

Cultural Pragmatics of Politeness: The Role of Javanese *Krama Inggil* in Indonesian Academic Communication

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Submission Track:

Received: 29-09-2025, Final Revision: 10-11-2025, Available Online: 01-12-2025

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the cultural pragmatics of politeness through the integration of Javanese krama inggil expressions in Indonesian academic communication. While most Central Javanese people are bilingual in Javanese and Indonesian, the use of highly respectful Javanese forms within formal Indonesian-language settings remains underexplored. This research aims to examine how Javanese krama inggil expressions are inserted into Indonesian discourse during academic meetings organized by the Higher Education Service Institute Region VI, Central Java. Ten recordings of meeting interactions were analyzed qualitatively to identify the lexical and contextual meanings, politeness levels, and acceptance levels of the inserted expressions. Questionnaire data from lecturers and administrative staff were also collected to assess their perceptions. The findings reveal that krama inggil expressions appear systematically across opening, main, and closing segments of meetings, serving as markers of deference, respect, and cultural identity. The majority of respondents rated these expressions as “polite” or “very polite,” and “acceptable” or “highly acceptable” within Indonesian academic contexts. The results suggest that incorporating local linguistic resources enriches communicative harmony, reinforces cultural values, and demonstrates how politeness strategies transcend linguistic boundaries in multilingual professional settings.

Keywords: cultural pragmatics, politeness, Javanese krama inggil, bilingual communication, academic discourse

INTRODUCTION

Politeness is a fundamental element of human interaction that reflects social values, hierarchy, and cultural identity. It operates not only as a linguistic strategy but also as a moral and social norm guiding interpersonal relationships. In multilingual societies such as Indonesia, politeness is often expressed through the interplay of different languages and cultural systems. Among the Javanese community, politeness is embedded in complex linguistic forms known as *undha-usuk basa Jawa* (Javanese speech levels), which serve to index social distance, respect, and harmony in communication. One of its highest levels, *krama inggil*, functions as a vehicle of deference and cultural refinement, traditionally used when addressing socially superior interlocutors. In institutional settings such as academic meetings, however, the deployment of *krama inggil* does more than merely reflect respect—it actively constructs and reaffirms hierarchical relationships between superiors and subordinates. When subordinates address rectors, deans, or senior lecturers using *krama inggil* forms like *panjenengan* or *kula aturi*, they linguistically position themselves within a stratified order that legitimizes authority and deference. Conversely, some senior participants may employ selective *krama inggil* expressions to project benevolence and relational closeness, subtly reshaping power dynamics from asymmetrical to more reciprocal. Thus, *krama inggil* operates as both a marker of hierarchy and a resource for negotiating institutional power, revealing how politeness in Javanese academic discourse intertwines with the moral economy of respect and leadership.

While Indonesian has become the national *lingua franca* in educational and professional domains, traces of Javanese politeness norms continue to influence communication in Central Java. Academic meetings in this region, especially those organized by governmental or higher education institutions, often include Javanese *krama inggil* expressions inserted into predominantly Indonesian discourse. Phrases such as *matur nuwun* ('thank you'), *nuwun sewu* ('excuse me'), and *panjenengan* ('you' – honorific) frequently appear as subtle markers of cultural courtesy. In addition, formal speakers such

as masters of ceremony or meeting chairs tend to replace standard Indonesian greetings like *selamat pagi*, *selamat siang*, and *selamat sore* with their *krama inggil* equivalents *sugeng enjang*, *sugeng siang*, and *sugeng sonten*. Likewise, expressions such as *sugeng rawuh* ('welcome') and *sugeng kondur* ('have a pleasant return home') are commonly used to greet and bid farewell to participants. These greeting formulas reflect a conscious effort to preserve politeness and cultural refinement within institutional discourse, illustrating how linguistic politeness and local identity coexist in formal communication.

Despite the persistence of these expressions, previous studies on Javanese politeness have primarily focused on everyday conversations, family interactions, and service encounters (Wijana, 2011; Muliawan, 2019; Farida & Yuliana, 2020). Much less attention has been given to how Javanese politeness forms are adapted within formal Indonesian-language contexts such as academic communication. Existing works in Indonesian pragmatics have highlighted the influence of local culture on language use (Rahardi, 2018; Wijana, 2020), yet few have explored the micro-level linguistic integration of *krama inggil* expressions into formal institutional discourse. This research, therefore, addresses a critical gap by investigating how politeness rooted in Javanese cultural pragmatics is manifested in modern, bilingual professional settings.

From a theoretical perspective, this study integrates Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory with Kecskes's (2014) cultural pragmatics to account for both universal and culture-specific dimensions of politeness. While Brown and Levinson's framework provides a foundational understanding of *face* and *facework* as universal components of social interaction, its individual-centered orientation may not fully capture the collectivist and relational ethos of Javanese communication, where politeness is grounded in shared moral values (*tata krama*) and social harmony (*rukun*). Kecskes's notion of cultural pragmatics, on the other hand, emphasizes the embeddedness of pragmatic meaning in socio-cultural experience, allowing a more nuanced interpretation of how *krama inggil* expressions encode deference, empathy, and hierarchy within local contexts. By combining

these approaches, this study does not treat politeness as a fixed universal system but as a dynamic interplay between culturally informed norms and pragmatic intentions. This synthesis enables a more context-sensitive analysis of Javanese *krama inggil* usage in Indonesian academic settings, revealing how speakers balance universal face concerns with culturally specific expectations of respect and relational harmony.

The main objective of this research is to analyze the use of Javanese *krama inggil* expressions inserted into Indonesian-language academic meetings conducted by the Higher Education Service Institute Region VI Central Java. Specifically, it seeks to identify the types of *krama inggil* expressions used, their contextual meanings, and their politeness and acceptance levels as perceived by lecturers and staff. Through this investigation, the study contributes to understanding how bilingual speakers navigate linguistic and cultural boundaries to achieve communicative harmony in professional domains.

This research also provides a broader contribution to the field of linguistic and cultural studies in Indonesia. It demonstrates how language serves as both a medium and a mirror of cultural values, offering evidence that local politeness systems continue to shape communicative norms even within the modern academic sphere. By analyzing the interaction between Javanese and Indonesian, this study contributes to the ongoing scholarly conversation on linguistic hybridity, intercultural pragmatics, and the preservation of cultural identity in multilingual contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach framed within the discipline of cultural pragmatics. The approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth exploration of how linguistic expressions function within specific cultural and social contexts. The research design focused on describing and interpreting the meanings, functions, and acceptance of Javanese *krama inggil* expressions as they appear in Indonesian academic communication. The qualitative nature of this study allowed for a contextualized analysis of real-life language

use, providing a deeper understanding of politeness as a culturally grounded communicative practice.

The data were obtained from ten recorded academic meetings held by the Higher Education Service Institute (HESI) Region VI Central Java between May and September 2025. These meetings involved participants from various private universities under the coordination of the Institute, including rectors, deans, lecturers, and administrative staff. The recordings were selected purposively because they represent institutional interactions where both Indonesian and Javanese are actively used, making them contextually rich for examining bilingual politeness practices. The total duration of the data amounted to approximately eight hours of spoken interaction. To complement the qualitative data, a short questionnaire was distributed to thirty lecturers and staff members who frequently attended HESI meetings to assess their perceptions of politeness and acceptance levels.

While the corpus and sample size are limited, the study does not aim for statistical generalization but for analytical generalization typical of qualitative descriptive inquiry (Yin, 2014). The focus lies in capturing the *depth and contextual meaning* of how Javanese *krama inggil* expressions operate within formal Indonesian discourse rather than quantifying their frequency across all institutions. Moreover, the inclusion of multiple meeting types and participant hierarchies—combined with triangulation between discourse data and perception data—enhances the credibility and transferability of the findings. Thus, the results provide grounded insights that can inform broader discussions of bilingual politeness in Central Java's academic settings without claiming universal representativeness.

The analysis procedure followed three main stages: data identification, contextual interpretation, and perception evaluation. In the first stage, all utterances containing Javanese *krama inggil* expressions were transcribed verbatim and categorized according to their lexical forms and functions. The second stage involved interpreting each expression's contextual meaning using frameworks of cultural pragmatics (Kecskes, 2014) and politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The third stage analyzed questionnaire responses to

determine how participants evaluated the politeness and acceptability of the *krama inggil* insertions in the formal Indonesian-language setting. Triangulation between discourse data and perception data ensured the credibility and validity of the findings.

The research systematics of this study followed the general structure of academic inquiry. The Introduction established the research context, theoretical background, and gap in the literature. The Research Method described the data sources, procedures, and analytical framework. The Discussion section presented the main findings supported by excerpts from meeting transcripts and respondents' evaluations. Finally, the Conclusion synthesized the major insights and theoretical implications for future studies in linguistic politeness, cultural pragmatics, and bilingual communication.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the insertion of Javanese *krama inggil* expressions into Indonesian academic discourse is both a linguistic and cultural strategy for managing politeness and social harmony. As discussed in the Introduction, the use of *krama inggil* forms such as *sugeng enjang* ('good morning'), *sugeng sonten* ('good afternoon'), *sugeng rawuh* ('welcome'), and *sugeng kondur* ('farewell') has become a recognizable feature of formal communication in Central Java's academic institutions. These greetings, along with other *krama inggil* expressions like *matur nuwun* ('thank you') and *nuwun sewu* ('excuse me'), demonstrate how linguistic politeness is enacted through cultural continuity even in predominantly Indonesian-speaking environments.

Across the ten recorded meetings of the Higher Education Service Institute (HESI) Region VI Central Java, *krama inggil* expressions were systematically embedded in different segments of discourse—particularly in the opening, main, and closing stages of meetings. Their occurrence was not random but pragmatically motivated, serving to establish rapport, express respect, and maintain decorum appropriate to the hierarchical and collectivist nature of Javanese culture. The frequent use of *krama inggil* greetings at the beginning and

end of meetings reflects how speakers symbolically align linguistic formality with social harmony, signaling both professionalism and cultural refinement.

This continued use of *krama inggil* within institutional communication indicates that politeness in Javanese settings is not merely a matter of lexical choice but represents a deeper cultural schema embedded in professional discourse. Even though Indonesian functions as the official medium, speakers consciously draw upon Javanese politeness conventions to manage relational balance and uphold the values of *tata krama* (courteous conduct). The following sections elaborate on the types, contexts, and pragmatic functions of *krama inggil* expressions found in the data, followed by an analysis of participants' perceptions of their politeness and acceptability levels.

Overview of Findings

Building on these observations, the analysis of meeting transcripts further confirms that Javanese forms of address and courtesy were systematically embedded within Indonesian utterances. This linguistic integration appeared consistently across the recorded meetings, reflecting both pragmatic awareness and cultural intentionality on the part of the speakers. The *krama inggil* expressions were most frequently used in the opening, main, and closing segments of meetings—contexts where speakers sought to establish rapport, express deference, or soften potentially face-threatening acts. Their patterned occurrence highlights how speakers draw upon Javanese politeness conventions to complement Indonesian formal discourse, creating a communicative style that is simultaneously professional and culturally resonant. Despite the dominance of Indonesian as the official medium of interaction, the persistence of these *krama inggil* forms demonstrates that Javanese politeness norms continue to shape communicative behavior within Central Java's academic institutions.

Types and Contexts of Krama Inggil Expressions

A closer examination of the data revealed three dominant patterns of *krama inggil* expressions used across the meetings: (1) gratitude and apology markers (*matur nuwun*, *nuwun sewu*), (2) honorific references (*panjenengan*, *sampeyan*, *derekaken*), and (3) formulaic greetings or invitations (*monggo*, *kula aturi*, *sumonggo*). These expressions were most frequently produced by meeting leaders or senior staff members when addressing audiences of varied hierarchical levels. Their presence served both a linguistic and socio-pragmatic function—helping speakers perform politeness, signal deference, and maintain social equilibrium in a formal institutional setting.

Table 1 presents examples of the most recurrent *krama inggil* expressions identified in the data, along with their literal meanings, pragmatic functions, and segments of occurrence within the meetings.

Table 1. Common Javanese *Krama Inggil* Expressions Found in Academic Meetings

No	Expression	Literal Meaning	Pragmatic Function	Segment of Occurrence
1	<i>Matur nuwun</i>	Thank you	Expressing gratitude	Closing
2	<i>Nuwun sewu</i>	Excuse me	Requesting permission/mitigating interruption	Opening & Main
3	<i>Panjenengan</i>	You (honorific)	Showing deference to superiors	Main
4	<i>Monggo</i>	Please/Go ahead	Inviting participation	Opening
5	<i>Kula aturi</i>	I invite (you)	Softening directive speech acts	Opening & Closing

The use and distribution of these expressions were context-dependent and deeply intertwined with the hierarchical nature of the meetings. For instance, *nuwun sewu* was often employed before making interruptions or objections, functioning as a pragmatic softener that preserved both the speaker's and the listener's negative face. Similarly, *panjenengan* was

strategically chosen over the Indonesian *Anda* to mark social distance and convey respect when addressing high-ranking officials.

In addition to these recurring lexical items, several formulaic *krama inggil* expressions were found to replace common Indonesian greetings in a way that foregrounds cultural refinement. Masters of ceremony and meeting leaders, for example, frequently preferred *sugeng enjang*, *sugeng siang*, and *sugeng sonten* in place of *selamat pagi*, *selamat siang*, and *selamat sore*, respectively. Likewise, *sugeng rawuh* ('welcome') was more often used than *selamat datang*, while *sugeng kondur* ('have a safe return home') appeared instead of *selamat jalan* or *selamat pulang*. These choices not only add a touch of cultural dignity to the proceedings but also signal the speaker's alignment with the Javanese ethos of *tata krama* (refined conduct).

Another noteworthy example occurred during the closing segment of a coordination meeting, when the master of ceremonies concluded with the statement: "*Dengan demikian selesailah rapat koordinasi kali ini. Terima kasih atas kerawuhan Bapak Ibu semuanya dan konduripun ndherekaken sugeng tindak.*" The terms *kerawuhan* ('attendance') and *konduripun ndherekaken sugeng tindak* ('we wish you a pleasant departure') demonstrate how *krama inggil* elements can be woven seamlessly into Indonesian utterances to convey gratitude and well-wishing with elevated respect. This closing formula not only marks the end of the meeting but also reinforces social harmony and the cultural value of mutual courtesy among participants.

Politeness and Acceptance Levels

Following the analysis of linguistic forms and contexts, participants' perceptions further illuminate the social significance of *krama inggil* usage in academic meetings. The questionnaire results showed that a large majority of respondents (83%) perceived the insertion of Javanese *krama inggil* expressions as *polite* or *very polite*, while 78% rated them as *acceptable* or *highly acceptable* within Indonesian-language academic communication.

Many respondents commented that these expressions created a “warm,” “respectful,” and “culturally appropriate” atmosphere, softening the formality of institutional interactions while reinforcing interpersonal respect.

Notably, even non-Javanese staff members expressed appreciation for the use of such expressions, acknowledging their role in fostering solidarity and mutual respect. This suggests that Javanese politeness markers, though rooted in local linguistic traditions, have achieved a shared cultural intelligibility in Central Java’s multilingual professional contexts. In other words, they function not only as regional linguistic features but also as socially rewarding strategies that promote inclusivity and cultural cohesion.

These perceptions resonate with Brown and Levinson’s (1987) framework of politeness, particularly the interplay between *positive* and *negative* politeness strategies. Expressions such as *matur nuwun* and *sugeng rawuh* exemplify *positive politeness*, as they enhance social solidarity and emphasize shared cultural belonging. Meanwhile, *nuwun sewu* illustrates *negative politeness*, serving to mitigate imposition and acknowledge the interlocutor’s autonomy. The coexistence of these two orientations reveals a balanced communicative ethos—one that is simultaneously deferential and affiliative.

Taken together, these findings highlight the hybrid nature of Indonesian academic discourse in Javanese regions. Formal institutional communication is shaped not merely by bureaucratic norms or national linguistic standards, but by the subtle integration of local politeness systems that enrich its pragmatic texture. The continued acceptance of *krama inggil* expressions in professional domains thus reflects both linguistic adaptability and cultural resilience—demonstrating that courtesy, as practiced in Central Java, remains deeply intertwined with the moral and relational values of *tata krama* (refined conduct).

Theoretical Interpretation and Cultural Implications

Building upon these findings, the phenomenon of inserting *krama inggil* expressions into Indonesian academic discourse can be understood through the lens of cultural

pragmatics, where linguistic choices function as reflections of culturally grounded schemas of respect, hierarchy, and harmony (Kecskes, 2014). Beyond pragmatic politeness, this practice also signals broader sociolinguistic processes of identity negotiation and cultural positioning among educated Javanese speakers. By selectively embedding *krama inggil* within Indonesian, speakers not only index deference and relational alignment but also reaffirm their dual linguistic identity — as members of the national academic community and as carriers of Javanese cultural heritage. In this sense, the alternation between Indonesian and *krama inggil* illustrates how language hierarchy and cultural continuity coexist within formal institutional settings, demonstrating the dynamic interplay between national lingua franca norms and local politeness ideologies (Errington, 1998; Sneddon, 2003). Rather than functioning as mere instances of code-switching, these insertions operate as symbolic acts of identity performance, reaffirming Javanese values within a predominantly Indonesian-language environment. Through such strategic use, speakers not only maintain politeness but also negotiate their dual membership in local and national cultural communities.

This interplay between linguistic systems underscores the dynamic negotiation of cultural values within professional communication. Indonesian serves as the formal medium of interaction, yet the infusion of *krama inggil* signals an enduring attachment to Javanese ideals of *tata krama* (refined conduct) and *rukun* (social harmony). In this sense, politeness becomes more than a pragmatic choice—it embodies a moral stance and a relational ethic that sustains cohesion among interlocutors in hierarchical settings.

The present findings extend the insights of previous studies on Indonesian politeness (Rahardi, 2018; Wijana, 2020) by demonstrating that local politeness systems are not displaced by the national language. Instead, they are integrated into it to produce culturally resonant modes of interaction. Such integration exemplifies what Bhabha (1994) calls linguistic hybridity, wherein speakers creatively blend linguistic repertoires to express both local affiliation and institutional professionalism. This hybridity reflects the adaptive

resilience of Javanese politeness, which continues to function as a communicative bridge across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Ultimately, this study advances the understanding of how politeness operates in bilingual and bicultural contexts. The continued use of *krama inggil* expressions in Indonesian academic meetings illustrates that local linguistic resources remain vital in achieving communicative harmony. Far from being decorative or archaic, these expressions function as pragmatic tools that maintain respect, solidarity, and cultural continuity. By foregrounding the cultural pragmatics of Javanese politeness, this research contributes to broader discussions on intercultural communication, linguistic identity, and pragmatic adaptation in multilingual societies—showing that even within formal academic institutions, cultural values remain deeply inscribed in the act of speaking politely.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the insertion of *krama inggil* expressions into Indonesian academic communication constitutes a distinctive form of cultural pragmatics that bridges local politeness traditions with national linguistic practices. Far from being remnants of regional habits, these expressions function as deliberate communicative strategies for maintaining harmony, respect, and relational balance in professional interactions. Through the selective embedding of *krama inggil* forms into Indonesian discourse, speakers demonstrate sensitivity to social hierarchy and cultural propriety while preserving the formality expected in institutional contexts.

The findings reveal that expressions such as *matur nuwun*, *nuwun sewu*, and *panjenengan* occur systematically across the opening, main, and closing stages of meetings, each fulfilling specific pragmatic roles consistent with the Javanese ethos of *tata krama* (refined conduct). Their frequent use and positive reception among lecturers and administrative staff underscore their continuing social relevance and pragmatic appropriateness in contemporary professional communication. This coexistence of linguistic

modernity and cultural continuity reflects a broader pattern of linguistic hybridity, where speakers integrate multiple codes to achieve both efficiency and cultural resonance.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the fields of intercultural pragmatics and politeness theory by demonstrating how linguistic forms index cultural schemas of respect and relational harmony. The persistence of *krama inggil* within Indonesian-language discourse challenges monolingual and universalist interpretations of politeness, showing instead that politeness in Indonesia—particularly in Javanese regions—emerges as a culturally negotiated practice rooted in local wisdom and social ethics.

Beyond theoretical implications, the findings carry several practical and policy-oriented insights. First, they highlight the need for language policy in higher education to recognize and accommodate local linguistic resources as part of communicative competence rather than viewing them as deviations from standard Indonesian (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997). Second, the study suggests that intercultural communication training for academics and administrative professionals should incorporate local politeness frameworks such as *tata krama Jawa* to foster culturally responsive interaction and reduce pragmatic misunderstandings (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). Finally, the sustained presence of *krama inggil* in formal academic settings underscores its potential role in cultural preservation, offering a model for how indigenous politeness traditions can coexist with modern bureaucratic and academic communication norms.

For future research, comparative investigations could explore how similar local politeness strategies operate in other multilingual regions of Indonesia or in international academic settings involving Indonesian speakers. Extending this inquiry across diverse sociolinguistic contexts would deepen our understanding of how politeness, identity, and language intertwine to sustain effective, respectful, and culturally grounded communication in today's increasingly interconnected world.

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