

# Language, Power, and Symbolic Violence in Classroom Communication: Insights From Indonesian Culture

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**Abstract**—This study explores how language serves as a medium of power and symbolic violence in classroom communication in Indonesian higher education. Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power, it examines how lecturers' speech reproduces unequal relations that are often legitimized by cultural norms. Using a qualitative case study, data were collected from classroom observations, recordings, and field notes in a language-education program. The analysis followed Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) model to identify linguistic forms representing symbolic domination. The findings reveal two main mechanisms: euphemizing expressions of obligation, efficiency, and affirmation that soften authority and censorship, reflected in politeness, generosity, and marginalization that limit student agency. These patterns illustrate how the Indonesian values of *tata krama* (decorum) and *rukun* (harmony) normalize hierarchical relationships in the discourse. The study concludes that symbolic violence in educational communication often goes unnoticed because it is culturally accepted, highlighting the need for greater linguistic and pedagogical awareness among educators.

**Index Terms**—symbolic violence, language and power, classroom communication, euphemization, Indonesian culture

## I. INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the most powerful instruments through which humans construct and negotiate social realities (Baa et al., 2023; Usman et al., 2024). Many individuals use language for various purposes, such as on an international scale to make friends worldwide through social media communication (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023b; Karamoy et al., 2024). Communication is not merely an act of exchanging information but a symbolic process that reflects, reproduces, and sometimes challenges the power structures embedded within a given society (Arafah et al., 2023; Arafah & Hasyim, 2023a). Symbolic meanings are given to explore the relationship between visual representations and ideas or concepts within society (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019). Indonesia is very diverse in terms of its local languages (Radjaban et al., 2025). Each region or tribe utilizes local terms originating from their cultural heritage from their areas (Halil et al., 2024; Hasyim et al., 2020; Mofu et al., 2024). Culture plays a central role in shaping the production, reception, and interpretation of messages (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023b; Takwa et al., 2024; Taqdir, 2025). The interpretation of a text or message is meaningful when it is observed in its context (Arafah et al., 2020). The cultural context determines communicative behavior, influencing both linguistic choice and pragmatic intent (Nuzuli, 2023; Sunata, 2023). In this sense, communication and culture are inseparable; culture provides an interpretive framework through which linguistic acts acquire meaning (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023a). It is interesting how a language contributes to a medium of informative communication to depict cultural values in various fields, such as a medium of communication for book authors (Yudith et al., 2023; Yulianti et al., 2022). Portraying local terms, such as local languages, traditions, or cultural events, both in the past and in the present, into a piece of work shows the act of preserving culture and language (Arifin et al., 2022; Yudith et al., 2023, 2024). Literary works have been known to reflect real-life conditions of what happened in a society to understand the surrounding elements (Afiah et al., 2022; Arafah et al., 2024; Tang et al., 2025). As a medium of communication, literary work is also inseparable from the use of language as a carrier of ideas, such as symbols and signs to convey ideas aesthetically (Arafah et al., 2022; Asriyanti et al., 2022; JUSDALYANA et al., 2024). In summary, this proves that culture and language have an interdependent relationship (Arafah et al., 2023).

Communication is of special significance in the educational sphere. Education is a process of acquiring knowledge and improving one's communication skills (Misnah et al., 2024; Taqdir et al., 2025). The interaction between teachers and students is not only pedagogical but also ideological, as it shapes students' perceptions of authority, knowledge, and identity (Arnawa & Arafah, 2023; Kaharuddin et al., 2024). Through speech, gestures, and disciplinary discourse, educators implicitly transmit values, norms, and expectations that extend beyond academic content (Kuswanti et al., 2023). Such communicative practices can motivate, persuade, or discipline learners; however, they may also embody subtle forms of domination (Arafah et al., 2023). In this state, educators hold a leadership role as they serve to guide, direct, manage, and supervise learners (Arafah et al., 2025). Jamiluddin et al. (2019) note that speech acts in education can represent a spectrum of intentions from encouragement and instruction to control and constraint depending on how language is used in social context. Therefore, environmental characteristics are reflected in the use of language in social life (Takwa et al., 2022). This duality situates language as both a tool for learning and a medium of power.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power provides an essential lens for understanding how language functions as an instrument of domination. In *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991), Bourdieu argues that linguistic exchanges are not neutral but are structured by power relations that are rooted in the social hierarchy. The authority of speech derives from the social position of the speaker, not from the inherent value of their words. Symbolic power operates when those subjected to authority recognize and accept such power relations as legitimate. Symbolic violence occurs when meanings and social orders are subtly imposed through linguistic practices that appear natural, rational, or benevolent (Siswadi, 2022; Bourdieu, 1991).

In classroom discourse, symbolic violence is often realized through seemingly harmless expressions, such as commands, admonitions, or evaluative remarks that reinforce hierarchical relations between teachers and students. Such a situation may occur in an offensive situation where educators try to express dissatisfaction towards learners (Arafah & Kaharuddin, 2019). For example, a teacher's utterance may appear as a form of motivation or correction, but it can simultaneously position students as passive, authority-receiving recipients. Siswadi (2024) observes that such asymmetrical relationships are integral to educational settings, where teachers hold institutional and moral authority over their students. These relationships are sustained not through physical coercion but through language—by the symbolic acceptance of teachers' words as legitimate truth.

In the Indonesian educational context, language, culture, and authority are closely intertwined (Mokoginta & Arafah 2022; Taqdir et al., 2025). The existence of culture passed down from generation to generation cannot be separated in this context (Takwa et al., 2024; Takwa et al., 2025). The teacher, or guru, occupies a highly respected position as a moral guide and cultural transmitter in Islam. Education from an Islamic perspective focuses on mentoring, guiding, and learning, in which the interaction and learning process are led by a mentor (Halidin et al., 2025). Communication in classrooms often emphasizes politeness, respect, and obedience in line with the cultural expectations of unggah-ungguh (appropriate manners) and tata krama (social decorum). When these norms are well managed, teacher-student communication will be effective, and students will be able to grasp the intended message (Kaharuddin et al., 2025). While these norms help maintain harmony, they also create an environment in which hierarchical power is normalized and is unquestioned. Communication goals are expected to be achieved when they come from educators, learners, and the environment surrounding them, since humans and the environment have a very close and causal relationship (Arafah et al., 2020; Manugeran et al., 2023; Siwi et al., 2022). The role of teachers is complex; they not only have to dominate the subjects taught, but also have the responsibility to manage the personal chronicle of every pupil (Sunardi et al., 2018). Rahman et al. (2023) explain that teachers in Indonesia are regarded not only as knowledge providers but also as moral exemplars responsible for cultivating discipline and virtue. Within this moral framework, directive and corrective speech acts are frequently justified as pedagogical necessities. However, as Bourdieu (1991) and Goldstein (2005) caution, such forms of communication may conceal symbolic domination, a mechanism through which authority is maintained without explicit coercion.

Despite its significance, symbolic violence in educational communication has received little empirical attention in Indonesia. Most local studies have examined teacher talk, classroom discourse, or pragmatic politeness (Kusumawati, 2019; Damayanti & Andarwulan, 2019), but rarely investigated how linguistic expressions encode and reproduce power relations. Research on teacher-student interaction tends to focus on communicative effectiveness rather than on how discourse enacts authority or legitimizes the hierarchy. Internationally, scholars such as Fairclough (2001), Van Dijk (2008), and Heller (2011) have shown how institutional discourse constructs dominance and compliance through specific linguistic choices. However, comparable analyses of Indonesian cultural and educational settings remain scarce. This gap highlights the need to explore how local communicative norms intersect with the global structures of symbolic power.

Bourdieu's framework offers two key mechanisms through which symbolic violence is linguistically reproduced: euphemization and censorship. Euphemization refers to the softening or masking of domination through polite or seemingly neutral language use. In educational settings, euphemistic speech can appear motivational but function as subtle coercion—for instance, when teachers use praise or encouragement to enforce conformity (Rusdiarti, 2003; Damayanti & Andarwulan, 2019). Censorship, on the other hand, involves the silencing or suppression of voices through discourse that marginalizes alternative perspectives or delegitimizes dissent. Both mechanisms operate beneath the level of awareness, leading individuals to internalize and reproduce hierarchies that constrain them. As Alfian (2023) observes,

victims of symbolic violence often do not recognize themselves as victims, perceiving linguistic domination as being natural and even desirable.

In Indonesia, this dynamic resonates with the broader cultural ethos of collectivism and harmony (*Rukun*). The emphasis on respect and avoidance of confrontation, while culturally positive, can also perpetuate communicative asymmetries in classrooms. Teachers' speech acts— directives, evaluations, or reprimands—are often accepted unquestioningly as legitimate, reinforcing the authority of the speaker. Over time, such interactions shape students' dispositions, cultivating what Bourdieu terms *habitus*: a system of internalized structures that guide one's behavior and perception. Within this process, the classroom becomes not merely a site of learning but also a microcosm of social reproduction, where language naturalizes inequality under the guise of discipline and of care.

This study addresses the scarcity of empirical research on symbolic violence in Indonesian higher education. While prior studies have explored teacher discourse and politeness strategies, few have examined the intersection of language, power, and culture from Bourdieu's social theory perspective. This study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing how symbolic violence is represented in the communication behavior of lecturers during classroom interactions. Specifically, it aims to identify and interpret expressions that exemplify euphemisms and censorship as mechanisms of symbolic domination.

By grounding the analysis in classroom discourse, this study contributes to the growing body of work on critical applied linguistics and language education research. It highlights how language functions as a site of power negotiation and how cultural norms mediate authority expression in Indonesian classrooms. The findings are expected to provide theoretical insights into the subtle operation of symbolic violence in teacher–student communication and offer practical implications for developing more reflexive and culturally sensitive pedagogical practices. Ultimately, understanding the representation of symbolic violence in educational communication can help educators become more aware of how their language choices shape learners' psychological and social development, ensuring that the process of teaching not only transmits knowledge but also fosters dignity, equality, and mutual respect.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. *Symbolic Violence and Symbolic Power*

The concept of symbolic violence was introduced by Pierre Bourdieu to explain how domination operates subtly through symbols, language, and everyday practices. Unlike physical or coercive forms of violence, symbolic violence functions through shared systems of meaning that make domination appear natural, legitimate, and invisible (Bourdieu, 1991). Through language, gestures, and institutional discourse, individuals internalize social hierarchies without being consciously aware of them. Symbolic power, therefore, is the capacity to impose meanings that are recognized as legitimate by both the dominant and the dominated (Thompson, 1991).

In educational contexts, symbolic violence often manifests in linguistic interactions between teachers and students. These interactions are embedded in institutional norms that legitimize authority and obedience. Teachers' words— commands, admonitions, evaluations, or praise—carry symbolic weight because they derive authority from the teacher's institutional position rather than the inherent content of the utterance (Siswadi, 2022; Fatmawati & Sholikin, 2020). As a result, classroom discourse becomes a site where linguistic practices sustain social structures and reproduce unequal power relations (Heller, 2011; Fairclough, 2001).

### B. *Symbolic Violence in Educational Practices*

Bourdieu (1991) emphasizes that education is one of the primary institutions through which symbolic violence operates. Schools reproduce social hierarchies by legitimizing the cultural capital of dominant groups, often disguised as “neutral” or “objective” academic knowledge. In the classroom, symbolic violence can take the form of authoritative speech that suppresses students' voices or frames obedience as a moral duty.

Studies in various contexts have demonstrated how this form of violence influences students' psychological and emotional development. For example, Putri (2020) and Siswadi (2024) found that teachers' use of demeaning or controlling language can lead to anxiety, passivity, and reduced self-esteem among students. Similarly, Fatmawati and Sholikin (2020) showed that symbolic power in education is often accepted as natural and unquestioned, perpetuating social inequality. International research supports these findings: Bernstein (1990) and Foucault (1977) both illustrate how pedagogical discourse regulates behavior and maintains institutional control through normalized linguistic forms.

### C. *Power Relations and Cultural Context*

The concept of power relations in Bourdieu's sociology refers to the structured interactions through which authority and submission are negotiated in social fields. In the classroom, these relations are materialized through *habitus*—a system of internalized dispositions that shape how teachers and students perceive and respond to authority. Teachers, as holders of symbolic capital, often exercise linguistic control under the guise of discipline or care. As noted by Rahman et al. (2023), such practices are culturally reinforced in Indonesia, where teachers are viewed as moral figures and authority is associated with respect.

From a cultural perspective, Indonesian communication norms emphasize politeness, deference, and avoidance of confrontation (Kusumawati, 2019). While these values foster harmony, they also provide fertile ground for symbolic violence to remain unnoticed. Alfian (2023) argues that victims of symbolic violence rarely perceive themselves as

victims, since domination is often justified as part of maintaining order or upholding tradition. In classroom discourse, this translates into a normalization of linguistic hierarchy where students internalize subordination as a form of respect.

#### *D. Mechanisms of Euphemization and Censorship*

Bourdieu (1991) identifies two discursive mechanisms through which symbolic violence operates: euphemization and censorship. Euphemization refers to the softening of domination through polite or moralistic expressions that disguise coercion. In educational settings, this might appear in teacher utterances that motivate students while subtly enforcing conformity (Rusdiarti, 2003; Damayanti & Andarwulan, 2019). Censorship involves the restriction of speech and the silencing of alternative perspectives through implicit social norms. Teachers may unintentionally marginalize students' voices by framing certain responses as inappropriate or irrelevant.

Both mechanisms are deeply cultural: they depend on shared beliefs about politeness, hierarchy, and the legitimacy of authority. In Indonesian classrooms, these mechanisms often manifest through indirect language and euphemistic expressions consistent with the national ethos of harmony (*rukun*) and respect (*tata krama*).

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### *A. Research Design*

This study employed a qualitative case study design (Creswell & Poth, 2018), which allows an in-depth exploration of symbolic violence as represented in the communication behavior of lecturers within a bounded social setting. The case selected for this research was one classroom of the Indonesian Language Education Study Program at Tadulako University, Palu, during the odd semester of 2024 (September–December). The classroom was chosen as a single, bounded case because it provided a rich and natural context in which teacher–student interaction and symbolic power relations could be observed in authentic discourse situations.

#### *B. Participants and Research Context*

The participants consisted of one lecturer and approximately 30 undergraduate students enrolled in a core language course. The lecturer was selected through purposive sampling, based on teaching experience (over five years) and willingness to participate. The classroom environment followed typical Indonesian higher-education norms emphasizing politeness, respect, and hierarchical relationships between lecturer and students. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Tadulako University. All participants provided informed consent, and pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity.

#### *C. Data Sources and Data Collection*

The primary data consisted of spoken utterances produced by the lecturer during classroom interactions, along with students' verbal responses. Data collection was conducted through:

- Non-participant observation, where the researcher observed naturally occurring classroom discourse without interference.
- Audio recording, using a concealed recorder placed with prior consent, to capture authentic speech data.
- Field notes, documenting contextual details such as classroom atmosphere, gestures, tone, and situational background.

A total of six classroom sessions (90 minutes each) were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcription process followed the conventions of discourse analysis (Jefferson, 2004), noting pauses, emphasis, and intonation where relevant.

#### *D. Data Analysis*

The data were analyzed using Miles et al. (2014) interactive model, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing.

- Data condensation involved selecting utterances that indicated power relations, directives, or evaluative language.
- Data display was performed through tabulation of utterances grouped by their pragmatic function.
- Conclusion drawing involved interpreting the discursive strategies through the theoretical lens of Bourdieu's symbolic power.

Two coding categories were developed inductively and refined through theoretical reflection:

- Euphemism, referring to polite or softened speech that implicitly enforces obedience or compliance.
- Censorship, referring to linguistic practices that suppress, redirect, or delegitimize students' responses.

To enhance trustworthiness, the study applied triangulation across data sources (recordings, field notes, and observations), peer debriefing, and member checking with the lecturer after transcription.

#### *E. Researcher Role and Reflexivity*

As the primary research instrument, the researcher served as observer, transcriber, and interpreter of the data. To minimize interpretive bias, reflexive memos were maintained throughout data collection and analysis to record subjective assumptions and contextual reflections. The researcher's prior familiarity with classroom culture was acknowledged as both a resource for cultural interpretation and a potential bias, mitigated through peer review of coding and interpretation.

## IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to reveal how symbolic violence is represented in lecturers' communicative behavior through euphemization and sensorization mechanisms during classroom instruction. Based on classroom observations and spoken data analysis, we found that symbolic violence emerges through linguistic patterns that, on the surface, appear ordinary, polite, or even positive yet subtly enact domination and control over students.

Each quoted excerpt is interpreted using Bourdieu's (1991) theoretical framework of symbolic power and habitus, alongside critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2001), to identify how language functions as a vehicle for legitimizing power within the Indonesian cultural context.

A. *Euphemization in Classroom Communication*

Euphemization works to mask power through language that sounds gentle, rational and motivational. In this sense, dominance is conveyed through utterances invoking morality, responsibility, or efficiency, yet in practice, it constrains students' freedom.

(a). *Obligation: Commands Framed as Responsibility*

## Excerpt 1

Lecturer: Silakan bagi yang terlambat, saya tidak akan mengulangi kembali.

(For those who are late this time, please. I will not repeat what I have assigned to you.)

Student: Iya, Pak... Siap. (Yes, Sir... ready.)

Lecturer: Ingat, waktunya sudah mau selesai. Tidak ada perpanjangan.

(Remember, time is almost up. No extension.)

Student: Baik, Pak! (Yes, Sir!)

## Excerpt 2

Lecturer: Kerjakan saja, Anda kan sudah pelajari dan sudah dijelaskan sebelumnya.

(Just do it; you have studied it and it has been explained before.)

Student: Siap, Pak... tapi yang ini, Pak—bisa dijelaskan?

(Yes, Sir, but could you explain this part?)

Lecturer: Ingat! Tinggal sedikit waktu.

(Remember, there is little time left!)

The two excerpts demonstrate how seemingly polite and rational commands are used to assert the lecturer's authority over students. Expressions such as *silakan* ("please") or *kerjakan saja* ("just do it") serve as euphemistic softeners of directive acts, so they do not sound coercive; pragmatically, however, they remain non-negotiable. Here, politeness is not neutrality but a symbolic strategy that normalizes the power relations.

Responses such as *siap, Pak* and *baik, Pak* indicate internalized compliance within the academic habitus (Bourdieu, 1991). The lecturer–student relationship proceeds along hierarchical lines and is accepted without resistance—what Bourdieu calls *misrecognition* when domination is taken as natural.

In Indonesian communicative culture, polite expressions such as *silakan*, *ingat*, or *kerjakan saja* are often interpreted as moral responsibility and discipline rather than as coercion. From a symbolic-violence perspective, however, such utterances constitute a mechanism of obligation operating subtly: commands are reframed as advice, time efficiency becomes a justification, and student compliance is construed as ethical awareness. Thus, polite language functions as an instrument for legitimizing power, culturally received—often unconsciously—as part of the academic norm.

(b). *Efficiency: Rationalizing Power Through the Discourse of Time*

## Excerpt 3

Lecturer: Latihan ini dikerjakan maksimal 15 menit, mengingat waktu terbatas.

(Let's do this exercise in no more than 15 minutes, considering the limited time.)

Student: Baik, Pak. (Yes, Sir.)

## Excerpt 4

Lecturer: Siapa yang tahu? Silakan, segera kerjakan di atas.

(Who knows? Please, do the exercise on the board immediately.)

Student: Saya, Pak. (The student immediately walks to the board.)

(I'm, Sir.)

The two excerpts illustrate how euphemization operates through efficiency rationalization. The lecturer uses practical justifications such as "considering the limited time" or "do it immediately" to regulate students' behavior. On the surface, these utterances appear to be reasonable and professional forms of time management. Pragmatically, however, they carry directive illocutionary force, demanding immediate compliance and leaving no room for negotiation or discussion.

From Bourdieu's (1991) theoretical perspective, this strategy reflects a form of symbolic power legitimized through reasonableness, that is, when authority is disguised as rational necessity. Efficiency becomes a softened form of domination, as power is communicated through an ostensibly objective discourse: "time efficiency" appears as a collective good, yet it actually reinforces the lecturer's control over the rhythm and direction of the classroom activity.

Students' immediate responses ("Baik, Pak" or physically moving to the board without hesitation) demonstrate internalization of symbolic discipline. They neither reject nor question the instruction, as in Indonesia's academic habitus, obedience is perceived as a mark of politeness and professionalism. Thus, the invocation of efficiency serves a dual function: it is linguistically logical yet sociologically coercive, rationalizing authority under the guise of practicality.

Culturally, these utterances embody the Indonesian values of *rukun* (harmony) and *tertib* (order), which are highly esteemed in social interactions. The lecturer, as an authoritative figure, commands control over the time, sequence, and tempo of learning. Students shaped by symbolic awareness accept this control as natural. Within this framework, efficiency becomes a moral façade for symbolic power—a legitimate excuse to suppress negotiation and reaffirm the hierarchical order within the classroom.

(c). *Bonus and Reward: Coercion Framed as Motivation*

Excerpt 5

Lecturer: Kalau ada yang bisa jawab dan tepat, saya kasih poin tersendiri.

(If anyone can answer correctly, I will give them special points.)

Student: (No verbal response; paying attention to the lecturer while thinking.)

Excerpt 6

Lecturer: Saya akan berikan bonus, tidak perlu mengikuti final semester.

(I will give you a bonus in the form of not having to take the semester finals.)

Student: (Students look at each other attentively.)

These excerpts illustrate how reward language functions as a form of symbolic coercion disguised in motivational discourse. On the surface, the lecturer's utterances appear to encourage participation and enthusiasm for learning the subject. Pragmatically, however, they carry coercive persuasive force, fostering dependence on the lecturer's legitimacy and approval as the gatekeeper of success in the course.

Expressions such as "I will give special points" or "you don't have to take the final exam" create an illusion of freedom—students seem to have a choice, yet their behavior is already directed by a reward system controlled by an authority figure. In Bourdieu's (1991) terms, this reflects symbolic violence operating through the mechanism of symbolic capital, where rewards function not merely as an incentive but as an instrument for reproducing the habitus of obedience. Students learn to align themselves with the values, preferences, and expectations of those in power without perceiving it as a compulsion.

Culturally, this strategy aligns with Indonesian social norms that frame respect for teachers (*unggah-ungguh*) as a moral obligation. Within this cultural framework, a "bonus" is not simply an academic incentive but a symbol of social recognition that students aspire to achieve. Consequently, students tend to accept such systems without resistance, viewing them as natural and equitable.

Thus, reward discourse serves as a euphemization mechanism that normalizes the exercise of power. Motivational utterances perform a dual function: explicitly, they build morale and encourage achievement; implicitly, they regulate behavior to fit lecturers' expectations. This process demonstrates how language that appears positive and appreciative can operate as a moral instrument of control, reproducing symbolic hierarchies and legitimizing authority within the classroom.

(d). *Image and Utility: The Naturalization of Hierarchical Competence*

Excerpt 7

Lecturer: Anda kan pasti sudah lulus mata kuliah sebelumnya bentuk ini!

(You must have passed the previous course on this form.)

Student: Lupa, Pak! ('Forgot, Sir!' while smiling.)

Excerpt 8

Lecturer: Ini kan pekerjaan mahasiswa semester 1 atau 2. Masa tidak bisa!

(This is the work of a first- or second-semester student. No way!)

Student: Waduuuh... ('Oh no...' while smiling.)

These excerpts illustrate how euphemization functions through the creation of images and perceived utility. The lecturer subtly asserts intellectual superiority through symbolic comparison, positioning students as "not yet capable" or "insufficiently competent." Although expressed with humor and a friendly tone, these utterances carry a symbolic devaluation, reinforcing a hierarchy of competence between lecturer (as the authority of knowledge) and student (as the recipient).

Humor and lightness serve as linguistic buffers that obscure underlying dominance. Within Bourdieu's (1991) framework, this interaction represents a form of symbolic violence sustained by misrecognition, a process through which power is perceived as guidance or care rather than subordination. The lecturer, often unconsciously, reproduces the academic field's structure, where competence and intellectual legitimacy are measured according to institutional norms regarded as natural and unquestionable.

Students' smiling responses and non-confrontational reactions demonstrate the internalization of the symbolic hierarchy. Rather than challenging or resisting, they exhibit emotional compliance through mild embarrassment or humor. This suggests that the lecturer's authority does not need to be explicitly enforced—it is culturally legitimized, as "scolding through humor" is seen as part of an acceptable pedagogy.

In the Indonesian cultural context, such communication is often perceived as constructive advice rather than an oppressive critique. However, from a critical sociolinguistic perspective, these practices normalize hierarchical competence and reinforce an academic habitus in which students must continually adapt to authority. Consequently, image-making and utility rationalization operate as euphemization mechanisms that naturalize symbolic inequality in classroom interactions.

(e). *Benevolence and Affirmation: Moral Discourse as an Instrument of Power*

Excerpt 9

Lecturer: Syukurlah saya sudah beri nilai maksimal Anda.

(Thank goodness, I've already given you the maximum grade.)

Student: Makasih, Pak! (Thanks, Sir!)

Excerpt 10

Lecturer: Sudah untung kamu tidak saya suruh pulang!

(You're lucky I didn't tell you to go home!)

Student: Terima kasih banyak, Pak! (Thank you very much, Sir!)

These excerpts reveal how symbolic power is enacted through language of benevolence and morality. The lecturer positions themselves as a giver of grace someone who possesses the authority to reward or withhold. Meanwhile, students are placed in the role of grateful recipients and are expected to show appreciation for the lecturer's generosity. Phrases such as "I've given you the maximum grade" or "You're lucky I didn't send you home" illustrate domination masked as kindness, where control is exercised through moral discourse rather than coercion.

Within Bourdieu's (1991) framework, this reflects symbolic domination a form of power accepted because it appears legitimate, natural, and even "good." The lecturer does not need to command or threaten explicitly; power is sustained through rhetoric of care and moral authority.

Students' responses of gratitude reveal the internalization of a patron-client relationship deeply embedded in Indonesian academic culture. Within the traditional values of *asah*, *asih*, and *asuh* (guidance, affection, and nurture), the lecturer is viewed as a nurturing figure deserving of respect and gratitude. However, in modern education, such moralized relationships can limit students' autonomy and their critical agency. When gratitude becomes an emotional form of obedience, students lose the ability to negotiate their academic rights, such as questioning grades, feedback, or treatment.

Thus, benevolence and affirmation operate as subtle instruments of symbolic control, where empathy and moral discourse supplant explicit authority. What appears as kindness and care becomes a powerful mechanism of social regulation—the softest and most effective form of domination—precisely because it is accepted without resistance. In the Indonesian context, this dynamic embodies a cultural paradox: the values of politeness and compassion that sustain social harmony also serve to normalize academic hierarchy and reinforce institutional authority.

B. *Mechanisms of Censorship in Classroom Discourse*

Unlike euphemization, which softens meaning through linguistic politeness, censorship mechanisms function to restrict the range of possible speech acts by emphasizing the norms of politeness, generosity, and morality. In this sense, symbolic violence does not operate through explicit threats but through erasing students' potential for verbal resistance.

(a). *Generosity: Emotional Control Through Praise*

Excerpt 11

Lecturer: Senang rasanya saya bisa mengajar Anda di kelas ini, selamat bertemu.

(It's a pleasure to teach you in this class; nice to meet you.)

Student: (Smiles)... Yes, Sir.

This utterance reflects a subtle form of symbolic violence that operates through the discourse of generosity and emotional intimacy. What appears as a genuine expression of kindness actually serves to construct a pseudo-emotional bond in which warmth and goodwill become instruments for regulating student responses. Linguistically, the utterance functions as a positive expressive act; pragmatically, however, it carries an illocutionary force of control, positioning the lecturer as both an authority figure and emotional gatekeeper.

Within Bourdieu's (1991) framework, this phenomenon illustrates the exercise of symbolic power through persuasion rather than coercion. The lecturer builds moral capital—a self-image of wisdom and benevolence—that, in turn, generates a sense of symbolic indebtedness among students. Such power is highly effective because it produces loyalty rather than fear.

As noted by Alfian (2023), praise within hierarchical relationships functions not only to create a positive atmosphere but also to cultivate obedience through affection—compliance driven by the desire to reciprocate kindness. Students who receive such praise or emotional attention tend to avoid disagreements, fearing that doing so would appear ungrateful or disrespectful.

In the Indonesian cultural context, which values *rukun* (harmony) and *tepo seliro* (empathy and consideration), expressions such as "It's a pleasure to teach you" are often interpreted as sincere and polite. Yet, beneath their positive surface lies a mechanism of censorship, whereby students' potential resistance is neutralized through the internalization of moral values such as politeness, gratitude, and respect.

Thus, generosity functions as an emotional control strategy that perpetuates symbolic power relations in classrooms. The lecturer's kindness, though outwardly nurturing, operates as a subtle discourse of domination, sustaining authority through warmth rather than force.

*(b). Politeness: Commands That Cannot Be Refused*

Excerpt 12

Lecturer: Kelas ini proaktif ya, bisa minta tolong hapus tulisan yang ada di papan?

(This class is proactive; can you please erase the writing on the board?)

Student: Iya, Pak. (The student walks to the board.)

(Yes, Sir.)

This utterance illustrates how politeness strategies are used to conceal the imperative function behind an interrogative form. The phrase "bisa minta tolong..." ("can you please...") linguistically conveys a sense of voluntary cooperation, yet within Indonesia's hierarchical academic context, students have no real freedom to decline. Thus, politeness does not function as an egalitarian tool but rather as a linguistic censorship mechanism—a form of control legitimized by norms of decorum and respect.

From a pragmatic perspective, this utterance represents an indirect directive speech act (Searle, 1979). The lecturer's actual intention is to command, but it is packaged as a polite question to maintain their positive self-image. In Fairclough's (2001) terms, this represents ideological control through discourse, where language regulates behavior not through overt threats but by symbolically limiting the possibility of refusal.

Viewed through Bourdieu's (1991) lens, such acts of politeness reveal how symbolic power operates within an academic habitus shaped by the moral and cultural expectations of respect. Politeness becomes a form of misrecognition—a situation in which power relations are accepted as gestures of appreciation or collaborative participation rather than as subordination. Students, conditioned by cultural norms that emphasize deference to authority, respond automatically ("Yes, Sir") without considering alternatives.

In the Indonesian cultural context, this strategy is particularly effective because it draws upon values such as *tepo seliro* (empathy and consideration) and *unggah-ungguh* (speech etiquette). Politeness serves as a moral façade for domination, creating an illusion of agency and mutual respect while the power dynamic remains unequal. Thus, commands masked as politeness exemplify symbolic violence—a form of control internalized through social norms. Students obey not out of fear, but out of a culturally ingrained desire to remain "polite."

*(c). Marginalization: Silencing Through Devaluation*

Excerpt 13

Lecturer: Kalau tidak mau belajar, tidak usah masuk kuliah!

(If you don't want to study, don't go to college!)

Student: Belajar, Pak!

(Study, Sir!)

This exchange represents one of the most explicit forms of symbolic violence, where the lecturer asserts authority through exclusive language that separates those deemed "worthy" from those considered "unworthy" members of the academic community. This statement exemplifies symbolic exclusion—a form of marginalization that disciplines students who fail to meet expected behavioral or intellectual standards. In this utterance, the lecturer positions themselves as the moral and intellectual gatekeeper of the classroom, while the student is relegated to a subordinate role in the classroom hierarchy.

From a pragmatic perspective, such direct imperatives not only express dissatisfaction but also eliminate the dialogic space. The student's brief response was, "Study, Sir!" does not signal genuine agreement but rather reflects an internalized fear and desire to maintain membership within the classroom community. In this sense, silence or minimal verbal compliance becomes a defensive mechanism rather than an expression of acceptance—an act of self-preservation within an unequal power dynamic.

Within Bourdieu's (1991) theoretical framework, this practice reinforces the field of power in educational institutions, where lecturers' authority is safeguarded by the symbolic legitimacy of the institution. Such utterances function as unwritten laws, reaffirming the social hierarchy of the classroom. Power is not limited to intellectual authority; it also encompasses moral authority—the right to define who deserves access to knowledge and participation in the research process.

Culturally, expressions like "If you don't want to study, don't go to college!" are often perceived as tough love—a legitimate and even "educational" form of discipline—by parents. However, beneath this moral justification lies a silencing mechanism that erodes students' confidence and discourages critical expression. Values such as discipline and responsibility are reframed as moral grounds for domination, while students' voices are muted by fear, respect, and cultural obligation to comply.

Thus, marginalization functions as the most insidious form of censorship in classroom discourse—not through physical coercion but through the symbolic success of language in instilling fear, shame, and conformity. This process demonstrates how discourse becomes a tool of social exclusion, reinforcing academic hierarchies that persist largely unnoticed by those who create them.

### C. Cultural Analysis and Implications

The findings of this study reveal that symbolic violence in classroom communication operates unconsciously, affecting both the speaker (lecturer) and receiver (student). Language does not function as an overt instrument of coercion but as a naturalized medium of authority—a form of communication that appears neutral and legitimate.

The mechanisms of euphemization and censorship represent two dimensions of the same habitus system: Indonesian academic culture rooted in respect, politeness, and social harmony (*rukun*). While these values maintain the stability of classroom interaction, they simultaneously conceal the structural inequalities between teachers and learners.

This study extends the findings of Ulfa (2013) and Damayanti and Andarwulan (2019) by identifying four additional subcategories of euphemization—efficiency, benevolence, utility, and affirmation—that characterize academic communication in Indonesian higher education. These subcategories demonstrate how polite, rational, and caring language can function as a culturally sanctioned form of control in which power is exercised through reason and morality rather than explicit dominance.

Moreover, the results support Putri's (2020) argument that Indonesian education is deeply embedded in forms of symbolic violence disguised as moral and pedagogical authority. Lecturer power is not enforced through physical coercion but rather through systems of reward, moral advice, and affectionate discourse. This dynamic produces obedient and disciplined students who often lose the space for critical and independent thought.

### D. Implications and Reflections

The phenomenon of symbolic violence in educational discourse should not be interpreted as the personal fault of individual lecturers but as a systemic outcome of cultural and institutional structures. Within the Indonesian context, the moral reverence for teachers as infallible figures makes it difficult for students to negotiate equality in the classroom interactions. As a result, the learning process often becomes monologic and hierarchical, privileging authority over dialogue.

To foster a more reflective and dialogic form of education, it is essential to develop discourse awareness among educators, which is a critical understanding of how language choices shape students' subject positions and participation. Lecturers must learn to recognize how habitual linguistic patterns can empower or silence their students.

Ultimately, understanding symbolic violence is not merely an act of critique but a transformative step toward a humanistic and critical pedagogy—one where language serves not to dominate but to liberate.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that symbolic violence in classroom communication is rarely visible but operates subtly through language and everyday interactions between lecturers and students. Such violence emerges from asymmetrical power relations, where lecturers hold institutional authority and students often unconsciously accept this authority as legitimate and natural.

The findings reveal two main mechanisms that sustain symbolic violence: euphemization and self-censorship. Euphemization disguises domination through polite, logical, or motivational expressions such as obligation, efficiency, and reward, while censorship limits students' voices through moral and cultural discourse, emphasizing politeness, generosity, and respect. These mechanisms demonstrate how language, deeply rooted in Indonesian values of *tata krama* (social decorum), *rukun* (harmony), and respect for authority, can function as a subtle instrument of social control.

Culturally, the study highlights that academic communication in Indonesian classrooms often reproduces hierarchical relationships under the guise of caring and politeness. This calls for greater linguistic and pedagogical awareness among educators to reflect on how their words may shape the power dynamics in learning. Ultimately, language should serve as a tool for empowerment and dialogue, not as an invisible mechanism of domination.

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