

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presented the introduction of the study, which was discussed the background of the study, the identification of the problem, the focus of the study, the research objective, and the significance of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Language is not merely a tool for communication, but also a reflection of human social life, culture, and identity. In the context of sociolinguistics, language represents a system of meaning that lives and develops within society, showing how humans interpret themselves and others through daily interactions (Esfahlan & Bagherzadeh, 2020). Language has a complex social function, which is not only to convey messages, but also to form power relations, show solidarity, and affirm social roles (Munirah et al., 2021). One important aspect that greatly influences language practice is gender, as men and women often have different ways of choosing language, using speech styles, and applying politeness strategies (Joys et al., 2022).

Although differences in language use between male and female vendors are observable, these variations raise critical sociolinguistic concerns. Such differences may not merely reflect communication styles but could indicate deeper gendered power relations embedded within traditional market interactions. In the context of Balinese philosophy, particularly the value of *tat twam asi*, which emphasizes equality and mutual respect, the persistence of dominant and submissive speech patterns may suggest a contradiction between cultural ideals and everyday linguistic

practices. Therefore, it becomes necessary to examine whether these differences reinforce gender inequality, reflect cultural continuity, or indicate shifts due to modernization and tourism influence.

As a multicultural region in Indonesia, Bali provides a compelling sociolinguistic context for examining this phenomenon. Balinese society lives in a social system that is still strongly influenced by traditional values and customs, in which language plays an important role in the social structure (Arjawa & Zulkifli, 2021). The Balinese language, for example, has a language level system (*sor singgih basa*) that reflects the social hierarchy and power relations between speakers and their conversation partners (Karmini et al., 2021). In addition, the existence of Indonesian as the national language and English as the global language adds to the complexity of language choice for the Balinese people. In this context, language use is not only determined by communication needs, but also by the speaker's social awareness of who their interlocutor is, where the conversation takes place, and the intended purpose of communication. One place that strongly reflects these sociolinguistic dynamics is the traditional market, particularly traditional markets in Denpasar, Bali. Traditional markets in Denpasar represent a unique intersection between traditional culture and urban-modern influences. These spaces are characterized by high linguistic diversity, frequent interaction between locals and tourists, and dynamic socio-economic exchanges, making them ideal sites for examining how gender, language, and power relations interact in real-life communication (Wirata, 2021).

Based on the observations at these markets, it is evident that female vendors employ a more refined, friendly, and expressive linguistic style during interactions.

They frequently use familiar address terms such as "*Nak*," "*Bli*," or "*Gek*," which culturally convey warmth and emotional intimacy. The speech patterns of women commonly reflect positive politeness strategies, characterized by the use of compliments, expressions of concern, and statements of solidarity (Andriyani et al., 2022). Male vendors tend to adopt a more direct and straightforward communication style, often incorporating humor or persuasive sarcasm (Hamzah, 2025). This linguistic behavior illustrates that gender significantly shapes language choice and politeness strategies within market interactions: female vendors prioritize relational and affective dimensions of communication, whereas male vendors focus on transactional efficiency and pragmatic effectiveness (Therese, 2024).

People in traditional markets should practice communication that reflects gender equality and respect for local cultural politeness values. The language used should reflect the value of *tat twam asi*, a concept in Balinese Hindu philosophy that means "I am you", which means respect for others as part of oneself (Andriyani et al., 2022). This principle should manifest in a mutually respectful mode of communication, regardless of gender. However, empirical observations often reveal pronounced differences between men and women in their speech patterns. Male traders, particularly those with extensive trading experience, frequently exhibit verbal dominance through elevated tones, assertive expressions, or instances of interrupting buyers. In contrast, female traders generally avoid verbal confrontation, opting instead for softer and more indirect forms of politeness. These distinctions extend beyond mere linguistic variation; they also mirror the patriarchal social and cultural structures embedded within society, wherein women are

traditionally expected to demonstrate politeness, patience, and non-confrontational behavior.

This phenomenon becomes interesting when viewed in a sociolinguistic framework, because traditional markets are not only economic spaces, but also social spaces that reveal how gender shapes linguistic practices. In buying and selling interactions at traditional markets, language can function as a tool to negotiate social identity, strengthen power relations, and show solidarity among speakers (Widiantari, 2023). For example, when male buyers interact with female vendors, the use of polite language and light humor can create social closeness. In contrast, interactions between male vendors and female buyers often exhibit a subtly flirtatious tone, while still adhering to the norms of culturally appropriate politeness. These patterns of communication underscore the intricate interplay between gender, cultural values, and politeness strategies in the Balinese sociolinguistic context.

The topic of gender's influence on language choice and politeness strategies has been widely discussed, but the context is often different from the unique situation of Balinese society. Lakoff's (1975) classic study on *Language and Woman's Place* shows that women tend to use more polite and cautious language due to the influence of social norms that place them in a subordinate position. Holmes' (1995) research also reinforces the view that women more often use positive politeness to build solidarity, while men more often use negative politeness to show autonomy and social distance. However, these studies were mostly conducted in Western societies, so the results are not always relevant when applied to societies with different social and cultural systems such as Bali.

A number of sociolinguistic studies in Indonesia have raised the theme of language and gender, for example, research by Sedyowidodo and Bakrie (2025) which shows that Javanese women use indirect politeness forms more often to avoid confrontation, and research by Agung and Dian (2022) which highlights how gender influences language code choices in traditional markets in Yogyakarta. However, despite extensive research on language and gender, several gaps remain. Conceptually, previous studies have often examined gender differences and politeness strategies separately, without integrating them within multilingual contexts. Most studies rely on Western frameworks such as Brown and Levinson's politeness theory without adequately contextualizing them within non-Western cultural values like the Balinese *tat twam asi*. Many studies depend on interviews or elicited data rather than analyzing naturally occurring interactions. Contextually, limited research has focused on informal economic spaces such as traditional markets in Bali, where linguistic practices are dynamic and socially embedded. This study addresses these gaps by examining gendered language use through natural interaction in a multilingual traditional market setting.

Furthermore, considering that most research on language and gender in Indonesia still concentrates on formal settings such as classrooms, mass media, or workplaces, while traditional markets remain largely unexplored, this study addresses a significant gap. Previous studies on politeness strategies in Bali have generally focused on the *sor singgih basa* aspect within ritual or customary contexts, without thoroughly examining its relation to gender in public spaces like markets. In addition, much of the existing research has been broadly descriptive, lacking an in-depth investigation of how gender influences language choice and

politeness strategies within the specific social, economic, and cultural contexts of Balinese society. Therefore, the research entitled "**Language Choice and Politeness Strategies in Bali's Traditional Markets: A Gender-Based Study**" is relevant and important, aiming to provide empirical evidence of gendered language practices in natural, community-based interactions.

1.2 Identification of the Problem

Based on the background of the study, the following problems were identified:

1. The difference in language use between men and women in Badung Traditional Market, Denpasar, shows a tendency toward different styles of speech, with women tending to use more refined and expressive language, while men are more direct and straightforward.
2. Language choice and politeness strategies in traditional market environments still reflect social and cultural structures embedded with gender roles and power relations.
3. Previous research on politeness strategies in Bali has generally only highlighted the *sor singgih basa* system in the context of rituals and customs, while its application of politeness in public social interactions such as in markets has not been widely analyzed, especially from a gender perspective.
4. There is a limited number of sociolinguistic research focusing on informal social spaces such as traditional markets, as sites for dynamic multilingual interactions.

5. There is a limited number of empirical understanding of the relationship between gender and language politeness practices in the context of multilingual societies such as Bali.

1.3 Focus of the Study

This study focused on analyzing the influence of gender on language choice and politeness strategies in buyer-vendor interactions within traditional market settings in Denpasar, Bali. Specifically, the investigation focused on the speech patterns of male and female vendors and buyers at Pasar Badung during transactional discourse, including how their linguistic choices reflect local Balinese sociocultural values.

1.4 Research Question

Based on the background and focus of the study, this research questions are formulated as follows:

1. How do male and female vendors differ in their language choice during transactional interactions in Denpasar traditional markets?
2. What positive and negative politeness strategies are employed by male and female vendors in market discourse?
3. How do these gendered linguistic practices reflect power relations and Balinese sociocultural norms within traditional market settings?

1.5 Research Objective

In accordance with the research questions, the objectives of this study are:

1. To describe how male and female vendors differ in their language choice during transactional interactions in Denpasar traditional markets.
2. To describe the positive and negative politeness strategies employed by male and female vendors in market discourse.
3. To describe how gendered linguistic practices reflect power relations and Balinese sociocultural norms within traditional market settings.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This research was expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of sociolinguistic studies, particularly in the area of gender, language choice, and politeness strategies within local cultural contexts such as traditional markets in Bali.

1.6.1 Theoretical Significance

This research was contributed to the development of sociolinguistic theory in several important ways.

1. First, it contextualizes established Western theories of politeness, particularly Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, within the local cultural setting of Balinese society, which is guided by values such as *tat twam asi*, *menyama braya*, and *sor singgih basa*. By doing so, the study provides a culturally grounded understanding of how politeness strategies are interpreted and practiced beyond Western contexts.
2. This study extends the scope of gender and language research by examining linguistic practices in informal economic spaces, specifically traditional markets, which have been relatively underexplored

compared to formal domains such as classrooms or institutional settings. This contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how gender is enacted through everyday communication.

3. The study integrates three important dimensions, namely gender, multilingual language choice, and politeness strategies, into a single analytical framework. This integrated approach offers new insights into how linguistic behavior is shaped by the interaction between social identity, cultural norms, and communicative purposes in real-life interactions.
4. This research contributes to the broader discourse of multilingual sociolinguistics by highlighting how speakers navigate multiple language codes (Balinese, Indonesian, and mixed forms) while simultaneously managing politeness and gendered expectations.

1.6.2 Practical Significance

The findings of this study were expected to offer several benefits:

1. For traditional market vendors (sellers and buyers)

This study offers insights into how language use and politeness strategies can improve communication effectiveness, build trust with customers, and strengthen interpersonal relationships. It can help vendors become more aware of how their linguistic choices may influence social perception and interaction outcomes.

2. For cultural preservation institutions and local communities

The study supports efforts to preserve and promote Balinese cultural values embedded in language use, particularly politeness norms

and respectful communication. It highlights the importance of maintaining culturally appropriate language practices in public social spaces.

3. For policymakers and local government

The findings may serve as a reference for developing community-based programs or training related to communication ethics, gender awareness, and cultural sensitivity in public service and informal economic sectors.

4. For educators and researchers

This research can be used as a reference for developing teaching materials in sociolinguistics, intercultural communication, and gender studies. It also provides a foundation for future research that explores language use in other informal or multicultural contexts.

5. For gender awareness and social equality initiatives

By revealing how language reflects and potentially reinforces gender roles and power relations, this study can contribute to increasing awareness of gender-sensitive communication practices in everyday interactions, particularly in informal economic environments.