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Apologizing with Threats? An Ethnocyberpragmatic Study of Social Commerce Content among the Madurese Ethnic Group

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Abstrak

Kata Kunci: Permintaan Maaf; Ancaman; Etnosiberpragmatik; Etnis Madura.

Secara konvensional, permintaan maaf dipahami sebagai ungkapan penyesalan atau bentuk pertukaran korektif yang bertujuan menjaga keteraturan sosial ketika suatu norma dilanggar. Namun, dalam konteks konten social commerce pada kelompok etnis Madura, permintaan maaf tidak selalu menandakan penyesalan. Penelitian ini mengkaji fenomena permintaan maaf yang disertai dengan ancaman dalam praktik social commerce masyarakat Madura di platform digital seperti Facebook dan YouTube. Ancaman yang menyertai permintaan maaf dapat bersifat tanpa syarat maupun bersyarat, serta digunakan untuk memperkuat posisi tawar atau menegaskan Dengan penutur. menggunakan etnosiberpragmatik, penelitian ini menyoroti bagaimana tuturan permintaan maaf yang disertai ancaman atau peringatan digunakan dalam konten social commerce Madura. Data diperoleh dari unggahan media sosial yang menampilkan interaksi tawar-menawar antara penjual dan pembeli. Analisis menunjukkan bahwa permintaan maaf dalam wacana ini tidak berfungsi secara literal, melainkan sebagai bagian dari strategi dagang khas budaya. Kesimpulannya, social commerce dalam komunitas Madura tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai media transaksi ekonomi, tetapi juga sebagai ruang ekspresi budaya dan negosiasi identitas yang tetap hidup dalam praktik komunikasi digital kontemporer.

Keywords:

Apologizing;
Threats;
Ethnocyberpragmatic;
Madurese Ethnic
Group.

Abstract Conventionally, apologies are understood as expressions of regret or corrective exchanges aimed at maintaining social order when a norm is violated. However, in the context of social commerce content among the Madurese ethnic group, apologies do not always signify remorse. This study examines the phenomenon of apologies accompanied by threats in the practice of Madurese social commerce on digital platforms such as Facebook and YouTube. The threats accompanying apologies can be either non-conditional or conditional, and are used to strengthen bargaining positions or assert the speaker's authority. Using an ethnocyberpragmatic approach, this research highlights how apology utterances accompanied by threats or warnings are employed within Madurese social commerce content. Data were collected from social media posts showcasing bargaining interactions between sellers and buyers. The analysis reveals that apologies in this discourse do not function literally, but rather as part of a culturally distinctive trading strategy. In conclusion, social commerce within the Madurese community serves not only as a medium for economic transactions but also as a site for cultural expression and identity negotiation that remains vibrant in contemporary digital communication practices.

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INTRODUCTION

Social media has evolved into an interactive space that serves not only for information sharing but also as a platform for digital product promotion and transactions. The concept of social commerce has emerged as an integration of e-commerce activities with social interactions, utilizing social media features to support consumer decision-making processes (Li et al., 2025). Unlike traditional e-commerce, which tends to be one-way, social commerce relies on two-way communication between sellers and buyers, building strong networks of social influence (Herzallah & Al-Sharafi, 2025). In the context of the Madurese ethnic group, social commerce practices have become arenas not only for economic exchange but also for expressing socio-cultural meanings, including the unique ways sellers communicate with consumers, such as through apology utterances embedded with threats. Social commerce has thus become a new stage for Madurese speakers to negotiate their identity, honor, and authority in digital trading relationships.

Over time, social commerce has experienced rapid development since its introduction in the mid-2000s, with more platforms enabling real-time seller-buyer interaction through features such as product reviews, customer communities, and live-stream selling (Ong et al., 2024; Tedjakusuma et al., 2025). In practice, social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram allow small-scale entrepreneurs, including those from the Madurese ethnic community, to promote their products while engaging directly with prospective buyers (Drummond et al., 2023). These interactions are often marked by distinct pragmatic expressions, such as apologies laced with reprimands or warnings, functioning as a means to uphold self-worth or maintain bargaining power in trade relations. Therefore, within the scope of this research, social commerce is not merely a digital economic phenomenon, it also serves as a cultural pragmatic space where local norms and ethnic-specific communication strategies, including unconventional forms of apology, are explicitly and repeatedly manifested.

Apologies are a common form of speech act used when an individual realizes that their actions have caused harm or discomfort to another party. Although this practice is found across nearly all cultures, the ways and purposes of its use are heavily influenced by the cultural norms of each community (Morrow & Yamanouchi, 2020). In intercultural contexts, individuals may differ in terms of their willingness and awareness to apologize, depending on the social rules that govern interpersonal relationships. Inappropriate use of apologies can even lead to communication breakdowns. Several studies have shown that non-native speakers who fail to adjust their apologetic expressions to local cultural norms are often perceived as communicatively incompetent (Alzahrani, 2023; Morrow & Yamanouchi, 2020). For instance, Jung (2022) found that Korean learners of English experienced communication difficulties because they relied on the norms and apology strategies of their first language when speaking English.

Pragmatically, apologies are understood as efforts to restore social balance disrupted by a violation of norms, whether verbal or nonverbal. Lakoff (2001) refers to the notion of "apparent apologies," a form of apology not merely intended as an admission of guilt, but also as a strategy to frame potentially offensive utterances. Contemporary pragmatic studies are therefore not only concerned with explicit expressions of remorse but also with the subtle and contextual ways people maintain social harmony. In this regard, Spencer-Oatey (2008) highlights the importance of managing good social relations, while Yu et al. (2024) distinguish between corrective apologies, which occur after a violation, and preventive apologies, which are intended to prevent potential violations of politeness or cultural norms.

Furthermore, apologies are closely related to the concept of politeness, as formulated by Brown & Levinson (1987). Within this framework, apologies function not only to repair the face of the hearer who has been harmed, but also involve a threat to the speaker's own face. Olshtain (1989) argue that when someone apologizes, they are implicitly admitting fault and placing themselves in a lower position. Thus, apologies represent a complex strategy for maintaining social harmony, negotiating relational power, and demonstrating cross-cultural pragmatic competence.

In a previous study, Putikadyanto et al. (2025) revealed intriguing findings regarding apology utterances in online trading interactions among Madurese speakers. In contrast to the patterns outlined in the CCSARP (Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project) model by Blum-kulka & Olshtain (1984), which typically emphasizes expressions of regret and responsibility to restore social relationships, apologies in Madurese ethnic contexts, especially in the context of cattle trading, tend to exhibit a hybrid pattern that combines apologies with elements of threat or warning. This strategy reflects a local cultural dynamic that places emphasis on honor, courage, and social bargaining power in maintaining commercial relationships.

This study employs the concept of Ethnocyberpragmatics, an analytical approach that integrates cross-cultural pragmatic studies with the dynamics of digital communication. This approach seeks to understand how utterance meanings are constructed and interpreted within online spaces (Mintowati et al., 2024), influenced by local cultural values and the specific interactions of digital environments (Putikadyanto et al., 2024). In the realm of cyber communication, utterances not only reflect the speaker's intent but also convey social identity, cultural values, and distinct ethnic norms (Blitvich, 2024). Therefore, Ethnocyberpragmatics enables a more nuanced analysis of how culture shapes linguistic practices in digital media.

In modern speech act studies, threats are categorized as commissive acts, as the speaker seriously commits to a future action that harms the hearer, fully aware that the action is undesired by the interlocutor (Neumaier, 2025). Generally, the primary goal of the speaker in issuing a threat is to instill fear or exert pressure on the hearer.

In pragmatic studies, threats take various forms and functions that are closely tied to emotional expression and the speaker's communicative intent. Non-conditional threats, such as intimidation and affective impoliteness, i.e., intense emotional expressions like anger directed explicitly at the hearer, are key features of this type (Culpeper, 2011). In contrast, conditional threats have an added dimension: they aim to coerce the hearer into performing or avoiding a particular action (Culpeper, 2011). For this reason, researchers distinguish between two main types of threats: manipulative threats, which are directive-commissive in nature, and retaliatory threats, which are more reactive (Muschalik, 2018; Salgueiro, 2010). Structurally, commissive speech acts like threats often resemble directive acts such as requests, and can also overlap with expressive acts like insults or swearing (Culpeper, 2011; Neumaier, 2025). These differences in form and intent are crucial to analyze, as the type of threat affects its linguistic representation. Some speech acts, such as requests, tend to appear only in the form of conditional threats, while others, like assertions, can be used more flexibly and are less context-bound.

Apologies, therefore, are not merely acts of humility but may also function as tools of social negotiation to maintain face and status. Based on these, the present study seeks to explore more specifically the forms of apology utterances accompanied by threats in the social commerce content of the Madurese ethnic group, particularly in digital tradebased communication practices.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach by combining ethnographic and pragmatic analysis methods to explore distinctive speech patterns within the Madurese ethnic community, particularly apology utterances that contain elements of threat. The data source comprises 300 trading content videos uploaded through the Facebook and YouTube Shorts account *Dunia Sapi* and *Rojo Sapi* during the period from January to July 2025. Data were collected through non-participatory observation and documentation of verbal interactions between sellers and buyers featured in the content.

The analysis process adopts a ethnocyberpragmatic approach, an integrated method combining ethnographic and pragmatic studies within the context of digital communication, to examine patterns of apologies accompanied by threats and to investigate the sociocultural background shaping such speech behavior. This analysis is grounded in Culpeper (2011) & Neumaier (2025) theoretical framework, which distinguishes between conditional and non-conditional threats, and is further supported by empirical findings from Putikadyanto et al. (2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Apologies Accompanied by Non-Conditional Threats

In the digital communication practices of the Madurese ethnic group, particularly in the context of online buying and selling, an apology does not always function as an expression of regret or an effort to ease social tension. On the contrary, in certain instances, an apology becomes an entry point for the speaker to deliver a veiled threat or assert social dominance. One prominent form is the non-conditional threat, which does not explicitly demand a change in the hearer's behavior but rather serves to affirm social superiority, display power, or express emotions affectively (Culpeper, 2011; Vassilieva, 2016). In this context, the apology acts as a polite facade masking intimidating intentions, reflecting a complex speech strategy imbued with local cultural values such as honor and pride.

The following excerpt from a Facebook "Dunia Sapi" post illustrates a speech act that combines an apology with a non-conditional threat:

Seller: Ya Allah, what is wrong with you. I'm sorry, but if you don't want to buy, that's fine. I have a lot of money. I'm rich. (Source: Facebook Dunia Sapi, 28 July 2025)

This data, taken from the Facebook page "Dunia Sapi" on July 28, 2025, demonstrates a non-conditional threat embedded within a negotiation at a cattle market.

The seller opens with an emotional expression, "Ya Allah, what is wrong with you," indicating dissatisfaction or disbelief at the buyer's behavior. This is followed by the utterance, "I'm sorry, but if you don't want to buy, that's fine," which on the surface appears polite and courteous. However, the subsequent statement, "I have a lot of money. I'm rich," carries an implicit threat, a declaration of economic superiority and indifference toward the buyer's decision. This constitutes a non-conditional threat because it does not compel the buyer to act in any particular way but rather serves as a form of affective intimidation and assertion of power.

From a ethncyberopragmatic perspective, this utterance illustrates how Madurese-specific communication strategies are manifested in digital spaces, where threats are wrapped in politeness formulas. Although the speaker includes an apology, the dominant meaning is a power assertion and identity reinforcement as the more authoritative party in the transactional interaction. This strategy reflects local cultural values such as social pride and self-respect (Dartiningsih, 2022), in which showing weakness in front of a buyer is to be avoided. In this context, an apology is not a gesture of humility but a rhetorical device used to preserve face while subtly intimidating the interlocutor. Thus, the non-conditional threat becomes part of the digital communication ecosystem of the Madurese, preserving local interaction patterns even within online platforms such as Facebook.

Another example is shown in the following data:

Seller: 15.5. How much, Bah?

Buyer: 12 (million)

Seller: You in a parliament meeting or something?

Buyer: Don't mess with me. Just sorry. I'd lose money. Don't bargain

recklessly.

(Source: YouTube Shorts Dunia Sapi, 23 February 2025)

This data from the "Dunia Sapi" YouTube Shorts video posted on February 23, 2025, presents another instance of an apology coupled with a non-conditional threat—one that lacks direct aggression but operates through verbal intimidation. In the exchange, the seller starts by stating a price, "15.5. How much, Bah?" The buyer responds with a counteroffer of 12 million. The seller then delivers a rhetorical jab, "You in a parliament meeting or something?" implying that the buyer's offer is absurdly low. The buyer's reply, "Don't mess with me. Just sorry. I'd lose money. Don't bargain recklessly," expresses anger and includes an apology used more as a strategic filler than a conciliatory gesture. The phrase "Just sorry" functions not to de-escalate the situation, but to frame the subsequent harsh statement and soft threat.

From a ethnocyberpragmatic lens, this interaction reveals characteristic features of Madurese communication, direct and assertive (Julijanti, 2025), even in commercial

transactions. The apology in "Just sorry" is not intended to convey remorse but rather acts as a marker of stance and a boundary between tolerance and veiled threat. The non-conditional threat in "Don't mess with me" represents a form of verbal intimidation grounded in personal identity and social status, in which the speaker asserts their dignity and authority within the negotiation. This strategy blurs the line between politeness and verbal aggression, which, in Madurese culture, may be perceived as a normal part of bargaining discourse. These findings reinforce the understanding that in Madurese social commerce practices, apologies sometime do not serve their literal function but instead operate as pragmatic tools to convey control, maintain face, and apply implicit pressure on the hearer.

Apologizing with a Conditional Threat

In the context of digital interactions among the Madurese ethnic community, the speech strategy that combines an apology with a conditional threat represents a complex form of pragmatic communication, rich in cultural meaning. In this context, the apology does not stand alone as a marker of politeness or regret, but rather functions as a rhetorical entry point through which the speaker introduces a demand accompanied by coercive pressure. A conditional threat is characterized by an explicit condition or consequence: the hearer is faced with a choice between complying with the request or facing a negative outcome (Culpeper, 2011; Neumaier, 2025). This strategy is often employed to strengthen bargaining power in negotiation, reflecting values such as assertiveness, confidence, and the importance of maintaining dignity in trade relations. Within the realm of social commerce, such utterances demonstrate how traditional communication norms persist in digital spaces.

The following is an example from a Facebook video posted by "Dunia Sapi" that illustrates a conditional threat embedded within an apology in an online bargaining situation:

Seller: "Eh, sorry, not allowed at 10.1."

Buyer: "This is 10.2."

Seller: "Still not allowed. Prices are rising. If not 10.5, just leave."

(Source: Facebook *Dunia Sapi*, 28/07/2025)

The interaction between the seller and buyer in the July 28, 2025 content on *Dunia Sapi* Facebook page demonstrates an utterance where an apology is followed by a conditional threat during livestock price negotiation. The seller opens with "Eh, saporaan, not allowed at 10.1," which implicitly rejects the buyer's offer. This statement may be interpreted as an indirect form of apology, indicating that the price cannot yet be lowered.

The seller then reinforces their stance with the utterance "If not 10.5, just leave," a clear conditional threat meaning the buyer must either agree to the set price (10.5 million) or walk away. This threat serves not merely to intimidate but to compel the hearer to act namely, to accept the stated price.

Such use of threat represents a distinctive pragmatic strategy in Madurese transactional communication, emphasizing bargaining leverage, confidence, and firmness. From the perspective of ethnocyberpragmatics, these utterances reflect culturally internalized values embedded in digital trade practices. Rather than aligning with the conventional politeness-based apology model such as that in the CCSARP framework (Blum-kulka & Olshtain, 1984), the speaker deploys a hybrid strategy: expressing regret implicitly while immediately following it with verbal pressure. This suggests that an apology is not always an act of humility or guilt admission, but can function as a tactic to assert and maintain power in an assertive interaction.

In the Madurese community, the use of conditional threats is closely tied to values of honor, pride, and self-image (Dartiningsih, 2022), where assertiveness is seen as vital for preserving social authority and credibility in trade. These findings reveal that in Madurese social commerce, apologies coupled with conditional threats act as mechanisms for negotiating identity and power, reflecting a mix of surface politeness and pragmatic dominance in digital interaction spaces.

Another example is illustrated in the following data:

Buyer: "Come on, what do you say? Let's settle on 9 million."

Seller: "Sorry, if you're paying 9 million, you'd better run far away. Don't

mess with the Young Boss."

(Source: YouTube Shorts *Dunia Sapi*, 14/03/2025)

This interaction from YouTube Shorts "Dunia Sapi" dated March 14, 2025, presents a bargaining dialogue between a cattle buyer and seller, featuring an apology paired with a conditional threat. The buyer initiates the negotiation with a final offer "Let's settle on 9 million" signifying serious buying intent. The seller responds, "Sorry, if you're paying 9 million, you'd better run far away. Don't mess with the Young Boss," which pragmatically conveys dual-layered meaning. First, the phrase "Sorry" serves as a polite opening or mitigation marker, immediately followed by a conditional threat, directing the buyer to leave if they insist on the price and warning them not to act disrespectfully toward the seller.

The threat is conditional as it establishes a contingency and a practical goal: if the buyer insists on the 9 million offer, they are told to leave, and are cautioned not to undermine the seller's authority. Thus, the seller not only rejects the offer but also applies

pressure for the buyer to increase it or exit the negotiation. This strategy reflects an assertive and dominant communicative style, where the apology does not signal humility, but instead acts as a rhetorical device preceding intimidation to preserve authority.

From a ethnocyberpragmatic perspective, this seller response reveals how Madurese cultural values shape communicative styles in digital arenas, including social commerce. The sarcastic threat "you'd better run far away" and the mock-honorific "Young Boss" highlight efforts to defend dignity and authority within sales interactions. The strategy indicates that apologies coupled with conditional threats serve as mechanisms for asserting identity and power, signaling that the speaker is not someone to be pushed or trifled with. In Madurese culture, sellers are expected to appear strong and confident (Izzati et al., 2024), even if that means sacrificing conventional politeness. As such, apologies in these contexts function not just to reject an offer but to coerce or control the interlocutor's actions, a linguistically potent tactic imbued with cultural and power-laden meaning that has now migrated into digital trading practices.

Another example appears in the following data:

Buyer: "Sorry, I'm offering 7.25."

Seller: "Not yet. If it's not 8, it's not allowed."

Buyer: "Don't joke, or I'll choke you!"

(Source: Facebook Rojo Sapi, 28/07/2025)

This interaction from Facebook "Rojo Sapi" on July 28, 2025, displays a buyer's utterance of an apology followed by a conditional threat in the context of cattle price negotiation. The exchange begins with the buyer saying "Sorry, I'm offering 7.25," which on the surface appears polite and humble. However, after the seller rejects the offer "Not yet. If it's not 8, it's not allowed" the buyer responds with a shocking and forceful line: "Don't joke, or I'll choke you!" This utterance blends initial politeness with an explicit physical threat, used as a form of verbal pressure to influence the seller's decision.

The threat is conditional, as it implies that the seller must stop "joking" with high prices or face (figurative) violence. While hyperbolic, the threat functions not merely as emotional expression but as part of a pragmatic pattern to pressure the hearer into accepting a specific course of action, in this case, lowering the price. The initial apology is thus not meant to de-escalate conflict, but rather acts as a rhetorical prelude to a coercive act intended to shape negotiation outcomes.

Under the ethnocyberpragmatic framework, this data shows how politeness norms in Madurese digital communication can be combined with aggressive verbal expressions, even from the buyer's side. The apology in the opening line is part of an aggressive negotiation strategy that embeds surface-level politeness, immediately followed by a high-

Agus Purnomo Ahmad Putikadyanto, Suhartono, Mintowati, Bagus Cahyanto, & Agung Setyawan pressure conditional threat. In Madurese culture, such communicative behavior reflects courage, assertiveness, and strong bargaining power (Syamsuddin, 2019), where buyer-seller interactions may be competitive but still operate within accepted market norms. These findings broaden the understanding that not only sellers, but also buyers, utilize apology-infused threats as legitimate pragmatic tactics in Madurese social commerce, both offline and in digital representations via social media.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that within the *social commerce* practices of the Madurese ethnic community, particularly in digital trade interactions via platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, apologies do not always represent regret or humility in the conventional sense of speech act theory. On the contrary, apologies are often paired with threats, either nonconditional or conditional, that instead reflect power, pride, and social dominance. This phenomenon indicates the existence of a distinctive hybrid communication strategy, in which apologies serve as rhetorical tools to veil intimidation, preserve face, and strengthen bargaining positions in transactional interactions. In this context, apologies accompanied by threats function as one of the strategic mechanisms in Madurese trade discourse, designed not to defuse conflict but to control the direction of negotiation and assert the speaker's authority.

Through an ethnocyberpragmatic lens, the study demonstrates that local cultural values of the Madurese people, such as courage, honor, and assertiveness, significantly shape patterns of speech in digital spaces. The threats embedded within apologies, whether articulated by sellers or buyers, reflect ongoing negotiations of identity and power, adapted into online interactions. Thus, social commerce becomes not only a vehicle for economic transaction but also a performative space for expressing cultural identity and pragmatic strategy, preserving traditional norms of communication within an expanded digital format.

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