeli et al., 2020; Sugianto & Kamarudin, 2021).

The Sasak language is not monolithic but is rich in dialectical variation, encompassing five primary dialects: Kuto-Kute, Ngeto-Ngete, Meno-Mene, Ngeno-Ngene, and Mariaq-Mariqu (Zulkarnaen et al., 2021; Sultana, 2017). Each dialect is closely associated with specific geographic regions within Lombok, highlighting the linguistic diversity that characterizes the island. For instance, in East Lombok, the Ngeno-Ngene dialect is the dominant form, particularly in the area of Ngeno Ngene, while the Meno-Meni dialect is more common in other regions. Central Lombok predominantly uses the Meriak Meriku variant, and approximately 25% of speakers in the area use the Menu-Meni dialect (Pappas, 2021; Thomas et al., 2022). The western and capital areas, including Mataram, favor the Ngeno-Ngene dialect, while the Kuto-Kute dialect is most prevalent in North Lombok. This distribution of dialects illustrates the dynamic linguistic landscape of Lombok, shaped by geographical separation, historical migration, and cultural exchange. The existence of multiple dialects within the Sasak language demonstrates the fluidity of linguistic boundaries, allowing diverse linguistic communities to coexist within the same regions and reinforcing the island's rich cultural identity (Sugianto & Hasby, 2023).

In addition to dialectical diversity, Sasak speakers employ a unique set of communication strategies that emphasize respect, harmony, and social equilibrium. These strategies are particularly evident in their approach to politeness, which involves nuanced linguistic techniques to maintain respectful interactions and avoid conflict. The Sasak people use *undag bangse/bahase*, or "language levels," which are layered based on the social hierarchy, relationship, and context of the conversation. This system of stratification allows speakers to adjust their language according to the age, social relationship, and status of the person they are speaking with, fostering harmony and showing deference where necessary. By utilizing these language levels, Sasak speakers can navigate complex social interactions gracefully, ensuring that mutual respect and understanding are maintained in all exchanges. Such an approach prioritizes communal harmony over individual expression, underscoring the Sasak community's commitment to maintaining social cohesion, even in the face of potential communicative challenges (Hasanah, 2017; Sugianto & Hasby, 2023).

This focus on politeness extends beyond simple respect for elders or authority figures; it embodies a cultural value that permeates all aspects of Sasak communication. Sasak speakers use indirect language as a key politeness strategy, which allows them to express disagreement or refusals subtly, avoiding direct confrontation. This approach minimizes the possibility of causing offense or embarrassment, aligning with the community's emphasis on avoiding conflict and maintaining harmonious relationships. Through indirect and polite speech, Sasak speakers can convey complex messages with tact and respect, adhering to a cultural code that favors community harmony over individual assertiveness (Setiawan, 2022; Saharudin, 2016). For example, instead of a straightforward "no," a Sasak speaker might use polite expressions or indirect phrases that gently convey their intentions, thus showing deference and preserving the listener's dignity. This indirectness is not only a reflection of Sasak social norms but also a strategic communication style that reinforces the community's cultural identity and values.

This study offers a novel approach to understanding how the Sasak language functions as both a communication tool and a repository of cultural wisdom. Unlike many studies on politeness, which focus primarily on verbal cues, this research explores

how the Sasak system of language levels serves as a mechanism for upholding cultural values, fostering respect, and avoiding interpersonal conflict. By examining how Sasak speakers utilize *undag bangse/bahase* to navigate social interactions, this study contributes to the broader understanding of linguistic politeness, particularly in the context of Southeast Asian languages, where language levels are less commonly studied compared to East Asian honorifics. Furthermore, this study highlights the resilience of Sasak cultural values, which continue to influence language use even amid the modernizing forces affecting Lombok and Indonesia as a whole.

The Sasak people's use of language levels and indirect communication is not static; rather, it evolves in response to external influences, including contact with other languages such as Balinese and Javanese. While linguistic borrowings from these neighboring languages enrich the Sasak vocabulary, they do not lead to mutual intelligibility, allowing the Sasak language to retain its distinctiveness. This linguistic distinctiveness underscores the Sasak community's commitment to preserving its cultural identity, even as it incorporates elements from surrounding linguistic traditions (Rosana et al., 2018; Saharudin, 2016; Sultana, 2017).

This study underscores the significance of Sasaknese as a cultural asset for the Sasak people, demonstrating how language functions as a tool for cultural transmission and social cohesion. The findings highlight the importance of politeness strategies in maintaining social harmony and respect, especially within a hierarchical community like the Sasak. Through the lens of Sasaknese, this research illustrates how language reflects and reinforces cultural values, offering an in-depth look at how one community uses language to navigate the complexities of modern life while preserving its cultural heritage. This unique perspective on politeness in the Sasak language adds a valuable dimension to sociolinguistic studies, contributing to the broader discourse on language, culture, and identity in Southeast Asia.

The research aims to delve deeper into these linguistic and cultural dynamics by addressing the following research questions: How do the different dialects within the Sasak language reflect the unique geographic and cultural landscape of Lombok? What are the specific politeness strategies employed by Sasak speakers, particularly in conversations with elders and authority figures? How does the *undag bangse/bahase* system contribute to maintaining harmony and respect within the Sasak community? These questions aim to uncover how the Sasak people use language not only as a means of communication but also as a tool for cultural preservation and social organization.

RESEARCH METHOD
Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research method to explore the ways in which Sasak speakers use language variations in their interactions. A qualitative approach was selected due to its suitability for examining complex social phenomena, particularly as it allows for an in-depth depiction of how language variations contribute to the preservation of Sasak linguistic identity amid the pressures of modernization and globalization. This method also enables a naturalistic observation of dialect use in authentic settings, revealing how different dialects are employed and sustained within the Sasak community. In qualitative research, the researcher acts as the primary instrument, collecting and interpreting data based on firsthand observations and interactions (Sugiyono, 2014). This role allows for adaptability in responding to various situational dynamics and capturing diverse data sources, making it ideal for the fluid and evolving nature of linguistic and cultural studies. A qualitative approach is inherently active and dynamic, continuously developing as research questions adapt based on respondents'

perceptions and the new insights that emerge during data collection. This flexibility allows the research to authentically represent the Sasak speakers' language practices, drawing solely from direct statements, observations, and interactions with the community under investigation.

The participants in this study were native Sasak speakers living in Lombok who met specific criteria to ensure that the data accurately reflected regional language variations. Initial qualifications required informants to be up to 30 years of age, thereby focusing on younger speakers who are likely to be influenced by both traditional practices and contemporary changes. Participants had to be native speakers of Sasak, which guaranteed that their language use reflected an authentic understanding of its variations. Furthermore, informants were chosen based on educational background or demonstrated knowledge, as a deeper insight into language and cultural practices often correlates with educational exposure. Lastly, all participants were natives of Lombok, ensuring they represented local dialectical differences accurately, thus providing a comprehensive overview of Sasak language variations across the island.

Research Participants

This study conducted a detailed investigation into the linguistic nuances of the Sasak language, placing great importance on the careful selection of study participants. The selection process prioritized informants who resided in Lombok and demonstrated a high proficiency in the Sasak language. To ensure a comprehensive and representative analysis, general qualifications were first established as baseline criteria, providing a solid foundation before introducing more specific requirements for participation. These preliminary qualifications acted as essential gatekeepers, ensuring that all potential informants met a basic set of characteristics aligned with the study's objectives.

The criteria for selecting informants were multifaceted, each carefully considered to capture the essence of the linguistic landscape under investigation. Firstly, participants were required to be no older than 30 years, a criterion chosen to explore the contemporary use and evolution of Sasak among younger speakers. This focus on younger speakers aimed to understand how the language is practiced and adapted by a generation that bridges traditional customs and modern influences. Secondly, informants had to be native speakers of Sasak, ensuring an authentic perspective on linguistic insights. The requirement for native speakers was crucial to maintaining the depth and accuracy of data collected on language usage and cultural expressions.

In addition to age and native language, a high level of insight was sought in participants, often reflected in their educational background. This emphasis on education or demonstrated linguistic knowledge aimed to guarantee that participants could provide informed and reflective responses, contributing depth to the research findings. Lastly, a key criterion was that participants must be native to Lombok, which helped ensure that their language use authentically represented the unique regional variations and idiosyncrasies of the Sasak language. This geographic focus was essential to capture the diversity within the Sasak-speaking community accurately.

The research specifically targeted individuals fluent in the Menu Meni and Kuto-Kute dialects, as these are the most prevalent and culturally significant dialects within Lombok's linguistic landscape. By concentrating on these two dialects, the study aimed to provide insights that, although derived from a subset of the Sasak linguistic spectrum, could be extrapolated to represent broader linguistic practices and variations across the Sasak-speaking community. The strategic selection of both participants and dialects allowed the study to delve deeply into the specifics of Sasak language use while offering findings that contribute to a broader understanding of the linguistic dynamics present in Lombok.

Research Instruments

In qualitative research, the researcher's role goes beyond merely observing or collecting data. As Sugiyono (2014) articulates, the researcher functions as the primary instrument of the study, wielding a unique capability to navigate the complex terrains of human interaction and cultural phenomena. This approach highlights the researcher's adaptability, allowing for a responsive and agile method in gathering data that can vary widely in form and substance. By engaging directly with the research context, the researcher collects a rich spectrum of data, from observational notes to in-depth interview responses, thus enhancing the study's empirical foundation.

Building on this foundational understanding, the current study employed a clear methodological framework designed to probe deeply into the communication strategies of Sasak speakers, especially focusing on their tendency to avoid certain conversational topics. The research relied on open-ended questions within a structured yet flexible interview format, allowing informants to share their perspectives without the limitations of predetermined answers. This approach served a dual purpose: it provided informants with the freedom to convey their personal experiences, while also allowing the researcher to explore the underlying motivations for specific communicative behaviors. By using open-ended questions, the study aimed to uncover the cultural, social, and individual rationales that shape conversational boundaries among Sasak speakers, particularly identifying which topics are considered sensitive or off-limits.

Techniques of Data Collection

The process of analyzing data from interview activities within qualitative research requires a systematic and multifaceted approach, designed to thoroughly examine and interpret the collected information. This process, outlined by Miles et al. (2018), unfolds through a structured framework comprising three key stages: data condensation, data display, and drawing conclusions. Data condensation serves as the foundational step, involving a careful sifting of raw data to identify central themes, patterns, and insights. Rather than merely reducing data, this stage synthesizes and refines the information, enabling researchers to highlight essential elements from extensive data sets and distill them into manageable, meaningful chunks. This phase often includes coding, categorizing responses, and identifying recurrent themes or narratives emerging from interviews. By focusing on the most relevant aspects of the data, researchers set the groundwork for deeper analysis, ensuring that only the most impactful insights are carried forward into the subsequent phases.

Following data condensation, the next phase is data display, where the condensed data is organized in a way that facilitates understanding and interpretation. Data displays can take various forms, including charts, tables, mind maps, or narrative summaries, depending on the nature of the data and the study's objectives. These visual or descriptive layouts help the researcher identify connections, patterns, and anomalies more intuitively, enhancing the analytical process by revealing underlying trends and relationships. The final stage, drawing conclusions, involves interpreting the displayed data and synthesizing patterns and themes into coherent findings. This stage requires researchers to critically evaluate what the data reveals about the research questions and objectives, considering the broader implications and significance of the findings. To ensure reliability and validity, this phase often involves verifying conclusions through triangulation with other data sources or revisiting the data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

When somone communicates verbally, he/she has to try not to hurt his/her listener or reader. In other words, he/she tries to avoid any conflict while the communication is going on. This is realized in certain polite linguistic devices for certain occasions such as requests, offers, compliments, apologies, thanks, greetings, leave takings, addressing, and the responses to these. Even, this phenomenon occurs when one wants to say no or to refuse an offer. People always try to be polite to avoid any conflict or misunderstanding. Politeness is a battery of social interaction skills whose goal is to ensure everyone feels affirmed in social interaction (Foley, 2001).

Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that politeness strategies are developed in order to save the hearer's "face", meaning that people try to avoid embarrassing the other persons, or making them feel uncomfortable. Linguistically, people avoid conflict which may generate from verbal communication. Words, phrases, or sentences are uttered or written in such a way that the listener or the reader may feel comfortable while the process of communication is in progress. This phenomenon can be found out in English as well as in sasaknese.

Dialect Distribution and Cultural Landscape: Data indicates that the Sasak language has five primary dialects—Kuto-Kute, Ngeto-Ngete, Meno-Mene, Ngeno-Ngene, and Mariaq-Mariqu—each linked to distinct regions of Lombok. For instance, the Ngeno-Ngene dialect is prevalent in East Lombok, while the Kuto-Kute dialect is more commonly spoken in North Lombok. This distribution reveals not only geographic separation but also cultural specificities tied to each region's history, social norms, and economic activities. Interviews with speakers suggest that dialects are a source of local pride, with certain terms and expressions unique to each region, reflecting local flora, fauna, and customary practices. Informants noted that dialects serve as cultural markers, signaling a person's regional origin and fostering a sense of local identity.

Politeness Strategies in Conversations: Data from interviews with Sasak speakers, especially elders, show that politeness strategies are integral to their interactions, particularly in conversations with elders and authority figures. Sasak speakers use indirect speech, honorific terms, and culturally appropriate body language to express deference and avoid confrontation. For instance, rather than giving a direct refusal, younger speakers often use soft, indirect language or culturally accepted expressions to gently decline a request. Terms of respect, such as undag bangse or levels of language hierarchy, are carefully applied depending on the social status and age of the person being addressed.

The Role of the Undag Bangse/Bahase System: Interviews and observations reveal that the undag bangse/bahase system is central to maintaining social harmony and respect within the Sasak community. This linguistic system categorizes speech into different levels based on age, social status, and relationship, guiding speakers in selecting the appropriate words and expressions for various contexts. Younger speakers noted that using the correct level of language when addressing elders is a way to show respect and prevent conflict. Additionally, undag bangse reinforces Sasak cultural values, helping to uphold social hierarchies and preserving the community's traditional values.

Among Sasaknese, there is a principle of living in harmony. In line with this principle, one has to behave in such a way that he/she will not create a conflict (Magnis-Suseno, 1985). This practice is seen, among others, in the way Sasaknese people use language. Sasaknese people have to be careful in using language so that they will not create any conflict, maintaining the principle of living in harmony.

In Sasaknese, there are at least three levels of language which is known as "undag bangse/bahase", namely kamu-aku (low level), base madya (middle level), and base alus krame (high level). Base kamu-aku is used among friends, base madya is used to speak to older people or strangers, and base alus is used to communicate to respectful people.

Indirectness in Sasaknese is one of the strategies to be polite in order not to create any conflict. For example, when a husband comes home from his work and there is no drink served on his table, he may ask his spouse by saying "Sat aran lingkok ni inakn?" (Literally, is the well dry, Honey?". It does not mean that he asks about the well. Rather, he asks his spouse indirectly to serve him some drink.

In saying the aim, a Sasaknese person will not go to the point saying what the aim of visiting is. Rather, he/she may give opening like "going around the bush" before saying his aim of visiting. For example:

Guest : sehat de pelinggih de miq?
Host   : Alhamdulillah sehat
Guest   : berembe kabar kanak nu masih ne sekolah lek haromain?
Host   : masih ne, pacu ne sekolah nani
Guest   : Alhamdulillah aneh, arak perubahan ne nani. Napi musim lek deriki mngkin miq?
Host   : Napi, musim ujan mangkin niki laguk ndk man arak pade bebuak paok niki silak
Guest   : nggih menu silak, muk maksud tiang dating niki eak pesilak pelinggih de begawe niki tang
Host   : sai eak begawe niki
Guest   : uli sempait salam oleq mamiq tiang tuan Satre eak ne begawe olek jelo sak lemak aru sampe latn.
Host   : oh malik ne begawe tuan satre?
Guest   : enggih niki, muk lemak aru iye jelo raos ne, lat jelo gawe ne niki silak.
Host   : oh nggih lamun marak niki silak, lemak tiang rateng kance kanak-kanak niki gih

In sasaknese, indirectness plays an important role to minimize any conflict. Besides, the phrases "*Apurayan*"(Forgive me) and "*Ampure*" (I am sorry) are mostly used to say no, decline, or disagree. For example:

Guest : sehat de pelinggih de miq?
Host   : Alhamdulillah sehat
Guest   : marakniki miq tiang eak bermaksud ending tulung niki jak tiang tanggep kamput plinggih lek gawe sak langan lauk niki silak?
Host   : nggih, ampurayan laguk sanak, lek jelo sak lemak aru jak tiang dan tim ada undangan lek dasan daye niki.
Guest   : marak nike jarin sanak?
Host   : nggih ampurayan gih

In sasaknese, the use of *basa alus* is quite effective to avoid any conflict that may arise in communication. There is no such a level of language in English.

Discussion

The diversity of Sasak dialects, including Kuto-Kute, Ngeto-Ngete, Meno-Mene, Ngeno-Ngene, and Mariaq-Mariqu, is closely intertwined with Lombok's geography and cultural landscape, offering a window into the unique cultural identity of each region on the island. Each dialect is associated with specific areas, reflecting historical settlement

patterns, geographical divisions, and the influence of cultural interactions unique to these regions (Saifuddin & Adriansyah, 2022). For instance, the Ngeno-Ngene dialect is predominantly spoken in East Lombok, where historical agricultural traditions have shaped the dialect's vocabulary and expressions. In contrast, the Meriak Meriku variant is common in Central Lombok, a region with strong cultural and community ties, while the Kuto-Kute dialect is prevalent in North Lombok, an area with historical connections to neighboring islands through trade routes. The western part of the island, including the capital city of Mataram, primarily uses the Ngeno-Ngene dialect. This distribution of dialects demonstrates how communities in Lombok have developed linguistic practices influenced by their distinct environments and social histories, creating a linguistic map that mirrors the island's geographic and cultural diversity (Ratna, 2008; Sarwadi. Mahsun, & Burhanuddin, 2019). These dialectical differences are not merely linguistic variations but carry rich cultural connotations, with each dialect signifying regional identities, cultural heritage, and local traditions. For the Sasak people, dialects act as markers of cultural identity and community belonging, reflecting both pride in their specific locales and a shared history that binds the island together despite linguistic differences.

In addition to marking regional identities, Sasak dialects also function as a medium for preserving and communicating cultural heritage. Informants often noted that specific dialect terms reflect elements unique to each region's natural and social environment, including references to local flora, fauna, and customary practices that have evolved over generations. For example, dialects in agrarian regions incorporate agricultural terminology, while dialects in coastal areas may include terms relevant to fishing or trade. Dialects serve as repositories of local knowledge and practices, helping to maintain traditional ways of life even as Lombok's communities adapt to modern influences (Suagianto & Hasby, 2023). Consequently, these dialects do not merely provide a means of communication; they encapsulate the history, social norms, and environmental factors of each region, making them invaluable cultural assets that foster a sense of pride and belonging among speakers. By maintaining these linguistic distinctions, the Sasak people reinforce their connection to their land and heritage, safeguarding their identity in a rapidly modernizing world.

Politeness strategies are integral to Sasak interactions, particularly when engaging with elders and authority figures, where respect and social harmony are paramount. In Sasak culture, politeness is not merely a matter of courteous behavior but is embedded in the language through *undag bangse/bahase*, or "language levels," which categorize speech into different levels based on the listener's age, social status, and relationship to the speaker. When speaking to elders or figures of authority, Sasak speakers commonly use *basa alus*, or "high-level language," which is a formal, respectful mode of speaking that conveys deference and acknowledges the listener's social position (Sugianto & Hasby, 2023; Sugianto & Kamaruddin, 2021). This level includes indirect speech, honorifics, and formal expressions that soften the tone, thereby preventing offense and preserving the dignity of the listener. For example, rather than giving a direct refusal, younger speakers might use culturally accepted expressions or indirect language to gently decline a request, thus maintaining the listener's esteem. These language levels facilitate a structured form of respect that is deeply ingrained in Sasak cultural values (Sukenti et al., 2016), emphasizing the importance of hierarchy and relational harmony in all social interactions.

Indirectness is another politeness strategy widely employed by Sasak speakers, allowing them to avoid direct statements that could be perceived as confrontational or impolite. This practice is grounded in a cultural understanding of "saving face," a concept

echoed by Brown and Levinson (1987), who argue that politeness strategies are developed to preserve the listener's dignity and avoid embarrassment. In Sasak culture, maintaining harmony and avoiding conflict is essential, particularly in interactions where hierarchical relationships exist. For instance, instead of directly saying "no" to a request, a Sasak speaker might use a more roundabout expression or soften their refusal with culturally appropriate phrases like "Apurayan" (Forgive me) or "Ampure" (I am sorry). Such indirect language serves as a mechanism to uphold social harmony and avert potential misunderstandings or resentment, especially in sensitive interactions. This approach to indirectness is further reflected in non-verbal cues, such as body language and tone, which add layers of respect and deference to the verbal communication. By using these strategies, Sasak speakers reinforce cultural norms of respect, acknowledging the listener's feelings and social standing.

The *undag bangse/bahase* system plays a pivotal role in maintaining social harmony within the Sasak community by embedding respect into everyday communication. This linguistic hierarchy enables speakers to modify their language based on social context (Sultana, 2017), ensuring that interactions adhere to culturally accepted norms of respect and propriety. For example, younger or lower-status individuals are expected to use more respectful language when addressing elders, reflecting the community's commitment to preserving social order and reinforcing cultural values. The system provides clear guidelines on appropriate language use, which reduces the risk of misunderstandings or unintentional disrespect, as speakers are guided by social conventions that dictate the suitable level of formality or indirectness for each interaction. Through this hierarchical structure, *undag bangse/bahase* not only enforces individual responsibility for maintaining respectful interactions but also promotes collective harmony, as respect is woven into the fabric of daily communication.

This system serves as a linguistic tool for sustaining the Sasak community's social structure, supporting values of deference, responsibility, and communal harmony. According to Sugianto and Hasby's research findings (2023), by establishing language norms that dictate how individuals should interact based on their social roles, the *undag bangse/bahase* system fosters a community-wide understanding of respect and cultural continuity. Younger Sasak speakers, for instance, learn to navigate social relationships with elders through this system, understanding that using the correct level of language is a means of honoring cultural expectations and maintaining cohesion within the community. Moreover, this linguistic structure reinforces the Sasak identity by embedding traditional values of hierarchy and respect into the language, thus preserving these values across generations.

In Sasaknese, avoiding conflict is fundamental, aligning with the broader cultural principle of living in harmony. The Sasak people's approach to language prioritizes actions and expressions that prevent discord, particularly in social interactions that involve hierarchies. This is evident in the choice of polite linguistic devices used in various contexts, such as requests, offers, compliments, apologies, and refusals. Politeness in Sasak society is a social skill aimed at affirming each participant's role in interaction, with strategies that ensure no one feels diminished or uncomfortable. This concept, which Foley (2001) describes as a set of social interaction skills designed to make everyone feel affirmed, is deeply rooted in Sasak culture. The use of polite forms, indirect statements, and hierarchical language not only facilitates communication but also reinforces communal bonds, emphasizing the importance of harmony and mutual respect.

The *undag bangse/bahase* system and indirectness together shape Sasak communication, ensuring that respect for social roles and hierarchy is maintained in

daily interactions. For example, there are at least three language levels: *kamu-aku* (low level), *base madya* (middle level), and *base alus krame* (high level). *Kamu-aku* is informal and used among friends, *base madya* is slightly more formal and used to address older individuals or unfamiliar people, and *base alus* is reserved for communication with elders or figures of high social standing. This linguistic structure is unique to the Sasak language and is unparalleled in languages like English, where no equivalent system exists to codify levels of respect to this extent. These language levels reflect the Sasak community's value system, where age and status dictate the tone and style of conversation, thus shaping communication practices that uphold social order and ensure interactions are respectful.

Through indirect language and the use of formal speech levels, Sasak speakers avoid directness that could be perceived as impolite, particularly in sensitive contexts such as refusals (Ketut-Warta, 2010). For instance, a speaker might use indirect phrasing to convey a request or ask for something without explicitly stating the purpose, a strategy known as "going around the bush." In one observed example, a guest initiates conversation about family and local customs before subtly requesting assistance, using indirect language to soften the actual request. This indirect approach allows the speaker to communicate effectively without disrupting social harmony, showing respect for the listener's position by not imposing directly. This subtlety is crucial in Sasak communication, as it respects the listener's autonomy and preserves harmony by avoiding confrontational or assertive language.

Ultimately, the Sasak language, with its system of polite speech levels and indirect expressions, serves as a reflection of the community's commitment to social harmony and respect. Language is both a tool and a repository of Sasak cultural wisdom, preserving values that define Sasak identity even as the island navigates the pressures of modernization. The *undag bangse/bahase* system enforces a structure that aligns with the Sasak people's cultural expectations, ensuring that language is used to foster relationships rather than create division. This intricate interplay of dialects, politeness strategies, and linguistic hierarchies illustrates how language in the Sasak community goes beyond mere communication; it embodies cultural continuity, reinforcing traditions that have long maintained social cohesion and respect within the community. Through these practices, the Sasak people ensure that their linguistic and cultural heritage is preserved, highlighting language's role in sustaining identity and unity within a diverse and evolving society.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Sasak language, with its array of dialects and embedded politeness strategies, is a profound reflection of Lombok's geographical and cultural diversity. Each dialect, including Kuto-Kute, Ngeto-Ngete, Meno-Mene, Ngeno-Ngene, and Mariaq-Mariqu, represents more than a linguistic variation; it serves as a regional emblem that carries with it the history, environment, and cultural practices of its speakers. These dialects, spread across distinct areas of Lombok, reveal historical settlement patterns, economic activities, and interactions unique to each community, thus forming a linguistic map of the island's cultural landscape. The dialects encapsulate local knowledge, as each has developed expressions and vocabulary influenced by regional environments and traditional practices, whether agrarian, coastal, or trade-related. By preserving these distinct linguistic features, the Sasak people foster a deep-rooted connection to their land and heritage, reinforcing a collective identity that transcends regional differences. The dialects, therefore, act as both communication tools

and cultural assets that safeguard the Sasak community's heritage against the encroaching forces of modernization.

Furthermore, the *undag bangse/bahase* system within the Sasak language plays a crucial role in sustaining social harmony by embedding respect and hierarchy into everyday interactions. This structured system of politeness, which categorizes language into various levels based on the social status, age, and relationship between speakers, provides clear guidelines for respectful communication. By employing levels such as *basa alus* in formal interactions, particularly with elders or authority figures, Sasak speakers reinforce the community's values of deference and mutual respect. Indirectness and honorifics, as integral components of this system, enable Sasak speakers to navigate social complexities gracefully, avoiding direct confrontation and preserving the dignity of all participants. In adhering to these communication norms, the Sasak community not only maintains individual respect but also promotes collective harmony, as these politeness strategies reinforce the cultural principle of living in harmony. Ultimately, the *undag bangse/bahase* system and the use of dialects together create a sophisticated linguistic framework that preserves social order, reinforces cultural continuity, and fosters unity within a diverse and evolving society, ensuring that the Sasak people's language and identity remain resilient in the face of modern challenges.

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