

# Criticism Response in The Javanese Mataram Cultural Community: Its Forms and Semantic Formulas

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**Abstract** - This article studies criticism response in the Javanese Mataram cultural community. Its goal is to understand the forms of response and semantic formulas used to express criticism response. The data was collected through a Discourse Completion Task and questionnaires. The results of the data analysis show that criticism response in the Javanese Mataram cultural community can be categorized into three forms: (a) total acceptance, (b) total resistance, and (c) partial resistance/acceptance. However, because the meaning of criticism in the Javanese Mataram cultural community is currently undergoing a process of pejoration, the most common form of response expressed is total resistance. The semantic formulas used to express total resistance may be in the form of (a) disagreement, (b) return of criticism, (c) justification, and (d) seeking evidence. The semantic formulas used to express total acceptance may be in the form of (a) agreement, (b) promise of repair, and (c) asking for advice. The semantic formulas for expressing partial acceptance/resistance usually consist of two different types of semantic formula – agreement and disagreement.

**Keywords:** criticism response, form of response, semantic formula of response, Javanese Mataram cultural community.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Criticism and criticism response are two types of mutually correlative linguistic acts. A criticism requires a response and a response is expressed to provide a reaction to a criticism. Viewed in terms of the threat it presents, a criticism is clearly a face threatening act. This is understandable because criticism is always expressed by presenting a negative evaluation towards the behaviour or action of the person who is the target of the criticism (Mulac et.al, 2000; Nguyen, 2005; Hoang Thi Xuang Hoa, 2007; MIN Shang-chao, 2008).

Due to its face threatening characteristic, in some cultures criticism may receive different forms of response. In certain cultural communities, for example, criticism tends to be responded to with resistance, while in other communities criticism is inclined to receive a positive response. It appears that the form of the response to criticism is strongly influenced by the way in which the cultural community concerned perceives criticism. In Vietnamese society, criticism tends to be met with resistance, while in Australian society this is not always the case (Nguyen, 2005). With a view to this fact, criticism response in different cultures appears to be an interesting topic to study.

This paper specifically examine the response to criticism. The speech act of responding to criticism in this present study is defined as a verbalized reaction to a given criticism (Nguyen, 2005). The community that is the object of study is the Javanese Mataram cultural community (one of the sub-ethnic Javanese communities in Indonesia). It should be stated that the Javanese Mataram cultural community (JMCC) is known to adhere strictly to the principles of harmony and respect (Suseno, 1988). In their day to day interaction, members of this community tend to avoid anything that contradicts these two principles, and this includes the way they speak. Therefore, it is interesting to observe how JMCC responds to criticism, and culturally what forms of response tend to be expressed. It is also interesting to observe the semantics formulas that are most commonly used to express criticism response. In order for this study to have a clear setting, it focuses specifically on the setting of a government office.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Facts show that to date, only a small number of studies on the speech act of criticism response in different cultures have been carried out by experts. The results of a literature search found only three experts in this field. These three scholars are Higara & Turner (1996) and Nguyen (2005). This differs from studies on the speech act of criticism which have been undertaken by numerous experts from different countries, including Tracy, et.al. (1987), Tracy and Eissenberg (1990), Wajnryb (1993), Gunarwan (1996), Toplak and Katz (2000), Nguyen (2005), Nguyen, 2008, Hoang Thi Xuang Hoa (2007), and Farnia & Hiba Qusay Abdul Sattar (2015). Therefore, in order to complement further the studies of Higara & Turner and Nguyen mentioned above, this current study focuses on the speech act of criticism response.

## III. METHOD

The data analyzed in this paper consists of three types. First, data in the form of verbal responses or verbal reactions when accepting criticism or being subjected to criticism. This first type of data is collected through the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) in order to understand the forms of response along with various semantic formulas. Because this study only takes office settings, DCT material is also only about matters that occur in the realm of offices such as employee discipline. The following is an example of the DCT made in this study as an instrument for collecting data.

## IV. DCT

You are an employee in an office. Your superior, Pak Parno, considers you to be an employee who lacks discipline. Therefore, Pak Parno criticizes you in an office meeting. The criticism is quite strong: "*Pak, njenengan ini gimana kok tidak bisa disiplin. Masak pekerjaan bertumpuk-tumpuk kok malah asyik main game*" 'Sir, how come you are so undisciplined. How can you allow your work to pile up while you just enjoy yourself playing games'. How do you respond to your superior's criticism?

Unlike the first type of data in the form of utterance, the second type of data is not in the form of utterance, but in the form of an informant's understanding of what is generally a motivation or a goal of C when criticizing R. Because the form is not an utterance, the second type of data is not collected through DCT, but through a questionnaire. The question raised in the questionnaire is what generally become motivation or become the goal of C when criticizing R. This question was given to 50 informants to get answers. The answer to this question is expected to give an idea of how MBJM's perception of criticism.

As with the second type of data, the third type of data is not in the form of utterance, but in the form of an informant's understanding of what kind of response or R reaction when accepting criticism or being criticized by C. This third type of data was also not collected through DCT, but through a questionnaire. The question posed to the informant is *what is the response or reaction of R when accepting criticism or being the target of criticism from C*. This question was given to 50 informants to get answers. The answer to this question is expected to provide an overview of the tendency of the response in MBJM.

## V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Forms of Criticism Response in JMCC

Based on the data analysis, it is known that criticism response in JMCC can be categorized into three forms: (a) total acceptance, (b) total resistance, (c) partial resistance/acceptance. In order to understand these forms of response, see data (1) below.

- (1) *Kami setuju Pak disiplin itu penting. Mohon maaf kalau selama ini saya sering bermain game pada jam kerja. 'I agree Sir that discipline is important. Sorry if I've been playing games during office hours'.*

Data (1) above shows the response of R (Recipient) to a criticism expressed by C (Critic). In his criticism, C says that R is an employee who lacks discipline because he often plays games during office hours, to the extent that it interferes with his office work. R responds to this criticism as shown in data (1) above. On close observation, it is clear that R's response in data (1) contains a statement that discipline is important. On the other hand, however, R admits that he often plays games during office hours, to the extent that it interferes with his office work, as stated by C in his criticism. By saying that discipline is important while also admitting that he often plays games during office hours (undisciplined conduct), this means that R in data (1) above is responding to the criticism expressed by C in the form of total acceptance.

Unlike data (1) above, data (2) below is an example of a criticism response expressed in the form of total resistance. Like the response of R in data (1), the response of R in data (2) is also a reaction to a criticism expressed by C, who states that R lacks discipline because he often plays games during office hours.

- (2) *Maaf Pak, penilaian Bapak itu saya kira tidak benar. Selama ini saya merasa sudah cukup disiplin. Kalau saya main game itu hanya pada jam istirahat. 'Sorry sir, I don't think your assessment is correct. All this time I feel that I have been quite disciplined. If I do play games it is only during break time'.*

If we look closely, R's response in data (2) above contains the phrases *penilaian Bapak tidak benar, saya sudah cukup disiplin, saya main game saat istirahat* 'I don't think your assessment is correct, I have been quite disciplined, I play games during break time'. These phrases clearly reflect the fact that R does not admit what C is saying in his criticism. In other words, in data (2) above, R is responding to the criticism of C in the form of total resistance.

Data (3) below is different from both data (1) and (2) above. In data (3), R does not express total resistance, nor does he show total acceptance of the criticism expressed by C. R only accepts a certain part of C's criticism but rejects another part of the criticism.

(3) *Betul Pak saya memang sering bermain game, tapi itu saya kira tidak mengganggu pekerjaan kantor karena saya lakukan hanya ketika jam istirahat.* 'Yes, Sir, I often play games, but I don't think it interferes with my office work because I only do it during break time'.

If we look closely, R's utterance in data (3) above clearly contains an admission that he does often play games. This is reflected in the phrase *betul Pak saya memang sering bermain game* 'yes, sir, I often play games'. This means that R accepts what C is saying in his criticism, namely that R often plays games. On the other hand, however, R does not admit that his actions (playing games) interfere with his office work, as C states in his criticism. This is reflected in the phrase *tapi itu saya kira tidak mengganggu pekerjaan kantor* 'but I don't think it interferes with my office work'. This phrase shows that R is rejecting C's criticism in another part. From this it can be understood that R's utterance in data (3) above contains two forms of response at the same time, namely resistance in one part and acceptance in another. However, if examined in more detail, it appears that what R is saying in data (3) above tends more towards resistance than acceptance. Why so? Because the essence of the response uttered by R in data (3) above is that his actions (playing games) do not interfere with his office work and that R is not committing a breach of discipline and should therefore still be allowed to play games.

Therefore, criticism response in JMCC can be categorized into three forms, namely total resistance, total acceptance, and partial acceptance/resistance. It is believed that each community has a different predisposition to making criticism response. With regard to this, one interesting question to answer is what the tendency of JMCC is in its criticism response, whether it tends towards the form of total resistance, total acceptance, or otherwise. It is also believed that the choice of form of criticism response does not happen randomly but is influenced by cultural factors related to the community concerned.

#### 4.2 Tendency of Criticism Response in JMCC

It should be mentioned that the tendency to choose a particular form of criticism response is strongly influenced by the perception of criticism itself. Furthermore, the perception of criticism is strongly influenced by the motivation or purpose of criticism. If criticism is often used culturally to express dislike or to attack R, then the meaning of criticism that tends to develop in the community in question automatically also becomes negative (as a result of the negative motivation). On the contrary, if criticism is often used as a medium to encourage or urge R to correct his behaviour or to be more aware of his inappropriate actions, the meaning of criticism that develops is of course not altogether negative. Hence, it can be seen that the motivation of criticism influences the perception of criticism. In turn, the perception of criticism influences the direction of the tendency for selecting the form of criticism response.

On the basis of the above explanation, the first thing that needs to be done in order to understand JMCC's perception of criticism is of course to discover what the real motivation is when making a criticism. The question that should be asked of the informant, in order to learn the motivation of criticism, is *why C criticizes R*. This question was asked to 50 informants, with four optional answers: (a) to encourage R to be introspective, (b) to attack R, (c) to express dislike towards R, and (d) another purpose, please state. Based on the answers of the informants, it is known that option (a) was chosen by 5 informants, option (b) was chosen by 30 informants, option (c) was chosen by 15 informants, and no informants chose option (d).

Therefore, based on the composition of the informants' answers described above, it can be concluded that in JMCC criticism is generally used by C to attack or express dislike towards R. This kind of purpose or motivation of criticism clearly shows that the meaning of criticism in JMCC has developed in a negative direction. The consequence of this is that criticism tends to be given a negative stigma or to be perceived as behaviour that is detrimental to R.

The question is, why has the meaning of criticism in JMCC developed in a direction leading to negative connotations? It would seem that the meaning of criticism is undergoing a process of pejoration. The same is also true of the word *oknum* (individual or person). Formerly, the meaning of the word *oknum* was neutral, but nowadays the meaning of this word has developed in a negative direction. *Guru* 'teacher' is an honourable profession, as is *dokter* 'doctor'. However, when the word *oknum* is used before the word *guru* or *dokter* (*oknum guru* or *oknum dokter*), the honourable nature of these professions disappears. It appears that the meaning of *criticism* has experienced more or less the same thing in that it has undergone a process of pejoration. The factor that has caused this to happen seems to be the frequent use of the word *criticism* for negative purposes, as illustrated in the data above.

The next question that needs to be answered is, with this negative tendency of the meaning of criticism, what is the response or reaction of R when receiving or becoming the target of criticism? In order to answer this question, the informants in this study were given three optional answers: (a) total acceptance, (b) total resistance, and (c) partial acceptance. This question was asked to 50 informants (different from the informants who answered the previous question). Based on the analysis of the data, it is known that option (a) was chosen by 8 informants, option (b) was chosen by 38 informants, and option (c) was chosen by 4 informants. The question is, why was option (b) the most popular choice? This appears to be very closely related to JMCC's perception of criticism as outlined above. This means that what this article is postulating, namely that the perception of criticism has a strong influence on the choice of the form of criticism response, is in fact correct.

#### 4.3 Semantic Formulas for Criticism Response

##### 4.3.1 Semantic Formulas for Response in the Form of Total Acceptance

Based on the data analysis, it is known that in JMCC there are several types of semantic formulas for response in the form of total acceptance, namely (a) agreement, (b) promise of repair, and (c) asking for advice.

###### 4.3.1.1 Semantic Formula Promise of Repair

In this semantic formula, R accepts completely what C says in his criticism, even though R does not explicitly use the word *accept* in his response. What R expresses in his response is a promise to C to rectify his erroneous behaviour in the future. It is this promise from R to C that leads us to understand that R totally accepts C's criticism. Look closely at R's utterance in data (4) below.

(4) *Baik Pak, saya akan atur waktunya.* 'OK, Sir, I will organize my time'.

R's utterance in data (4) above is a response to a criticism by C (head of office) who says that R is an employee who often takes care of his side business during office hours, to the extent that it interferes with his office work. In reply to this criticism, R gives the response shown in (4). On close observation, R's utterance in (4) clearly reflects a promise. In this instance, R is promising C that he will improve his behaviour by organizing his time so that his personal business affairs do not interfere with his office work. R's promise to C gives us a clear understanding that R admits his mistake and accepts C's criticism in full.

###### 4.3.1.2 Semantic Formula Asking for Advice

R's response in this type of semantic formula also reflects the fact that R totally accepts C's criticism. The way this is reflected in R's utterance is by R asking for C's advice regarding what C would do if he were in R's position. This semantic formula can be seen in R's utterance in data (5) below.

(5) *Kira-kira apa yang seharusnya saya lakukan Pak?* 'What do you think I should do, Sir?'

Utterance (5) above is a response made by R (head of office) to a criticism expressed by C (employee) who says that as the head of the office, R is too lenient with his subordinates and frequently allows employees to behave in an undisciplined manner, to the extent that their office tasks are often not completed in the way that is expected. R responds to this criticism with the statement shown in utterance (5).

If we look closely, R's response in (5) clearly illustrates a request for C's suggestion/advice about what he should do to deal with employees who lack discipline. The phrase *kira-kira apa yang seharusnya saya lakukan* 'what do you think I should do' is clearly a request for advice. R's request for advice from C also implies that R is accepting C's criticism in full. From the data analyzed, it is found that in the Javanese Mataram cultural community the semantic formula asking for advice is expressed using various different ways.

#### 4.3.1.3 Semantic Formula Agreement

Another type of semantic formula that is often used by R to express total acceptance in JMCC is agreement. In this semantic formula, R gives a response that states his agreement with C or confirms what C says in his criticism. The realization of this semantic formula may be in the form of an expression of thanks, as seen in data (6) below.

(6) *Baik Pak, terima kasih.* ‘OK, Sir, thank you’.

R’s utterance in data (6) above is a response to a criticism by C (head of office) who says that R is an employee who lacks discipline because he frequently plays games in the office, and it interferes with his office work. R is being asked to stop playing games. In response to this criticism by C, R utters the statement shown in (6). If we look closely, R’s response in (6) clearly illustrates that R agrees with C’s criticism that playing games interferes with his office work. The phrase *baik Pak, terima kasih* ‘OK Sir, thank you’ uttered by R, clearly demonstrates R’s agreement with what C is saying.

#### 4.3.2 Semantic Formulas for Total Resistance

Based on the data analysis, it is known that total resistance to criticism in JMCC is expressed by using a number of different semantic formulas, namely (a) disagreement, (b) return of criticism, (c) justification, and (d) seeking evidence.

##### 4.3.2.1 Semantic Formula Disagreement

In this type of semantic formula, R states total resistance to the criticism made by C, and this is expressed by R displaying his disagreement with what C states in the criticism. In the data that is found to state disagreement, R generally presents a response that uses an explicit phrase of denial, such as *tidak betul* ‘not true’, *tidak mungkin* ‘impossible’, *tidak merasa* ‘do not feel’, *tidak benar* ‘incorrect’ and other forms of denial. Pay attention to data (7) below.

(7) *Pak Minto, saya tahu kalau fasilitas kantor tidak boleh digunakan untuk kepentingan pribadi. Karena itu, tidak mungkin saya melakukan itu Pak.* ‘Mr Minto, I am aware that office facilities may not be used for personal interests. For that reason, it is impossible that I would do so, Sir’.

Data (7) above is R’s response to a criticism expressed by C (R’s subordinate) who says that R (C’s boss) often uses office facilities for his own personal interests. In response to this criticism, R utters the statement shown in (7) above. On close examination, R’s utterance in (7) clearly demonstrates total resistance to the criticism expressed by C. R does not agree with what C says in his criticism. The phrase *tidak mungkin saya melakukan itu* ‘it is impossible that I would do so’ (underlined) uttered by R in his response clearly indicates R’s denial of C’s criticism.

##### 4.3.2.2 Semantic Formula Return of Criticism

In this semantic formula, R expresses total resistance to C’s criticism by criticizing C in return. Thus, in this case, criticism is responded to with criticism. C criticizes R and R responds to C’s criticism also with criticism. By returning the criticism, R is displaying total resistance to C. Look at data (8) below.

(8) *Terima kasih Pak, tapi maaf, apakah Bapak lebih berdisiplin daripada saya? Sebelum menilai orang lain sebaiknya Bapak introspeksi dulu.* ‘Thank you Sir, but sorry, are you more disciplined than me? Before judging others you should take a look at yourself first’.

Utterance (8) above is the response of R (head of office) to a criticism expressed by C (R's subordinate) who states that R, as the head of the office, lacks discipline and is not setting a good example to his subordinates. In response to this criticism, R utters the statement shown in (8) above. On close examination, R's utterance in (8) is clearly a criticism that is used to respond to the criticism expressed by C. In his response, R states that C shows no better discipline than R himself. Therefore, R asks C to look at his own behaviour first before criticizing R.

#### 4.3.2.3 Semantic Formula Justification

In order to express total resistance to criticism, in JMCC the semantic formula justification is sometimes used by R. This means that when R receives a criticism from C, he justifies his actions or behaviour, stating that what he has done is correct, fine, or does not violate any norms. Look at data (9) below.

(9) *Mohon maaf Pak, saya hanya main game pada waktu istirahat.* 'Sorry Sir, I only play games during break time'.

Data (9) above is R's response to a criticism expressed by C (head of office) who states that as an employee, R often plays games during office hours, to the extent that it interferes with his work. On receiving this criticism, R responds as shown in (9) above. If we look closely, R's utterance in (9) is a clear affirmation that what he has been doing (playing games) all this time has not violated any rules or interfered with his office work as C says in his criticism. R attests that he only plays games during break time or in his free time. This affirmation leads to the understanding that R is displaying total resistance to the criticism expressed by C.

#### 4.3.2.4 Semantic Formula Seeking Evidence

Total resistance to criticism is sometimes also expressed with the semantic formula seeking evidence. In this case, R, as the recipient of the criticism, seeks evidence that he has acted inappropriately as stated by C in the criticism. See data (10) below.

(10) *Pak Minto, apa njenengan tahu sendiri kalau saya menggunakan fasilitas kantor? Kalau tidak tahu sendiri, sebaiknya jangan mengatakan seperti itu Pak biar tidak jadi fitnah.* 'Mr Minto, do you know yourself that I have been using the office facilities? If you don't know yourself, you had better not say so, Sir, or you may be committing slander'.

R's utterance in (10) above is expressed as a response to C (R's subordinate) who is criticizing R, the head of the office, for his frequent use of office facilities for his own personal interests. If we look closely, R's utterance in (10) clearly shows that R wishes C to provide evidence that R has been using office facilities for his own personal interests. This request for evidence is of course driven by the fact that R does not believe or feel he has acted in the way that C states in his criticism. This means that R is stating total resistance to the criticism expressed by C.

#### 4.3.3 Semantic Formula for Partial Acceptance/Resistance

As mentioned above, in certain instances, R does not demonstrate total resistance to or total acceptance of what C expresses in a criticism. Instead, R only accepts a certain part of the criticism and rejects the other part. A response in the form of partial acceptance/resistance is usually expressed by combining two different types of semantic formula, the first in the form of agreement and the second in the form of disagreement. These two types of semantic formula are usually contrasted by the use of a conjunction such as *tetapi* 'but' or *namun* 'however'. Pay attention to data (11) below.

- (11) *Pangapunten. Memang saya suka game Pak. Nanging bermain game saya lakukan sak sampunipun sedanten pekerjaan selesai.* 'Sorry. I do indeed like games Sir. But I play games after all my work is finished'.

Utterance (11) above is used by R to respond to a criticism expressed by C (head of office) who states that R (C' subordinate) often plays games in the office and it interferes with his office work. If we look closely at R's utterance in (11), it is clear that it contains two different semantic formulas, the first of which is in the form of agreement (*memang saya suka game Pak* 'I do indeed like games, Sir'), and the second in the form of disagreement (*bermain game saya lakukan sak sampunipun sedanten pekerjaan selesai* 'I play games after all my work is finished'). Agreement means that R accepts or confirms C's criticism that he often plays games, while disagreement means that R rejects or does not accept C's criticism. By saying that *bermain game saya lakukan sak sampunipun sedanten pekerjaan selesai* 'I play games after all my work is finished', the meaning is that R's actions (playing games) do not interfere with his work. So in this part of the utterance, R resists C's criticism. Thus, a response in the form of partial acceptance/resistance is usually expressed by combining two different types of semantic formula, namely agreement and disagreement. These two types of semantic formula are usually contrasted by using a conjunction such as *tetapi* 'but' or *namun* 'however', or, in the Javanese language, *nanging* 'tetapi' as seen in data (11) above.

## V. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study and the discussion presented above, it can be concluded that criticism response in JMCC can be categorized into three forms, namely (a) total acceptance, (b) total resistance, and (c) partial resistance/acceptance. However, because the meaning of criticism in JMCC is undergoing a process of pejoration, the most common form of response expressed is total resistance.

The semantic formulas used to express each of the three different forms of response are varied. Response in the form of total acceptance can be expressed with the semantic formulas (a) agreement, (b) promise of repair, and (c) asking for advice. Meanwhile, response in the form of total resistance can be expressed with the semantic formulas (a) disagreement, (b) return of criticism, (c) justification, and (d) seeking evidence. And finally, response in the form of partial acceptance/resistance is generally expressed by combining two types of semantic formula, namely agreement and disagreement. These two types of semantic formula are usually contrasted by using of a conjunction such as *tetapi* 'but' or *namun* 'however', or, in the Javanese language, *nanging* 'tetapi'.

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