

## THE ANALYSIS OF THE FACE THREATENING ACT DELIVERED BY ASPERGER SYNDROME IN *ADAM* MOVIE

(ANALISA TINDAKAN MENGANCAM HARGA DIRI YANG DISAMPAIKAN OLEH PENDERITA SINDROM ASPERGER DALAM FILM *ADAM*)

**Achmad Mubasyiril Anwar, Syamsul Anam, Wisasongko**

English Department, Faculty of Letters, Jember University

Jln. Kalimantan 37, Jember 68121

E-mail: [avant.anwar@gmail.com](mailto:avant.anwar@gmail.com)

085 855 558 054

### ABSTRAK

Ketika bahasa dikomunikasikan dalam sebuah konteks sosial dimana setiap teman bicara diharapkan melakukan sebuah bahasa komunikasi yang sopan yang tidak membahayakan baik bagi dirinya atau kepada orang yang pesan itu sedang disampaikan, pembicara harus menjaga komunikasi yang sopan dalam kehidupan sosial. Dalam kajian ini sebuah kerangka pemahaman pragmatik dilakukan berdasarkan prinsip kesopanan (Brown & Levinson 1987) yang bertujuan untuk menjelaskan bagaimana harga diri sebagai sebuah aspek universal dalam kajian kesopanan. Penelitian ini untuk menemukan kemampuan pemahaman pragmatik Adam, dan memahami ucapan apa saja yang kemungkinan besar membingungkan bagi penderita sindrom Asperger yang mengarahkannya pada tindakan mengancam harga diri. Jenis penelitian kualitatif dan kuantitatif digunakan dalam penelitian ini. Penelitian kualitatif yang digunakan untuk menjabarkan data dalam bentuk kutipan percakapan dan penelitian kuantitatif digunakan untuk mengetahui presentase hasil. Hasilnya menunjukkan Adam cenderung menggunakan komunikasi langsung terhadap ucapan yang membingungkannya. Kemudian, kelemahan yang paling menonjol Adam miliki adalah interaksi sosial dan kemampuan emosional.

**Kata Kunci:** Bahasa, komunikasi, tindakan mengancam harga diri, sindrom Asperger.

### ABSTRACT

*When language is communicated within a social context where every interlocutor is expected to carry out a linguistically polite communication which will not bring harm both to him or herself and the person to whom the messages are being delivered, speaker socially should maintain it. This study pragmatic understanding is conducted from a framework based on politeness principle (Brown & Levinson 1987) that aims to explain how face as a universal aspect in politeness study. The research is to find out the pragmatic understanding abilities of Adam, and to understand what utterances for person with Asperger Syndrome is potentially confusing leading him to face threatening act. Qualitative and quantitative research are employed in this study. Qualitative research used is to describe the data in the form of extract conversation and quantitative research is used to know the presentage of the results. The results show Adam tend to use bald on record communication without redressive action toward confusing utterances. Therefore, the prominent weakness Adam has is social interaction and emotional abilities.*

**Keywords:** Language, communication, face threatening act, Asperger Syndrome.

### 1. Introduction

Language and communication are often seen as two sides of a single coin. On this view, the essential feature of language is used in communication, and the essential feature of

communication involves the use of a language or code, Sperber & Wilson (1995:172). Language used in communication does not always run as expected. Speaker and listener have to own mutual knowledge, same ground or understanding to

know the intended meaning delivered by the speaker. Language used by speakers to bridge their ideas can be misunderstood.

In English, for instance, we are expected to put 'please' at the end of a sentence that functions as a request. We are also driven to understand that it is not polite to address someone with 'stupid' or 'imbecile' or any other names and titles that aim to humiliate him or her. This is to guarantee that the process of social interaction transpires in a way that any conflicts that might drag the interlocutors into can be minimized if not avoided at all. Unfortunately, misunderstanding and other such conflicts in verbal interaction are sometimes inevitable to occur.

There is a movie that interested in writers research, that is *Adam*. *Adam* is a movie that presents a character with Asperger Syndrome in using 'odd' communication strategies of very interesting language phenomena. One of these interesting and most prominent characters is Adam Raki. He is interesting and unique at the same time for his lack of social interaction, empathy, and his act of being aloofness. They have combined to form so much a personality that almost everything in his utterances is relevant to him but not very polite responses. He likes to say 'thank you' when he gets excited even when after kissing Beth. He always tends to ask what people thought, to seek his preference and being insensitive to others' feeling. His feelings of being smart has somewhat given him an excuse to explicitly explain in detail what he knows. He has caused Beth and his friends to like him the way he is and sometimes annoying.

Asperger syndrome (AS) and high-functioning autism (HFA) are characterized by communication problems which are best described as affecting pragmatic aspects of language. Pragmatic difficulties may even be the most stigmatizing and handicapping aspect of these syndromes (Landa, 2000:125) and Lawson (2003:21) defines:

"The people with Asperger syndrome exhibit difficulty in social interaction, unusual play with toys and other objects for children, difficulty with changes to environment and routines, repetitive

body movement or behavior patterns, delay in the development of motor skills like walking or biking, one way conversations meaning. They only focus on their topic of interest, inability to read facial expressions and literal understanding of words".

Theoretical frameworks of pragmatic understanding studies vary widely. However, this study pragmatic understanding is approached from a framework based on politeness principle (Brown & Levinson 1987) that aims to explain how face as a universal aspect in politeness study. They argue that in order to be polite we need to maintain both the hearer's positive face wants and his/her negative face wants. They also provide super strategies that could help speakers to communicate more politely on daily basis. Pragmatic understanding and its development is a complex process. Appropriateness conditions for speech acts, related to pragmatic contexts, are usually formulated in terms of wants, preferences, knowledge, beliefs or evaluations of speakers and hearers. Such conditions are abstractions from the actual communicative situation: how speakers and hearers go about planning, executing, understanding, storing in memory, and accepting are topics which are usually neglected. Being able to engage in contextual processing when taking part in communication is an important ability. The research in this study is to find out the pragmatic understanding abilities with Adam's utterances toward Beth and the other characters as face threatening act strategies.

Concerning with the pragmatics difficulties Adam undergoes, the writers find two main problems of the study; 1. What potentially confusing utterances Adam has failed to understand in his interaction with the other characters in the *Adam* movie, 2. What kinds of possible face threatening act Adam has tended to deliver.

This study is designed to achieve two purposes; 1. To describe how face threatening act can explain politeness difficulties of people with AS/HFA in understanding contextual meaning and, 2. To understand how people with Asperger Syndrome almost cannot produce reasonable responses leading him to face threatening act.

**2. Research Methodology**

This study applies both qualitative and quantitative research. The quantitative method is used to count the potentially confusing utterances and face threatening acts delivered by Adam while qualitative method is used to interpret and describe the two problems discussed. Furthermore, the technique of data collection in this study applies the documentary method. Blaxter at al, (2006:154) state “documents is using written materials as a basic for the research”. The extract data are taken from the script of Adam movie. The data are collected by using stratified sampling. Descombe (2007:14) writes “a stratified sampling is as one in which every member of the population has an equal chance of being selected in relation to their proportion within the total population”.

The movie script has 30 extract data using 18 potentially confusing utterances, consisting double bluff, joke, persuasion, pretending, sarcasm, white lie, irony and others 11 utterances. They are lip service, metaphor, indirect request, ambiguity, polite refusal, sympathy, personal recount, compliment, direct request, expectation and idiom. The nature of analysis of this study applies descriptive method which is used to apply the theory of face threatening act proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) in the selected clauses taken from Adam’s conversation in *Adam* as sample. Then, we apply statistical method in classifying and counting the failed utterance type and face threatening act strategies used. Finally, interpretative method is used to investigate the possible face threatening act strategies in *Adam* movie based on investigated failed utterance type to finally conclude the results of this study.

**3. Results**

Based on the data which have been collected and analyzed, it is found that there is significant effect of Adam having Asperger syndrome that is to understand pretending with 5 or 12.4% of the data found. It means that Adam with Asperger syndrome cannot understand real intention or artificial condition to do something before faced. It can be seen the whole difficulties in the following table:

Utterances	Number	Percentage	Description
Double Bluff	1	3.1%	
Joke	3	7.8%	
Persuasion	2	5.4%	
Pretending	5	12.4%	The most potentially confusing
Sarcasm	4	10.1%	
White lie	1	3.1%	
Irony	2	5.4%	
Others			
a. Lip service	4	10.1%	
b. Indirect request	2	5.4%	
c. Ambiguity	1	3.1%	
d. Polite refusal	1	3.1%	
e. Metaphor	2	5.4%	
f. Sympathy	2	5.4%	
g. Personal recount	4	10.1%	
h. Compliment	1	3.1%	
i. Direct request	4	10.1%	
j. Expectation	1	3.1%	
k. Idiom	1	3.1%	
Total	41	100%	

Furthermore, the following results are the results of face threatening act delivered by Adam. He tends to speak bluntly about what he thinks due to his severe social interaction problems. It can be seen in the figure below:

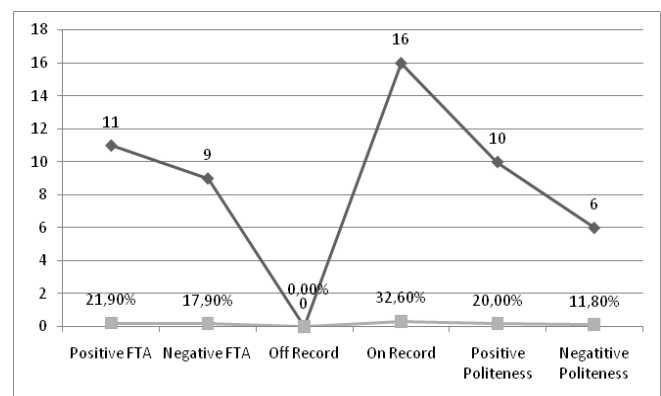


Figure 1. The results of the face threatening act delivered

#### 4. Discussion

Happé (1993:102) found that there was a close relationship between understanding metaphor or irony and performance on theory of mind tasks. In her later study, she again found a strong relationship between the ability to explain a variety of non literal messages such as lies, jokes, pretence, irony, sarcasm, and double bluff. Conclusively, people with Asperger Syndrome have complexity in understanding non literal meanings like lies, jokes, pretence, double bluff, sarcasm, idiom, and irony. The common non literal meanings are sarcasm, idiom, metaphor and indirect request.

Additionally, one of the most commonly suggested explanations for the understanding difficulties of individuals with AS or HFA is weak central coherence, which means that they have a tendency to interpret utterances in isolation and problems in integrating information from many sources stated in line with Jolliffe & Baron-Cohen (1999). In reverse, lacking of Theory of Mind (ToM) causes pragmatic deficits understanding as Martin and McDonald (2004) argue in their study which was previously introduced by Simon Baron-Cohen (1995) *entitled Mindblindness An Essay on Autism and Theory of Mind*. Theory of Mind (ToM) means the ability to recognize and understand thoughts, beliefs, desires and intentions of other people in order to make sense of their behaviour and predict what they are going to do next, Attwood, (2007:112). Hence, Asperger syndrome has become known as Mindblindness, which means that they are unable to think about other people's thinking, and further, to think about what they think about our thinking or even to think about what they think we think about their thinking.

Therefore, Brown & Levinson base their theory on a central concept of 'face' which in general defends as one's self-image. This concept embraces two sorts of needs in every person: negative and positive face. Positive face is defined as to be approved of by others; for example: life, health, honor, a positive self-image and negative face as "a desire to be free from imposition and distraction and to have their personal prerogatives and territory respected" (Brown & Levinson, 1987:66). Any acts which tend to break away from maintaining hearers' positive and negative face

wants is known as 'face-threatening act'. The face-threatening act analysis can be seen in the following extracts. This is the example of double bluff.

1. Adam: But their sensor systems have detected an error in analyzing space radiation.

Harlan: *Adam, I'm having lunch. Speak English.*

Adam: I'm sorry.

You see, the Star Tracker system is—

Harlan: *No. No more background radiation black holes or Mars robots. Lunchtime is for guy talk.*

Two guys talking about women, the weather and such. You got it?

Adam: But the Star Tracker system—

Harlan: *No.*

Adam: Hmm.

[ Chuckles ] A woman moved into 3A.

Harlan: All right. Now, that's lunch talk. So?

Adam: So, that's all.

This analysis focuses on the utterances that are potentially confusing which are italicized and the utterances that contain FTA which are underlined. In the park, Adam and Harlan are having lunch in the park while watching people walking. Lunch time is time for guy talk, unserious but interesting. Adam tries to keep talking about space but Harlan doesn't want to hear that by bluffing Adam several times after put his positive face to Adam. Finally, Adam attends to Harlan wants but he no longer maintains Harlan's face by saying "that's all" to end the conversation about women. This conversation proves that person with Asperger syndrome is hard to understand double bluff as people want.

2. Joke

Adam: Can you see the sky from the third floor?

Beth: *I guess I would if the windows weren't covered in soot.*

Adam: (Quite)

Beth: Some nerve, right...

Beth: I'm a writer. For children. So it's a good experience.

What do you do?

Adam: Uh, I help make toys.

Beth: *Are you an elf?*

Adam: No, I'm an electronic engineer.

In apartment's laundry, while putting clothes into washing machine, Adam asks whether she can see sky from third floor. However, Beth takes it unserious with smiling. Adam considers it as the real meaning in the real situation. And the conversation goes on to know each other from experience to job. Here, Adam fails how to joke. His expression of disapproval falls under category positive FTA, because it is illogical for him become an elf to just help make toys without knowing that it is Beth's way to introduce with the person she has just met.

### 3. Persuasion

Beth: *Listen, I'm going out with some friends tonight later, if you want to come.*

Adam: Oh.

Beth: *They're people, so you might want to... watch them.*

Adam: uh-huh

Beth: *But if not, you know, that's fine.*

Adam: No, I want to go, but, um, I- I-I don't think I can.

In the apartment entrance upstairs, Beth comes back to Adam sitting on the upstairs due to neglecting her to help bringing grocery bags. Then, she puts her positive face to that her new neighbour by inviting him to go around. She is persuading to show that she has good intention toward him. Beth tries to argue by the reason Adam delivered before when she was asking him about he was doing. However, Adam seems restricted to socialize with peer or community which Beth has. This can be one of characteristics of person with Asperger syndrome reflected by Adam's reluctance and incapability to join in a group of people. He thinks he cannot come not because cannot go, but Adam thinks he cannot socialize. He tries to *avoid disagreement* by saying "No, I want to go, but, um, I- I-I don't think I can" to make her understand people would think he is freak.

### 4. Pretence

Adam: Buying a telescope is a complicated decision. You should focus on your interests.

Woman 3: No pun intended.

Adam: *what?*

Woman 3: *Focus?*

Adam: Right. A-Are you interested in the solar system-moon, planets, et cetera? [*keep talking about telescope*]

When Beth is coming with Adam in her friend party, Adam is talking to one of Beth friend about telescope. Seemingly, Adam does not understand that the woman he is talking to having no pun intended to buy telescope. Firstly he attacks Michael positive face by saying "What?". The woman seems uncomfortable with the topic and Adam does not understand what her real intention is. However, as a stranger, Michael thinks that she has to pretend involving in Adam's conversation topic which Michael considers inoffensive way by saying "focus?" repeating his key word. Due to his understanding disorder about this kind of potentially confusing utterances, he continues attacking her negative face by enthusiastically explaining how to buy a good telescope by giving its details specification.

### 5. Sarcasm

Marty : It wasn't even a hard call to make, but now they all think they've uncovered

Enron.

Adam : Could you go to jail?

Beth: Adam!

Marty: No. I'm glad you asked.

Bethy, I'm not going anywhere.

*Any more questions, Mr. Prosecutor?*

Adam : uh, no.

Marty : [*to Becky*] *see, he fits right in.*

Adam appears unaware of social conventions of codes of conduct and makes inappropriate actions and comments. In conversation above, Adam is making a personal comment to Marty but Adam seems unaware of how the comment could offend him. Adam attacks Marty's negative face by bluntly asking what will happen to him. Adam is unaware that he has to maintain Marty's face as his father's girlfriend. This completely makes the situation uncomfortable for Beth's family. The use of word 'prosecutor' by Marty as a sarcastic word shows he is inconvenient with Adam's question. However, Adam does not understand that he was as though a prosecutor to judge Marty. Adam just thinks why Marty calls him prosecutor while he

was not. It indicates Adam is potentially confusing with this kind of utterance.

#### 6. White Lie

Beth : Okay, you're right.

Adam : Right?

Beth : *My father and I arranged for us to meet.*

Adam: You arranged?

Beth: *I knew they were gonna be at them theater. They really wanted to meet you.*

Now, will you please tell me what happened?

Adam : You lied?

Beth : *Just a little.*

Adam : Ha-ha-ha! Fooled you! Dumb

Adam!

Dumb, dumb, dumb, dumb, dumb, dumb! Dumb, dumb, dumb Adam!

Beth : Adam, I didn't- I- I'm sorry. I-

Adam, please just calm down.

Adam : No, I hate you!

Adam does not understand but insist not to tolerate the 'white' reason Beth delivered to him because he cannot find out that the meeting she arranged is to take further step in their relationship. Adam gets very angry for Beth cheated him. Adam lacks precision in controlling emotion, so he does not understand in which levels he has to use it appropriately. Even though Beth apologizes for her mistake, Adam ignores it and keeps yelling at her with high temper. Moreover, he repeatedly objurgates himself by rude words for his stupidity being easily cheated by his girlfriend. His high temper attacks Beth's both positive and negative face by *strong negative emotion* toward her. By saying "*I hate you*" Adam delivers negative face threatening act which harms not only face but also physic. Adam breaks every things to show that Beth is really threatened. In brief, a person with Asperger syndrome cannot cope with white lie. If somebody lies to him, it would make him irritated and uncontrolled while saying rude words to the one who lies.

#### 7. Irony

Harlan : *You're not 10 years old anymore. You need a job.*

Adam : I got fired.

Adam does not understand that Harlan means the need of job is to find another job as Adam got fired. Adam thinks he knows he needs a job but he does not have job anymore. He just focuses on his previous job as his real job. Furthermore, because of his lack of precision in his experience of emotion toward people, Atwood (2007:50), this means not understanding levels of emotional expression that is appropriate for different people. Adam says with high tone *reminding* Harlan meaning that an anger for Harlan. It really attacks Harlan's positive face, but for Harlan knows his condition he keeps telling him patiently afterward.

### 5. Conclusion and Suggestion

Adam who has understanding impairment is potentially confusing to some utterances like double bluff, joke, persuasion, sarcasm, irony, white lie, especially pretending. He is aware how people can make their thoughts illogical and out of reality but he cannot understand it. Besides, lip service, personal recount and direct request are also recognized as factors confusing to understand for Adam. From this results at least represent Adam's communication skill that tend to interpret things literally, appear uninterested in other characters' conversation, have less eye contact, talk in pedantic or over-precise speech, and have problems repairing a conversation. Therefore, the prominent weakness Adam has is social interaction and emotional abilities. He is unaware of social conventions of codes and unwritten rules, lacks of empathy, expecting Beth and other characters know his thought and experience, and not understanding levels to control emotion.

What is shown by the analysis off all extracts suggests that firstly, Adam has applied almost all face threatening act strategies but off-record. The only strategy he cannot cope with. This happen because Adam always says his thought in blunt way. Secondly, all other characters who have involved with Adam's face threatening act have also used possible strategies to make him understand. They have attacked him, or ignored him which gets them upset and threatened. Although in the end those do not seem to change Adam, but he has much learned how to deal with social interaction.

Finally, the results of this study is expected

to contribute a better concept in understanding the issue of pragmatic results in face threatening act. For the next prospective researchers, it is recommended to conduct a study of relevancy analysis in Asperger's Syndrome in Adam movie. Hopefully by doing such pragmatic analysis, we can conclude how Adam is difficult to social interaction and emotional abilities leading him to threaten other's face. We hope this study can also be used as the reference for other researchers in writing about pragmatic analysis on other subjects.

## References

### Books

- Attwood, T. 2007. *The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Blaxter at al. 2006. *How to Research*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: Open University Press.
- Brown, P. and Levinson, S. 1987. *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Denscombe, Martin. 2007. *The Good Research Guide for Small-Scale Social Research Projects*. Poland: Open University Press.
- Grice, H. 1975. *Logic and Conversation*. San Diego: Academic Press
- Lawson, Wendy. 2003. *Building Your Own Life: A Self Help Guide for Individuals with Asperger Syndrome*. London and Philadelphia USA: Jessica Kingsley publishers.
- Oxford Advanced Dictionary. 2000.
- Sperber, D and Wilson, D. 1995. *Relevance Communication and Cognition*. Second ed. Oxford: Blackwell.

### Journals

- Happé, F. 1993. Communicative Competence and Theory of Mind in Autism: A Test of Relevance Theory. *Cognition*, pp. 101-119. Online, <http://www.bibliomaker.autism.ch>, accessed on December 1, 2012.
- Landa, R. 2000. Social Language Use in Asperger Syndrome and High-Functioning Autism. *Asperger Syndrome*. New York: The Guilford Press, pp. 125–155.