

## DISPARITY OF THE ENGLISH FORMAL AND INFORMAL LANGUAGE ON THE STUDENTS' SPOKEN TEXT : A SOCIOPRAGMATIC PERCEPTIONS

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### ABSTRACT

Recent phenomena have been identified among students at the university level, such as the tendency to use an informal language style, which has become a normal and common one, even though the context situation requires a very formal context. The students prefer to use a casual and informal style over a formal one. This is, of course, not appropriate since in formal contexts and situations, a formal language including nonverbal elements is used.

The study analyzes the disparity in the use of formal and informal English language, including the nonverbal elements used by the students of the English department in their fourth semester of the academic year 2024-2025 with the number of seventy seven students as the subjects of the study. The objectives of this study are to describe the perceived characteristics of English formal language used by the students in their formal spoken language, as well as the nonverbal elements from the point of Sociopragmatic views, thus explaining the factors of the difficulties the students face. Along with the descriptions of the formality, an implementation of some strategies through theoretical concepts on Pragmatics and Sociolinguistics is also conducted.

The method used in this study is a descriptive qualitative design with some process phases applied, starting with conducting a direct observation in the classroom during the lecture of Advanced Interpretation taking place. Then it is also followed by a deep interview with the students and some lecturers in order to gain some preliminary data about the use of English formal language expressions. The data sources are the classroom activities, especially classroom presentations, discussions, and Q & A sessions during the lecture. The data are all the verbal and nonverbal English language showing formality. After that, there is an exposure to some theoretical concepts on Pragmatics and Sociolinguistics. The strategic explanations will be introduced to the students so that they can identify the most challenging factors that make them feel discomfort and unwilling to use the formal English language and nonverbal elements in very formal contexts and situations. By conducting the study there are some significant contributions such as the use of English formal expressions and dictions is used, the nonverbal elements such as the good tone of speaking, intonation, pause, eye contact, body gestures are also used, thus they contribute to enhance students' ability to use the formal English language and nonverbal elements in a formal situation.

**Keywords :** Formal Language; Informal Language; Sociopragmatics; Nonverbal elements; Dictions.

### ABSTRAK

*Fenomena belakangan ini yang sering kita perhatikan dikalangan pelajar, termasuk mahasiswa di tingkat universitas, yaitu kecenderungan berkomunikasi dengan gaya informal (tidak baku), yang dianggap menjadi sesuatu yang normal dan biasa sekalipun konteks situasinya bersifat resmi bahkan sangat resmi sekalipun. Pelajar lebih menyukai bentuk bahasa ragam kasual atau santai, yang menuntut penggunaan bahasa ragam formal sekaligus bentuk bentuk nonverbal.*

*Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis perbedaan penggunaan ragam formal dan informal beserta unsur unsur nonverbal, yang digunakan oleh mahasiswa semester empat yang berjumlah tujuh puluh tujuh pada tahun akademik 2024-2025. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah mendeskripsikan ciri ciri ragam formal dan informal beserta unsur unsur nonverbal yang digunakan oleh mahasiswa dari sudut pandang Sociopragmatics, sekaligus menjelaskan faktor faktor penyebab kesulitan yang dihadapi mahasiswa ketika menggunakan ragam formal.*

*Metode yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif yang dilakukan dalam beberapa tahapan. Dimulai dengan observasi langsung di dalam kelas pada mata kuliah Advanced Interpretation. Kemudian diikuti dengan wawancara yang menyeluruh terhadap mahasiswa dan beberapa dosen, untuk mendapatkan data awal mengenai penggunaan ragam formal yang digunakan pada situasi formal di kelas. Sumber data adalah kegiatan kegiatan mahasiswa di kelas, presentasi, diskusi serta tanya jawab selama perkuliahan berlangsung. Dan yang menjadi data adalah seluruh bahasa Inggris verbal maupun unsur unsur nonverbal yang mengacu kepada bentuk formalitas. Kemudian pendekatan konsep teoritis tentang Pragmatik dan Soslolinguistik diperkenalkan kepada mahasiswa dan akhirnya dengan penjelasan penjelasan teoritis yang strategis diperkenalkan kepada mahasiswa sehingga mahasiswa dapat mengenali faktor penyebab sehingga mereka merasa enggan dan sulit untuk menggunakan ragam bahasa Inggris formal baik secara verbal maupun nonverbal pada konteks dan situasi formal.*

*Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan suatu peningkatan yang signifikan dan dikatakan berhasil, seperti penggunaan ragam diksi bahasa Inggris formal oleh mahasiswa termasuk unsur unsur nonverbal yang digunakan seperti nada, intonasi, jeda, kontak mata serta gestur tubuh yang formal, sehingga penelitian ini dikatakan berhasil untuk meningkatkan penggunaan ragam bahasa Inggris formal maupun nonverbal dikalangan mahasiswa.*

**Kata kunci :** *Ragam formal; Ragam informal; Sosiopragmatik; Unsur unsur nonverbal; Diksi.*

## INTRODUCTION

English, as one of the international languages, has dominated global communication around the world, specifically in education and the sciences. In terms of this, students of the English department should be able to perform good formal communication in English, either in a spoken way or nonverbally. Being able to speak English formally in formal situational contexts can also be presumed to indicate a high professionalism. Formal communication is regarded as essential, as in situational contexts such as presentation, debate, classroom discussion, official ceremony remarks, and other formal forums that need a formal usage of language verbally or nonverbally.<sup>[1]</sup>

But in fact, recent phenomena have been identified among students at the university level, such as the tendency to use an informal language style, which has become a normal and common one, even though the context situation requires a very formal context. The students prefer to use a casual and informal style over a formal one. This is, of course, not appropriate since in formal contexts and situations, a formal language including nonverbal elements is used.

This phenomenon is also seen for the students of the English department, the faculty of Languages and Arts of Universitas Negeri Medan, in their fourth semester. The students tend to use a rather casual and informal English language both verbally and nonverbally, even though the situational contexts are formal situations. In some cases, the diction used is rather inappropriate, or even incorrect in formal contexts.

While the nonverbal aspects of communication, such as intonation, tone, pauses, gestures, eye contact, voice volume, self-confidence, and time control, show inappropriateness for formal situations. This is aligned with the research conducted by Utami and Budiarta (2021), which says that students tend to feel comfortable using a rather informal English language over the formal one, even though the situational contexts require very formal settings.<sup>[2]</sup>

Furthermore, Paramarta and Sudana (2021), in their research on nonverbal communication, revealed that incorrect nonverbal communication can affect the listeners' or audiences' perceptions towards the speaker's credibility.<sup>[3]</sup>

It is also strengthened by Muspawi et al. (2023), who found that miscommunication is often caused by the use of incorrect nonverbal elements, especially in formal situations.<sup>[4]</sup> The inability of the students to use the correct dictions as well as the nonverbal aspects in formal situational contexts can decrease the quality of the academic communication as a whole.

Previous research has also shown that factors such as a lack of intensive training, a lack of understanding of the importance of formality, and the tendency of a casual lifestyle have been the primary factors for this problem.

Crystal (2003), said that the mastery of formal language needs continuous training as well as the understanding of the correct rules of social expectations in every situational context.<sup>[5]</sup> Thus, it needs ways to improve students' ability in using English formal language effectively, either a good pedagogic approach or teaching strategies relevant to academic formal communication.

The objectives of this study are to describe the perceived characteristics of English formal language used by the students in their formal spoken language, as well as the nonverbal elements from the point of Sociopragmatic views, thus explaining the factors of the difficulties the students face. Along with the descriptions of the formality, an implementation of some strategies through theoretical concepts on Pragmatics and Sociolinguistics is also conducted.

## METHODS

The research was implemented by using the descriptive qualitative method on the students of the English Literature department of Universitas Negeri Medan, in the fourth semester of the academic year 2024-2025, with a total of seventy-seven students in the Advanced Interpretation Class. The method was conducted with some process phases applied, starting with conducting a direct

observation in the classroom during the lectures. Then it was also followed by a deep interview with the students and some lecturers in order to gain some preliminary data about the use of English formal language expressions. The data sources were the classroom activities, especially classroom presentations, discussions, and Q & A sessions during the lectures. The data were all the verbal and nonverbal English language showing formality. After that, there was an exposure to some theoretical concepts on Pragmatics and Sociolinguistics. The strategic explanations then were introduced to the students so that they could identify the most challenging factors that make them feel discomfort and unwilling to use the formal English language and nonverbal elements in very formal contexts and situations.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Questions and responses from the students towards the questionnaire sheets

No.	questions	responses
1.	What styles of language do you prefer to use in a classroom presentation? Formal or Informal?	Most answers show the tendency to prefer speaking casually to formal ones, though there were a few answers used formal styles.
2.	Do you find it difficult to speak in front of the class ?	Some students were reluctant and felt nervous to speak in front of the class. While some others were brave enough to do so.
3.	What nonverbal aspects do you find most difficult to handle while speaking?	Some answers were about good tone, gestures/body language, some were about self confidence, memory, or voice volume.
4.	Are you able to differ the disparity of English dictions for formal usage and informal one ?	Some students said yes, but some others said no.
5.	Does the mastery of the topic affect you to speak fluently in front of the clsssroom?	Most of the students answered yes.
6.	Does the theories of Sociopragmatics help you to use the disparity of formal and informal languages?	Most of the students said yes, and realized that the theories were really helpful.

*table continued*

The questionnaire list was designed to find out the students' responses to their perceptions of the disparity between the formal and informal English language. From the above table, it can be seen that most of the students prefer using informal English to formal one, due to the habit that they have brought even since elementary school. They have never been taught to use or respond to questions from their teachers by using formal expressions, since the teachers themselves used informal language as well. This habit was continued to junior high school. So, that is why they cannot differ between the use of formal language and informal language, though the activities take place in classroom settings.

For question number 2, it can be found out, such as they do not have bravery since they are shy of being observed by their classmates because they have known each other for quite a long time, and thus it makes them feel nervous. This is due to they seldom have chances to present their English speaking to the front of the class. Besides that they also feel embarrassed to speak bad English pronunciation.

The underlying reason for question number 3 is since they are used to speaking informally and thus it can be seen from their nonverbal aspects especially gestures or body languages showing informal ones, such as hands are put in the pockets, body movements to and fro, unclear eye contact i.e looking at the passerby, using very soft for the voice volume, screaming, clapping hands when there were some funny actions, etc. As the opposite, some other students can perform nonverbal aspects well, since their primary motivation is that they want to be able to conduct English speaking practice in front of the class, this is especially for female students.

To answer question number 4, it can be said that most of the students do not care about the differences between English formal and informal languages; they choose to use English dictions and nonverbal elements informally.

However, the answers for questions 5 and 6, i.e. all of the students admit that knowing the topics beforehand and the theories of Socio pragmatics are helpful, were great positive contribution for them to be able to conduct English speaking formally in any kinds of formal setting. It means that the students actually want to perform English better.

Table 2. Examples of students' formal and informal English dictions and nonverbal elements

No.	Formal English dictions	Informal English dictions	Nonverbal elements informally
1.	can relieve our stress..	can waste our stress....	moving to and fro
2.	..your..	Ur.. Halo, cerioo	
3.	good morning, thank you		
4.	very sorry	your readiness the price is net	
5.	your request asking	your we've filled your order thank you for good relation	
6.	your willingness	to sum my speech a new furniture	
7.	the price is fixed	have to guard her will shatter our friendship	
8.	we've fulfilled your order		
9.	thank you for good cooperation		
10.	finally,..I'll conclude..		
11.	a new sofa		
12.	have to take care her		
13.	will break our friendship		

From the above data, it can be seen that most students often used informal usage of English that is usually transferred from their mother tongue. They tend to find the similar meaning in bahasa Indonesia then translate them into English directly.

Table 3. Findings based on theories on Socio-Pragmatic views

	Multicultural Class	Different sex	Classmates	Social background
Sociopragmatic Views	Speak to the point, sounds impolite, no lengthy words (Bataknesse)	Female students more polite and informal than male students	Have the same solidarity, accept others' informal English	Some students are more formal than others since the different status
	Speak more politely and use a non direct utterances (Javanese)	Female Students tend to use a lot of vocabulary (lengthy words) than male students	Feeling the same status in class, so they often use informal English	Smart students are more active than less smart ones, so they talk more and others accept this
	Speaking sounds informal, because the tonal languages of their mother tongue (Karonese, Nias)	Male are easy to control emotion, feeling, easier to understand than female students.	Students try to support others, eventhough their English are still informal ones.	The richy students tend to use rather formal than the poor ones.

Sociopragmatic views are also have greatly contributed to the usage of formality of languages used either spoken or written ones. Brown and Levinson (1987:24) stated that negative politeness strategies are strategies that focus on hearer's negative face such as using formal language, showing deference and minimizing the imposition. Brown and Levinson's theory highlights the importance of context and social dynamics in communication, demonstrating how individuals strategically use language to manage relationships and navigate social situations.

From the above table, it can be seen that students from different social backgrounds, also affect the use of language formality, but as a professional, it needs to highlight the importance of identifying the social situations, such as in classroom activities, the formal language should be primarily used instead of informal ones, no matter our social backgrounds tend to be indirect or direct culture.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Having done the research for around two months, there was a significant improvement among the students in using the English formal and informal language either verbally or nonverbally, and thus, this research has successfully contributed to enhancing students' speaking abilities. Some conclusions were drawn as follows :

1. Students are rarely exposed to speaking English formally, especially in the classroom, even from early levels of school, such as elementary school, up to higher education. This casual habit has made the students unable to perform English speaking verbally or nonverbally in correct social contexts.

2. The teachers' social backgrounds have also affected the students' use of English, either more formally or informally.
3. Classmates during the semester have also figured out the use of informal English among the students, since classmates tend to show great solidarity.
4. No matter how different our social status is, different sex, different social background, etc, we need to use our language appropriately, i.e, formal language in a formal setting, such as classroom activities, presentation, debate, opening ceremony, project discussion, rather than an informal language.
5. The use of nonverbal aspects is also used to align with the formal situations; we need to use the formal gestures, intonation, eye contact, voice volume, and so on in formal situational contexts and vice versa.
6. The study of English formal and informal language should also be increased among students for their knowledge.

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