

# Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: An Investigation into Speech Act Realization on The Ship

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## Abstract

This study, titled "*Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: An Investigation into Speech Act Realization on the Ship*," aims to explore the influence of cultural backgrounds on the realization of speech acts among crew members in the Indonesian maritime industry. Specifically, it identifies the patterns and challenges associated with cross-cultural pragmatics on ships. Utilizing a descriptive qualitative design, the research was conducted on KM Lambelu, employing field notes, interviews, and observations as data collection instruments. The findings reveal that cultural backgrounds significantly influence how speech acts are realized by crew members, particularly regarding politeness, directness, and respect for hierarchy. The study highlights that while cultural diversity enriches interactions among crew members, it can also create communication barriers if not properly managed. The research further emphasizes that politeness strategies are deeply rooted in cultural norms, with a strong emphasis on seniority in hierarchical maritime settings.

**Keywords:** *Cross-Cultural, Pragmatics, Ship, Speech Act*

## Introduction

In the Indonesian maritime industry, where diverse cultural backgrounds converge, effective communication is paramount for ensuring the smooth operation of vessels. Ships, functioning as floating microcosms, bring together crew members from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds who must collaborate seamlessly to maintain operational success (Daniels, Daija M, 2017). The study of cross-cultural communication, particularly through the lens of speech act realization, is essential for fostering effective interactions in this unique maritime environment.

Indonesia's maritime sector represents a rich tapestry of cultural diversity, with seafarers from different regions contributing their distinct linguistic styles and communication practices. Despite a wealth of research on cross-cultural pragmatics, the specific context of Indonesian maritime settings remains underexplored. This study seeks to address this gap by examining how speech act realization operates on Indonesian ships, focusing on the confined spaces and multicultural nature of these maritime environments.

Previous research provides a foundation for understanding the complexities of communication in diverse settings. For instance, Roberts (2012) highlighted the unique communication challenges on ships, emphasizing the importance of effective interpersonal interactions for safety and operational efficiency. Wu (2010) investigated intercultural communication in maritime operations, revealing that crew members face linguistic and cultural barriers that impact communication clarity and efficiency. Similarly, Yamamoto (2021) explored communication channels used by maritime crews, emphasizing the reliance on both verbal and non-verbal methods and the role of standardized communication protocols.

Further, studies by Smith and Lee (2015) and Brown and Levinson (2013) have explored how cultural diversity influences speech act realization and politeness strategies in multicultural teams. These studies underscore the need for adaptability in intercultural interactions and the impact of cultural norms on communication practices. This research aims to build on these findings by investigating how cultural backgrounds influence speech act realization among Indonesian maritime crews. By identifying specific patterns and challenges associated with cross-cultural pragmatics, the study aspires to provide valuable insights for developing targeted communication strategies and training programs. Such insights are crucial for minimizing misunderstandings, promoting teamwork, and ensuring the safety and efficiency of maritime operations. In summary, this study endeavors to illuminate the nuances of cross-cultural pragmatics and speech act realization within the Indonesian maritime context. By integrating findings from related studies and focusing on the unique challenges of communication on Indonesian ships, the research aims to enhance communication competence, strengthen intercultural understanding, and contribute to the overall effectiveness of maritime operations in Indonesia.

## **Method**

This chapter details the methodology employed in this research, covering the study design, variables, study site, data resources, instruments, data collection procedures, and techniques for data analysis. The study aims to investigate cross-cultural pragmatics in the maritime industry, particularly focusing on speech act realization on ships. A descriptive qualitative design was chosen for its suitability in examining the lived experiences, cultural nuances, and communication patterns among crew members, which are critical for effective and safe maritime operations. By immersing in these communication practices, the study seeks to understand the influence of cultural diversity on speech act realization, contributing to both theoretical insights and practical applications in cross-cultural maritime communication.

The study's variables include speech acts and cross-cultural pragmatics. A speech act is defined as any use of language to perform an action, such as making a request or issuing a command. Cross-cultural pragmatics, on the other hand, refers to the influence of cultural background on communication practices, particularly in how speech acts are interpreted and understood by people from different cultures. This investigation centers on how these variables interact within the maritime industry, focusing on the crew's communication on board a ship.

The study was conducted at two sites: Politeknik Ilmu Pelayaran (PIP) Makassar and the passenger ship KM Lambelu. PIP Makassar was chosen due to the researchers' roles as Maritime English lecturers, which facilitated easier access to participants and observation opportunities. KM Lambelu was selected because of its diverse crew from

various regions of Indonesia, making it an ideal setting to study cross-cultural pragmatics in real-world maritime communication. Data collection involved both primary and secondary resources, with primary data coming from observations and interviews with crew members, while secondary data consisted of literature related to cross-cultural pragmatics and speech acts.

The instruments used for data collection included field notes, interviews, and questionnaires. These tools were designed to gather detailed information on the crew's communication practices and perceptions of cross-cultural pragmatics. Observations were conducted on board the ship to document real-time interactions, while interviews and questionnaires provided additional insights into the crew's experiences and attitudes toward cross-cultural communication.

Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's (2014) theory of descriptive qualitative research. The process involved data reduction, where raw data from field notes and interviews were simplified and coded for analysis. The reduced data was then presented in a structured format to facilitate interpretation and comparison. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on the organized data, addressing the research questions and providing solutions to the identified challenges in cross-cultural maritime communication.

## Results

### Influence of Cultural Backgrounds on Speech Acts Among Crew Members

The study aimed to explore how cultural backgrounds impact the realization of speech acts among crew members in the Indonesian maritime industry. The analysis, guided by Miles and Huberman (2014), reveals significant cultural variations in communication practices.

### Cultural Differences in Direct Speech Acts: Ordering and Giving Instructions

Data collected from interviews with the crew of the KM Lambelu illustrate how cultural backgrounds influence speech act realization. For instance, Chief Mate AY from Magetan, Java, demonstrates a preference for polite directives, often using Bahasa Indonesia with the addition of "Please" to minimize miscommunication among a diverse crew. Conversely, crew members from Makassar are more direct, reflecting their cultural norm of straightforwardness. Javanese crew members typically employ indirect language and politeness markers in their communication, while Makassar crew members use more direct and authoritative commands. This difference highlights the impact of regional cultural norms on communication styles. It can be seen in the following extract

- LIA : Are you available to answer in English or in Bahasa Pak?  
(Are you available to answer in English or in Bahasa Sir?)  
AY : I wish I can answer full English tapi Bahasa Indonesia saja ya.  
(I wish I could answer in English but I'd rather to use Bahasa)  
LIA : Ok pak. Bapak asalnya dari mana dan rank Bapak apa ?  
(Ok Sir, Where are you from and what is your rank onboard?)  
AY : Kebetulan saya dari Magetan ibu dan rank saya Chief mate  
(I am actually from Magetan, Mam, And I am Chief mate)  
LIA: Sebagai Chief mate, pasti selalu memberikan order dan  
instruksikan pak apalagi crew bapak itu mix crew, nah bisa  
dijelaskan!

(As the chief mate, you always give orders and instructions to your mixed-crew, how do you conduct those?

AY : Baik, sehari-harinya di kapal itu saya pakai Bahasa Indonesia ketika memberikan instruksi pada tim saya agar lebih mudah di pahami karena kalau pakai Bahasa saya bisa jadi tim saya yang bukan orang Jawa tidak mengerti. Tapi penyampaiannya halus ya usahakan pakai kata tolong.  
(Well, everyday on the ship I use Indonesian when giving instructions to my team so that it is easier to understand because if I use my language my non-Javanese team may not understand. But the delivery is smooth, so try to use the word please.

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### **Cultural Differences in Direct Speech Acts: Requests and Politeness**

Extracts from crew member RI, who hails from Makassar, further illustrate these differences. Despite the directness of requests, RI maintains a level of politeness consistent with Makassar norms. This is contrasted with Javanese crew members, who use formal and indirect forms of requests, reflecting their cultural emphasis on hierarchy and respect. It can be seen in the following extract

ADE : Pagi pak saya pakai Bahasa Indonesia saja ya pak supaya lebih mudah ditanggap pertanyaan saya. (Morning sir, I only use Indonesian language so that it is easier to respond to my questions).

RI : Siap! Pakai Bahasa Indonesia saja pak. (Ok! Just speak Indonesian Language sir!).

ADE : Sehari-hari, Saya tahu pekerjaan bapak adalah menerima order dan memberikan order ke taruna serta mengawasi semua pekerjaan di deck, semisal kalau bapak ingin request atau meminta sesuatu itu bagaimana pak ? (On a daily basis, I know that your job is to receive orders

and give orders to the cadets and supervise all work on the decks, for example if you want to request or ask for something, how do you do it? how is that?

RI : Simple saja, kalau saya request ke atasan pasti langsung saja saya Bilang pakai Bahasa Indonesia terus tetap harus ada kata tolongnya walaupun itu atasan saya lebih muda dari saya, terus kalau ke cadet itu saya juga biasa pakai kata tolong, bilang eh cadet tolong kerjakan dulu itu. (It's simple, if I make a request to my superiors, I'll say it in Indonesian, and I still have to use the word please. even though my boss is younger than me, then if it's to a cadet, I also usually use the word please. Saying, hey cadet please do it first please!

### **Cultural Influence on Commissive and Expressive Acts: Apologizing and Expressing Gratitude**

When addressing miscommunication, crew member SAM from Palu or Makassar/Bugis emphasized the use of "Maaf" and "sorry," showcasing a blend of directness and responsibility in apologies. Similarly, crew member CE from Java highlighted the use of "terima kasih" along with "Mas" in expressing gratitude, illustrating the role of cultural expressions in maintaining positive interactions, even in infrequent communications.

In summary, cultural backgrounds significantly influence how crew members in the Indonesian maritime industry perform speech acts, particularly concerning politeness, directness, and hierarchical respect. While cultural diversity can enhance team dynamics, it also presents challenges in communication that need to be effectively managed.

## **Specific Patterns and Challenges Associated with Cross-Cultural Pragmatics on Ships**

The study also examined specific patterns and challenges of cross-cultural pragmatics on the KM Lambelu. Observations and field notes reveal distinct patterns in communication among crew members from various cultural backgrounds.

### **Pragmatic Patterns**

#### **Direct vs. Indirect Communication**

Crew members from direct communication cultures, such as Makassar and Bugis, often use straightforward language for requests, commands, and feedback. For example, Makassar speakers may issue direct orders reflecting cultural values of openness and assertiveness. In contrast, Javanese and Sundanese crew members use more indirect language, employing politeness markers or non-verbal cues to align with cultural norms of harmony and respect. This difference in communication styles is evident in the varying approaches to requests and commands.

#### **Politeness Strategies and Seniority**

Politeness strategies in the Indonesian maritime context are deeply intertwined with cultural norms regarding hierarchy and seniority. Seniority influences communication, with younger or less experienced crew members using indirect speech acts and formal language to show respect. For instance, Javanese crew members might use honorific titles or softened directives when addressing senior colleagues. This practice is crucial for maintaining respect and avoiding perceived disrespect, even in high-stress situations.

### **Common Challenges**

Several challenges arise from cross-cultural pragmatics on board. Direct-speaking crew members, such as those from Makassar and Bugis, may misinterpret the indirect language of Javanese or Sundanese colleagues, leading to potential delays or incomplete tasks. Differing perceptions of hierarchy and politeness can also cause discomfort or misunderstandings. For example, Javanese crew members might view the directness of other cultures as rudeness, while direct-speaking crew members might find indirect communication inefficient.

Overall, these findings highlight the importance of understanding and managing cultural differences to facilitate effective communication and teamwork in the diverse environment of maritime operations.

## **Discussion**

The research explored two key questions related to cross-cultural pragmatics in the Indonesian maritime industry: How do cultural backgrounds influence the realization of speech acts among crew members? And What are the specific patterns and challenges associated with cross-cultural pragmatics?

Based on the findings above, there are some points that the writers need to discuss in this point. In extract 1 The simple conclusion that the researchers can take is when giving orders and giving instructions simply to avoid miscommunication among the mixed-crew, the crew use Bahasa Indonesia politely and followed by the phrase "Please". The researchers also meet others crew from the same region that is Java and others regions and come up to the conclusion that Javanese crew members tend to use indirect

or softened language when giving orders, reflecting the cultural norm of *halus* (politeness and subtlety). Makassar crew members, known for their direct communication style, often issue commands more bluntly, which can be interpreted as authoritative but efficient. The data can be seen in the Extract 2.

The performed of one of the speech act that is apologizing can be seen in extract 3. The extract 3 above shows us how one of the crewmember SAM used the speech act in apologizing when there is miscommunication happened onboard. The crew SAM was asked about how to overcome if there is miscommunication. The answer was to use the word "Maaf" as a formal and "sorry" to say it to her friends or informal. It may be concluded that Crew members from Palu or Makassar/Bugis backgrounds may apologize more directly but with a strong sense of responsibility.

The word "terima kasih" is often used to express gratitude when working onboard as one of the speech acts happened onboard, it can be seen in the extract 4 above.

Cultural backgrounds significantly shape how crew members perform speech acts such as requests, apologies, gratitude, and commands. The study revealed clear differences between the more direct communication styles of ethnic groups such as the Makassar, Palu and Bugis, and the indirect, more formal styles of Javanese and Sundanese crew members. Politeness strategies are deeply embedded in communication, particularly regarding seniority and hierarchy on board. Almost all crew members place significant importance on showing respect to senior colleagues, but the way they express this varies by culture.

There were also some challenges happened onboard associated to cross-cultural pragmatic such as when more direct-speaking crew members (e.g., Makassar, Bugis) misinterpret the indirect language of their Javanese or Sundanese colleagues. The perception of hierarchy differs between cultures. For instance, Javanese crew members are more likely to defer to superiors using indirect speech acts and honorifics. In contrast, crew members from more egalitarian cultures may interact more casually with their superiors. This can cause discomfort or perceived disrespect. What one culture views as polite might not be perceived the same way in another.

The findings of this study on cross-cultural pragmatics in the Indonesian maritime industry reveal the profound influence of cultural backgrounds on communication, particularly in the realization of speech acts. The study highlights how crew members from diverse regions navigate the challenges of communication on board, adapting their language use to accommodate both cultural norms and the demands of the maritime environment. For instance, when giving orders or instructions, crew members from different cultural backgrounds tend to adopt varying levels of politeness and directness. The use of Bahasa Indonesia followed by the phrase "please" was a common strategy to ensure clarity and avoid misunderstandings among mixed-crew members. This simple yet effective approach underscores the importance of linguistic adaptability in cross-cultural communication.

Cultural differences in communication styles were evident, particularly between crew members from Java and those from Makassar or Bugis regions. Javanese crew members, for example, were observed to use softened or indirect language when issuing commands, reflecting the cultural norm of *halus* (politeness and subtlety). In contrast, crew members from Makassar, known for their direct communication style, often delivered instructions more bluntly, which, while efficient, could be perceived as authoritative. These differences highlight the role of cultural norms in shaping speech act realization, particularly in hierarchical environments like ships, where communication efficiency and clarity are paramount.

The study also examined how crew members perform other speech acts, such as apologizing. When miscommunication occurred, crew members from different regions approached apologies in culturally distinct ways. For instance, crew members from Palu or Makassar/Bugis backgrounds were found to apologize directly, often expressing a strong sense of responsibility. The use of the words "maaf" (formal apology) and "sorry" (informal apology) demonstrated how language choices varied depending on the context and the relationship between the speakers. This suggests that cultural background not only influences the form of the apology but also the level of formality and the perceived sincerity behind it.

Gratitude was another speech act frequently observed in the study, with the expression "terima kasih" commonly used by crew members to convey thanks in the workplace. The way gratitude is expressed also varied by culture, with some crew members offering more elaborate expressions of thanks depending on the hierarchical relationships on board. These findings emphasize the role of cultural context in shaping both the form and frequency of gratitude expressions, further illustrating the diversity of communicative practices among the crew.

However, the study also identified challenges associated with cross-cultural pragmatics on board ships. Misinterpretations often arose when more direct-speaking crew members, such as those from Makassar or Bugis, encountered the indirect language of their Javanese or Sundanese colleagues. Additionally, differences in perceptions of hierarchy led to varying communication styles, with Javanese crew members more likely to defer to superiors using honorifics and indirect speech acts. In contrast, crew members from more egalitarian cultures interacted more casually with superiors, which sometimes caused discomfort or was perceived as disrespectful. These challenges highlight the complexity of cross-cultural communication in the maritime industry, where differing cultural norms can impact both interpersonal relationships and operational efficiency.

## Conclusion

The research shows that cultural backgrounds significantly shape how crew members perform speech acts such as requests, commands, apologies, and expressions of gratitude.

The study identified several key patterns and challenges related to cross-cultural pragmatics: Politeness strategies are heavily influenced by cultural norms, with a strong focus on seniority in hierarchical settings. Junior crew members often use indirect language when communicating with seniors, especially in cultures that value deference and respect. Indirectness vs. directness: Misunderstandings often arise when crew members from direct-speaking cultures perceive indirectness as unclear or inefficient, while indirect speakers may find directness too forward or impolite.

Implementing cross-cultural communication training for crew members is essential. This training should focus on raising awareness about the different pragmatic patterns that exist among various cultural groups, such as the use of indirectness, politeness, and honorifics.

The use of Standard Maritime Communication Phrases (SMCP) should be reinforced across the board to minimize the impact of cultural differences. Future research could focus on exploring communication patterns in more multicultural crews that include members from various nationalities beyond Indonesia.

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