

# Politeness Strategy and *Kato Nan Ampek* in the Minangkabau Language in Medan: A Pragmatic Study

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20260545>

## ABSTRACT

This study examines politeness strategies in the Minangkabau language through the framework of *kato nan ampek* (four speech styles): *kato mandaki* (upward), *kato manurun* (downward), *kato mandata* (equal-level), and *kato malereang* (indirect/figurative). Using a qualitative approach, the data were analyzed from multiple sets of naturally occurring utterances to explore how politeness is constructed across different social relations and communicative contexts. The findings reveal that imperatives dominate in *kato manurun*, where direct commands are considered culturally acceptable due to hierarchical authority rather than linguistic mitigation. In contrast, *kato mandaki* employs explicit politeness markers such as honorifics, apologies, and softening devices to show deference toward higher-status interlocutors. Meanwhile, *kato mandata* reflects neutral, information-oriented communication with minimal politeness marking among equals. *Kato malereang* plays a crucial role in maintaining social harmony through indirectness, metaphor, and figurative expressions, particularly in

sensitive acts such as criticism and complaint. Across the data, indirect strategies—such as rhetorical questions, metaphorical expressions, and contextual softeners—are frequently used to reduce face-threatening acts. The study highlights that politeness in Minangkabau is primarily socially encoded, relying on hierarchy, context, and indirectness rather than purely grammatical forms. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of culturally embedded pragmatics and the role of language in sustaining social harmony within Minangkabau society.

**Keywords:** Minangkabau language; politeness strategies; *kato nan ampek*; pragmatics; social hierarchy; indirectness; metaphor; qualitative study

## INTRODUCTION

The Minangkabau language (ML), the mother tongue of West Sumatra, is used and utilized in everyday communication. Although the Minangkabau people (MP) have a long-standing custom or tradition of *marantau* 'migration', they remain loyal to their homeland and their mother tongue. This is one of the reasons why the ML has

spread widely and is recognized by the majority of the archipelago's population. Although influenced by the Minangkabau social order, which adheres to a matrilineal cultural system, the tradition of migration has not negatively affected the use of the ML, as it strongly ties them to their homeland.

However, in recent times, as times have changed and information technology has taken hold in the archipelago, the ML has experienced a decline in usage. The MP have begun to be influenced by global culture. There is pressure to use Indonesian, the MP's second language, as a strong national language, and as a unifying language for the archipelago's cultural diversity. This is the main reason the ML is starting to be marginalized. In every aspect of life, professional demands, and social gatherings in Minangkabau, Indonesian is the mandatory language of instruction. This use is increasingly limiting the space for ML use in the lives of MP.

This situation becomes even more concerning when parents worry that if their children acquire ML as their mother tongue, they will have difficulty learning a second language, Indonesian. This paradigm, which hinders Minangkabau children's first language acquisition, is misguided. Parents who are native Minangkabau and speak their ancestral language, cannot automatically provide or replace their children's first language with Indonesian. Parents are not necessarily able to use Indonesian as a complete first language for their children. In fact, when parents make Indonesian their child's first language, this acquisition complicates the child's second language learning. Children easily learn a second language if they acquire their first language fully without any language mixing.

Another consequence experienced when MP no longer learn the ML is that the MP today no longer uphold customs, etiquette, and politeness, particularly in communication, which are inherently embedded in the rules known as *kato nan ampek* (KNA) or four

styles of words. This exacerbates the character development of future generations.

Therefore, this paper discusses how to cultivate polite individuals through instilling cultural values in the homes. This politeness can be formed based on the rules of etiquette in KNA. It is undeniable that a barometer of politeness can be seen in a person's verbal communication. The questions are: to what extent is the custom of speaking politely using KNA still practiced in daily life in Minangkabau society in Medan, and what are the factors that are the main cause of KNA being forgotten in daily communication among the Minangkabau people in Medan?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the ML, there is a *langgam kato* or style of words, which is a kind of language politeness or everyday etiquette between fellow MP according to their respective social status. <sup>[1]</sup> This does not mean there is a noble language and a common language, but the difference in usage is determined by who the person is talking to. The KNA includes *kato mandaki* (upward or ascending), *kato malereang* (indirect or figurative), *kato manurun* (downward), and *kato mandata* (equal level). The first is a language used for more mature or respected people, such as younger people to older people, students to teachers, and subordinates to superiors. The use of grammar is neater, the expressions are clear, and the use of first, second and third person pronouns is specific, for instance, *ambo* (I) for the first person, and the honorifics for older people include *mamak* (mother's brother), *inyiak* (a term of address for grandfather or grandmother [parents of father/mother]), *uda* (a respectful term for an older brother or male), *etek* (a nickname for a mother's or father's younger sister), *amai* (a term of address for mother or older woman, sometimes used for birth mother or as a respectful greeting), or *uni* (a respectful term for older sister or female) and *baliau* (he/she) for the third person.

The second type is the language used for interlocutors who are respected according to tradition and culture. For example, people who are related by marriage, for example, parents-in-laws, brothers-in-laws, sisters-in-laws and sons-in-law, or between people whose positions are respected such as ulemas and teachers. The use of grammar is neat, but MP uses more proverbs, such as similes, figures of speech or satire. First, second and third person pronouns are also special. *Wak ambo* or *awak ambo* for the first person, the title and kinship nickname given by the family to the second person. *Baliau* is exclusively used for third person.

The third is *kato manurun*, which is the language used for younger interlocutors, such as persuading small children, mamak to nieces, teachers to students, and superiors to subordinates. Use neat grammar, but with shorter sentences. First, second, and third person pronouns are also special. *Wak den* or *wak aden* (originally from *awak aden*) for the first person. *Awak ang* or *wak ang* is used for the second male person, and *awak kau* or *wak kau* refers to the second female person. *Wak nyo* or *awak nyo* is used for third person and the word *awak* or *wak* means 'we'. This word is used as a statement that everyone is the same as 'we' or among us too.

Finally, the *kato mandata* is the language used in casual communication with people of the same age and equal standing. Furthermore, *kato mandata* is also used by people of similar social status and close relationships. The language commonly used is a slang and its grammar tends to use final syllables or incomplete words, and its sentences are short. The first, second, and third person pronouns are also specific, for instance, *aden* or *den* for the first person, *ang* for the second person (male), *kau* for the second person (female), and *inyo* or *anyo* for the third person.

The description above shows that differences in social status and situations indicate the existence of clear rules of etiquette in the Minangkabau language. The use of "person references" in Minangkabau

differs from other languages. <sup>[2]</sup> This use is very diverse because it is used in different situations. In ML, the person category is not only associated with specific forms. Minangkabau speakers also have a series of words borrowed from various vocabularies, such as kinship and social status.

For more clarity, we can see the following utterances in (1)-(4).

- 1) **Den** indak dapek pai jo **ang**
- 2) **Uni** indak dapek pai jo **adiak**
- 3) **Ambo** indak dapek pai jo **angku**
- 4) **Awak** indak dapek pai jo **uda**

These four utterances can mean 'I can't go with you'. However, in ML, the forms used to refer to oneself or others vary because they are used in different situations. In the first sentence, the words are addressed by a young man to a friend of the same age. He uses the special word *den* 'I' and *ang* 'you' which connote familiarity. This type of sentence is also called *kato mandata*. In the second sentence, a woman speaks to her younger brother and she uses kinship terms *uni* 'elder sister' and *adiak* 'younger brother'. We can call this sentence *kato manurun* because it is spoken from an older person to a younger one. In the third sentence, someone speaks to their *penghulu* (respected person) and he uses the respectful term *angku* 'you' specifically addressing to the tribal leader and the word *ambo* 'I' replaces *den*. This sentence can be categorized as *kato malereang* because it is spoken to a respected person.

In the fourth sentence, a wife speaks to her husband and uses the word *awak* (lit. body) to refer to himself or herself, while the kinship term *uda* (older brother) refers to her husband. The combination of *uda* and *awak* connotes familiarity. Because this conversation is conducted by someone of lower social status than the person she is talking to, this is called *kato mandaki*. It is clear that the use of personal references in speech must be appropriate to the context of the conversation, namely considering who the speaker and the interlocutor are. A child should not use the persona *den* with his/her parents because it is considered impolite.

*Den* is only used with interlocutors of the same age and younger. Likewise, using the persona *den* with respected people is also considered impolite. It is more polite to use the persona *ambo* or *awak*.

With these rules of etiquette, polite language can be instilled, starting with how to greet someone. Communicators can differentiate these personas according to different contexts and situations. If parents set a good example for their children, they will retain it, as it's known that children learn this unconsciously. What they hear is stored in their conscience and will emerge when they begin to speak.

### **ML Learning for Generation Character**

West Sumatra is the only region in the archipelago to establish local content (hereinafter referred to as *mulok*); however, in Medan, no schools have such *mulok*. In the Indonesian archipelago, various regional languages have their own unique characteristics and established rules of etiquette, defined by tradition and customs and the ML is one such language. These rules serve as a bond between its speakers and the existing culture and traditions. Culture within a society can serve as a foundation for personality formation. A person's politeness can be determined by the language they use as a medium of communication, as language and culture are undeniably inseparable.

The importance of forming a polite personality needs to be based on the culture of society. This is because: (1) a community association is an association of individuals in the sense of personality or ego, and (2) a national association is an ethnic or multicultural association. <sup>[3]</sup> First, what is gathered in a society are individuals starting from individuals in the family. It is in this personal or family component that these characters are gathered which ultimately form a broader ethnic character which ultimately forms the character of the nation. Second, it cannot be denied that Indonesia is a multicultural region that has 370 ethnic groups and 706 regional languages. So, in

forming a personality in a person, culture occupies a major influence which is mediated by language.

Formally, the objectives of ML learning can be seen from two different dimensions: (1) developing the strength of an individual's cultural identity, and (2) developing the strength of an individual's orientation. Both dimensions are equally important and interrelated; like looking at two sides of a coin. <sup>[4]</sup> The first dimension aims to develop an individual's identity that is resilient and responsive. Resilient means solid, having clear cultural roots. Resilient means not easily swayed by atmosphere, circumstances, or developments of the times. Responsive means having wisdom and high concern for the environment and cultural community around them. The second dimension is intended to develop clarity and strength of an individual's cultural orientation as the direction the individual will head, namely as a human being who understands what, who he is, where he wants to go, and how he should think, act, and behave in accordance with Minangkabau culture in the order of local, regional, national, and universal values. <sup>[5]</sup>

### **Politeness in Language**

Politeness can be defined as a sincere desire to do good to others. <sup>[6]</sup> This sincere desire can manifest itself in verbal (language) and non-verbal (daily behavior) actions. Politeness is an important variable in a language event. When speaking or communicating, politeness is the first consideration in choosing a language form, alongside clarity of intent. Clarity and politeness are two important aspects that must be considered in verbal communication. <sup>[7]</sup> However, sometimes these two aspects conflict because in order for speech to be understood by the interlocutor, speakers usually carefully consider the pragmatic factors that may be involved in the communication process.

In conversation we recognize politeness; when a governor calls a Minister, the question arises as to who opened the

telephone conversation first and how he discussed the opening. <sup>[8]</sup> There are two hypotheses that can be put forward to answer the problem of who and how language is used as a conversation starter.

**Hypothesis 1:** Someone who has a position or role that is hierarchically higher will open a conversation than someone who has a position and role that is not high. In general, they will open a conversation. Meanwhile, someone who does not hold a position and role usually does not open a conversation.

**Hypothesis 2:** Someone who plays a higher role and has more and higher knowledge will open a conversation than someone who does not play a role and does not have as much knowledge. This hypothesis can be tested in teaching and learning activities in the classroom between teachers and students. In general, the teacher will explain first and then ask questions or the teacher will open the learning activity by asking.

The hypothesis can be tested in a consultation meeting or conversation between a doctor and a patient. Politeness has a function of neutralizing potentially offensive consequences. <sup>[9]</sup> The greater the speaker's freedom to refuse a request, the greater the politeness of the request. <sup>[10]</sup> In other words, the lower the pressure on the speaker, the higher the politeness of the request. Language characteristics such as mode, modal, negation, affirmative clause, and modal tense are related to Lakoff's level of politeness. Interrogative forms are more polite than declarative forms, and declarative forms are more polite than imperative forms.

Politeness in communication is related to speech acts and all utterances in communication acts always contain three elements, namely (1) locutionary acts in the form of utterances produced by a speaker, (2) illocutionary acts in the form of intentions contained in the utterance, and (3) perlocutionary acts in the form of effects caused by the utterance. <sup>[11]</sup> In one speech act there are three types of actions at once, namely (1) utterances in the form of words or sentences, (2) proportional acts in the

form of references and predictions, and (3) illocutionary acts can be in the form of statements, questions, promises, commands, and so on. <sup>[12]</sup> These communicative effects are what sometimes have an impact on a person's behavior.

The concept of politeness is very appropriate to be used as a social behavior, or etiquette of a culture. <sup>[13]</sup> He also said that it is possible to establish a number of general principles of politeness in social interactions, namely humility and sympathy towards others. <sup>[13]</sup> Among other things, speakers and speakers in an interaction are generally aware of the norms and principles that exist in the wider society. To describe this interaction, a concept known as face is required. Technically, face refers to a person's personal image. It refers to the social feelings and personal emotions that each person expects to know about another person.

In speech acts, it is considered a way to demonstrate concern for face. Technically, face refers to a person's general image. This refers to the social feelings and personal emotions that each person expects to know about others. Politeness in speech acts is considered a way to demonstrate concern for the face of others. In this case, politeness can be implemented in situations of social distance or closeness. The expression of concern for the face of others who are socially distant is often characterized by respect or honor. The display of concern for the face of others who are socially distant is often characterized by respect or honor.

The appearance and concern for the faces of other people who have social similarities is characterized by friendliness, familiarity or a sense of solidarity. For example, the student's question to his teacher is described in sentence (1) and the student's question to his fellow students in sentence (2) below.

1. Excuse me, sir, can we start today's meeting?

2. Hey, John, wait a moment. I still have a guest.

The term "face" comes from the everyday terms "losing face" and "face saving." <sup>[14]</sup>

This term was first cited by Goffman to describe people's desire to maintain a positive image of themselves in the eyes of others. [9] This is clear because almost everyone wants to make their self-image as positive as possible. He also said that everyone tends to avoid threatening the self-image of others. Humans in almost every interaction always display actions that have the potential to threaten others. According to the terminology used by Brown & Levinson, this term is labelled face-threatening actions. [14] More specifically, these face-threatening actions include evaluating, assessing, or completely ignoring the positive face of others. This may be due to direct criticism (mockery), opposition, or ridicule directed at others, as well as impatient behavior such as engaging in taboos or displaying inappropriate or excessive emotions. Therefore, we are presented with the purpose of interacting with others and developing together through interaction.

The realization of speech acts is the result of strategy selection. [14] This strategy revolves around the concept of face which symbolizes a person's self-image. Face in this figurative sense consists of two faces, namely positive face and negative face, which is when the speaker does not provide any explanation or reason or says what it is without caring about the speaker's feelings or does not apologize at all. According to them, politeness categories are divided into five, namely:

1. Speak frankly without further ado (Bald on record)
2. Speak using positive politeness
3. Speak using negative politeness
4. Speaking in a vague, non-transparent manner (off record)
5. Not speaking at all or in your heart (say nothing)

Politeness expressed lexically and syntactically can be contrasted with prosodic and paralinguistic expressions, such as facial expressions, and so on, which can alter the politeness strategy expressed through specific semantic and syntactic

forms. From the above, it can be concluded that in creating communication, both speakers and listeners must pay attention to the rules governing speech; each speaker must equally pay attention to the rules governing the speech acts of each participant. This relates to linguistic politeness, which maintains two types of face: positive and negative face, with the aim of distinguishing between positive and negative politeness.

Speaking is not always related to textual issues, but often also relates to interpersonal issues. As textual rhetoric, pragmatics requires principles of cooperation. As interpersonal rhetoric, pragmatics requires principles of negative face, with the aim of distinguishing between positive and negative politeness. It is not always related to textual issues, but often relates to interpersonal issues. While pragmatic textual rhetoric requires the principle of cooperation, pragmatic interpersonal rhetoric requires another principle: the principle of politeness, which has several maxims: the maxim of tact, the maxim of generosity, the maxim of acceptance, the maxim of humility, the maxim of agreement, and the maxim of sympathy.

Politeness has five categories: 1) bald on record (speaking frankly), 2) positive politeness, 3) negative politeness, 4) off record (not frank), and 5) say nothing (not speaking at all). The categories would be discussed in the discussion section. [14]

These politeness principles relate to two participants in a conversation: oneself and the other person. The self is the speaker and the interlocutor. [15] In cooperative communication, the speakers accept the "face" conveyed by their interlocutors. [9]. [16] The meaning of the word "face" varies depending on the conversational situation. Sometimes "face" means close friend, and sometimes it means teacher. However, when combined with the word "face" it becomes "face to face," meaning meeting. This is because the verb has taken on a noun, giving it a different meaning. Another meaning of "face" can be joy. In other

situations, it can mean anger or sadness. For example, "his face is red" (angry). "His face is gloomy" means sad, "his face is wrinkled" (stressed), and so on.

The "face" is related to the speaker's affective state and identity profile. <sup>[17]</sup> The interlocutor must interpret the face presented to them. According to H.P. Grice, a good conversation must fulfill the conversational purpose; this principle he calls "a cooperative maxim." Grice states, "Make your conversational contribution as required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged". <sup>[18]</sup>

### Grice's Principle

The principle proposed by Grice is general. <sup>[19]</sup> The cooperative maxim is further divided into four submaxims: quality: say what is true, or what you know to be true, or for which you have sufficient evidence. In other words, speak honestly and truthfully; quantity: say/talk no more and no less than necessary. Speak truthfully, not too much and not too little; relevance: speak according to the topic being discussed or ongoing in the conversation. Don't deviate from the main point of the conversation; and method: speak clearly so that the other person understands. Don't be condescending; be clear and direct. The cooperative principle proposed by Grice above is not a scientific law, but rather a norm for maintaining the purpose of conversation. If any one of these axioms is not met, the purpose of the conversation is diminished.

### Non-Verbal Communication

E.T. Hall distinguishes seven characteristics of nonverbal communication in a conversational context: (1) proxemics (space and distance), (2) chronemics (time), (3) oculusics (eye contact and gaze), (4) haptics (touch), (5) kinesics (body movements and gestures), (6) artifacts (appearance and environment), and (7) vocalics (paralanguage). <sup>[20]</sup> These seven characteristics of nonverbal communication

are interconnected in the course of the conversation. In proxemics, seating and the distance between people's sitting or standing in a conversation carry specific meanings in the continuity of the conversation between speakers. Seating location and distance are agreed upon by protocol between nations. In meetings, seating location and distance are determined by each person's cultural background. In formal conversations, a speaker will address and converse with someone sitting directly opposite or diagonally across from them. A conversationalist will not immediately converse with a colleague next to him. Distance carries the meaning of closeness or distance. People who converse at a close distance according to normal standards are seen as friendly/friendly or can also be considered aggressive, whereas people who talk at a distance according to normal standards are considered less friendly.

In chronemic "timing" what is meant by timing is the conversation time, the time used in the conversation, the time used with timing is the conversation time, the time used in the conversation and the period of exchange of opportunities between speakers. For example, talking late at night is not good and will be suspected. People have to choose when to talk. About oculusics, contact always provides its own meaning in a conversation. Conversing while meeting eyes shows curiosity and attention. However, meeting eyes in conversation has different meanings from one culture to another. For example, in Javanese, children are not allowed to look their parents in the eye, but Europeans make eye contact when talking to show appreciation.

Regarding the haptics 'touching' leaders in the Middle East embrace each other at the beginning of friendship and at parting. A handshake with both hands provides more meaning between conversations than a handshake with just one hand. Touching provides its own meaning. In kinesics (mimicry) during a conversation, one of our body parts and our facial expressions will

definitely move. Body movements and facial expressions provide their own meaning. About artifacts, objects of 'propagation' is meant for propagation for all objects/items used by the conversation and found around the place of conversation. The items worn show the special meaning of the clothes worn. Finally, about vocalics, voicing the color and quality of the voice are nonverbal communication signals that are most closely related to language signs in conversation. Intonation can also differentiate meaning. Examples include whispering, shouting, and rebuttal.

## METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach, which is widely used in politeness research to explore how language reflects social relationships and cultural norms. Qualitative methods allow researchers to interpret meaning, intention, and context in communication. The study is grounded in politeness theory [21] which explains how speakers manage public self-image through strategies such as positive politeness, negative politeness, bald-on-record, and off-record strategies. This framework remains one of the most influential and widely applied models in politeness studies across cultures. [21] With reference to data source the data consist of naturally occurring communication, such as, spoken interactions (e.g., daily conversations); however, written texts (e.g., social media, chats, emails) were not used. Politeness research commonly uses authentic discourse because it reflects real-life social interaction and contextual meaning [22] The research was carried in Kecamatan Medan Tembung in North Sumatera Province in which the population amounts to 50 informants and among them only 30 were selected as samples. Sampling was conducted using purposive sampling, selecting participants that represent relevant communication contexts.

About data collection methods, data are collected through: observation to record or note real-life interactions and interviews (optional) to explore participants' intentions and perceptions. These methods are consistent with qualitative politeness studies, which emphasize natural data and contextual interpretation rather than experimental control. [23] Referring to data analysis technique the data are analyzed using thematic and pragmatic analysis, such as, transcribing the data, identifying utterances containing politeness strategies, classifying them based on politeness theory, and interpreting how social variables influence politeness use. According to Brown and Levinson's model, politeness strategies are influenced by social distance, power relations, and degree of imposition. This analytical framework is widely used to examine how speakers adjust language based on context.

In case of validity and reliability (trustworthiness) and to ensure research quality, three techniques are involved, for instance, triangulation by using multiple data sources (spoken and written), member checking by confirming interpretations with participants, and peer debriefing by consulting other researchers. These techniques are standard in qualitative linguistic research to enhance credibility and reduce bias. About ethical considerations, the authors received informed consent from participants, confidentiality and anonymity, and responsible use of data. Ethics are essential in discourse research, especially when analyzing real-life communication.

## RESULTS

### Bald on record

Several examples of communication with reference to this section is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Minangkabau language expressions in bald on record

No	Minangkabau language	English translation
1.	Etong pitihnyo	'Count the money'
2.	Mambasuah parang	'Wash the machete'

3.	Anak sia ko?	'Whose child is this?'
4.	Ikuik apo nan dikatokannyo	'Follow what she says'
5.	Kok mangantuak katiko mangaji?	'Why are you sleepy when studying?'
6.	Mandanyuik-danyuik jantuang ambo	'Thumping and pounding my heart'
7.	Mandangung talingo den kau buek	'You made my ears buzz'
8.	Amak mambali pin pengaman '	'My mother buys a safety pin'
9.	Uda alah marantangkan bahu apak uda	'You're already stretching your father's shoulders'
10.	Masakan sanak lamak rasonyo	'Your cooking tastes delicious'

### Positive expression

Table 2 records the positive expressions.

**Table 2. Minangkabau language in positive expressions**

No	Minangkabau language	English translation
1.	Pak, silahkan masuk	'Sir, please come in'
2.	Buliah amak makan dulu? Litak bana rasonyo	'Can you eat first? I'm really hungry'
3.	Di ateh, masuk oto	'At the top, get into the car'
4.	Tolonglah cangkia tu.... iyo.... iyo	'Please that basin. Yes...yes)
5.	Jadih...Ok, Pak. Ok, tarimo kasih	'Ok...Ok, sir. Ok, thank you'
6.	Lai capek awak jadi datang laruik malam?	Are you tired so coming late at night?
7.	Apokoh inyo ka basamo jo ambo?	'Will he be with me?'
8.	Alah laruik malam, lai buliah lalok di siko?	'It's already late at night, can I sleep here?'
9.	Dunsanak dipersilakan untuak mencari mufakaik	'You are welcome to seek consensus'
10.	Inyo lah masuk, kan?	'He's already entered, right?'

### Negative politeness

There is an element of coercion on the interlocutor to comply with the speaker's wishes.

**Table 3. Minangkabau language expressions in negative politeness**

No	Minangkabau language	English translation
1.	Maaf, nenek indak bisa datang	'Sorry, grandmother can't come'
2.	Maaf, jan dipacik baban ko	'Sorry, don't hold this load'
3.	Tolong pinjamkan ambo baju tu	'Please lend me that shirt'
4.	Agiah ambo ikan tu dulu	'Give me the fish first'
5.	Sutan datang karano disuruah	'Sutan came because he was told to'
6.	Ambiak sadonyo	'Take it all'
7.	Tolong sambuik baliu masuk rumah ko	'Please welcome him into this house'
8.	Baliak ka rumah uda	'Back to your house'
9.	Buek gaji dulu, sudah tu pai	'Make your salary first, then go'
10.	Bagageh ka pasa dulu	'Hurry to the market first'

### Off record

The meaning of the utterance is unclear (subtle insinuation) there is a hidden meaning. (submissive indirectly expresses his meaning.

**Table 4. Minangkabau language expressions in off record**

No	Minangkabau language	English translation
1.	Alun ba kilek ala ta kalam	'Even if you don't say it, you can read it his thoughts'
2.	Sayok lah tabantang tapi ndak namuah tabang tinggi	'The wings are stretched but want to fly high'
3.	Pakak paja ko	'This kid is deaf'
4.	Onde sabantuk jo sadonyo	'Oh, it's all the same'
5.	Onde, sakonyo bajahiek	'Oh, his pocket has a seam'
6.	Habieh makannyo	'Sweep up everything'
7.	Lah kalua apel mato adiak	'You have got your baby'

8.	Awak ka pai bia pun ujan labek	'I will still go even if it rains hard'
9.	Onde lah managieh sibuyung susunyo lah abieh	'Oh, sibuyung is hungry, the milk is gone'
10.	Lah cabiek bajo ko	'The shirt is torn'

## DISCUSSION

Concerning *kato manurun* (downward speech: authority to subordinate) in Table 1 these utterances show control, instruction, or correction. About the utterances *etong pitihnyo* 'count the money' and *mambasuah parang* 'wash the machete' their function is direct commands. Both are bare imperatives with no softeners. In Minangkabau norms, this is acceptable when spoken by someone with higher status (e.g., parent to child). Here, politeness is maintained through social hierarchy, not linguistic mitigation. About the utterance *ikuik apo nan dikatokannyo* 'follow what he/she says' it functions as instruction. It is still directive, but slightly less forceful because it refers to a third person "what he/she says" and also shows indirect authority alignment, not just personal command.

Concerning the utterance *kok mangantuak katiko mangaji?* 'why are you sleepy when studying?' it functions as an indirect reprimand. It is grammatically a question, but pragmatically a criticism. This is a classic softening strategy—correcting behavior without direct accusation. The utterance *uda alah marantangkan bahu apak uda* 'You're already burdening your father' functions as an indirect criticism and uses metaphor "stretching shoulders" instead of saying "You are a burden." This is a strong example of face-saving through figurative language.

In case of utterances in *kato mandata* (equal-level speech) two have been noted, such as, *anak sia ko?* 'whose child is this?' and *amak mambali pin pengaman* 'my mother buys a safety pin'. The first functions as an information question in which it is neutral, direct, and context-dependent. No politeness marking needed among equals. The second might function as a statement in which it is a plain declarative sentence. Purely informational, no hierarchy or politeness strategy involved. For *kato*

*malereang* (indirect / figurative speech) two utterances are also noted, such as, *mandanyuik-danyuik jantuang ambo* 'My heart keeps pounding' and *mandangung talingo den kau buek* 'You made my ears buzz'. The two have different functions; the first is as emotional expression and consists of reduplication (*mandanyuik-danyuik*) to intensify feeling and to show aesthetic and affective politeness—emotion conveyed indirectly. The second functions as an indirect complaint instead of saying "You are too loud," the speaker uses metaphor. It also reduces confrontation to negative politeness strategy.

With regard to *kato mandaki* (upward speech: respect to higher status) the utterance *masakan sanak lamak rasonyo* 'Your cooking tastes delicious' functions as a compliment, expresses appreciation, likely toward someone respected, and represents positive politeness—building solidarity and respect. Then, we will invite you see the cross-data insights and we have found imperatives, indirectness, metaphors, and question. Imperatives are not inherently impolite, for instance, *etong pitihnyo* and *mambasuah parang* are direct but culturally acceptable due to role-based authority. Thus, politeness is socially encoded, not grammatically marked. The indirectness appears in sensitive contexts when criticizing, such as, *kok mangantuak...*, *marantangkan bahu...* and complaining *talingo den kau buek* in which they function to reduce face threat.

Metaphor is a key politeness strategy as emotional expression, criticism, and complaint, for example, the *kato malereang* plays a central role in maintaining harmony. In questions they function beyond information, such as, in utterance *kok mangantuak katiko mangaji?* This is not a real question but only a disciplinary tool. Hence, the dataset demonstrates that Minangkabau politeness, as reflected in *kato*

*nan ampek*, relies heavily on social hierarchy and indirectness.

About Table 2 four utterances reflecting *kato mandaki* are found; the first is *Pak, silahkan masuk* ‘Sir, please come in’ which uses honorific “Pak” plus polite marker “silahkan” showing clear deference strategy toward a higher-status interlocutor and the linguistic politeness is explicit. The second is *alah laruik malam, lai buliah lalok di siko?* ‘It’s already late at night, can I sleep here?’ which uses contextual softener “it’s already late” before request and modal “buliah” (may/can). It is classified as classic indirect request to show respect and avoid imposition. The third one is *dunsanak dipersilakan untuak mencari mufakaik* ‘You are welcome to seek consensus’ having formal lexicon “dipersilakan” and “mufakaik” and reflecting ceremonial politeness, often in *adat* (customary) contexts and pointing to highly respectful and inclusive tone. The last one is *jadih...Ok, Pak. Ok, tarimo kasih* ‘Ok...Ok, sir. Ok, thank you’ having repetition and gratitude marker “tarimo kasih” and showing acknowledgment and respect, especially upward.

Concerning *kato manurun* in Table 2, two utterances are available; the first is *Di ateh, masuk oto* ‘At the top, get into the car’ which is classified as directive without politeness markers in which authority is implied. The second is *tolonglah cangkia tu... iyo... iyo* ‘please that basin... yes... yes’ using “tolonglah” as softening particle -lah and reflecting a mitigated command, reducing directness while maintaining control. In *kato mandata* two utterances are found; the first is *apokoh inyo ka basamo jo ambo?* ‘will he be with me?’ as neutral question and no hierarchy marking or as equal interaction. The second utterance is *Inyo lah masuk, kan?* ‘he’s already entered, right?’ having tag particle “kan?” to seek confirmation which indicates shared knowledge / solidarity.

There are also ambiguous/mixed utterances which are considered as context-dependent politeness. The first is *buliah amak makan*

*dulu? litak bana rasonyo* ‘can you eat first? I’m really hungry’. It is typed as borderline *mandaki / mandata* which uses “buliah” (permission) as a polite request and followed by justification “I’m really hungry”. Here, it combines indirect request + explanation and suggests soft negotiation, not strict hierarchy. The second is *lai capek awak jadi datang laruik malam?* ‘are you tired so coming late at night?’ as *kato malereang*. It is classed as surface question, but may imply concern or mild criticism, and its indirect meaning depends on context which could function as empathetic inquiry or subtle reproach.

Referring to Table 3, four utterances consisting of *kato mandaki* are well-noted; the first is *maaf, nenek indak bisa datang* ‘sorry, grandmother can’t come’ which uses apology marker “maaf” and a reference to “nenek” (elder). The utterance shows deference and face-saving, especially when conveying potentially disappointing information. The second one is *maaf, jan dipacik baban ko* ‘sorry, don’t hold this load’ which is classified as mitigated directive. A negative command “jan” (don’t) is softened by “maaf” to reduce imposition. The third one is *tolong pinjamkan ambo baju tu* ‘please lend me that shirt’ using “tolong” (please) as standard polite request to minimize force. The last one is *tolong sambuik baliu masuk rumah ko* ‘please welcome him into this house’ consisting of “baliu” as honorific (respectful reference) and of “tolong” to soften directive; thus, here, there combines honorific and politeness marker.

Regarding *kato manurun*, five utterances have been recorded; the first is *agiah ambo ikan tu dulu* ‘give me the fish first’ which is considered as direct imperative with no softener but acceptable in hierarchical relation. The second is *ambiak sadonyo* ‘take it all’ having short, strong command to show maximum directness in which authority is implied. The third is *baliak ka rumah uda* ‘go back to your house’ as directive without mitigation in which context likely legitimizes directness. The

fourth is *buek gaji dulu, sudah tu pai* ‘do your work first, then go’ as a sequential command with instructional tone for typical authority speech. The last one is *bagegeh ka pasa dulu* ‘hurry to the market first’ consisting of urgency (*bagegeh* = hurry) to reinforce control and expectation. In case of *kato mandata*, an utterance is found, such as, *Sutan datang karano disuruah* ‘Sutan came because he was told to’ which is a declarative and no politeness strategy is needed except for informational function only.

In case of observations on politeness strategies, four points have been noted; the first is apology as a key softener, for example, *maaf, nenek indak bisa datang* and *maaf, jan dipacik...*. The word “*maaf*” functions to reduce potential offense, to show humility, and to maintain social harmony. The second is a clear contrast of softened vs. direct directives: *tolong pinjamkan* (softened) and *ambiak sadonyo* (direct). Meanwhile, the hybrid *maaf, jan* is an apology and prohibition showing flexibility depending on social relation. The third is honorific usage to strengthen politeness, for instance, *baliau* (respectful pronoun) to indicate awareness of social status aligning with *kato mandaki*. The fourth point is imperatives which remain dominant in which most utterances are commands, but some are softened linguistically (*tolong, maaf*). Others rely on social hierarchy to confirm pattern from previous datasets.

In Table 4, concerning the *kato malereang*, four utterances are well-noted; the first one is *alun ba kilek ala ta kalam* ‘Even if you don’t say it, [we] can read his thoughts’ which is an idiomatic/figurative expression, communicates understanding without explicit statement, and reflects high-context communication and subtle politeness. The second is *sayok lah tabantang tapi ndak namuah tabang tinggi* ‘the wings are stretched but [they] do not want to fly high’ which is a strong metaphor, a likely indirect criticism (someone capable but unmotivated, and avoids direct blame for

face-saving strategy. The third is *onde, sakonyo bajahiek* ‘oh, his pocket has a seam’ which is a figurative, culturally loaded meaning (often implies stinginess/hidden money), an indirect evaluation of character, and reduces confrontation. The last one is *onde lah managieh sibuyung susunyo lah abieh* ‘oh, the baby is crying, the milk is gone’ reflecting a symbolic situation (need vs. lack of resource), can imply hardship indirectly, and is an emotional and socially sensitive expression.

Regarding *kato mandata*, four utterances exist; the first is *pakak paja ko* ‘this kid is deaf’ which is a direct descriptive statement, can sound harsh, and shows absence of politeness strategy. The second is *onde sabantuk jo sadonyo* ‘oh, it’s all the same’ which is evaluative but general, mild expression, with no hierarchy involved. The third is *lah kalua apel mato adiak* ‘the baby has been born’ as an informational statement and a neutral, context-driven. The fourth is *awak ka pai bia pun ujan labek* ‘I will still go even if it rains hard’ as a statement of intention but no politeness marking, although expresses determination. The last one is *lah cabiek bajo ko* ‘the shirt is torn’ as a simple observation with no social meaning beyond information. With reference to *kato manurun*, only one utterance is recorded, such as, *habieh makannyo* (‘finish/eat it all’ / ‘sweep it all up’ as an imperative form to show direct command (authority implied) without mitigation.

## CONCLUSION

Direct imperatives are acceptable within hierarchical relations (*kato manurun*), while figurative and indirect expressions (*kato malereang*) are strategically used to mitigate criticism and maintain interpersonal harmony. Meanwhile, neutral exchanges (*kato mandata*) and respectful compliments (*kato mandaki*) reinforce social balance and solidarity. The politeness in ML is not only governed by social hierarchy (*kato nan ampek*), but also realized through explicit linguistic strategies, including honorifics,

modal verbs, politeness particles, and formal lexical choices. Also, the politeness in ML operates through a dual system: (1) explicit linguistic mitigation (e.g., *maaf*, *tolong*, honorifics), and (2) implicit social hierarchy, where direct imperatives are acceptable within authority relations (*kato manurun*). The presence of apology markers and polite request forms indicates a stronger orientation toward interactional politeness, while unmitigated commands continue to reflect role-based authority. This result highlights the importance of *kato malereang* as a dominant politeness strategy in ML. Speakers frequently employ metaphor, idiomatic expressions, and emotional particles to convey meaning indirectly, particularly when expressing criticism or sensitive information. Compared to direct statements, these figurative forms function to minimize face threat and preserve social harmony, reinforcing the cultural preference for indirectness. Across all the datasets, a clear system emerges: *kato manurun* to direct authority (commands), *kato mandaki* to respectful, mitigated requests, *kato mandata* to neutral communication, and *kato malereang* to indirect, metaphor-based politeness. Indirectness (especially metaphor) is not optional—it is a core politeness mechanism in ML.

#### **Declaration by Authors**

**Acknowledgement:** None

**Source of Funding:** None

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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- How to cite this article: Risnawaty, Annim Hasibuan, Ihsan Fadhilah, Efendi Barus, Emmy Erwina, Milisi Sembiring, and Muhammad Ali Pawiro. Politeness strategy and *Kato Nan Ampek* in the Minangkabau language in Medan: A pragmatic study. *International Journal of Research and Review*. 2026; 13(5): 489-502. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20260545>

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