

MORAL SCHEMATA IN L2 POLITENESS: SASAK AND BALINESE EFL LEARNERS' PRAGMATIC TRANSFER

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ABSTRACT

Research in interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) has increasingly recognized that politeness is shaped not only by linguistic knowledge but also by the cultural values learners bring to interaction. However, evidence from Southeast Asian contexts remains limited, restricting current understanding of how local value systems influence pragmatic transfer. This study investigates how Indonesian EFL learners from two ethnolinguistic groups, Sasak ($n = 30$) and Balinese ($n = 30$), realize politeness in apology and refusal speech acts and how first-language (L1) moral schemata influence their pragmatic choices. Adopting a convergent mixed-methods design, the study combines discourse completion tasks (DCTs) with semi-structured interviews to examine both pragmatic performance and learners' underlying reasoning. The findings reveal clear differences between the two groups. Sasak learners showed a stronger tendency toward negative politeness strategies, reflecting the value of humility (*andap asor*), whereas Balinese learners more frequently employed indirect strategies associated with maintaining social harmony (*rwa bhineda*). These differences suggest that pragmatic transfer is influenced not only by language proficiency but also by culturally shaped understandings of appropriate social conduct. The results further indicate that learners draw on locally shared value systems when managing face and interpersonal relationships in English. The study contributes to ILP scholarship by providing evidence that politeness is closely linked to culturally informed moral reasoning and by extending discussions of facework beyond dominant Western and East Asian perspectives. It also highlights the importance of incorporating intercultural and values-based dimensions into pragmatics instruction, enabling learners to develop greater awareness of how different communities interpret and enact politeness in communication.

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INTRODUCTION

Politeness constitutes a fundamental component of successful second-language (L2) communication because it enables speakers to manage face, maintain social harmony, and

interpret relational meanings across cultural boundaries. Within the field of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP), politeness has therefore been widely investigated as a key dimension of pragmatic competence. Beyond the accurate production of linguistic forms, pragmatic competence entails the ability to align language use with culturally appropriate norms governing respect, responsibility, and interpersonal alignment. As Taguchi (2023) notes, pragmatic competence in an L2 involves not only producing contextually appropriate expressions but also enacting culturally meaningful interpretations of interaction through language. Consequently, politeness has increasingly been understood as a socially and culturally embedded practice through which speakers negotiate relational meanings in intercultural encounters.

A substantial body of ILP research has demonstrated that L2 learners frequently rely on pragmatic transfer from their first language (L1) when performing speech acts such as apologies, refusals, or requests. This transfer reflects the influence of culturally learned interactional norms that shape how learners interpret contextual variables such as power, social distance, and imposition. Earlier research generally conceptualized pragmatic transfer as the application of L1 linguistic routines or discourse conventions to L2 interaction. However, recent scholarship suggests that pragmatic transfer is not merely a mechanical reproduction of linguistic patterns but also involves deeper cognitive and cultural processes. In particular, learners' interpretations of politeness may be shaped by culturally grounded moral understandings of appropriate behavior in interaction (Ishihara & Taguchi, 2022; Ren & Han, 2023). Despite this growing recognition, the precise role of moral schemata, culturally shared ethical frameworks guiding judgments of appropriateness in mediating pragmatic transfer, remains insufficiently examined.

Recent theoretical developments in pragmatics have begun to foreground the relationship between moral cognition and pragmatic behavior. Kádár (2024), for instance, introduces the concept of moralized facework, arguing that face concerns are interpreted through culturally embedded moral values rather than through purely strategic calculations of politeness. From this perspective, politeness strategies are shaped not only by sociolinguistic variables but also by ethical orientations that guide how speakers conceptualize respect, obligation, and relational responsibility. Similarly, Ishihara & Taguchi (2022) and Ren & Han (2023) emphasize that L1 moral schemata may significantly influence how learners evaluate communicative appropriateness and select politeness strategies in L2 interaction. While these theoretical insights highlight the potential importance of moral cognition in pragmatic transfer, empirical research examining this relationship remains limited.

The lack of empirical evidence is particularly evident in Southeast Asian contexts. Much of the existing ILP literature has focused on learners from East Asian, Middle Eastern, or Western settings, leaving Southeast Asia comparatively underrepresented in empirical datasets and theoretical discussions (Wang & Ren, 2024; Alrefaee & Aljabr, 2025; Fang, 2025). This geographical imbalance restricts the diversity of cultural perspectives informing politeness research and limits the generalizability of existing theoretical frameworks. Moreover, the few studies investigating English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Southeast Asia have largely concentrated on the surface realization of speech acts rather than on the underlying moral and ethical reasoning that shapes pragmatic behavior (Sanjaya, 2023). As a result, the role of culturally grounded moral schemata in mediating pragmatic transfer among Southeast Asian learners remains largely unexplored.

Indonesia offers a particularly compelling setting for addressing this gap due to its rich linguistic diversity and culturally embedded moral systems governing interpersonal interaction. Among Indonesia's many ethnolinguistic communities, the Sasak community of Lombok and the Balinese community of Bali represent two distinct yet theoretically informative moral orientations toward politeness and social relations. Sasak interactional norms emphasize

humility and deference toward authority through the principle of *andap asor*, which frames politeness as a moral obligation to position oneself modestly in relation to others (Mahyuni, 2006; Erlinda, 2023). In contrast, Balinese communicative ethics emphasize the maintenance of harmony through the principle of *rwa bhineda*, which conceptualizes social interaction as a process of balancing opposing forces in order to preserve relational equilibrium (Clynes & Dede, 2017). These differing ethical orientations provide a valuable comparative context for investigating how culturally embedded moral frameworks shape L2 politeness strategies.

To examine this relationship systematically, the present study integrates two key conceptual constructs emerging from contemporary pragmatics research. First, moralized facework refers to the interpretation and enactment of politeness through culturally embedded ethical values, whereby face concerns are understood as moral obligations rather than merely strategic considerations (Kádár, 2024). Second, moral schemata denote culturally shared cognitive frameworks that guide individuals' judgments of appropriateness and responsibility in interaction (Ishihara & Taguchi, 2022). By linking these constructs with empirical analysis of speech act performance, the study investigates how learners' L1 moral orientations influence their L2 politeness production and pragmatic reasoning.

Methodologically, the study adopts a mixed-method convergent design that combines quantitative analysis of politeness strategies in apologies and refusals with qualitative exploration of learners' metapragmatic explanations and moral reasoning. This approach responds to recent calls within ILP research to integrate linguistic performance data with learners' reflective interpretations of communicative behavior (Ren & Han, 2023; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2024). By examining both observable pragmatic choices and the ethical reasoning underlying them, the study seeks to illuminate the cognitive and cultural mechanisms through which moral schemata shape pragmatic transfer.

Against this backdrop, the present study addresses the following research questions: (1) How do Sasak and Balinese EFL learners realize apologies and refusals in English across contexts characterized by different levels of power, social distance, and imposition? (2) To what extent do the L1 moral orientations of *andap asor* and *rwa bhineda* influence learners' L2 politeness strategies? (3) How do learners explain and justify their strategy choices, and what role does moral reasoning play in their metapragmatic awareness?

By addressing these questions, this study aims to expand empirical evidence from Southeast Asia, illuminate the role of moral schemata in pragmatic transfer, and contribute to the reconceptualization of politeness in ILP as a form of morally grounded facework rather than merely a strategic linguistic practice.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a convergent mixed-methods design to systematically link learners' observable pragmatic performance with the moral cognition underlying their politeness choices (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023). This approach responds to recent calls in interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) for methodological frameworks capable of capturing both strategic language use and the ethical reasoning that informs it (Taguchi, 2023; Sánchez-Hernández et al., 2024). Quantitative data examined the distributional patterns of politeness strategies in face-threatening acts, while qualitative data explored learners' metapragmatic explanations and moral interpretations. Both strands were collected and analyzed concurrently with equal analytical weight. Integration was achieved through triangulation and joint interpretive comparison, enabling a comprehensive explanation of pragmatic transfer and ensuring alignment with contemporary ILP methodological standards.

Participants

The sample comprised 60 Indonesian undergraduate EFL learners (aged 19–23; 32 females, 28 males), drawn equally from Universitas Pendidikan Mandalika (Sasak group, $n = 30$) and Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha (Balinese group, $n = 30$). English proficiency levels (B1–B2) were verified using the Oxford Placement Test ($M = 62.4$, $SD = 8.3$), and learners reported 8–10 years of formal English study ($M = 9.1$). None had significant overseas experience, and all were L1 speakers of Sasak or Balinese with Indonesian as L2. These controls ensured comparability consistent with recent methodological standards in applied linguistics (Bella et al., 2024; Taguchi & Roever, 2023).

A stratified purposive sampling approach was employed to ensure balanced representation of Sasak and Balinese EFL learners while maintaining strict inclusion criteria relevant to interlanguage pragmatics research (Dörnyei, 2007). Participants were first screened based on predefined eligibility criteria, including L1 background, English proficiency level, and enrollment in English education programs. From a pool of 87 volunteers recruited through collaboration with program coordinators and informational sessions, 60 participants were selected to achieve equal group representation ($n = 30$ per group).

Selection within each group was guided by quota requirements and eligibility screening rather than full probability randomization, ensuring both contextual relevance and methodological control in line with contemporary discussions in cross-cultural pragmatics research (Ishihara, 2022; Li & Taguchi, 2024).

A priori power analysis G*Power (Faul et al., 2007) targeted $\alpha = .05$, power = .80, and an expected effect size of $d = .75$. The minimum requirement ($n = 56$) was exceeded, yielding post-hoc power $> .84$. Power-based sampling is increasingly recommended in ILP and applied linguistics research for ensuring statistical robustness (Roever, 2022).

Inclusion criteria centered on: (1) L1 Sasak/Balinese speakers; (2) Indonesian as L2; (3) English proficiency B1–B2; and (4) active enrollment in English education programs. Exclusion criteria removed participants with extensive overseas exposure, multilingual repertoires, prior pragmatics training, or hearing-language concerns. These parameters reflect recent trends in system publications emphasizing clear control of confounding linguistic variables.

Instruments

Data were collected using two complementary instruments: a discourse completion task (DCT) and semi-structured interviews. The combination of these instruments was intended to capture both learners' observable pragmatic performance and the underlying reasoning that informed their language choices. This integration aligns with current recommendations in interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) research, which emphasize the importance of combining elicited production data with reflective accounts to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of pragmatic competence and transfer processes (Taguchi, 2023; Ren & Han, 2023).

The primary instrument was a written DCT designed to elicit learners' realizations of two face-threatening speech acts: apologies and refusals. The DCT consisted of eight situational prompts adapted from established ILP research and modified to reflect contexts relevant to Indonesian EFL learners. The scenarios systematically varied key sociopragmatic variables, including power relations, social distance, and degree of imposition, which are widely recognized as influencing politeness behavior. Participants were asked to provide written responses in English to each situation, allowing the researchers to examine the range and frequency of politeness strategies employed across different interactional contexts. The DCT was selected because it enables systematic comparison of pragmatic performance while maintaining control over contextual variables, making it particularly suitable for cross-cultural and intergroup analysis.

To complement the DCT data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive subsample of participants from both ethnolinguistic groups following completion of the written tasks. The interviews sought to explore participants' metapragmatic awareness and the cultural considerations underlying their responses. Interview questions focused on how learners interpreted the situations, justified their strategy choices, and understood concepts such as respect, politeness, social harmony, and interpersonal responsibility. This qualitative component provided valuable insights into the role of first-language (L1) moral schemata in shaping pragmatic behavior and enabled the researchers to interpret quantitative patterns within their broader sociocultural context.

Prior to data collection, both instruments underwent expert review by two specialists in applied linguistics and pragmatics to ensure content validity and contextual appropriateness. Minor revisions were made to improve clarity and cultural relevance. Together, the DCT and interview protocols generated complementary datasets that facilitated a comprehensive examination of politeness realization, pragmatic transfer, and the influence of moral schemata among Sasak and Balinese EFL learners.

Data Analysis

All discourse completion task (DCT) responses were coded independently by two trained raters following CCSARP conventions. A calibration session using 20 benchmark responses ensured shared interpretation of strategy categories. Inter-rater reliability was evaluated with indices appropriate for categorical and ordinal pragmatic data: Cohen's κ for categorical consistency and ICC (2,1) for absolute agreement (Roever & Kasper, 2021; Taguchi & Roever, 2023). Agreement was high ($\kappa = .84$; ICC = .89), exceeding the recommended .75 threshold. Discrepancies ($\approx 10\%$) were resolved through adjudication by a third coder, and consensus codes were used for all analyses.

Assumption testing was conducted prior to inferential analysis. Although minor deviations from normality were observed in some strategy categories, independent-samples *t*-tests were employed to compare the two learner groups across all politeness strategy types. This decision was based on the balanced group sizes ($n = 30$ per group) and the relative robustness of *t*-tests to moderate violations of normality in comparative designs (Field, 2018; Sato & McLean, 2023). Descriptive statistics and effect sizes (Cohen's *d*) were calculated and reported in accordance with APA 7 guidelines. All analyses were conducted using SPSS 27 and JASP 0.18.

Qualitative data were examined through combined deductive–inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Two coders generated and refined codes, achieving a final agreement of 92%. Saturation was reached by the 10th interview. Integration of qualitative and quantitative results employed joint-display analysis (Fetters et al., 2023), enabling systematic comparison of themes and statistical patterns and facilitating a coherent mixed-methods interpretation relevant to ILP research.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

1. Quantitative Findings

Overall Strategy Distribution

A total of 480 responses (8 scenarios $\times$ 60 participants) were analyzed to examine the politeness strategies employed by Sasak and Balinese learners in English apologies and refusals. Table 1 presents the distribution of the four major strategy types.

Table 1
Distribution of politeness strategies by group

Strategy	Sasak (%)	Balinese (%)	Test	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i> (95% CI)
Positive Politeness	21	26	<i>t</i> (58) = 1.21	.230	0.30 [-0.17, 0.77]
Negative Politeness	42	28	<i>t</i> (58) = 3.91	.001**	0.89 (large) [0.42, 1.36]
Off-Record	25	38	<i>t</i> (58) = 2.21	.032*	0.64 (medium) [0.17, 1.11]
Bald-on-Record	12	8	<i>t</i> (58) = 0.84	.405	0.19 [-0.28, 0.66]

Note. Cohen's *d*: small ≥ 0.20 , medium ≥ 0.50 , large ≥ 0.80 . Bonferroni-corrected threshold ($p < .0125$).

As shown in Table 1, negative politeness was the most frequently used strategy among Sasak learners (42%), whereas off-record strategies were more common among Balinese learners (38%). A statistically significant group difference was found for negative politeness, with Sasak learners reporting higher usage than Balinese learners, $t(58) = 3.91$, $p = .001$, $d = 0.89$. Balinese learners also showed a higher frequency of off-record strategies than Sasak learners, $t(58) = 2.21$, $p = .032$, $d = 0.64$; however, this difference did not remain significant under the Bonferroni-adjusted threshold ($p < .0125$). No statistically significant differences were identified for positive politeness or bald-on-record strategies. Overall, the findings indicate distinct distributions of politeness strategies across the two learner groups, with the clearest contrast emerging in the use of negative politeness.

Contextual Effects of Power

To examine the influence of power relations, Spearman correlation analyses were conducted between perceived power difference and strategy complexity. Across the dataset, a significant positive correlation was observed ($r = .52$, $p < .01$), indicating that greater hierarchical distance was associated with more complex politeness strategies.

Group-level analyses revealed variation in the strength of this relationship. Sasak learners showed a stronger correlation ($r = .61$, $p < .01$) than Balinese learners ($r = .38$, $p < .05$). The pattern is illustrated in Figure 1.

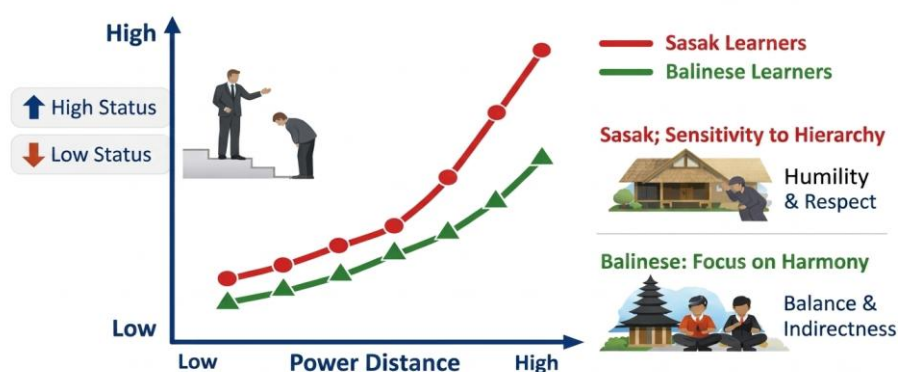


Figure 1. Hierarchical contexts activate stronger politeness elaboration among Sasak learners than among Balinese learners

As displayed in Figure 1, strategy complexity increased with greater power asymmetry in both groups, although the increase was more pronounced among Sasak learners.

2. Qualitative Findings

Thematic Analysis of Interview Data

Semi-structured interviews with 12 participants (6 Sasak and 6 Balinese) were analyzed using deductive-inductive thematic procedures. Inter-coder agreement reached 92%, and thematic saturation was achieved by the tenth interview. Table 2 summarizes the major themes identified across the interview data.

Table 2
Thematic Analysis Summary: Moral Orientations

Theme	Sasak (n/6)	Balinese (n/6)	Representative Quote
Humility-Based Accountability	6 (100%)	1 (17%)	"When we make a mistake, we must lower ourselves. It shows our moral respect."
Harmony Preservation	2 (33%)	6 (100%)	"Politeness means keeping balance between people."
Explicit Self-Blame	5 (83%)	2 (33%)	"I'm very careless; I feel ashamed for my mistake."
Contextual Discretion	2 (33%)	5 (83%)	"Maybe later... I don't say no but give reason."
Ethical Intention	6 (100%)	6 (100%)	"Being polite is not only about words; it's about respect."

The interview data revealed several recurring themes across participants. Ethical intention was identified in all interviews, indicating that participants associated politeness with broader considerations of respect and interpersonal conduct. Differences emerged, however, in the prominence of other themes across groups.

Among Sasak participants, humility-based accountability appeared in all six interviews, while explicit self-blame was reported by five participants. The following excerpt illustrates this pattern:

"When we make a mistake, we must lower ourselves. It's not just polite, it shows our moral respect." (Sasak Participant 04)

Among Balinese participants, harmony preservation was reported by all six participants, and contextual discretion appeared in five interviews. Representative excerpts include:

"Maybe later, after I finish my work... it keeps the heart calm for both people." (Balinese Participant 12)

"We don't like saying no directly. Politeness means keeping balance between people." (Balinese Participant 09)

Taken together, the interview data indicate different emphases in how participants described appropriate interactional behavior, despite a shared orientation toward respectful communication.

3. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Results

The integration of both datasets revealed convergence between observed strategy use and interview themes. The higher frequency of negative politeness among Sasak learners corresponded with the prominence of humility-based accountability and explicit self-blame in the interview data. Similarly, the greater use of off-record strategies among Balinese learners aligned with themes of harmony preservation and contextual discretion.

These convergent patterns provide evidence that participants' reported orientations were reflected in their pragmatic choices during apology and refusal tasks. The combined findings therefore address research questions 2 and 3 by demonstrating associations between learners' first-language value orientations, politeness strategy selection, and metapragmatic explanations.

Discussion

The present study investigated how Sasak and Balinese EFL learners realize politeness in English apologies and refusals and explored the extent to which first-language (L1) value orientations shape pragmatic transfer. Three major findings emerged. First, the two groups displayed distinct preferences in politeness strategy use, with Sasak learners relying more heavily on negative politeness and Balinese learners favoring off-record indirectness. Second, these differences were associated with contrasting cultural orientations reflected in participants' metapragmatic explanations. Third, the convergence of quantitative and

qualitative evidence suggests that pragmatic transfer operates beyond the level of linguistic forms and is closely linked to learners' culturally informed understandings of appropriate interpersonal conduct.

The contrast between Sasak and Balinese learners provides important insight into how politeness is interpreted across cultural settings. Although both groups responded to the same communicative situations and shared a common EFL learning environment, they differed in how they managed face-threatening acts. Sasak learners showed a stronger preference for strategies that foreground deference, mitigation, and acknowledgment of responsibility, whereas Balinese learners more frequently employed indirect forms of expression. These patterns suggest that sociopragmatic variables such as power, distance, and imposition do not operate independently of culture. Rather, learners interpret these variables through locally meaningful systems of social values that shape what is considered appropriate behavior in interaction.

This interpretation is supported by the qualitative findings. Interview data revealed that Sasak participants frequently associated politeness with humility, self-restraint, and accountability, while Balinese participants emphasized interpersonal balance and the avoidance of social disruption. Importantly, these orientations were not merely post hoc explanations of language use; they appeared to function as interpretive frameworks through which participants evaluated communicative choices. As a result, the observed differences in apology and refusal strategies can be understood as reflecting different pathways toward achieving socially appropriate interaction rather than different levels of pragmatic competence.

The findings contribute to a growing body of ILP research that views pragmatic transfer as a culturally mediated process rather than a simple transfer of linguistic conventions. Earlier studies have demonstrated that learners often draw on L1 norms when producing speech acts in a second language (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984). However, much of this work has focused on observable discourse patterns and strategy selection. The present study extends this line of inquiry by showing that what is transferred may not be the linguistic strategy itself but the underlying principles used to evaluate interpersonal appropriateness. This interpretation is consistent with recent scholarship emphasizing the role of moral cognition and culturally situated value systems in pragmatic development (Ishihara & Taguchi, 2022; Ren & Han, 2023; Kádár, 2024).

The results also provide further support for contemporary discussions of moralized facework. While traditional politeness theories have successfully explained how speakers manage face through strategic interaction (Brown & Levinson, 1987), the present findings suggest that face concerns are interpreted differently across cultural contexts. The same communicative objective, maintaining a respectful relationship, was realized through different interactional preferences among the two groups. For Sasak learners, respect was commonly associated with visible expressions of humility and acknowledgment of responsibility. For Balinese learners, respect was more closely linked to maintaining interpersonal balance and minimizing relational tension. These findings do not challenge the relevance of universal sociopragmatic variables; rather, they indicate that such variables are filtered through culturally specific systems of meaning before they are enacted in discourse.

From a broader comparative perspective, the findings resonate with patterns reported in other Asian pragmatics studies. Research conducted in Japanese, Korean, and Chinese contexts has similarly shown that politeness is often closely connected to culturally valued forms of social conduct rather than to strategic face management alone (Lee, 2021; Kitao, 2022; Ren & Han, 2023). The present study extends this discussion by introducing evidence from two underrepresented Southeast Asian communities. In doing so, it responds to recent calls for greater geographical diversity in ILP research and contributes empirical data that help broaden

current understandings of politeness beyond the contexts that have traditionally dominated the literature (Wang & Ren, 2024; Alrefaee & Aljabr, 2025; Fang, 2025).

Theoretically, the study advances ILP scholarship in three ways. First, it demonstrates that pragmatic transfer should be understood as a process involving culturally informed interpretations of appropriateness rather than merely the transfer of discourse routines. Second, it highlights the importance of examining learners' metapragmatic perspectives alongside their linguistic performance, as these perspectives provide insight into the cultural logic underlying pragmatic behavior. Third, the findings support an expanded view of facework in which universal interactional concerns are realized through locally meaningful value systems. Such a perspective helps bridge traditional sociopragmatic models with emerging approaches that emphasize culture, cognition, and ethical reasoning in language use.

The findings also carry important pedagogical implications. Pragmatics instruction in EFL contexts has often focused on teaching formulaic expressions and context-specific linguistic strategies. While such approaches remain valuable, the present results suggest that effective pragmatics instruction should also encourage learners to reflect on the cultural assumptions underlying communicative behavior. One possible approach is the incorporation of contrastive pragmatics activities that invite learners to compare how politeness is conceptualized across different communities. Reflective tasks, discussion-based analyses of speech acts, and intercultural case studies may further help learners recognize that pragmatic appropriateness is shaped by culturally situated interpretations rather than by universally fixed norms. Such pedagogical practices can support the development of intercultural communicative competence by fostering greater awareness of the diversity of politeness systems encountered in global communication.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the use of Discourse Completion Tasks captured elicited rather than naturally occurring interaction, which may not fully reflect spontaneous language use. Second, the study focused on undergraduate EFL learners from a specific Indonesian context, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other populations and proficiency levels. Third, only apologies and refusals were examined, and different patterns may emerge in other speech acts. Finally, although the qualitative component provided valuable explanatory insights, future studies could incorporate larger interview samples and longitudinal designs to explore how pragmatic orientations evolve over time.

Overall, the findings indicate that differences in L2 politeness behavior are closely associated with culturally informed ways of interpreting interpersonal relationships and communicative responsibility. By demonstrating how these orientations shape both pragmatic performance and metapragmatic reflection, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of pragmatic transfer and expands current discussions of politeness within interlanguage pragmatics.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Sasak and Balinese EFL learners' politeness strategies are shaped by culturally embedded moral schemata that guide their interpretations of appropriateness in English interaction. The findings indicate that pragmatic transfer occurs not merely through the replication of L1 strategies but through the transfer of deeper ethical frameworks that define what respectful communication entails. In this sense, learners' pragmatic choices reflect culturally grounded moral reasoning rather than purely strategic language use.

The study contributes to interlanguage pragmatics by advancing a moral-pragmatic perspective, conceptualizing politeness as moralized facework and pragmatic transfer as the movement of ethical templates across languages. This perspective clarifies why learners maintain culturally patterned pragmatic behavior even when interacting in a second language.

Pedagogically, the findings support approaches to pragmatics instruction that integrate ethical reflection with communicative practice, aligning with Indonesia's Merdeka Belajar curriculum emphasis on character formation and intercultural competence. Future research should examine how moral-pragmatic awareness develops over time and how such frameworks operate across broader sociocultural contexts.

In sum, the study underscores the importance of viewing pragmatic competence as inseparable from moral cognition. By demonstrating how culturally grounded ethical frameworks shape L2 politeness behavior, the research offers a theoretically grounded and pedagogically relevant contribution to contemporary interlanguage pragmatics.

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INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Participation in this study was voluntary. Prior to participation, all participants were provided with clear information regarding the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks, and anticipated benefits. Participants were assured of the confidentiality of their personal information and informed that all data collected would be used solely for research purposes. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data generated and analyzed in this study are not publicly available because they contain information that could compromise participant privacy and confidentiality. Restricting public access ensures compliance with ethical research principles and applicable data protection regulations. Nevertheless, the dataset may be made available to qualified researchers upon reasonable request for verification or further analysis. Any such request will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and will require prior approval from the appropriate institutional ethics authority.

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