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PRAGMATIC MARKER AS A LANGUAGE POLITENESS MITIGATING DEVICE IN TALK SHOW ON SPIRITUAL GENRE

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ABSTRACT

High level social communication skill involving language politeness is important in communications and as such, it cannot be ruled out. As such, this paper aimed to explore the function of the *ya* pragmatic marker as a tool for language politeness as well as its relationship with the usage of the language politeness strategy from the pragmalinguistic aspect. In this study, the researcher used the religious talk show programme hosted by ustazah (female religious teachers) in the context of examining the pragmatic marker. The particular religious talk show programme was produced by TV9 and it was titled *Tanyalah Ustazah* with the topic *The Decency in Facing Difficulty 'Kebaikan dalam Masalah'.* The data acquired was then transcribed to enable the analysis process. The data was processed using the AntConc 3.2.4w software and later it was analysed using a qualitative method. Additionally, the *ya* pragmatic marker was also described based on the contemporary and authentic corpus data. The analysis was conducted using Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987). The findings showed that the *ya* pragmatic marker in the religious talk show genre could function as a language politeness device.

INTRODUCTION

The features of a high-powered discourse are evident in the polite expressions of the mind and the polite usage. According to Omar (2002), the status of the Malay language depends on the type of discourse being utilized. A high-powered discourse would cause the individual who is the discourse target to accept the discourse easily and with a positive attitude. In practising a polite culture, the Malay community would tend to utilize indirect language to safeguard the facial expression of the other speaking party (Nopiah, Jalaluddin & Kasdan, 2018) and they also tend to utilize implicatured speech especially indirect speech which emphasizes politeness as it would give a better effect to the audience in a pragmatic manner by taking into account the relationship between culture and the community (Yaakub & Mohamed, 2018).

Good language in a high-powered discourse is not only limited to the compliance of grammatical requirements but also other aspects in language usage. The relevant aspects are the sociolinguistic and pragmatic aspects. The sociolinguistic aspects describe the social relationship between both parties, so that there is mutual respect. The pragmatic aspect in language usage looks at the purpose of language usage or the effect to be conveyed and any further action from the effect. As such, there are sociolinguistic and pragmatic guidelines to adhere to. Clearly, unrefined language usage from the sociolinguistic aspect cannot be considered as providing any positive effect from the pragmatic aspect. Therefore, this type of communication is not high-powered, though the language used is not wrong from the grammatical aspect. As such, the sustainability of the practice via the improved ability of using high Malay language and being cultured with a focus on polite language should be continued so that could be the vision of becoming the driving force of high culture could be realized (Mohamed Redzwan, Sarudin & Bahari, 2018; Mohamed Redzwan, Bahari, Sarudin & Osman, 2020).

In this study, the media communication of the study corpus was the religious talk programme *Tanyalah Ustazah* with the topic *The Decency in Facing Difficulty (Kebaikan dalam Masalah)* . Based on theories of politeness, recent research has focused on the possible influences of politeness on learning with media (e.g. Schneider, Nebel, Pradel, & Rey, 2015). A meta-analysis by Ginns, Martin & Marsh (2013) showed that politeness could enhance the retention and transfer of knowledge. In other words, media could become a medium which could influence the audience in the practice of using polite language via the language used by the polite speaker or host. Additionally, the programme itself contains knowledge which could be transferred as well as having polite elements with content which could inspire or invite others towards being positive**.**

As such, this paper aimed to explore the aspects of linguistic politeness especially from the aspect of usage and function of the pragmatic marker *ya* and its relationship with the spectrum of politeness strategy in formal oral communications especially in religious talk programmes on the television. This analysis would not be limited from the grammatical aspect, but it would also be focused on the pragmatic aspect especially pragmalinguistics. Pragmalinguistics refers to the sources in conveying the relational meaning and the interpersonal meaning with the speech action. These sources comprise the pragmatic strategy such as being honest, routine and various linguistics forms which could strengthen or weaken the speech act (Leech, 1983).

Studies on *ya* have been analysed before this but the descriptions are only on the surface. Some of the research on *ya* conducted by the nation's top linguists such as Za'ba (2000), Karim, Onn, Musa & Mahmood (2009), Omar (2008) and Hassan (2006) is limited from the grammatical aspect. Intuitively, it could be concluded that there is not much description on the *ya* pragmatic marker in Malay Language. In fact, the description of existing *ya* pragmatic marker is not as comprehensive or theoretical. As such, this particular statement starts off this research for the benefit of generating more knowledge and research about the *ya* pragmatic marker in Malay Language.

The study objectives

The objectives of this study titled *Pragmatic marker as a language politeness mitigating device in talk show on spiritual genre* are:

Identify the function of the *ya* pragmatic marker in religious talk programmes on television.

Identify how the usage of the *ya* pragmatic marker could be linked to linguistic politeness via the strategic spectrum of negative politeness in the religious talk programme genre on television.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pragmatic Marker

There are many conflicting terminologies regarding the pragmatic marker. Other terms are also used with the same way and very often there is overlapping in linguistic research (Aijmer, 2002). Clearly, there is no single agreement in the usage of terminology. The disagreement about the usage and conceptualization of the definition of the pragmatic marker according to the usual convention among the researchers themselves causes much controversy. There is various usage regarding the terms used referring to the pragmatic marker. For example, the term *pragmatic marker* is used by Romero-Trillo (2018), Beeching (2016), Babanoğlu (2014), Feng (2011) dan Han (2011); *pragmatic particle* is used by Miskovic-Lukovic (2009) and King (2007); *discourse particle* by Ramón (2015) and Vivien (2001); and *discourse marker* by Yeh and Huang (2016), Marmorstein (2016) and Blakemore & Gallai

(2014). The various terms used are related to the contradiction in the attribution of the pragmatic marker from the aspect of function and scope of research area.

In this paper, the term pragmatic marker was used. This was because the pragmatic marker was linked to the pragmatic analysis focused upon in this paper. The pragmatic analysis being considered here took into consideration all the parameters which influenced the language use, the conversational and speech situations and the verbal interaction between the speakers which included the politeness parameter. Clearly, the pragmatic marker functions according to context (Ösman, 1995).

Language Politeness

It is evident that the politeness has become a field of study which is gaining interest among linguists over the world especially among the sociolinguists and pragmaticians. According to Ramli, Janan, Mohamed Redzwan and Bahari (2009), the growing interest in this field is proven with the establishment of Inter-University Linguistic Politeness Research Group in 1999.

In the context of language politeness in Malaysia, the aspect of practice and compliance of language rules which refer to the basic language politeness according to social norms have been discussed by Omar (2002), Hassan (2005a) and Sariyan (2007). Omar (2002) summarized that there were three types of language rules which needed to be complied to, which were the linguistic rules, the sociolinguistic rules and pragmatic rules. Compliance to these three types of rules in integration would provide the basis for language politeness. In other words, a person who uses polite language would be someone who is able to use the language while emphasizing the three types of language rules.

According to Hassan (2005a), certain rules require us to use polite and courteous language which is known as social grammar. He further stated that though a sentence may be structurally correct, sometimes it may cause others to feel annoyed, disrespected, angry or uncomfortable in the communication. Even worse is when that person is categorised as being uncultured when his/her utterances do not follow the rules of polite language.

Language politeness refers to good language use, which is polite, cultured, courteous and reflects on an honourable personality and shows respect towards the other party/speaker (Sariyan, 2007). Malaysians are made up of various races and ethnic groups (see Bahari, Suhaili, Jamaluddin, Umar & Zakaria, 2019) and they have the right to live in a harmonious and conflict-free situation and the practice of polite language can provide the catalyst to make this a reality. Additionally, Mohd. Kiram & Raja Arifin (2012) also emphasised upon the element of harmony in the community as well as the formation of personality as the medium of language politeness. The practice of language politeness through high and cultured Malay language specifically on sociopragmatic skills (Mohamed Redzwan, Bahari, Sarudin & Osman, 2020), thinking skills including those which are based on higher order thinking skills,

(Sarudin, Mohamed Redzwan, Osman, Raja Ma'amor Shah, & Mohd Ariff Albkri, 2019a; Sarudin, Mohamed Redzwan, Mohd Ariff Al-Bakri, & Osman, 2019b) and sociosemantic skills (Sarudin et al., 2019c) are able to cultivate a community of speakers who are academically and spiritually balanced are also capable of providing a high cultural legacy from one generation to another as well as symbolizing a milestone of the intellectuality of the community of high-cultured speakers.

This paper would focus on politeness by using the Brown and Levinson Politeness Theory (1987) especially on the usage of the *ya* pragmatic marker as a language politeness tool which has not been studied in detail and theoretically. Though the *ya* pragmatic marker is only a small meaningful unit in grammar, its role and function from the sociolinguistic and pragmatic perspective should not be ignored. The findings regarding its usage and function in oral communication especially in the religious talk genre would be discussed further.

Pragmatic Marker and Its Relationship with Language Politeness

Studies focusing on pragmatic marker in the West would focus on its role as a supportive act. The pragmatic marker which co-occurs with the head act (speech act) functions as the supportive act. The head act or the speech act as well as the face threatening act are some of the focus of researchers who look at its relationship with language politeness specifically in giving *advice* (e.g. Terkourafi, Weissman & Roy, 2020; and Drew, 2018); attention getter and alerter (e.g. Maros & Halim, 2018; Mohamed, 2019); and apology (e.g. Beeching, 2019; and Ruytenbeek, 2019) from the linguistic perspective especially in the branches of pragmatic, sociolinguistics, pragmalinguistics and sociopragmatics.

In the context of the Malay language, *ya* is frequently described in grammatical terms by linguists. In grammar studies, *ya* is known as the affirmative (Karim, Onn, Musa & Mahmood, 2009). According to Omar (2008) *ya* is required in closed interrogative clauses; *ya* is also used as a tag (Omar, 2008) and *ya* is also a short answer required in an interrogative sentence (Hassan, 2005b). Clearly, *ya* is very much limited in its description in the grammatical context by the linguists.

The researcher chose to look at the usage of the *ya* pragmatic marker which is often used as the affirmative. However, the researcher also wanted to analyse and scrutinize other functions for the *ya* pragmatic marker apart from being the affirmative. As mentioned previously, this study would look in detail on the usage of the *ya* pragmatic marker and its relationship with the language politeness aspect based on other examples in the oral corpus data especially in the genre of religious talk programmes.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

This study utilized the descriptive qualitative method. The data was acquired from the interaction and communication in the religious programme, *Tanyalah Ustazah*, which was screened on TV9. The data was collected and documented using the recording method via audio and visual. Then the data was transcribed. The transcribed data was processed using the AntConc. 3.2.4.w. software to enable the researcher to identify the usage of the *ya* pragmatic marker in the data to be analysed as shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1** *Ya* Pragmatic Marker using the AntConc 3.2.4w

In this study, the corpus data-based approach was utilized. The chosen and acquired data had authentic features. The authenticity or the originality meant that the data was real data produced in human communication. This indicated that the data was not created by the corpus data producer but rather it was naturally formed (Jamaluddin, 2015) and it was not self-created but accurate corpus data without any changes (Sarudin dan Jalaluddin, 2017; Jalaluddin, Sarudin & Ahmad, 2012).

The data with authentic features acquired in this study were later analysed in a descriptive qualitative manner from the pragmalinguistics perspective. Pragmalinguistic refers to sources for conveying the speech act meaning and the interpersonal meaning. These sources include strategies such as continuity and discontinuity, routine and linguistic forms which emphasise or soften the speech act (Leech, 1983 dan Thomas, 1983). Pragmalinguistic is a type of politeness which is based on linguistic awareness (Leech, 2014). According to Leech (2014), on the surface, pragmalinguistic in politeness involves pragmatic markers at the end of the sentence such as *hedges, downgraders* (e.g. *a tiny bit); and intensity* (*intensifiers,* e.g. *really, terribly*).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this paper, the Politeness Theoretical Framework by Brown and Levinson (1987) was utilised to describe the function of the *ya* pragmatic marker and its relationship with language politeness. Brown dan Levinson (1987) assessed politeness as an effort to lessen the *Face Threatening Act* to the listener by establishing the Linguistic Politeness Theory with 5 main strategies, which comprise the *on record strategy,* the *positive politeness strategy*, the *negative politeness strategy*, the *off record strategy* and the strategy to choose not to do any face threatening act strategies.
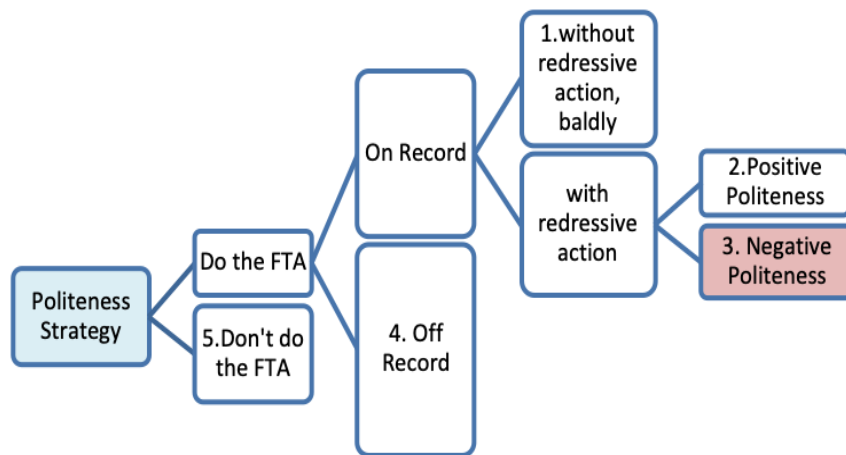
Diagram 2 Politeness Strategy in *Face Threatening Act* (FTA)
(Brown and Levinson, 1987)

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the *Face Threatening Act* (FTA) is closely related to the positive face concept and the negative face concept. Face here refers to the meaning *face wants*. In the context of the face as wants, the positive face wants refer to one's desire of his/her self-image to be appreciated and approved. On the other hand, the negative face wants refer to one's wants such as the freedom to act or to behave and to feel free from a particular burden. In this paper, we would be focusing on the negative politeness strategy spectrum.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, it was found that the *ya* pragmatic marker functioned as a language politeness tool in the negative politeness strategy spectrum. The *ya* pragmatic marker was present in the negative politeness strategy spectrum such as the giving advice strategy, the apologizing strategy and the attention-grabbing strategy.

The giving advice strategy

The *ya* pragmatic marker also functions as a strategy to give advice. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), giving advice is categorized as negative face threatening act. This particular act, which is a request in the form of advice is shown in (U1). With the presence of the *ya* pragmatic marker in (U1), the illocutionary force of request is weakened to become a speech act or a speech act functioning to give advice. In other words, the *ya* pragmatic marker functions as a negative politeness tool or it mitigates the illocutionary force of the face threatening act in the giving advice strategy.

U1:	*Okay, yang pertama, yang pertama ialah kita lepas solat dalam wudhu, tempat sembahyang kita, kalau tidak boleh sembahyang pun tidak apa, duduk diam, kita bernafas dengan baik, sebab kadang-kadang kita ini masalah tidak bernafas sebab itu kalau kita nak marah, kita bernafas dengan baik sebab pernafasan yang baik iaitu akan menimbulkan hormon endorfin **ya** [26:23] dan otak kita 'go into wave' yang lebih tenang, lebih menerima.* Okay, the first thing is after we have completed the prayers, we still have our wudhu', we are in our prayer location, if we can't pray then never mind, we sit silently, we are breathing properly, because sometimes we have a problem with breathing when we are angry , we breathe properly as it will produce endorphine hormones **ya** [26:23] and our brains 'go into wave' which are more relaxed, more receptive.

The illocutionary force in the negative face threatening act in giving orders had been softened to become an advice-giving act as shown in (U2). With the presence of the *ya* pragmatic marker in (U2), the illocutionary force of giving orders had been weakened to become a speech act in giving advice. The *ya* pragmatic marker in (U2) functioned as a negative politeness tool, or it softened the negative threatening act illocutionary force as shown in the giving advice strategy below:

U2:	*... maknanya cara anda melihat sesuatu menentukan emosi anda terhadap sesuatu perkara itu. Jadi kalau kita dapat sesuatu benda negatif, kalau kita kata Tuhan ini tak sayang akulah ni, Subhanallah, mesti bertaubat **ya** [20:13]. Sebab, macam saya sebut tadi, setiap saat kita mendapat nikmat lebih daripada ujian atau masalah, sebab apabila kita bangun pagi, saya nak tanya macam inilah yang boleh taip whatsapp ini siapa beri nikmat tangan, siapa beri nikmat mata, siapa memberi nikmat udara boleh bernafas, itu Allah punya nikmat yang kita tidak nampak.* …which means that the way you look at something determines your emotions towards that particular thing. So if we get a negative thing, if we say God

doesn't love me, Subhanallah, you have to repent *ya* [20:13]. Because as I mentioned just now, every second we get more favours than trials or problems, because when we wake up in the morning, I would like to ask like this who can type a whatsapp about who has blessed you with the gift of the hand, who has blessed you with the gift of the eye, who has blessed you with the gift of the air for you to breathe, those are Allah's favours which we can't see.

What differentiates the *ya* pragmatic marker in (U1) with (U2) is that the *ya* pragmatic marker in (U1) softened the illocutionary force of the threatening face act when the request was made, while the *ya* pragmatic marker in (U2) softened the illocutionary force of the threatening face act when the directive was made. The two illocutionary forces of the face threatening act were transformed into speech acts of giving advice with the presence of the *ya* pragmatic marker. In other words, the negative face threatening act scale spectrum had been weakened to a lower degree. The *ya* pragmatic marker functioned as a hedge or a mitigator categorized as a negative politeness strategy.

The findings indicated that the *ya* pragmatic marker functioned as a mitigator or specifically as a negative politeness mitigating device. In other words, *ya* weakened the illocutionary force of the speech acts of request and directive; these face threatening acts in the utterances were mitigated as advising speech acts which were more polite. This is because advice is not a part of the request anymore because advising does not mean trying to get someone to do something for the speaker. Advice is considered to benefit the hearer rather than the speaker (Searle, 1969). Advice can be defined as an utterance that encourages the hearer or advisee to take a particular action (Searle, 1969).

Speech act of giving advice is potentially a face-threatening act because it places the hearer into the position that he/she is asked to do something and limits the hearer's freedom of action (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and giving advice can be a complicated act because no one wants to be told what to do (Jenetto & Hanafi, 2019). However, with the presence of the *ya* pragmatic marker, the utterance became more polite as the face threatening act in the form of directive could be minimized or mitigated to become an advising speech act.

The strategy of getting the listener's attention

The *ya* pragmatic marker was also used in the strategy to get the listeners' attention. With the presence of the *ya* pragmatic marker in (U3), the utterance which contained the speech act of reminding also functioned at the same time as an utterance to get the attention of the listeners. With the presence of the *ya* pragmatic marker, the utterance had a softer tone as the illocutionary force had been weakened. Without the *ya* pragmatic marker, the utterance could be interpreted as a negative face threatening act or giving a warning. The

presence of the *ya* pragmatic marker informed us of its role as a tool for language politeness in the negative politeness strategy ; it functioned as a mitigator or hedge for the speech act of giving warning which had been toned down as a reminding act to show the speaker's concern for the audience. At the same time, besides softening the illocutionary force of the speech act, the strategy of getting the listeners' attention could be conducted in a more polite way as shown in (U3) below.

U3:	*Alhamdullilah, saya rasa kita semua sudah dapat sedikit inspirasi dan niat **ya** [13:19], ingat kita dalam hidup ini kita dapat apa yang kita niatkan. Jadi niat menonton rancangan ini sebagai majlis ilmu dan Insya-Allah doa pada Allah "Ya Allah Tuhanku, bagilah aku dapat ilmu ini, aku faham aku amalkan dan aku ikhlaskan dan kalau ada saudara mara kita, adik-beradik kita yang ada masalah, kita doakan mereka diberi hidayah untuk sama-sama menonton dan melihat diri mereka.*
	Alhamdulillah, I think we have got a bit of inspiration and good intention **ya** [13:19], remember in this life we have already got what we wished for. So we have intended to watch this programme as a knowledge sharing and Insya-Allah we pray to Allah 'Ya Allah, grant me this knowledge, I understand and I practise and I am sincere and if there are relatives or siblings with problems, we pray that Allah guides them to watch this show and look within themselves.

Clearly, attention getters in requests as supportive moves are mainly used to express politeness for the purpose of mitigating the effects of FTA, such as a request (Megaib et al., 2019; Chin, Mamat, Burkhardt & Farid, 2018). In this study, the attention getter *ya* functioned as mitigator to remind, by mitigating the illocutionary force of the face threatening act in the reminding utterance.

The apologizing strategy

The *ya* pragmatic marker also plays a function in implementing the apologising strategy. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), apologising is categorized as a negative politeness strategy. The speech act of apologising plays an important role in maintaining social relations. In everyday communication, whether intentionally or otherwise we would be involved in apologizing or saying sorry and being responsible as we have probably annoyed the hearer's feelings (Trang & Thi, 2017).

Referring to the data as in the context of U4 utterance, the apologizing utterance was conveyed by the speaker as a sign of regret as he had caused the caller at home who had made the phone call to wait for some time. The presence of the *ya* pragmatic marker when the speaker had to apologise to the caller, caused the degree of imposition and illocutionary force to be weakened

when implementing the speech act of apologizing. This function is shown in (U4) as the following:

U4:	Ustazah:	*Minta maaf, dah lama menanti, ya, caller dari studio. Okay kita ada caller, minta maaf sudah lama menanti ya [38:19], silakan caller di studio. Ada panggilan daripada penonton.* Sorry, you've been waiting awhile *ya*, the caller from the studio. Okay we have a caller, sorry for waiting so long **ya** [38:19], lets welcome the caller to the studio. There's a call from the audience.
	Pemanggil:	*Hello, Assalamualaikum prof.* Hello, Assalamualaikum prof.
	Ustazah:	*Waalaikumusalam wbt.* Waalaikumusalam wbt.
	Pemanggil:	*Prof, terima kasihlah Prof. banyak bagi motivasi, walaupun dalam televisyen ataupun radio, ini Pak Zainal dari Taman Kota Jaya, Kota Tinggi Johor ini.* Prof, thank you Prof, you give us a lot of motivation, on television and on the radio, this is Pak Zainal from Taman Kota Jaya, Kota Tinggi Johor
	Ustazah:	*Silakan Pak Zainal.* Go ahead, Pak Zainal.

Clearly, apology had to be handled in a wise and prudent manner as the apology would be evaluated as "(very) impolite", and so "bad", if it was judged to be "insincere" (Haugh & Melody Chang, 2019). The lexical semantics remain apologetic while the pragmatic illocutionary force is the opposite, creating a potentially impolite interpretation. As such, the presence of the pragmatic marker *ya* in the apologizing utterance played an important role in mitigating a highly face-threatening act especially when it concerned negative politeness.

Based on the study findings, it was found that the *ya* pragmatic marker was a supportive act to the negative politeness strategy which was the head act. The *ya* pragmatic marker played its role as a softener to the illocutionary force with the utilization of the hedge which was the *ya* pragmatic marker itself. Brown and Levinson (1987) stated that the hedge was a softener or a weakener. Thus, the hedge functioned as a mitigator to the illocutionary force and gave the indication towards the speaker's commitment about anything uttered or in other words, modified the illocutionary force of the face-threatening act, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Function of the *ya* pragmatic marker in Implementing the Negative Politeness Strategy

Utterance	Function of PM ya	Negative Politeness Strategy
U1	Softens the illocutionary force (Request → Advice)	Strategy of giving advice
U2	Softens the illocutionary force (Directive → Advice)	
U3	Softens the illocutionary force (Warning → Advice)	Strategy of getting the listeners' attention
U4	Softens the illocutionary force Apologising	Strategy of apologizing

Based on the findings in Table 2, it can be concluded that the *ya* pragmatic marker functioned as a weakener which was able to weaken the illocutionary force of face threatening act, with its presence when implementing the negative politeness strategy. Clearly, the *ya* pragmatic marker had a function as a mitigator or hedge towards the illocutionary force of the speaker's utterance in giving advice, getting the attention of listeners and apologizing. Besides the *ya* pragmatic marker, the mitigating function also showed a relationship with the language politeness practice as proven in studies by other researchers (e.g. Fraser, 2010; Abdolrezapour & Eslami-Rasekh, 2012; Soler, 2013).

CONCLUSION

It was clear that though the *ya* pragmatic marker could be considered a diminutive language unit, it was able to shine in its role as a device for language politeness with the ability to initiate, generate and develop a community which is harmonious, polite, respecting each other and free from conflict. The effort to establish a conflict-free situation may not start with a big effort. A small role should not be regarded as unimportant. Which high-powered discourse should be our choice in the effort to uplift the language? *Where there is a will there is a way 'Di mana ada kemahuan di situ ada jalan'. T*elevision programmes such as religious talk programmes could provide a resource in educating and inculcating our community with good values by communicating using a polite language with responsible values.

RUJUKAN

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