

An analysis of politeness strategies in the comments section of a travel blog

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the politeness strategies used in the comment sections of travel-related discussions within the Reddit community r/travel. The research aims to identify the types of politeness strategies applied by users in online interactions. This study employed a qualitative descriptive method based on the politeness theory proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson, which classifies politeness strategies into bald-on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. The data were collected from publicly accessible comments on selected travel-related posts in r/travel and analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that all four politeness strategies appear in the data, with positive politeness emerging as the most dominant strategy. This indicates that users tend to create friendly and supportive interactions while discussing travel experiences and recommendations. Negative politeness is used to soften suggestions and disagreements, while bald-on record strategies are applied for direct communication. Off-record strategies appear least frequently and are mainly used for indirect criticism or implied meaning. The study concludes that politeness strategies play an important role in maintaining respectful communication in online travel discussions.

Keyword: politeness strategies; pragmatics; reddit; travel discourse; online communication

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1. INTRODUCTION

Language plays a crucial role in human interaction because it enables individuals to communicate ideas, emotions, and intentions effectively. In digital communication, language is not only used to exchange information but also to maintain social relationships among users. The emergence of social media and online discussion platforms has significantly transformed the way people communicate, especially through written interactions in comment sections. Online users often employ various linguistic strategies to express agreement, criticism, appreciation, or suggestions while attempting to maintain politeness in communication. One important aspect of linguistic study related to this phenomenon is politeness strategies.

Politeness strategies refer to communicative actions used by speakers to minimize potential threats to the interlocutor's face during interaction. The concept of politeness was extensively developed by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson (1987), who proposed that speakers apply different strategies to maintain harmonious social interaction. According to their theory, politeness strategies are divided into four major categories: bald-on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. These strategies are commonly found in both spoken and written communication, including online interactions on social media platforms and discussion forums.

In recent years, online communities have become an important field for linguistic research because they provide authentic examples of naturally occurring communication. One of the most active online discussion platforms is Reddit, which allows users to participate in topic-based communities known as subreddits. Among these communities, r/travel is widely used by travelers to share experiences, recommendations, travel stories, and opinions regarding destinations around the world. The comment sections in travel-related posts contain rich linguistic interactions in which users express support, disagreement, advice, humor, and criticism using different politeness strategies.

The communication patterns found in travel blog comment sections are particularly interesting because users come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Cultural differences may influence how individuals interpret politeness and construct responses in online discussions. According to Geoffrey Leech (2014), politeness is closely related to maintaining social harmony and avoiding conflict during interaction. In online communication, the absence of face-to-face interaction may increase the possibility of misunderstanding, making politeness strategies even more important for sustaining respectful communication among users.

Several previous studies have examined politeness strategies in online communication. For example, research conducted by Setiawan & Sulthan (2025) found that positive politeness strategies were dominant in social media interactions because users tended to create solidarity and friendliness in online discussions. Similarly, Salam & Jufry (2026) reported that internet users often employ indirect language and humor as forms of politeness to reduce potential conflict in comment sections. However, studies specifically focusing on politeness strategies in travel-related online communities remain limited, particularly within Reddit travel discussions.

The present study aims to analyze the types of politeness strategies used by users in the comment sections of travel-related posts in the r/travel community. This study focuses on identifying how users express opinions politely while interacting with others in discussions about travel experiences and recommendations. By applying the theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), this research seeks to categorize the linguistic forms of politeness strategies appearing in the comments. This study is significant both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it contributes to the field of pragmatics, particularly studies related to politeness strategies in digital communication. Practically, the findings may help internet users understand the importance of maintaining politeness in online interactions, especially in multicultural communities. In addition, this research may serve as a reference for future researchers interested in analyzing language use on online discussion platforms.

Finally, this research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of how politeness strategies are employed in online travel discussions and how these strategies contribute to maintaining effective communication among users. Since online communication continues to grow rapidly, examining politeness in digital interaction becomes increasingly relevant to understanding modern language behavior in virtual communities.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

A. Research Design

This research employed a qualitative descriptive design. Qualitative research is appropriate for analyzing linguistic phenomena because it focuses on understanding meanings, interpretations, and social interactions expressed through language. According to Creswell (2017), qualitative research aims to explore and understand social or human problems by analyzing words and detailed perspectives from participants. In this study, the qualitative approach was used to identify and describe the politeness strategies found in the comment sections of travel-related discussions on Reddit.

A descriptive qualitative method was considered suitable because the research focused on interpreting language use rather than measuring numerical data. The study examined how users applied politeness strategies in online communication and how these strategies reflected interpersonal relationships among users in digital interaction. The researcher categorized the comments based on the politeness strategy theory proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson (1987), namely bald-on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies.

B. Data Source

The data source of this research was taken from Reddit, particularly the r/travel community. Reddit is an online discussion platform where users can share opinions, experiences, and information related to various topics. The r/travel community specifically focuses on travel experiences, travel recommendations, tourism discussions, and destination reviews from users around the world.

The subjects of this research were the users of the r/travel community who participated in discussions through comment sections. Meanwhile, the object of this research was travel-related posts with publicly visible comment sections, where users expressed their opinions, suggestions, criticism, and experiences regarding travel topics. The comments were analyzed based on the politeness strategies used by the commenters in their interactions.

The researcher selected several travel-related posts containing active discussions and a significant number of comments. Only English-language comments were included in the analysis to maintain consistency

in data interpretation. Comments containing irrelevant content such as advertisements, spam, or deleted messages were excluded from the data.

C. *Technique of Data Collection*

The data in this research were collected using documentation and observation techniques. According to Sugiyono (2017), documentation is a method of collecting data from written records, texts, or documents relevant to the research topic. In this study, the researcher documented comments from selected travel-related posts in the r/travel community.

Several steps were conducted during the data collection process. First, the researcher visited the r/travel subreddit and identified travel-related posts with active public comment sections. Second, the researcher selected comments that contained interactions among users, such as opinions, advice, responses, criticism, or appreciation. Third, the researcher copied and compiled the comments into a data sheet for analysis. Finally, the researcher classified the comments based on preliminary indications of politeness strategies.

To ensure the validity of the data, the researcher repeatedly read the comments and selected comments relevant to the objectives of the study. The researcher also focused on naturally occurring communication to obtain authentic linguistic data from real online interactions.

D. *Technique of Data Analysis*

The data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman (1994), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and simplified the collected comments by focusing only on comments containing politeness strategies.

Next, in the data display stage, the selected comments were organized into categories based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategy theory. The researcher classified each comment into one of the four politeness strategy categories: bald-on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategy. The categorized data were then presented in tables to facilitate analysis and interpretation.

Finally, in the conclusion drawing stage, the researcher interpreted the findings and identified the dominant politeness strategies used by users in the comment sections. The researcher also analyzed how these strategies contributed to maintaining interaction and communication among users in the online travel community.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. *Results*

This section presents the findings of the analysis of politeness strategies used by users in the comment sections of travel-related posts in the r/travel community. The analysis was based on the politeness strategy theory proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson (1987), which classifies politeness strategies into four categories: bald-on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. The researcher analyzed 100 selected comments taken from several travel-related discussions. The comments contained various forms of interaction, such as giving advice, expressing agreement, sharing experiences, criticizing opinions, and responding to travel recommendations. The findings showed that all four politeness strategies were used by users in online discussions, although some strategies appeared more frequently than others.

Table 1. Frequency of Politeness Strategies Used in the Comment Sections

No	Politeness Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
1	Bald-on Record	18	18%
2	Positive Politeness	46	46%
3	Negative Politeness	24	24%
4	Off-Record	12	12%
Total		100	100%

Table 1 shows that positive politeness was the most frequently used strategy, appearing in 46 comments or 46% of the total data. This finding indicates that users in the r/travel community tended to create friendly and supportive interactions while discussing travel experiences. Positive politeness strategies were commonly used to express agreement, appreciation, encouragement, and solidarity among users.

Negative politeness strategies appeared in 24 comments or 24% of the data. This strategy was generally used when users gave suggestions, corrections, or disagreements indirectly to avoid offending others. Users often employed polite expressions such as "I think," "maybe," or "perhaps" to soften their opinions and

maintain respectful interaction. Bald-on record strategies were found in 18 comments or 18% of the data. These strategies were usually used when users gave direct advice or urgent information related to travel recommendations. Although the comments were direct, they were generally accepted within the context of online discussions because users focused on efficiency and clarity of communication.

Off-record strategies appeared least frequently, with only 12 comments or 12% of the total data. This strategy involved indirect expressions, hints, humor, or sarcasm that required interpretation from readers. Users applied off-record strategies mainly when expressing criticism or dissatisfaction indirectly.

Table 2. Examples of Politeness Strategies Found in the Data

Politeness Strategy	Example of Comment	Analysis
Bald-on Record	“Book your hotel early. Prices increase quickly.”	The user gives direct advice without mitigation.
Positive Politeness	“That’s an amazing place! You’ll definitely enjoy the experience.”	The comment shows support and friendliness toward another user.
Negative Politeness	“I think you might want to avoid traveling there during the rainy season.”	The user softens the advice using indirect language.
Off-Record	“Well, some tourists learned that lesson the hard way.”	The comment indirectly implies criticism or warning.

Table 2 presents examples of politeness strategies identified in the comment sections. The examples demonstrate how users applied different linguistic strategies depending on the context and communicative purpose of the interaction. Positive politeness strategies were mainly characterized by compliments, expressions of agreement, and supportive language. For example, users frequently used phrases such as “great idea,” “sounds wonderful,” or “you should definitely try it” to create a sense of solidarity and friendliness in the discussion.

Negative politeness strategies were identified through indirect suggestions and cautious expressions. Users often attempted to respect the autonomy of others by avoiding overly direct statements. This strategy reflected users’ awareness of maintaining politeness even in online interactions where participants came from different cultural backgrounds.

Meanwhile, bald-on record strategies were commonly used in situations requiring concise and clear communication, particularly when users shared practical travel advice. In contrast, off-record strategies were often associated with humor, sarcasm, or implied criticism, requiring readers to interpret the intended meaning beyond the literal expression.

Overall, the findings indicate that politeness strategies play an important role in maintaining communication within online travel discussions. The dominance of positive politeness suggests that users in the r/travel community generally attempt to create harmonious and supportive interactions despite the anonymous nature of online communication.

B. Discussion

The findings of this study show that politeness strategies are widely used in the comment sections of travel-related discussions within the r/travel community. The dominance of positive politeness strategies indicates that users generally attempt to maintain friendly interaction and build solidarity, even in an anonymous online environment. This aligns with the view of politeness as a tool for maintaining social harmony, as proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson (1987), who emphasize that speakers use politeness strategies to protect both their own and others’ “face” in interaction.

The high frequency of positive politeness strategies suggests that users in online travel discussions prioritize social connection over conflict. Expressions of agreement, encouragement, compliments, and shared enthusiasm were commonly found in the data. This reflects the nature of travel discourse, where users often exchange experiences, recommendations, and emotional impressions of destinations. In such contexts, positive politeness functions as a means of building rapport and strengthening community engagement.

Negative politeness strategies also appeared significantly in the data, showing that users are aware of the need to respect others’ opinions and autonomy. These strategies were typically expressed through hedging, indirect suggestions, and careful wording. This finding supports the idea that online communication, despite its informal nature, still requires linguistic politeness to avoid potential misunderstandings or interpersonal conflict. According to Geoffrey Leech (2014), politeness plays a crucial role in reducing friction and maintaining conversational harmony, especially in diverse communicative settings such as global online communities.

Bald-on record strategies were less dominant but still present in the dataset. These strategies were mainly used when users provided direct travel advice, warnings, or factual information. In the context of online forums such as Reddit, directness is often acceptable because communication is goal-oriented and users seek quick and practical responses. However, the relatively lower frequency of this strategy indicates that users still tend to balance directness with politeness considerations.

Off-record strategies were the least frequently used. This suggests that indirectness, such as hints, sarcasm, or implied meanings, is less preferred in travel-related discussions where clarity is important. However, when used, off-record strategies often served to express criticism or disagreement in a less confrontational manner. This reflects users' effort to avoid direct conflict while still conveying evaluative opinions.

The findings of this research have several important implications. Theoretically, this study supports Brown and Levinson's politeness theory by demonstrating its applicability in modern digital communication environments. It confirms that politeness strategies remain relevant even on anonymous online platforms such as Reddit. Practically, the results highlight the importance of maintaining polite communication in online communities. Users in travel forums benefit from polite interaction because it encourages cooperation, trust, and the sharing of useful travel information. For online community moderators and platform designers, understanding politeness strategies can help in developing better communication guidelines to promote respectful discourse.

This study contributes novelty by focusing specifically on politeness strategies in travel-related discussions within the r/travel community. While previous research has examined politeness in social media or general online communication, limited studies have explored how politeness functions in travel-focused online communities. Additionally, this research highlights how cultural diversity among users influences linguistic strategies in a global digital environment, making it a relevant contribution to pragmatics and online discourse studies.

4. CONCLUSION

This study analyzed politeness strategies used in the comment sections of travel-related posts within the r/travel community based on the framework proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson (1987). The findings show that all four politeness strategies—bald-on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies—are present in the data, with varying frequencies. Positive politeness emerged as the most dominant strategy, indicating that users tend to maintain friendly and supportive interactions in online travel discussions.

The dominance of positive politeness suggests that the nature of travel-related communication encourages users to build solidarity, share experiences, and express appreciation toward others. Even in an anonymous digital environment, users generally attempt to maintain harmonious relationships by using encouraging and friendly expressions. This reflects the social function of language in sustaining community engagement within online platforms.

Negative politeness and bald-on record strategies also play important roles in maintaining effective communication. Negative politeness is used to soften suggestions or disagreements, while bald-on record strategies are applied when clarity and efficiency are prioritized. Meanwhile, off-record strategies appear less frequently, indicating that indirect communication is less preferred in contexts where users seek clear travel-related information and advice.

Overall, the study confirms that politeness strategies remain highly relevant in digital communication and contribute significantly to maintaining respectful interaction in online communities. The findings also demonstrate that online users, despite the anonymous nature of internet communication, still show awareness of politeness norms in social interaction. This research is expected to contribute to the field of pragmatics and serve as a reference for future studies on language use in online communication platforms.

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