

Do Forms of Address to Fathers (Ayah, Bapak, Papa) and Daily Language Use Influence Parenting Styles and Parent–Child Emotional Closeness in Indonesia?

Mamang Efendy^{1*}, Muchammad Rizal², Inka Sukma Melati³, Rudik⁴

1,2,3,4 Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, Indonesia

*mamangefendy@untag-sby.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Emotional closeness between children and parents and parenting styles are central to children's psychological development. Linguistic features in the family, such as the terms used to address fathers and the language of daily communication, are often assumed to reflect cultural values and relational patterns. However, empirical evidence for these assumptions remains limited, particularly in the Indonesian context. This study examined whether (1) the type of term used to address the father (e.g., *Ayah, Bapak, Papa*, and others) and (2) the language used in family communication (local language vs. Indonesian) are associated with parenting styles and parent–child emotional closeness. Using a quantitative comparative design, data were collected from 254 participants who completed the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) and the Parenting Style and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ). Analyses were conducted using one-way ANOVA, two-way ANOVA, and independent samples *t*-tests. The results revealed no significant differences in parenting styles based on daily language use, $t(252) = -1.214, p = .190$, or on the form of address, $F(3, 250) = 0.786, p = .503$. Similarly, emotional closeness did not differ significantly by daily language, $t(252) = -0.578, p = .564$, or by forms of address, $F(3, 250) = 2.532, p = .058$. Interaction analyses also showed that the combination of language and forms of address had no significant effects on parenting styles ($F = 0.297, p = .827$) or emotional closeness ($F = 0.395, p = .756$). These findings suggest that linguistic features within the family do not function as strong determinants of parenting practices or emotional relationships in Indonesia. Instead, parent–child relationships may be more strongly shaped by other psychosocial factors, such as interaction quality, family dynamics, and parenting values. Future studies should explore potential mediating and moderating variables and extend the analysis across diverse cultural contexts.

Keywords: emotional closeness; parenting style; forms of address to the father; family language

Introduction

Parenting styles are important determinants of children's cognitive, emotional, and social development (Mesman, Van IJzendoorn, & Sagi-Schwartz, 2016; Sahithya, Manohari, & Vijaya, 2019; Huang, Wu, & Yang, 2024). Baumrind's classical model distinguishes three parenting styles, authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive (Baumrind, 1966, 1983), which was later expanded with the uninvolved style (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Consistently, authoritative parenting, characterized by a balance between demandingness and warmth, has

been associated with children's emotional well-being, academic achievement, and social competence (Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989).

However, cross-cultural findings suggest that the meanings and consequences of parenting styles are not universal. In several collectivist cultures, practices categorized as "authoritarian" in Western literature are instead understood as forms of training or moral socialization and are not necessarily harmful to children (Chao, 1994; Rudy & Grusec, 2006; Hamel, 2023). This indicates that parenting styles cannot be separated from the cultural value systems and social norms in which they are embedded.

Language is one of the primary media through which cultural values are expressed. From sociolinguistic and cultural-psychological perspectives, language functions not only as a tool for communication but also as a symbolic marker of power relations, emotional closeness, and value orientations within the family (Wierzbicka, 1997). Studies of immigrant families have shown that language orientation, toward either the majority language or the heritage language, is associated with differences in parenting practices, particularly in terms of warmth, control, and autonomy granting (Tseng & Fuligni, 2000; Kim et al., 2013). For example, orientation toward the majority language has been linked to more supportive and autonomy-promoting parenting, whereas orientation toward the heritage language is more often associated with stricter control (Tseng & Fuligni, 2000; Kim et al., 2013).

In the Indonesian context, linguistic dimensions of parenting take a distinctive form through terms of address used for parents, such as Bapak, Ayah, and Papa. Culturally, these terms are often assumed to reflect differences in formality, hierarchy, and emotional closeness in parent-child relationships (Geertz, 1961; Wierzbicka, 1997). To date, however, these assumptions remain largely speculative and have not been examined systematically. Most parenting research in Indonesia has focused on typologies of parenting styles and their outcomes, without considering language as part of the relational meaning system within families.

Thus, a clear empirical gap remains. Although cross-cultural and sociolinguistic studies indicate that language is related to parenting practices (Chao, 1994; Tseng & Fuligni, 2000; Kim et al., 2013), there is still insufficient evidence in Indonesia regarding whether and to what extent daily language use and forms of address to fathers are associated with parenting styles and parent-child emotional closeness. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the relationships between family language use and forms of address to fathers with parenting styles and emotional closeness in Indonesia's multicultural society.

This study does not assume that particular linguistic forms or terms of address are inherently more adaptive; rather, they are viewed as symbolic indicators that may reflect differences in value orientations and relational patterns within families (Hossain et al., 2023). Accordingly, the present study aims to provide more contextually grounded empirical evidence on the interconnections among linguistic, cultural, and parenting processes in Indonesia.

Based on this framework, the following hypotheses were formulated: 1) There are differences in parenting styles and parent–child emotional closeness based on the combination of daily language use and forms of address to fathers. 2) There is an interaction effect between daily language use and forms of address to fathers on parenting styles and parent–child emotional closeness.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a **factorial comparative quantitative design** to examine differences in parenting styles and parent–child emotional closeness based on variations in family linguistic practices. A comparative design was selected because the primary aim was not to manipulate variables, but to compare naturally occurring groups formed according to daily language use and forms of address to fathers.

Theoretically, family language practices are viewed as relational and cultural markers that reflect affective structure, hierarchy, and psychological distance in parent–child relationships. Accordingly, differences in language choice (local/heritage language vs. Indonesian) and forms of address (*Ayah*, *Bapak*, and *Papa*) were assumed to be associated with variations in relational patterns and parenting styles. The comparative approach enabled these hypotheses to be tested systematically through between-group mean comparisons.

This study addressed the following six research questions:

1. Are there differences in parenting styles based on the language used in daily communication (local language vs. Indonesian)?
2. Are there differences in parent–child emotional closeness based on the language used in daily communication?
3. Are there differences in parenting styles based on the form of address to the father (*Ayah*, *Bapak*, or *Papa*)?
4. Are there differences in parent–child emotional closeness based on the form of address to the father?
5. Is there an interaction effect between daily language use and forms of address on parenting styles?
6. Is there an interaction effect between daily language use and forms of address on parent–child emotional closeness?

Instruments

Parent–child emotional closeness was measured using the Parental Bonding Instrument (PBI) developed by Parker, Tupling, and Brown (1979), which demonstrated excellent internal consistency in this study (Cronbach's $\alpha = .952$). Parenting styles were assessed using the Parenting Style and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ) developed by Robinson et al. (1995). The internal consistency coefficients in the present sample were $\alpha = .973$ for the

authoritative/democratic dimension, $\alpha = .953$ for the authoritarian dimension, and $\alpha = .805$ for the permissive dimension.

Data on forms of address (*Bapak, Ayah, and Papa*) and on daily language use (heritage/local language vs. national language) were collected as categorical variables selected directly by participants from predefined options.

Both instruments were chosen because the constructs they measure, warmth, control, responsiveness, and emotional closeness, are conceptually related to the relational functions of language as a medium for constructing psychological distance, affect, and hierarchy within the family.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using independent samples t-tests to examine differences based on daily language use (two groups), one-way ANOVA to test differences based on forms of address (three groups), and two-way ANOVA to examine interaction effects between language use and forms of address on parenting styles and emotional closeness. Each analytical technique was selected based on the number of groups and the structure of the hypotheses.

Prior to hypothesis testing, assumptions of normality (Kolmogorov–Smirnov/Shapiro–Wilk tests) and homogeneity of variance (Levene’s test) were examined. When assumptions were violated, appropriate alternative procedures were applied.

Results

The following section presents the research findings, beginning with demographic data and followed by the results of hypothesis testing.

Table 1. Age Range

| Category | Age Range | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Late Adolescence | 17–20 | 142 | 55.90% |
| Early Adulthood | 21–30 | 99 | 39.00% |
| Middle Adulthood | 31–54 | 13 | 5.10% |
| Total | | 254 | 100% |

A total of 254 participants were included in this study. As shown in Table 1, the age distribution was dominated by late adolescents aged 17–20 years (55.90%) and young adults aged 21–30 years (39.00%). This indicates that most respondents were in a transitional developmental stage toward adulthood, a period considered sensitive to emotional relationships with parents.

Table 2. Gender

| Gender | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------|-----------|------------|
| Male | 51 | 20,1% |
| Female | 203 | 79,9% |
| Total | 254 | 100% |

Regarding gender (Table 2), 203 participants (79.9%) were female and 51 (20.1%) were male, indicating a substantial gender imbalance. This disproportion should be considered when interpreting the findings, as prior research suggests that males and females may differ in their perceptions of parenting and emotional closeness. Consequently, the results may reflect female perspectives more strongly than those of the general population.

Table 3. Form of Address to Father

| Form of Address to Father | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Papa | 106 | 41.70% |
| Bapak | 80 | 31.50% |
| Ayah | 56 | 22.00% |
| Others | 12 | 4.70% |
| Total | 254 | 100% |

In terms of forms of address to fathers (Table 3), most respondents reported using “Papa” (41.7%), followed by “Bapak” (31.5%), and “Ayah” (22.0%), while 4.7% used other terms. This distribution reflects cultural and personal variation in family linguistic practices.

1) *Hypothesis 1: There is a difference in parenting style based on the language used in daily communication (local language vs. Indonesian).*

Table 5. Independent Samples t-Test of Parenting Style Based on Daily Language

| Variable | t | sig |
|-----------------|--------|-------|
| Parenting Style | -1.214 | 0.190 |

The t-test result shows a value of $t = -1.214$ with $p = 0.190$ ($p > 0.05$), indicating that the difference is not statistically significant. This means that the use of local or national language in daily communication does not significantly affect parenting style. Thus, the language used is not a distinguishing factor in parenting practices.

2) *Hypothesis 2: There is a difference in the level of emotional closeness between children and parents based on the language used in daily communication.*

Table 6. Independent Samples t-Test of Emotional Closeness Based on Daily Language

| Variable | t | sig |
|---------------------|--------|-------|
| Emotional Closeness | -0.578 | 0.564 |

The t-test result indicates that the difference is not statistically significant ($t = -0.578$; $p = 0.564$). This finding shows that the language used in daily communication (local language vs. Indonesian) does not significantly differentiate either parenting style or the level of emotional closeness between children and parents. These results suggest that language functions primarily as a medium of communication rather than as a determinant of relationship quality. In other words, how parents interact appears to be more meaningful than which language is

used. This finding reinforces the view that the quality of family relationships is more strongly influenced by affective dimensions, openness, and warmth than by formal linguistic aspects..

3) *Hypothesis 3: There is a difference in parenting style based on the form of address used for the father (“Ayah,” “Bapak,” “Papa”).*

Table 8. ANOVA Results of Parenting Style Based on Forms of Address

| Pola asuh | F | sig |
|----------------|-------|-------|
| Between Groups | 0.786 | 0.503 |

The ANOVA results show that the difference is not statistically significant ($F = 0.786$; $p = 0.503$). This indicates that the way children address their fathers does not significantly influence parenting style. In other words, forms of address such as “Ayah,” “Bapak,” “Papa,” or others do not differentiate parenting practices.

4) *Hypothesis 4: There is a difference in the level of emotional closeness between children and parents based on the form of address used for the father.*

Table 12. ANOVA Results of Emotional Closeness Based on Forms of Address

| Emotional Closeness | F | sig |
|---------------------|-------|-------|
| Between Groups | 2.532 | 0.058 |

The ANOVA results indicate that the difference is not statistically significant ($F = 2.532$; $p = 0.058$). No significant difference in parenting style was found based on the form of address used for the father (“Ayah,” “Bapak,” “Papa,” and others). This suggests that forms of address do not directly reflect different parenting styles.

However, for the emotional closeness variable, a tendency pattern emerged ($p = 0.058$). Although not statistically significant, this result suggests that forms of address may carry symbolic relational meaning. Rather than being described as “approaching significance,” this finding is better understood as a preliminary indication that the way children address their fathers may relate to perceptions of attachment, but requires further testing with larger samples and more sensitive research designs.

5) *Hypothesis 5: There is an interaction effect between daily language and forms of address on parenting style.*

Table 13. Two-Way ANOVA of Parenting Style Based on Language and Form of Address

| Variable | F | sig |
|-----------------|-------|-------|
| Parenting Style | 0.297 | 0.827 |

The analysis shows that there is no significant interaction effect on parenting style ($F = 0.297$; $p = 0.827$). This indicates that language and forms of address, when considered together, do not influence parenting style.

6) *Hypothesis 6: There is an interaction effect between daily language and forms of address on emotional closeness between children and parents..*

Table 14. Two-Way ANOVA of Emotional Closeness Based on Language and Form of Address

| Variable | F | sig |
|---------------------|-------|-------|
| Emotional Closeness | 0.395 | 0.756 |

The analysis shows that there is no significant interaction effect on emotional closeness ($F = 0.395$; $p = 0.756$). This indicates that language and forms of address, when considered together, do not influence emotional closeness.

Overall, the two-way ANOVA results indicate that there is no significant interaction between daily language and forms of address on either parenting style or emotional closeness. This means that the effect (or lack of effect) of language does not change depending on the form of address, and vice versa. Theoretically, if language and forms of address functioned as symbols of closeness or relational hierarchy, a specific interaction pattern would be expected. The absence of such interaction suggests that linguistic factors are peripheral, while the quality of the parent–child relationship is more likely shaped by other psychosocial variables such as warmth, consistency, and parental responsiveness.

Discussions

This study examined whether linguistic symbols within the family, namely daily communication language (local languages vs. Indonesian) and forms of address to fathers (“*Ayah*,” “*Bapak*,” “*Papa*,” and others), are associated with parenting styles and parent–child emotional closeness. Theoretically, language is not merely a communicative tool but a cultural symbol that conveys values, power relations, and affective meanings (Geertz, 1961; Wierzbicka, 1997). However, the findings of this study indicate that most of these differences were not statistically significant, either for parenting styles or for emotional closeness.

Rather than being interpreted as a failure to support the hypotheses, these null findings make an important theoretical contribution by challenging deterministic assumptions in cross-cultural psychology that directly link linguistic symbols to relational practices. Consistent with Hamel (2023), the relationship between language, culture, and social behavior is situational rather than universal; linguistic symbols do not consistently represent relational values or structures across contexts.

The absence of differences in parenting styles and emotional closeness based on daily language use suggests that, in the Indonesian context, language does not function as a marker of value orientation in the same way as reported in immigrant families. Studies by Tseng and Fuligni (2000) and Kim et al. (2013) found that, among Asian immigrant families in the United States, the use of English was associated with more authoritative parenting, whereas heritage language use was more closely linked to authoritarian practices. In those contexts, language symbolized an acculturative position between the culture of origin and the dominant culture. This condition, however, does not fully apply in Indonesia. Local languages and Indonesian do not stand in a competitive relationship but rather coexist as complementary symbolic systems. Thus, the present null findings indicate that language cannot always be

treated as a proxy for cultural values, reinforcing critiques of cross-cultural generalizations that neglect social context (Hamel, 2023).

Wierzbicka (1997) proposed that the terms “*Bapak*,” “*Ayah*,” and “*Papa*” carry distinct social meanings, such as authority, warmth, or intimacy. Nevertheless, the present findings suggest that these symbolic distinctions are not consistently translated into parenting practices. This implies a disjunction between symbol and action, whereby lexical meaning does not automatically manifest as relational behavior. Forms of address appear to function more as markers of family identity or preference than as direct predictors of parenting styles.

With regard to emotional closeness, the near-significant *p*-value for forms of address revealed an interesting descriptive pattern: “*Papa*” tended to be associated with higher emotional closeness, whereas “*Bapak*” was associated with lower scores. This pattern resonates with Geertz’s (1961) notion of culture as a “web of meanings” that shapes how individuals interpret social relationships. However, because these differences did not reach statistical significance, they should be interpreted cautiously. Linguistic symbols seem to operate as subtle affective cues rather than as deterministic factors. As Sahithya, Manohari, and Vijaya (2019) argue, the quality of parent–child relationships is more strongly shaped by interactional dynamics such as responsiveness, emotional support, and parental psychological presence.

The absence of interaction effects between language and forms of address on both parenting styles and emotional closeness further suggests that family linguistic symbols reflect relational contexts rather than shape them. These findings support a conceptual shift from viewing language as a determinant of relationships toward understanding it as a symbolic representation of deeper psychosocial structures.

Other factors, such as parental education, socioeconomic status, attachment quality, and communication patterns, are likely to play a more substantial role. Because these variables were not directly measured, they should be regarded as alternative explanations rather than causal conclusions.

Overall, this study contributes to cross-cultural literature by demonstrating that family linguistic symbols cannot be assumed to universally represent values or parenting practices. The relationship between language, culture, and family relations is non-linear and contextually negotiated (Hamel, 2023; Wierzbicka, 1997). Thus, the null findings of this study do not close the discussion but instead challenge overly simplified theoretical models and open space for more reflexive approaches to understanding the complexity of family life in Indonesia.

Conclusion

Based on the operationalization of variables and the characteristics of the sample in this study, no empirical evidence was found to support differences in parenting styles or parent–child emotional closeness based on either daily communication language or forms of address to fathers. These findings should not be interpreted as evidence that linguistic symbols have

“no influence,” but rather that, within the context and design of the present study, such differences were not statistically detectable. The results indicate that family linguistic symbols, both language choice and terms of address, do not function as sufficiently strong predictors to differentiate parenting patterns or the quality of emotional relationships.

The interpretation that other factors (e.g., family characteristics or interaction quality) may play a more central role should be understood as a plausible alternative explanation, rather than as a causal conclusion, as these variables were not directly measured in this study. Although descriptive variations were observed across groups, these patterns are not inferential in nature and therefore cannot be used as a basis for causal claims. Accordingly, the findings must be interpreted with caution and should not be overstated.

Theoretically, this study contributes evidence that the symbolic meanings of language within families are not universal and do not necessarily translate into differences in parenting practices, thereby challenging deterministic assumptions in cultural linguistics and cross-cultural psychology. Methodologically, the study highlights the importance of explicitly measuring cultural values and relational dynamics before drawing conclusions about the role of language in family contexts.

References

- Baumrind, D. (1966). Effects of authoritative parental control on child behavior. *Child Development, 37*(4), 887–907. doi:10.2307/1126611
- Baumrind, D. (1983). Rejoinder to Lewis’s reinterpretation of parental firm control effects: Are authoritative families really harmonious? *Psychological Bulletin, 94*(1), 132–142. doi:10.1037/0033-2909.94.1.132
- Chao, R. K. (1994). Beyond parental control and authoritarian parenting style: Understanding Chinese parenting through the cultural notion of training. *Child Development, 65*(4), 1111–1119. doi:10.2307/1131308
- Geertz, H. (1961). *The Javanese family: A study of kinship and socialization*. New York, NY: Free Press of Glencoe.
- Hamel, K. (2023). An exploration of parenting styles, cultural values, and infant development in a sample of Latin American immigrants in Canada. *Infant Mental Health Journal, 44*(2), 319–334. doi:10.1002/imhj.22035
- Huang, L., Wu, W., & Yang, F. (2024). Parenting style and subjective well-being in children and youth: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Reports*. doi:10.1177/00332941241256883
- Kim, S. Y., Wang, Y., Orozco-Lapray, D., Shen, Y., & Murtuza, M. (2013). Does “tiger parenting” exist? parenting profiles of Chinese Americans and adolescent developmental outcomes. *Asian American Journal of Psychology, 4*(1), 7–18. doi:10.1037/a0030612

- Maccoby, E. E., & Martin, J. A. (1983). Socialization in the context of the family: Parent-child interaction. In P. H. Mussen & E. M. Hetherington (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology* (Vol. 4, pp. 1–101). New York, NY: Wiley.
- Mesman, J., Van IJzendoorn, M. H., & Sagi-Schwartz, A. (2016). Cross-cultural patterns of attachment: Universal and contextual dimensions. In J. Cassidy & P. R. Shaver (Eds.), *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical applications* (3rd ed., pp. 852–877). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Rudy, D., & Grusec, J. E. (2006). Authoritarian parenting in individualist and collectivist groups: Associations with maternal emotion and cognition and children's self-esteem. *Journal of Family Psychology, 20*(1), 68–78. doi: 10.1037/0893-3200.20.1.68
- Sahithya, B. R., Manohari, S. M., & Vijaya, R. (2019). Parenting styles and its impact on children: A cross-cultural review with a focus on India. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture, 22*(4), 357–383. doi:10.1080/13674676.2019.1594178
- Steinberg, L., Elmen, J. D., & Mounts, N. S. (1989). Authoritative parenting, psychosocial maturity, and academic success among adolescents. *Child Development, 60*(6), 1424–1436. doi:10.2307/1130932
- Tseng, V., & Fuligni, A. J. (2000). Parent-adolescent language use and relationships among immigrant families with East Asian, Filipino, and Latin American backgrounds. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 62*(2), 465–476. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.00465
- Wierzbicka, A. (1997). *Understanding cultures through their key words: English, Russian, Polish, German, and Japanese*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.