

Normative Ethics and Descriptive Ethics Concerning the Context of Politeness in the *Ondhâggâ* Tradition in Madura

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Abstract

Language and ethics are intrinsically linked, with ethics playing a crucial role in ensuring politeness and recognizing social distinctions among speakers. One regional language rich in ethical traditions is Madurese, particularly through a practice known as *Ondhâggâ*. This tradition emphasizes the importance of speech and grammar tailored to the social position of the person being addressed. In Madurese culture, the speaker must consider the listener's social status to appropriately use *Ondhâggâ* forms. This research highlights two types of ethics within this tradition: normative and descriptive ethics. Normative ethics focuses on defining the behaviors and values that are considered morally good within a social group, guiding individuals on appropriate actions without making judgments. On the other hand, descriptive ethics describes existing behaviors and their meanings, offering insight into actions without prescribing standards. The study analyzed twenty conversational samples across various contexts using qualitative, phenomenological methods. Data was collected through documentation, and analysis was conducted using data reduction and presentation techniques. To ensure validity, the research employed data triangulation and credibility testing. The aim was to explain how normative and descriptive ethics operate within the *Ondhâggâ* tradition. The findings emphasize the importance of ethical communication, tailored to context and situation. It underscores that ethics in language not only applies to Madurese but is relevant across all languages and cultures. Ultimately, language ethics reflects our nobility as human beings, as it shapes respectful communication in everyday interactions.

Keywords: Ethnolinguistics; descriptive ethics; normative ethics, ondhâggâ

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INTRODUCTION

Madura is an island in Indonesia that consists of four districts: Bangkalan, Sampang, Pamekasan, and Sumenep. Geographically, it is located off the eastern coast of Java, separated from the main island by the Madura Strait, which connects the Java Sea to the Bali Sea (Faried & Lavieta, 2015). As a large region, Madura is home to various communities that coexist, each with its unique cultural identity. The Madurese people, who are native to the island, possess distinct societal norms, languages, and cultural practices that differentiate them from other ethnic groups in Indonesia. As with any society, the Madurese people maintain relationships through constant communication, and the primary medium of communication in this region is the Madurese language, which is spoken both by those living on the island and those in the diaspora.

The Madurese language plays a crucial role in maintaining social bonds, conveying messages, and reinforcing cultural identity. It serves as a means for the people to navigate their social structure and build meaningful interactions. Unlike many other languages, the Madurese language features a complex system of speech levels, referred to as "Ondhâggâ Bhâsa," which is influenced by the social status, age, and familiarity of the speaker and listener. These language levels dictate the formality and politeness required in conversation, underscoring the importance of social hierarchy in Madurese society.

Several studies have explored the intricacies of Madurese speech levels and their role in communication within Madurese communities. For instance, Samsiyadi et al. (2016) conducted research on the use of Madurese language levels at Nurul Falah Islamic Boarding School in Bondowoso Regency. Their findings revealed that age, familiarity, and role within the community were the primary factors that influenced the selection of appropriate speech levels. Similarly, a study by Nuris (2019) focused on the use of Madurese language levels in Bâruh Village, Sampang District. The research highlighted that while three speech levels—General (enjâ'-iyâ), Intermediate (èngghi-enten), and High/Polite (èngghi-bhunten)—are commonly used, daily interactions in the village tend to rely more on the general level due to factors such as social proximity, age, and education level.

The Madurese language's ondhâggâ system reflects a strong emphasis on social distinctions (Amrullah, 2023; Haryono, 2018). When engaging in conversation, Madurese speakers must first assess their social standing in relation to the listener. Based on this assessment, they choose the appropriate speech level. The system is hierarchical, with coarse, intermediate, and fine speech levels (Tjahyadi & Andayani, 2022). The coarse level (enjâ'-iyâ) is used in informal settings or among peers, the intermediate level (èngghi-enten) is used in more respectful conversations with elders, and the fine level (èngghi-bhunten) is reserved for speaking to individuals of high social status, such as religious leaders or community elites. The linguistic variations in Madurese speech levels are not limited to politeness and formality but also extend to the psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of communication (Kirby, 2018; Miqawati, 2019; Sugiharti & Pariyanto, 2021). As Muttaqin et al. (2019) observed, the variations in Madurese speech patterns can be attributed to individual differences (idiolects), regional differences (dialects), and social class distinctions. The levels of speech used reflect the speaker's assumptions about their relationship with the listener and the social context of the interaction. This complex layering of speech levels underscores the richness of the Madurese language as a tool for navigating social hierarchies and maintaining cultural traditions.

In the current context, this study offers a unique contribution to the existing body of research on Madurese language by focusing on two key dimensions of language use: normative ethics and descriptive ethics (Sugiharti & Pariyanto, 2021). These two ethical frameworks are crucial for understanding the broader significance of speech levels in the Madurese language. Normative ethics refers to the moral principles that guide the use of speech levels, dictating what is considered polite or impolite in various social contexts. Descriptive ethics, on the other hand, deals with the observable behaviors and practices of Madurese speakers as they navigate social interactions and choose appropriate speech levels based on societal norms.

The novelty of this research lies in its emphasis on the ethical dimensions of language use, particularly in the context of speech levels. While previous studies have explored the sociolinguistic factors influencing language use in Madura, this research highlights the importance of maintaining ethical considerations in communication. Specifically, it demonstrates how politeness, respect, and social hierarchy are embedded in the structure of the language itself, and how these elements are essential for preserving the cultural integrity of Madurese society (Wildan et al., 2023). One of the core objectives of this

research is to underscore the importance of preserving linguistic ethics in contemporary Madurese culture. In recent years, there has been a noticeable shift in the way younger generations use the Madurese language, particularly in their disregard for traditional speech levels. This trend signals a potential erosion of linguistic manners, as younger people are increasingly influenced by global languages and modern communication styles (Rajagukguk, 2022; Setyawan, 2023). The research argues that the gradual decline of speech level usage reflects a broader cultural shift that threatens the preservation of Madurese social values.

To counter this trend, the research advocates for greater awareness of linguistic ethics, particularly among the younger generation. By understanding the ethical principles underlying the use of speech levels, young people can develop a deeper appreciation for the cultural significance of their language (Rajagukguk, 2022; Wildan et al., 2023). This is especially important in an era of rapid globalization, where local languages and traditions are increasingly vulnerable to being overshadowed by dominant global cultures. The study also highlights the role of language as a marker of social identity. In Madurese society, the choice of speech level is not merely a linguistic preference but a reflection of the speaker's social identity and their relationship with others (Muttaqin et al., 2019; Sugiharti & Pariyanto, 2021). By using the appropriate speech level, speakers reinforce social norms and demonstrate respect for their interlocutors. This reinforces the idea that language is not just a tool for communication but a vehicle for expressing social values and maintaining cultural continuity.

Through this research, it becomes evident that the Madurese language is a vital component of the island's cultural heritage. The language's speech levels, grounded in ethical principles of respect and politeness, play a crucial role in preserving the social fabric of Madurese society. As such, efforts to maintain and promote the use of speech levels are essential for safeguarding the region's cultural identity (Rahmat & Boeriswati, 2023; Setyawan, 2023). This research is also timely, as it addresses a growing concern regarding the erosion of traditional linguistic practices. The shift away from using speech levels is symptomatic of broader social changes, such as urbanization, globalization, and the increasing influence of national and global languages on local cultures. As younger generations become more disconnected from traditional cultural practices, there is a pressing need to revitalize linguistic customs that are at risk of disappearing.

This study contributes to the understanding of Madurese language by examining the ethical dimensions of speech levels and their role in shaping social interactions. By focusing on normative and descriptive ethics, the research sheds light on the importance of linguistic manners in maintaining social harmony and cultural continuity. Furthermore, it emphasizes the need for greater awareness and appreciation of linguistic ethics, particularly among the younger generation, to ensure that the Madurese language continues to serve as a vital link to the island's cultural heritage. Through this research, it is hoped that the Madurese people, especially the youth, will recognize the significance of preserving their linguistic traditions and the ethical values they embody, ensuring that these cultural practices endure for future generations.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study utilizes a qualitative research method with a descriptive approach to explore the intricate language patterns of the Madurese community, specifically focusing on the *ondhâgghâ* tradition. A qualitative method, as defined by Mahsun (2017), is designed to thoroughly investigate and analyze data in a comprehensive manner, allowing for an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. This approach is ideal for examining linguistic and cultural complexities, where context, meaning, and social significance play

a central role. Unlike quantitative research, which focuses on numerical data and statistical relationships, qualitative research aims to provide rich, detailed insights into human behaviors, social practices, and cultural norms. In this case, the research delves into the specific words, phrases, and sentence structures used in the Madurese language to uncover how the ondhâggâ tradition—a system of language hierarchy based on social status and respect—is manifested in everyday communication. The descriptive nature of this approach enables the researcher to explain how these linguistic elements reflect and reinforce social hierarchies within the Madurese community, offering a detailed portrayal of language as both a communicative tool and a cultural artifact.

The research method involves systematically observing and listening to the use of the Madurese language within its natural context, which is key to capturing the nuanced ways in which the ondhâggâ tradition operates. By employing observation and listening techniques, the researcher immerses themselves in real-life interactions, focusing on the use of speech levels that convey politeness, respect, and social hierarchy. Data collection in this study is qualitative and consists of verbal exchanges, focusing on how certain words and sentences reflect different levels of speech in communication. The analysis follows an inductive process, where data is first collected and then analyzed to identify patterns, themes, and relationships that emerge. This process involves reducing the data to its essential elements, presenting it in a coherent format, and then interpreting the findings to explain the social and cultural implications of the ondhâggâ tradition. Additionally, credibility and data triangulation techniques are applied to ensure the reliability and validity of the research, allowing the researcher to compare data from multiple sources and methods to ensure a well-rounded and accurate representation of the language use in Madurese society. This methodological rigor ensures that the research findings provide valuable insights into the ways in which language reflects and sustains cultural practices and social structures.

Research Instruments and Data Collection Technique

In qualitative research, the primary instrument is often the researcher themselves, as they are directly involved in data collection and analysis. In this study, the researcher takes an active role in observing and interpreting the use of the Madurese language to understand its cultural significance. The researcher collects data through observation and listening techniques, ensuring that they capture both verbal and non-verbal cues from the participants in their natural settings. As the research centers around the ondhâggâ tradition in language, particular attention is paid to specific words, sentences, and linguistic patterns that demonstrate the hierarchical nature of communication in Madurese culture. Additionally, the credibility of the research instrument is enhanced by triangulation techniques, where data is validated through multiple sources and methods to ensure reliability.

The data collection process in this research involves observation and listening techniques. The researcher observes real-life usage of the Madurese language, focusing on how different levels of speech are employed in various social contexts, particularly in interactions that reflect the ondhâggâ tradition. This includes paying attention to the choice of words, phrases, and sentence structures that signal politeness, respect, and social hierarchy. As part of the listening technique, the researcher listens to conversations in the Madurese community, noting the use of language in different settings. Through these techniques, the researcher gathers rich, qualitative data that will be analyzed to identify patterns and themes related to the ondhâggâ tradition.

Data Analysis

The data analysis technique used in this research is qualitative in nature, focusing on inductive analysis. This means that the researcher starts by examining the data—words,

sentences, and phrases collected through observation and listening—and then develops broader patterns and relationships based on this information. As described by Miles and Huberman (2016), qualitative data analysis involves continuous and interactive activities, such as data reduction, where unnecessary data is filtered out, and data presentation, where the researcher organizes the data for further analysis. Additionally, distributional analysis is employed, focusing on the linguistic elements in the data, such as words, phrases, clauses, and syllables (Sudaryanto, 1993). This type of analysis helps in understanding how the ondhâgghâ tradition is reflected linguistically in the Madurese language. To ensure the validity of the data, the research uses credibility testing and data triangulation techniques. Credibility is established by ensuring that the data is trustworthy, meaning the researcher provides accurate representations of the language use observed. Triangulation involves comparing data from multiple sources (source triangulation), using different data collection methods (technique triangulation), and collecting data at different times (time triangulation) to confirm the consistency of the findings. This comprehensive approach ensures the reliability and validity of the research outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

Descriptive Ethics in Ondhâgghâ

Efforts to assess actions based on the provisions or norms of good and bad that grow in society are a form of descriptive ethics. He places existing habits in society as an ethical reference. This includes the norms of morality adhered to by certain nations. As happens in the Madurese community in treating older people or people who should be respected. The following are several phenomena in Madurese society recently.

Table 1. Descriptive Ethics in Ondhâgghâ

Data 1	Translate	Data 2	Translate
Sèngko' ghi' ta' marè	Saya belum selesai I'm not finished yet	Kaulâ ghi' ta' lastarè	Saya belum selesai I'm not finished yet
Tang româ neng tèmorra pasar	Rumah saya di sebelah timur pasar My house is east of the market	Compo' kaulâ neng tèmorra pasar	Rumah saya di sebelah timur pasar My house is east of the market
Bu, ajuwa lakèna kakè?	Bu, itu suamimu?	Bu, ka'dissa' raka ajunan	Bu, itu suamimu?
Bânnè, Bu, jarowa tang bhibbhi'	Bukan, Bu, itu bibi saya Mom, that's your husband?	Bânnè, Bu, ka'dissa' bhibbhi' kaulâ	Bukan, Bu, itu bibi saya Mom, that's your husband?
Ka'dissa' pottra kaulâ	Itu putra saya That's my son	Ka'dissa' ana' kaulâ atau Ka'dissa' budu' kaulâ	Itu putra saya That's my son
Saka'dinto dhâbu kaulâ, korang langkong sapora	Demikian perkataan saya, kurang lebihnya mohon maaf Those are my words, more or less I apologize	Saka'dinto ator/pamator kaulâ, korang langkong nyo'on saporan	Demikian perkataan saya, kurang lebihnya mohon maaf Those are my words, more or less I apologize
Jhuko' kaulâ èdhâ'âr tèkos	Ikan saya dimakan tikus My fish was eaten by mice	Jhuko' kaulâ èkakan tèkos	Ikan saya dimakan tikus My fish was eaten by mice
Sèngko' sake'	Saya sakit I am sick	Kaulâ anglo	Saya sakit I am sick
Pak Ghuru sake' tabu'	Pak guru sakit perut	Pak Ghuru songkan padhâ'ârân	Pak guru sakit perut

Data 1	Translate	Data 2	Translate
	<i>The teacher has a stomach ache</i>		<i>The teacher has a stomach ache</i>
<i>Eppa' mènta pèssè</i>	<i>Bapak minta uang</i> <i>You ask for money</i>	<i>Rama mondhut obâng</i>	<i>Bapak minta uang</i> <i>You ask for money</i>
<i>Alè' mènta jhâjhân</i>	<i>Adik minta kue</i> <i>My sister asked for cake</i>	<i>Alè' nyo'on jhâjhân</i>	<i>Adik minta kue</i> <i>My sister asked for cake</i>
<i>Embu' ngakan toju' è mèja makan</i>	<i>Ibu makan duduk di meja makan</i> <i>Mother ate sitting at the dining table</i>	<i>Èbhu aqdhâ'âr alongghu è mèja makan</i>	<i>Ibu makan duduk di meja makan</i> <i>Mother ate sitting at the dining table</i>
<i>Engko' ngakan toju' è ampèr</i>	<i>Saya makan duduk di beranda rumah</i> <i>I ate sitting on the veranda of the house</i>	<i>Kaulâ neddhâ' toju' è ampèr</i>	<i>Saya makan duduk di beranda rumah</i> <i>I ate sitting on the veranda of the house</i>
<i>Kaka' mèyos ka Kaè</i>	<i>Kakak pergi ke rumah kakek</i> <i>Brother went to grandfather's house</i>	<i>Kaka' acabis ka Kaè</i>	<i>Kakak pergi ke rumah kakek</i> <i>Brother went to grandfather's house</i>

Discussion

The discussion of ethics and morals, particularly in the context of language and communication, highlights the nuanced distinctions between these two concepts. While ethics and morals are often considered synonymous, they differ in significant ways. The findings showed that ethics, particularly in philosophical discourse, represents a framework for human behavior aimed at promoting peace, happiness, and social harmony. It is more of a societal construct, rooted in rules of conduct that govern actions, interactions, and decision-making. Morals, on the other hand, are personal values concerning right and wrong, shaped by individual experiences, cultural influences, and personal beliefs (Syahril, 2018; Hamalainen, 2022). In any society, including the Madurese community, the intertwining of ethics and morals plays a crucial role in regulating interactions, fostering respect, and preserving cultural identity, particularly through the medium of language.

The examples provided from the Madurese community illustrate how ethics manifest in daily communication, especially in hierarchical societies where respect and social status are integral. The linguistic structure of the Madurese language, particularly the ondhâk or speech levels, directly correlates with ethical behavior. In Madurese, ondhâk mabâ (rough speech) and ondhâk tengghi or alos (polite speech) serve as linguistic markers that differentiate social classes, age groups, and levels of respect. It is in line with Rohaniyah (2016) who argues the use of appropriate speech levels reflects a speaker's awareness of their social environment and their ability to navigate it respectfully. For instance, the dialogue between a student and teacher reveals the ethical expectations placed on students to address their elders and authority figures with politeness. Khotimah (2020) informs that the failure to use ondhâk tengghi in such interactions is perceived as unethical, as it disregards the societal expectation of respect for elders and superiors.

The significance of speech levels in the Madurese language points to broader implications for other fields of study, such as sociolinguistics, anthropology, and intercultural communication. The study of how language conveys social hierarchies and ethical conduct can offer insights into other hierarchical or collectivist cultures where respect is embedded in language. For instance, similar speech levels can be observed in

languages such as Japanese and Korean, where politeness is an inherent part of verbal interactions (Diana, 2023; Tjahyadi & Andayani, 2022). Comparative studies of these languages could provide deeper understanding of how different cultures use language to enforce ethical behavior and social order. Furthermore, the implications of language use in these cultures extend into areas such as education, leadership, and conflict resolution, where appropriate speech can impact authority, negotiations, and harmony within groups.

The growing influence of social media presents both a challenge and an opportunity for the study of ethics and language in traditional societies. As outlined in the examples from the Madurese community, the advent of social media and digital communication threatens to erode linguistic norms that are deeply tied to respect and ethics (Haryono & Wibisono, 2018; Fajariyah, 2020). The rapid spread of slang and informal language use, facilitated by platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, disrupts the traditional ondhâgghâ bhâsa system. For Madurese youth, the influence of global digital trends could dilute the cultural importance of maintaining proper speech levels. This phenomenon is not unique to Madura and has been observed across various cultures, where the simplicity and brevity of online communication often sidestep established linguistic etiquette (Sugiharti & Pariyanto, 2021). Future research could explore the effects of social media on language and ethics, examining how digital platforms either reinforce or undermine ethical communication practices.

In addressing these concerns, it would be beneficial to develop educational programs that teach younger generations the importance of linguistic ethics. Schools could integrate lessons on language, culture, and ethics to ensure that traditional speech practices are preserved. By incorporating digital literacy into these lessons, educators can provide students with the tools to navigate modern communication spaces while still respecting their cultural and linguistic heritage (Lockshin & Williams, 2020; Han & Cheng, 2020). Furthermore, language policy makers in Madura and other regions with similar linguistic traditions could consider promoting the use of ondhâk tengghi in media and public discourse (Haryono & Wibisono, 2018; Scharrer, 2021). Initiatives such as televised programs or online campaigns that emphasize the value of polite speech could raise awareness and prevent the deterioration of these language norms in the face of globalization.

Placing the research within the context of previous studies, it is clear that the ondhâgghâ tradition in the Madurese language serves as an essential framework for understanding the ethical dimensions of language use. Previous research on the ondhâgghâ bhâsa has largely focused on the sociolinguistic aspects of language levels, such as how they reflect social structures, family ties, and respect for authority (e.g., Samsiyadi et al., 2016; Nuris, 2019). This current study builds on that foundation by addressing not only the sociolinguistic implications but also the ethical ones, emphasizing the moral weight carried by speech levels in everyday interactions. By connecting linguistic practices with philosophical ethics, this research provides a more holistic view of how language functions within society, extending beyond communication to encompass broader moral and ethical considerations.

However, while this research offers valuable insights into the ethical dimensions of language, it also opens up several areas for potential improvement and further exploration. One of the key areas for improvement lies in expanding the research beyond formal settings, such as schools, to more informal contexts, such as family gatherings, community meetings, and online forums (Lockshin & Williams, 2020; Han & Cheng, 2020). By observing how speech levels are used in diverse environments, researchers could gain a more comprehensive understanding of how linguistic ethics operate across different social domains. Moreover, future research could delve deeper into how external factors, such as socioeconomic status, education, and exposure to global cultures, influence the use of

ondhâk tèngghi and mabâ. For instance, do individuals with higher levels of education or greater exposure to Western cultures adhere less strictly to traditional speech levels? Investigating these factors could shed light on the dynamics between tradition and modernity in the Madurese language.

Another potential avenue for future research is to explore the psychological aspects of linguistic ethics. While this study focuses primarily on the social and cultural dimensions, there is room to investigate how individuals internalize these linguistic rules and the cognitive processes involved in choosing the appropriate speech level. Do speakers consciously switch between ondhâk mabâ and tèngghi based on situational cues, or is this a more automatic, ingrained process? Cognitive linguistic studies could provide insights into how deeply these linguistic ethics are embedded in a speaker's psyche, further contributing to our understanding of the interplay between language, culture, and ethics.

The discussion of ethics in relation to the Madurese language opens up a wide range of possibilities for interdisciplinary research and practical applications. The ethical dimensions of language, as demonstrated through the use of ondhâk mabâ and tèngghi, reveal the deep connections between communication, respect, and social order (Misnadin & Kirby, 2018; Muttaqin et al., 2019). While this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on sociolinguistics and ethics, it also highlights areas for further exploration, particularly in relation to the impact of digital media, the role of education, and the psychological underpinnings of linguistic choices. As societies continue to evolve and grapple with the pressures of globalization, maintaining a balance between tradition and modern communication practices will be crucial in preserving cultural identity and ethical communication practices. Therefore, future research should continue to explore the intersections of language, culture, and ethics, ensuring that traditional linguistic systems like the ondhâgghâ bhâsa are understood, respected, and preserved for generations to come.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the exploration of ethics in the context of the Madurese language underscores the fundamental role that language plays in shaping social behavior and maintaining cultural values. The ondhâgghâ bhâsa tradition, with its system of speech levels, reflects the deep connection between language and ethical communication. These linguistic practices, deeply ingrained in the Madurese society, serve as more than just a method of communication—they are a means of expressing respect, maintaining social order, and reinforcing moral values. The examples provided throughout the discussion demonstrate how ethical considerations are embedded in everyday conversations, with the appropriate use of ondhâk tèngghi (polite speech) and ondhâk mabâ (rough speech) reflecting the speaker's understanding of social hierarchies and respect for others. However, the rise of digital communication platforms and the influence of globalization pose challenges to the preservation of these traditional linguistic norms, threatening to erode the ethical standards once upheld by the Madurese language.

To ensure the continued relevance and preservation of these ethical linguistic practices, it is essential to raise awareness of their importance, particularly among younger generations who are increasingly influenced by global digital culture. Educational programs that emphasize linguistic ethics, combined with public campaigns that promote the proper use of ondhâgghâ bhâsa, could play a crucial role in maintaining these traditions. Additionally, future research should explore how these linguistic practices adapt to modern contexts, such as social media, while investigating the psychological and cognitive dimensions of ethical language use. By doing so, scholars and educators can work together to strike a balance between tradition and modernity, ensuring that the Madurese language continues to serve as a powerful tool for ethical communication and

cultural preservation. Ultimately, the study of ethics in language extends beyond the boundaries of Madura, offering valuable insights into the broader relationship between language, culture, and morality across different societies.

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