

Politeness Marker Change in Bima-Dompu: A Sociopragmatic Analysis of *Ta* from Lectures' Perspectives

Ismail^{1*}, Nur Wahyuni², Muh. Nasoha³

^{1,2,3} STKIP Yapis Dompu, Dompu, Indonesia

*Corresponding author email: ismaildelembo@gmail.com

Abstract

Penelitian ini mengkaji pergeseran penggunaan “ta” sebagai penanda kesopanan dalam bahasa Bima dan Dompu dari perspektif sosiopragmatik. Dalam bahasa lokal tersebut, “ta” berfungsi sebagai morfem infleksional yang mengekspresikan kesopanan, penghormatan, dan hierarki sosial dalam komunikasi. Namun, pengamatan terbaru menunjukkan bahwa penutur muda semakin sering mengganti bentuk-bentuk sopan seperti *iyota*, *madata*, dan *buneta* dengan ungkapan yang lebih informal seperti *iyora*, bahkan ketika berinteraksi dengan dosen atau orang yang lebih tua. Fenomena ini mencerminkan perubahan pola komunikasi serta melemahnya kesadaran terhadap norma-norma kebahasaan tradisional. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan sosiopragmatik. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan dosen di STKIP Yapis Dompu dan dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa menurunnya penggunaan “ta” dipengaruhi oleh komunikasi digital, pola interaksi informal, perubahan persepsi terhadap hierarki, serta berkurangnya paparan terhadap nilai-nilai budaya lokal di kalangan generasi muda. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa melemahnya penggunaan “ta” tidak hanya merepresentasikan perubahan linguistik, tetapi juga potensi degradasi nilai budaya yang terkandung dalam bahasa Bima dan Dompu.

Kata Kunci: Penanda Kesopanan; Sosiopragmatik; Bahasa Bima dan Dompu; Pergeseran Bahasa; Nilai Budaya

Abstrak

This study investigates the shift in the use of “ta” as a politeness marker in Bima and Dompu languages from a sociopragmatic perspective. In these local languages, “ta” functions as an inflectional morpheme expressing politeness, respect, and social hierarchy in communication. However, recent observations show that younger speakers increasingly replace polite forms such as iyota, madata, and buneta with less formal expressions such as iyora, even when interacting with lecturers or older people. This phenomenon reflects changing communication patterns and weakening awareness of traditional linguistic norms. This study employed a qualitative method with a sociopragmatic approach. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with lecturers at STKIP Yapis Dompu and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that the declining use of “ta” is influenced by digital communication, informal interaction patterns, changing perceptions of hierarchy, and reduced exposure to local cultural values among younger generations. The study concludes that the weakening use of “ta” represents not only linguistic change but also a potential erosion of cultural values embedded in Bima and Dompu languages.

Keywords: Politeness Marker; Sociopragmatics; Bima and Dompu Language; Language Shift; Cultural Values

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I. PENDAHULUAN

Language is not merely a tool for communication; it is also a reflection of cultural values, social norms, and interpersonal relationships within a speech community. In many traditional

societies, linguistic forms are closely tied to expressions of respect, hierarchy, and social distance. This is particularly evident in the local languages of Bima and Dompu, where specific linguistic elements function as markers of politeness and social alignment.

One important feature in these languages is the use of “*ta*”, which functions as an inflectional morpheme attached to lexical items such as *iyo* (yes), *mada* (I), and *bune* (what/where), forming expressions like *iyota*, *madata*, and *buneta*. While the addition of “*ta*” does not change the propositional meaning of the utterance, it significantly alters its social meaning by signaling politeness and respect toward the interlocutor. In this sense, “*ta*” operates as a politeness marker that encodes cultural values of respect and deference, particularly in hierarchical interactions.

From a sociopragmatic perspective, such features play a crucial role in maintaining social harmony. Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that politeness is fundamental in human interaction as it helps manage social relationships and mitigate potential face-threatening acts. Similarly, Leech (2014) emphasizes that politeness principles function to sustain social equilibrium and reinforce mutual respect in communication. More recent studies further highlight that politeness markers are deeply embedded in cultural systems and ritualized interaction patterns, functioning as essential elements of socially appropriate communication, (Kadar & House, 2020).

In the context of Bima and Dompu, previous studies have demonstrated that language is closely linked to cultural identity and social values. Suryaningsih et al., (2025) argue that the Bima language reflects local cultural norms, including respect, kinship, and traditional values, indicating that language serves not only communicative but also cultural and social functions. Similarly, Soro, (2021) highlights that respect in Bima-Dompu communities is deeply embedded in daily interaction and is manifested through linguistic practices. This issue is very crucial to be taught to the next generations, (Ismail, Rusdin, & Prayudi, 2025; Ismail, 2022; Ismail, Rusdin, & Othman, 2025)

From a sociolinguistic perspective, research has also shown that social hierarchy and respect are encoded in linguistic systems such as forms of address. Jannah, (2018) demonstrates that variations in address forms in the Bima language reflect differences in social status and interpersonal relationships. This finding supports the idea that linguistic forms in Bima and Dompu inherently function to regulate social interaction.

Furthermore, studies on meaning in Bima language reveal that linguistic elements often carry nuanced and context-dependent meanings. Adawiyah, (2023), using the Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach, shows that even basic lexical items are shaped by cultural and contextual interpretations. Likewise, Ismail et al., (2022) found that idiomatic expressions in Bima and Dompu languages, such as *kalembo ade*, serve multiple communicative functions, including expressing politeness, empathy, and social advice depending on the context.

These findings collectively suggest that politeness and respect are deeply embedded within the linguistic system of Bima and Dompu languages. However, despite this strong cultural-linguistic foundation, recent observations in educational settings indicate a noticeable shift in language use, particularly among younger speakers. In daily interactions, forms such as *iyora*, which are traditionally associated with informal or equal-status communication, are increasingly used in contexts that require politeness and respect, such as interactions with lecturers. This phenomenon occurs repeatedly and reflects a broader pattern of change rather than isolated instances.

This shift can be understood as part of a wider sociolinguistic transformation influenced by changing social norms and communication practices. Holmes & Wilson, (2022) notes that

language variation and change are closely linked to social change, including evolving attitudes toward hierarchy and authority. In addition, contemporary studies indicate that digital communication environments tend to reduce the use of politeness strategies and normalize more direct forms of expression (Firdaus et al., 2025; Yanti et al., 2026; Nisa et al., 2025). This trend may contribute to the weakening of linguistic features that traditionally encode respect.

The declining use of “ta” therefore represents more than a linguistic variation; it signals a potential erosion of cultural values embedded in language use. In the context of Bima and Dompu societies, where respect and politeness are central to social interaction, such changes raise important concerns about the sustainability of these values in contemporary communication.

Despite the importance of this issue, studies focusing specifically on morphological politeness markers in local languages, particularly in Eastern Indonesia, remain limited. Previous research has largely focused on cultural values, semantics, and forms of address, leaving a gap in understanding how specific linguistic elements such as “ta” function and shift in contemporary usage.

Based on this background, this study aims to investigate the shift in the use of “ta” as a politeness marker in Bima and Dompu languages from a sociopragmatic perspective, focusing on lecturers’ perspectives. As individuals who regularly interact with younger speakers in educational contexts, lecturers are well positioned to observe patterns of language use and evaluate their social implications. The objectives of this study are to examine lecturers’ perceptions of the use of “ta” as a politeness marker among younger speakers, to identify the extent to which the use of “ta” has shifted in contemporary communication, and to analyze the sociocultural factors contributing to this shift. By addressing these objectives, this study contributes to the field of sociopragmatics and to the broader effort of preserving local linguistic features that embody cultural values and social ethics.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

A. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design with a sociopragmatic approach to investigate the shift in the use of “ta” as a politeness marker in Bima and Dompu language. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because this study aimed to explore participants’ experiences, perceptions, and interpretations regarding language use in natural social interactions. Qualitative research focuses on understanding social phenomena from participants’ perspectives within their natural settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The sociopragmatic approach was used because this study examined how linguistic forms are utilized in relation to social norms, politeness, hierarchy, and interpersonal relationships. In this context, the use of “ta” reflects the relationship between language and cultural expectations in communication.

1. Research Site

This research was conducted at STKIP Yapis Dompu, located in Dompu, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. The institution was selected because it provides an educational environment where interactions between lecturers and students occur intensively in both formal and informal contexts. These interactions provide relevant settings for observing the use of politeness markers in authentic communication.

2. Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of 4 lecturers at STKIP Yapis Dompus who actively interact with students in academic environments. The participants were selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling enables researchers to select participants based on characteristics relevant to the objectives of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3. Inclusion Criteria

The participants that were included in this research are Lecturers actively teaching at STKIP Yapis Dompus, lecturers who frequently communicate with students in formal and informal contexts, and Lecturers familiar with Bima and Dompus local language

4. Data Collection Technique

The primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to explore participants' experiences in depth while maintaining focus on the research objectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The interview questions focused on: Lecturers' experiences in communicating with students, the use of expressions using suffix "ta" in communication such as *iyora* and *iyota*, *santabe* and *santabeta*, *bune* and *buneta*, etc., the use of expressions using suffix "ta" in communication such as *iyora* and *iyota*, *santabe* and *santabeta*, *bune* and *buneta*, etc., perceptions of politeness and respect in communication, and views regarding the shift in the use of "ta" among younger speakers. All interviews were conducted in natural settings. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

5. Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytical method used to identify, analyze, and interpret patterns or themes within a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This method was selected because it provides flexibility and depth in interpreting interview data related to language use and politeness. The analysis process followed several steps proposed by Byrne, (2021): familiarizing with the data through repeated reading, generating initial codes, searching for recurring themes, reviewing and refining themes, defining and naming themes, and interpreting the findings sociopragmatically. Recent studies also emphasize that thematic analysis remains an effective approach for analyzing qualitative interview data because it allows systematic interpretation of social meanings and participant experiences, (Byrne, 2021)

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

This study investigated the shift in the use of "ta" as a politeness marker in Bima and Dompus languages based on lecturers' perspectives. The findings were derived from semi-structured interviews conducted with several lecturers at STKIP Yapis Dompus. The analysis revealed several recurring themes related to the weakening of politeness markers, changing communication patterns among younger speakers, and concerns regarding the erosion of cultural values embedded in local language use.

1. The Declining Use of "ta" in Student Communication

One of the most prominent findings of this study is the decreasing use of "ta" in interactions between students and lecturers. Most participants stated that expressions traditionally considered

polite, such as *iyota*, *madata*, or *buneta*, are now less frequently used by younger speakers. Instead, students often use forms such as *iyora* even in formal or hierarchical interactions.

One participant stated:

“In the past, students naturally used expressions like iyota when speaking to lecturers or older people. Now, many students simply say iyora, even in formal situations.”

Another participant explained:

“Sometimes students may not realize that using iyora toward lecturers sounds less respectful in our cultural context.”

These findings indicate a noticeable sociopragmatic shift in the use of politeness markers among younger speakers. Although students may not intentionally intend to be disrespectful, the reduced use of “ta” reflects changing norms of interaction and politeness.

2. “ta” as a Marker of Respect and Social Distance

The interviews revealed that lecturers strongly associate the use of “ta” with politeness, respect, and appropriate social positioning. Participants emphasized that “ta” is not merely a linguistic addition but a cultural marker that reflects awareness of hierarchy and interpersonal ethics.

One lecturer explained:

“The meaning of the word does not change significantly, but the feeling and social value change completely when ‘ta’ is added.”

Another participant stated:

“When students use iyota, it feels respectful. It shows that they understand how to position themselves when communicating with older people or lecturers.”

These findings support the idea that “ta” functions sociopragmatically as a politeness marker encoding respect and social harmony.

3. Factors Contributing to the Shift

The participants identified several factors contributing to the declining use of “ta” among younger speakers.

a. Influence of Digital Communication

Many lecturers argued that communication through social media and digital platforms has encouraged more informal language use.

One participant commented:

“Students today are influenced by social media communication, which tends to be direct and informal. This affects how they speak in real life.”

b. Reduced Awareness of Local Language Norms

Some lecturers believed that younger generations are becoming less familiar with traditional linguistic norms.

A participant stated:

“Some students may understand the words, but they do not fully understand the cultural meaning behind them.”

c. Changing Social Relationships

Participants also noted that modern communication patterns tend to minimize hierarchical boundaries between younger and older speakers.

One lecturer remarked:

“Communication today is more egalitarian. Students often speak casually because they feel social distance is no longer important.”

4. Concerns about Cultural Value Erosion

Another significant finding is that lecturers perceive the decline of “ta” not merely as linguistic variation but as part of a broader weakening of cultural values. Several participants expressed concern that the reduced use of politeness markers may gradually diminish values of respect and courtesy traditionally upheld in Bima and Dompu societies.

One participant explained:

“If this continues, younger generations may eventually lose sensitivity toward respectful communication.”

Another lecturer added:

“This is not only about language. It is about maintaining cultural identity and respect in society.”

These responses demonstrate that the use of “ta” is deeply connected to cultural identity and moral values within the local speech community.

5. The Need for Language and Cultural Awareness

Most participants emphasized the importance of preserving politeness markers such as “ta” through education and daily practice. Lecturers suggested that awareness of respectful language should be continuously introduced in families, schools, and social environments.

One participant stated:

“We should not blame younger people entirely. They need examples and guidance regarding respectful language use.”

The findings suggest that maintaining politeness markers requires collective efforts from educators, families, and society to preserve cultural values embedded in local languages.

B. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the use of “ta” as a politeness marker in Bima and Dompu language is undergoing a sociopragmatic shift, particularly among younger speakers in educational contexts. Based on lecturers’ perspectives, expressions traditionally associated with politeness and respect, such as iyota, madata, and buneta, are increasingly replaced by less formal expressions such as iyora. This shift reflects broader changes in communication patterns, social relationships, and cultural awareness among younger generations. From a sociopragmatic

perspective, the findings confirm that politeness is closely related to social hierarchy, interpersonal relationships, and cultural expectations. Brown and Levinson (1987) explain that politeness strategies function to maintain social harmony and reduce face-threatening acts in communication. In the context of Bima and Dompu languages, the suffix “ta” functions as a linguistic mechanism for expressing deference and recognizing social distance between speakers and interlocutors. Therefore, the reduced use of “ta” in formal interactions may indicate a weakening awareness of culturally appropriate communication practices.

The findings also support Leech’s (2014) politeness theory, which emphasizes that politeness principles are essential for sustaining mutual respect and social equilibrium. The lecturers interviewed in this study consistently perceived “ta” not merely as a grammatical addition but as a reflection of ethical communication and cultural manners. This demonstrates that the meaning carried by “ta” extends beyond linguistic structure and functions as a marker of sociocultural identity. Furthermore, the findings align with recent sociopragmatic studies emphasizing that small linguistic forms, such as particles, suffixes, or discourse markers, may carry substantial social meaning. Kadar & House, (2020) argue that politeness markers are deeply embedded within cultural systems and ritualized interaction patterns. Similarly, recent studies in pragmatics indicate that even minor linguistic elements contribute significantly to socially appropriate communication and the maintenance of interpersonal harmony (van Dorst et al., 2024).

The interviews also revealed that many students use expressions such as *iyora* in contexts traditionally requiring respect and formality, including communication with lecturers. This finding reflects what Holmes & Wilson, (2022) describes as sociolinguistic change influenced by shifting social values and attitudes toward hierarchy. Contemporary communication tends to become increasingly egalitarian, reducing traditional boundaries between younger and older speakers. Consequently, forms previously considered informal are now frequently normalized in broader social contexts. Another important aspect emerging from the findings is the influence of digital communication on language behavior. Several participants stated that social media interaction has contributed to the increasing use of direct and informal language styles among younger speakers. This finding is consistent with recent studies suggesting that digital communication environments often reduce the use of conventional politeness strategies and encourage more casual interaction patterns (RHEE, 2023). Similarly, Firdaus et al., (2025) argue that communication in digital spaces tends to prioritize efficiency and immediacy, often at the expense of traditional politeness norms.

The findings also indicate that younger speakers may still understand the lexical meaning of forms such as *iyota* or *buneta*, but they are becoming less aware of their sociocultural significance. This phenomenon reflects what Chung (2024) identifies as a shift in politeness judgment, where social interpretations of respectful language become increasingly influenced by changing communicative environments and generational perspectives. In this context, the decline in the use of “ta” is not merely a matter of linguistic simplification but also a reflection of changing perceptions of respect and interpersonal ethics. Moreover, the findings reinforce previous studies on Bima and Dompu languages highlighting the close relationship between language and cultural identity. Suryaningsih et al. (2024) emphasize that language in Bima society reflects local values, kinship systems, and norms of respect. Likewise, Soro, (2021) explains that respectful communication practices are fundamental elements of social life within Bima-Dompu communities. Therefore, the weakening use of “ta” may also indicate a gradual erosion of cultural values traditionally maintained through language.

This study contributes to sociopragmatic and sociolinguistic discussions by demonstrating that politeness markers in local languages are not merely linguistic ornaments but essential components of communicative competence and cultural preservation. The findings provide evidence that language change in smaller speech communities may directly affect the transmission of cultural values embedded in linguistic practices. Despite these contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the study involved a limited number of participants from a single educational institution, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Second, the data relied primarily on lecturers' perspectives and did not directly examine students' viewpoints regarding the use of "ta." Third, the study focused mainly on spoken interactions within educational settings, while the use of politeness markers in digital communication contexts was not explored extensively.

Therefore, future studies are recommended to involve broader participant groups, including students, parents, and community leaders, to obtain more comprehensive perspectives regarding language shift and politeness practices. Future research may also investigate the use of "ta" in digital communication environments, such as social media interactions, considering the increasing influence of online communication on language behavior among younger generations. In addition, comparative studies involving other local languages in Eastern Indonesia may provide deeper insights into the dynamics of politeness markers and cultural preservation in multilingual societies. Overall, the findings of this study indicate that the shift from forms such as *iyota* to *iyora* represents more than a simple linguistic variation. It reflects broader sociocultural transformations affecting how respect, hierarchy, and interpersonal relationships are expressed in contemporary communication. Consequently, preserving linguistic features such as "ta" is important not only for maintaining local languages but also for sustaining the cultural values and social ethics embedded within them.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study found that the use of "ta" as a politeness marker in Bima and Dompu languages is gradually declining among younger speakers, particularly in educational interactions. Expressions such as *iyota*, *madata*, and *buneta* are increasingly replaced by more informal forms such as *iyora*, even in contexts that traditionally require respect and politeness. The findings show that "ta" functions not only as an inflectional morpheme but also as a sociopragmatic marker reflecting respect, hierarchy, and cultural values in Bima and Dompu communities. Therefore, the weakening use of "ta" may indicate a broader shift in cultural attitudes and communication practices among younger generations. This study highlights the importance of preserving local politeness markers as part of maintaining cultural identity and respectful communication within society.

Future studies are recommended to involve broader participants, including students and community members, to obtain more comprehensive perspectives on the use of "ta." Further research may also explore the use of politeness markers in digital communication and compare similar politeness systems in other local languages in Indonesia.

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