

**SILENCE SPEAKS: THE POLITENESS OF BEING SILENT IN REFUSAL
AMONG BUGINESE PEOPLE**TITLE ARTICLE PRESENT ALL ARTICLE

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Abstract

Silence is often theorized as a pragmatic act rather than simply the absence of speech, which is still limited to investigation, leaving silence as a source of politeness in acts of refusal unexplored. In Buginese society, this phenomenon is most clearly seen through the lens of siri' na pacce, a value system that regulates social dignity and communal solidarity. To capture this issue, this study aims to identify the forms of silence, its pragmatic functions, the influence of the cultural value of siri' na pacce, and the social context of its use. Using qualitative with an ethnographic case study design, data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 10 Buginese respondents, analysed using Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, and validated through observation triangulation and member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The findings reveal that Buginese silence is multimodal, that is avoiding eye contact, looking down, smiling faintly, delaying responses, brief pauses and functions as a negative politeness device to mitigate face-threatening acts, maintain interpersonal harmony, and avoid conflict. Siri' (honour/shame) acts as a strong predictor, encouraging verbal caution to protect shared dignity, while the use of silence is dominant in high-risk contexts: elderly hierarchy, vulnerable emotions, formal public arenas, and persistent requests. This study produced the first silence-siri' framework that synthesises cultural ethnography with speech act theory, contributing to culture-specific politeness theory and applicative implications for cross-cultural communication training in South Sulawesi. Buginese silence, not merely speech, is a communicative ontology that reflects local wisdom and contemporary social ethics.

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INTRODUCTION

Silence is often regarded as a lack of communication, yet it carries significant pragmatic and social functions. Although many people assume that communication is realized only through spoken language, pragmatic and sociolinguistic studies indicate

that silence can convey intention, emotion, and interpersonal stance indirectly (Ibrahim & Muhammad, 2021; Grothjan, 2022). In interaction, silence functions not merely as a pause but as a communicative resource used to avoid conflict, maintain respect, and express rejection politely. By withholding explicit disagreement, individuals preserve interpersonal harmony, a view supported by Brown & Levinson (1987) and more recently by Holmes & Schnurr (2020), who note that indirectness often serves to minimize relational tension. Refusal as a speech act carries a high risk of threatening the interlocutor's face. Because it involves declining a request or invitation, refusal can easily be perceived as impolite or confrontational. To mitigate this risk, speakers employ politeness strategies that maintain social relationships and reduce the potential for conflict. Silence is one such strategy, enabling speakers to convey refusal without explicitly articulating disagreement. Through silence, refusal becomes less face-threatening and less likely to disrupt communicative harmony. This highlights the need to examine silence more closely, especially in cultural contexts that value social cohesion and prefer indirect communication.

Within the Indonesian sociocultural landscape, particularly among the Buginese, politeness constitutes a central normative principle. Communication practices are deeply shaped by the philosophy of *Siri' na pacce* (Azis et al., 2022), which emphasizes dignity, emotional sensitivity, and social responsibility. These cultural values influence how individuals manage interactional tension, especially in situations involving refusal. Accordingly, politeness is expressed not only through linguistic choices but also through culturally embedded communicative behaviors such as silence. Understanding silence in this context, therefore, provides insights into how cultural norms guide pragmatic choices and contribute to the maintenance of social harmony.

Despite its recognized importance in pragmatic theory, silence as a politeness strategy remains underexplored. Existing studies on refusal predominantly examine verbal strategies aimed at mitigating face threats, leaving nonverbal strategies such as silence less documented. Research on silence has also been concentrated in institutional or intercultural settings, such as classroom interactions examined by Nakane (2007), rather than in everyday encounters within traditional communities. As a result, scholarly understanding of silence in culturally specific contexts remains limited. This gap is echoed in more recent pragmatic and communication research that highlights silence as

a complex communicative resource but does not prioritize its function as a nonverbal politeness strategy in refusal speech acts (Müller, 2024; Chutintaranond, 2025; Male & Sbastian, 2024).

Historically, studies on linguistic politeness in Indonesia have predominantly focused on the majority ethnic communities, especially Javanese and Sundanese, producing extensive literature on positive and negative politeness strategies in various speech acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Pragmatic studies on the Buginese community have only recently begun to emerge. For instance, Nurjanah (2023) examined verbal politeness strategies in interactions among Buginese youth, and Rahmawati and Yusuf (2022) analyzed everyday communication patterns influenced by the values of *siri' na pacce*. These studies generally rely on the framework of Brown and Levinson (1987), focusing on the use of honorifics, indirectness, and linguistic restraint that reflect the value of *siri'*, such as the respectful clitics *-kik* and *-nik* as indicators of social hierarchy, which were identified by Sunnuraini and Yassi (2022). Other studies, such as those by Putri et al. (2025), explore the adaptation of hierarchical politeness in market and family environments.

In addition, previous research on verbal refusal strategies in Buginese has identified a range of strategies including direct refusal (*de'*), apology, offering alternatives, implicit refusal, and conditional refusal (Amir & Dalle, 2018). Similar patterns of verbal indirectness were also documented in Makassarese (Salim & Salmin, 2020). However, these existing studies predominantly focus on verbal strategies and do not sufficiently examine the nonverbal dimension, particularly silence as a politeness strategy in refusal speech acts. This limitation highlights the need for research that explores silence not merely as an absence of speech but as an integral communicative and politeness resource within culturally specific contexts (Maretha et al., 2023; Hennink et al., 2022; Male & Sbastian, 2024).

Furthermore, findings from studies on politeness strategies, such as Male and Sbastian (2024), highlight that social dynamics and gender influence the use of various politeness strategies. For instance, in their analysis of transgender discussions, they found that male speakers predominantly employed positive politeness strategies, while female speakers were more direct in their communication. Similarly, Maretha et al. (2023) explored how children's communication behaviors, including impolite words

and disregard for intonation, are shaped by social factors such as social distance and power, further emphasizing the role of context in politeness strategies.

In the social etiquette dimension, the custom of eating in silence is seen as a form of respect and self-discipline (Mastanning, 2022), while Buginese idioms often utilize silence to soften speech or express sentiments without direct confrontation (Sul et al., 2023). Even in the political dimension, silence serves as a form of resistance and social commentary common in Southeast Asian communication traditions, allowing individuals to challenge authority without verbal confrontation (Cassaniti, 2023; Lupaş, 2022). All of these dimensions are grounded in *siri' na pacce*, a value system that regulates social face and communal solidarity. Thus, silence is not merely the absence of sound but a communicative act imbued with moral and cultural significance.

Although the conceptual richness of silence in Buginese culture has been identified in cultural and ritual contexts, no study has empirically linked silence to its function as a politeness strategy in refusal speech acts. Cross-ethnic studies in Indonesia, such as verbal refusal strategies in the Sundanese community by Pratiwi et al. (2021), are also limited to combined verbal strategies without exploring the pragmatic role of silence. In fact, *siri' na pacce* logically encourages Buginese speakers to choose silence over explicit refusal to preserve social face and avoid shame, especially in hierarchical relationships. This research gap encompasses at least four dimensions that have not been empirically addressed: (1) the concrete forms of silence in Buginese refusals, whether it is polite pauses, prolonged silence, or silence accompanied by gestures; (2) the pragmatic function of silence as a face-saving device in refusals; (3) how the values of *siri' na pacce* shape the use of silence, such as whether silence is more dominant when refusing requests from older or higher-status individuals; and (4) specific social contexts, that is gender differences, age range, hierarchical relations, and formal versus informal situations that trigger the use of silence as a polite refusal strategy in contemporary Buginese communities.

Based on these identified research gaps, the novelty of this study lies in three fundamental aspects: first, this is the first empirical study to analyze silence as a specific politeness strategy in refusal speech acts within the Buginese community, filling a gap that previous Buginese pragmatic studies have not addressed; second, this research integrates the cultural value of *siri' na pacce* as an explanatory variable linking the

practice of silence with the local value system, contributing to the development of culture-specific politeness theory; and third, this study expands cross-cultural pragmatics by including non-linguistic strategies as analytical objects on par with verbal strategies. In line with this novelty, the objectives of this study are to: (1) identify and describe the forms of silence used as politeness strategies in refusal speech acts within the Buginese community; (2) analyze the pragmatic function of silence in these refusals; (3) explain how the values of *siri' na pacce* shape and influence the use of silence as a refusal strategy; and (4) map the social situations and interactional contexts most commonly associated with the use of silence as a polite refusal strategy in contemporary Buginese life.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach with an ethnographic case study design to explore the use of silence as a politeness strategy in refusal among Buginese speakers. Ethnography, as a qualitative research method, is deeply rooted in understanding cultural practices and social behaviors through prolonged engagement, direct observation, and participant interaction, making it especially suitable for exploring communicative norms within specific cultural communities (Tracy, 2020; Madge, Meek, & O'Connell, 2021). This approach allowed the researchers to capture the nuanced, culturally embedded practice of silence in communication and refusal within the Buginese community, providing a more holistic understanding of how silence operates as a politeness strategy in social interactions. The respondents involved in this study are 10 students from Universitas Negeri Makassar, all of whom are native Buginese speakers. The selection of 10 respondents for this study used convenience sampling, a technique that selects participants who are easily accessible and willing to provide relevant data regarding the use of silence as a politeness strategy in refusal speech acts among the Buginese community. This approach was chosen due to the researchers' accessibility to this community, which is not only representative of contemporary Buginese communication practices but also actively engaged in everyday refusal situations such as rejecting invitations, requests for help, or social offers that require face-saving without the use of direct confrontation.

The use of convenience sampling is well-suited for exploratory qualitative research like this, particularly when the goal is to explore specific cultural phenomena in their natural context (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The UNM students involved in this study meet these criteria because (1) they are native Buginese speakers who are fluent in both Buginese and Indonesian, (2) they are exposed to both traditional and modern social hierarchy dynamics, and (3) they frequently encounter refusal dilemmas in campus and community interactions influenced by *siri' na pacce*. Literature supports that *convenience sampling* is effective for cultural pragmatics studies when the target population is difficult to reach probabilistically, as long as informants are selected based on thematic relevance. This is consistent with broader qualitative sampling principles in which non-probability techniques — including convenience and purposive sampling — are appropriate for exploratory research involving hard-to-reach populations or unique cultural contexts (Dahal et al., 2024; Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025).

The sample size of 10 respondents aligns with the principles of qualitative inquiry, which emphasizes depth of analysis over breadth of coverage. Creswell and Creswell (2023) asserts that small samples (5-25 informants) are optimal for phenomenological studies and grounded theory, allowing for in-depth interviews and careful thematic analysis. Furthermore, recent qualitative methodology literature shows that the point of data saturation—in which no new themes emerge—is commonly reached within a relatively small number of semi-structured interviews in studies with homogeneous populations and focused thematic objectives (Hennink et al., 2022; Guest et al., 2020). In this study's design, which centers on the specific communicative context of Buginese silence patterns and involves participants who share cultural exposure to *siri' na pacce*, such a sample size is justified as sufficient to achieve saturation of themes related to forms, functions, and contexts of silence. Similar pragmatic pilot studies in Indonesian ethnic groups (e.g., Sundanese refusal) have also succeeded with 8-12 informants (Pratiwi et al., 2021).

In this study, primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews, which served as the primary instrument for gathering in-depth information regarding the perception and use of silence as a politeness strategy in refusal speech acts among the Buginese community (Lim, 2025; Ruslin et al., 2022). The choice of semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to explore the topic more flexibly while still adhering

to established guidelines. These interviews focused on identifying forms of silence, such as polite pauses and prolonged silences, as well as the pragmatic functions of silence in refusal, such as face-saving and indirect refusal. Furthermore, the interviews aimed to explore the reasons for choosing silence over direct verbal refusal, as well as the influence of the cultural value of *siri' na pacce* on this communicative choice.

Data collection was conducted face-to-face in the respondents' natural location, the campus of Makassar State University (UNM), which also serves as their daily social interaction location. Interviews lasted 30 to 40 minutes per session, using a flexible interview guide that allowed the researcher to probe in-depth on several key questions, such as, "Tell me about a specific situation in which you chose silence when refusing? How did the other person react?" All interviews were audio-recorded with the respondents' ethical approval. Interview transcripts were then produced verbatim in the original languages (Buginese-Indonesian) and translated into standard Indonesian for analysis.

The collected data were then analyzed using thematic analysis based on the framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2021), which focuses on identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning emerging from the data. The analysis process consisted of six stages: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of the interview transcripts; (2) initial coding for descriptive (such as the form of silence) and interpretative (e.g., the function of *siri'*); (3) search for potential themes; (4) review and refinement of themes; (5) definition of final themes; and (6) preparation of a report containing authentic quotations from the respondents. The primary focus of this analysis was themes related to the form of silence, the function of silence in refusal, the influence of *siri' na pacce*, and the social context of the use of silence in refusal.

To ensure the validity and credibility of the data, this study applied the four main criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was achieved through prolonged engagement (in-depth interviews and participant observation over two sessions per respondent), persistent observation (focusing on observing nonverbal silence via audio and video), and member checking (verifying a summary of initial findings by respondents via WhatsApp). Transferability was supported by respondents' thick contextual descriptions and

purposeful sampling, while dependability was maintained through a comprehensive audit trail verified by peer debriefers (linguistics lecturers from UNM), with an inter-rater agreement of 85% (Cohen's κ). Confirmability was achieved through method triangulation (interviews, observation, and discourse analysis) and a reflexivity journal that recorded the researcher's personal biases throughout the study.

With this approach, this study not only produced credible, reliable, and objective findings but also made an authentic contribution to the understanding of silence as a politeness strategy in the speech act of refusal among the Buginese community. The approach used ensures that the findings of this study provide in-depth insights into the dynamics of the use of silence in the contemporary Buginese social and cultural context, as well as the influence of local cultural values such as *siri'* na pacce in shaping patterns of polite refusal communication.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The interview results demonstrate that the act of remaining silent is employed as a significant strategy of politeness in the refusal of requests among Buginese speakers. This utilization is closely associated with considerations of emotional comfort, interpersonal relationships, and the cultural value of *Siri'*. Participants explained that silence can manifest in various forms, both verbal and non-verbal, and is employed selectively depending on the context. It was also noted that preferences between direct and indirect refusal vary, but that silence is consistently recognized as a culturally acceptable alternative to avoid conflict and maintain social harmony.

Forms of Silence Used in Buginese Refusal

The interviews demonstrate that Buginese people employ several recognizable forms of silence when refusing a request. Participants reported that silence does not always appear as total muteness, but rather as subtle non-verbal cues that indicate hesitation or indirect rejection. These forms include averting eye contact, a downward gaze, a faint smile, delayed responses, and a brief period of silence. Furthermore, some participants described situations in which subjects feel uncomfortable providing a direct answer, they may choose to remain silent, thus indicating their discomfort. As posited by several participants, these silent behaviors are perceived as communicative signals

that allow the speaker to avoid confrontation. The following extracts are provided for illustrative purposes:

Extract 1 (ZK)

“...usually, the forms are like lowering the head, giving a small smile, or answering late. People will understand that it means we are refusing politely.”

Extract 2 (H)

“...I usually avoid eye contact or stay quiet for a while. That’s a sign that I cannot accept the request.”

Extract 3 (SZN)

“...some people smile while shaking their head a little, or they stay silent because they really don’t know how to respond.”

These findings indicate that silence in Buginese refusal is multimodal, expressed not only through the absence of speech but also through meaningful nonverbal gestures. These findings suggest that silence in Buginese refusal is not merely the absence of verbal communication but a complex, multimodal phenomenon. Silence, in this context, is coupled with various nonverbal gestures that carry significant meaning, further enriching the act of refusal.

Functions of Silence as a Politeness Strategy

The data demonstrate that the act of silence functions primarily as a politeness strategy with the aim of maintaining interpersonal harmony. Participants explained that silence helps them avoid causing offence to the requester, prevents unnecessary conflict, and allows them to maintain smooth social interaction. Silence is regarded as a milder, less assertive form of refusal. Participants frequently reported that silence is used to reduce face-threatening acts, especially when they feel uncomfortable or afraid of sounding rude. The following extracts illustrate this pattern:

Extract 4 (NAA)

“...if I refuse directly, I’m afraid they will get offended, especially older people. So, I choose to stay silent first.”

Extract 5 (F)

“...silence makes the situation calmer. It prevents people from feeling embarrassed.”

Extract 6 (H)

“...I feel shy to say no. Better to keep quiet so the person doesn't feel hurt.”

Based on the above extracts, it can be concluded that silence in rejection in Buginese culture is not merely a way of avoiding direct confrontation but also a means of maintaining social relationships and avoiding hurt feelings. Whether in the context of relationships with older people, maintaining calm in tense situations, or avoiding embarrassment or hurting others' feelings, silence serves as a subtle but effective communication strategy. By choosing to remain silent, individuals attempt to manage social interactions more carefully, avoid conflict, and protect others' feelings from being hurt.

Influence of *Siri'* on the Use of Silence

The present study set out to explore the relationship between cultural values and the practice of silence in refusal. The research found that cultural values rooted in *Siri's* honor, dignity, and shame strongly influence how silence is practiced in refusal. For a considerable number of participants, the principle of *Siri'* is a compelling incentive to refrain from causing embarrassment to others, to exercise caution in speech, and to uphold mutual respect. In a variety of cultural contexts, silence can serve as a means of safeguarding the dignity of both the speaker and the addressee. It has been posited by a number of participants that the utilization of *Siri'* has led to an increased awareness of the potential impact of their verbal utterances on others. It is evident that silence is employed as a means of averting what is referred to as 'loss of face'.

Extract 7 (H)

“...*Siri'* makes me careful because I don't want people to feel ashamed. So, I refuse in a very soft way, sometimes staying silent first.”

Extract 8 (LI)

“...*Siri'* influences me to be more polite, to avoid making someone feel embarrassed.”

Extract 9 (I)

“...*Siri'* affects everything. We must be careful with our words because people can feel ashamed.”

Although some participants claimed that *Siri'* only affected them a little, they still acknowledged the influence of *Siri'* in their interactions. This shows that *Siri'* remains a cultural value that is deeply embedded in Buginese society, which significantly shapes the communication choices of its speakers. Thus, although its level of influence may vary, *Siri'* continues to play an important role in guiding the way people communicate and act in the social context of Buginese society.

Social Situations Where Silence Is More Commonly Used

The interviews reveal that silence is more frequently used in specific social contexts, particularly those involving hierarchy, emotional sensitivity, or crowded environments. Silence tends to be chosen when interacting with older people or respected figures, in situations where the speaker feels unsure or uncomfortable, or during moments that require emotional control, such as when feeling angry or embarrassed. It is also more common in public or formal settings, as well as in scenarios where the requester insists repeatedly or when the speaker experiences confusion or hesitation. In these situations, speakers often turn to silence, as direct refusal may be perceived as inappropriate or risky.

Extract 10 (NAA)

“...I use silence mostly with older people because we must respect them. Better to stay quiet than cause conflict.”

Extract 11 (NPR)

“...when I’m emotional, I choose silence first, so I won’t hurt someone with my words.”

Extract 12 (JK)

“...in crowds, silence is better because refusing loudly can embarrass someone.”

Those findings above slightly reveal that silence emerges as a socially sensitive strategy that aligns with both cultural expectations and situational demands, serving as a means to maintain social harmony, avoid conflict, and show respect in delicate interactions. It reflects a deep understanding of social norms and the subtleties of communication in which choosing silence can be a way to navigate complex power dynamics, emotional states, and formal contexts without causing offense or discomfort.

Discussion

This study provides valuable empirical insights on the use of silence as a politeness strategy in rejection among Buginese speakers. Data collected through in-depth interviews and validated through methodological triangulation highlight the complexity of silence in Buginese communication. It challenges the reductionist view of silence simply as the absence of verbal articulation (Laver, 2023) and instead frames it as a multimodal communicative phenomenon firmly embedded in cultural and social norms. This study significantly fills a gap in Buginese pragmatics, which traditionally centered on verbal strategies (Amir & Dalle, 2018; Sunnuraini & Yassi, 2022), as well as contributing to the broader field of cross-cultural pragmatics, especially in Southeast Asia.

The first findings reveal that silence among Buginese speakers is not limited to mere silence but exists along the spectrum of subtle multimodal movements. These include *avoiding eye contact* (H: "avoiding eye contact, pause"), *staring down with a faint smile* (ZK: "looking down, small smile, slow response"), *delayed responses*, *short pauses*, and *shaking hands accompanied by a smile* (SZN). These forms challenge conventional understandings of silence and affirm Laver's (2023) assertion that silence is a communicative approach, rich in social codes, especially in *high-context* cultures. The multimodal nature of silence, as shown in this study, is in line with the findings of Kim and Lee (2022) that posture and facial expressions are important components of communication in the culture. Unlike previous research on Buginese rejection, which focused only on verbal strategies such as direct "de" rejection or implicit apologies (Amir & Dalle, 2108), this study expands Bao et al.'s (2025) theory of silence in East Asia as a multimodal indirect, especially in the context of hierarchical relationships. Persistent observations validate this movement as an implicit communicative act, suggesting that silence functions as an active illocutional act (Austin, 1962)

Silent pragmatic function analysis confirms its role as a negative politeness strategy par excellence, designed to reduce Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Silence serves to avoid offense (NAA: "to remain silent to avoid offending feelings, especially parents"), to prevent conflict (F: "silence calms the situation, prevents embarrassment"), and protects feelings (H: "to be embarrassed to say no, silence avoids painful feelings"). These findings highlight that Buginese silence is

milder and less assertive than direct verbal rejection, acting as a face-saving tool that maintains interpersonal harmony. This is in line with recent studies on the pragmatics of silence, which show that silence can function strategically to manage interpersonal relationships, maintain harmony, and regulate social interaction through meaningful non-verbal absence (Amer et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2025). This study compares Buginese rejection with verbal Makassar-Sundanese (Pratiwi et al., 2021), in which Buginese speakers stand out for using silence as a moral choice for emotional protection. Thematic analysis categorized the function of silence into harmony maintenance, conflict avoidance, and face-saving, with data saturation achieved by the eighth respondent, supporting the efficacy of small sample sizes in qualitative pragmatics research (Guest et al., 2020).

The third finding shows the dominant influence of *siri'* as a dialectic of shame-honor that governs verbal prudence. Respondents highlighted that *Siri' motivates politeness through prudence in rejection*: H ("*Siri' makes you careful, gently refuses quietly*"), LI ("*Siri' encourages politeness, avoids embarrassing others*"), I ("*Siri' sets everything in order, words can bring shame*"). Even respondents with minimal exposure to *siri'* recognized it as an attractive cultural incentive, supporting Migundo's (2024) honorary culture theory that relies on indirectness to protect against *face loss*. In the Buginese context, *siri' na pacce* synthesizes the avoidance of shame (*siri'*) and solidarity (*pacce*), making silence an externalization of moral and social ethics. These findings improve understanding of the resolution of the Buginese conflict (2025), which largely ignores non-verbal strategies. In addition, the evolution of silence from *the bissu* ritual (Suliyati, 2018) in its profane use in daily rejection adds a nuanced layer to this phenomenon. The varying intensity of *the series'* influence – strong versus weak – reflects the dynamics of urban modernization in Makassar (Mastanning, 2022), in which traditional values remain resilient despite adaptation.

Social context mapping, which fulfills the fourth objective, reveals that silence is mostly used in high-risk interactions, including hierarchy with parents (NAA: "silence to honor the elderly"), vulnerable emotions (NPR: "emotionally, silence avoids pain"), formal public settings (JK: "crowded places, silence prevents shame"), uncertainty, and constant demand. These patterns corroborate the assertion of Smith and Williams (2023) that silence is optimal in situations involving power asymmetry or high emotional

intensity, representing a way to navigate social dynamics without confrontation. These findings bridge the silence of traditional social etiquette (Mastanning, 2022) with contemporary rejection, illustrating the adaptation of *siri'* in urban contexts.

This study revolutionized Buginese pragmatism by empirically meeting four research objectives for the first time, synthesizing cultural ethnography with speech theory (Austin, 1962), resulted in a series of silence frameworks that extend the universality of Brown and Levinson (1987) to local specificity. *Siri'* serves as a predictor of non-verbal FTA in honor culture. The main contributions of this study include mapping multimodal silence as a politeness strategy that does not exist in the Buginese verbal literature, integrating *siri' na pacce* as a follow-up cultural variable, and validating contextuality

CONCLUSION

This study empirically discusses four research objectives: identifying forms of silence, analysing its pragmatic function as a strategy of politeness, explaining the influence of *siri' na pacce*, and mapping the social context of its use in speech refusal among Buginese speakers in urban Makassar. The findings show that silence in Buginese communication is a complex multimodal phenomenon rather than simply the absence of verbal articulation. This study also contributes significantly to Buginese pragmatics, which has traditionally focused on verbal strategies, and enriches the broader field of cross-cultural pragmatics. By emphasising the cultural, social, and pragmatic layers of silence in refusal, this research adds a unique perspective to our understanding of politeness strategies in high-context cultures.

Although this research provides valuable insights into the role of silence in speech refusal actions, there are several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the study focuses on a relatively small sample of 10 respondents, which, although sufficient for qualitative research, may limit the generalisation of findings to a wider population. Participants were selected from specific demographic groups that may not fully represent the diversity of Buginese speakers across different regions. Second, the study was conducted in a specific urban environment, and thus its findings may differ in rural or more traditional settings in which social dynamics, particularly those governed by *siri' na pacce*, may be more pronounced. Future research should expand the sample size to include a more diverse range of Buginese speakers from different age groups and

geographical regions, including both urban and rural areas. This would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how silence as a strategy of politeness operates in different contexts and settings. In addition, researchers could explore the role of digital communication in the use of silence, as contemporary modes of interaction (such as social media and text messaging) may present new challenges and opportunities for silence in refusal. The influence of gender and social status on the use of silence in refusal can also be explored in greater depth, examining how these variables interact with cultural values such as *siri' na pacce* in different social contexts. Longitudinal studies can also provide insights into how the practice of using silence evolves over time, particularly in relation to generational shifts and the impact of globalisation on traditional Buginese communication practices.

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