

The Politeness Strategies Found in @kulinersby's Instagram Account in Promoting Culinary Businesses

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to find out the types of politeness₂ that are found in @kulinersby's promotion culinary business promotion, and from there, the comments that are included as politeness₁. The analysis is based on the theories of Brown and Levinson (1987) and Watts (2003). Watts (2003) states that what is theoretically considered as politeness (politeness₂) in Brown and Levinson (1987) may not be the case in reality (politeness₁). This research is a qualitative, content analysis study, which data are limited to video-based posts, with the comments related only to how the account's administrator promotes culinary businesses. By using both politeness theories in the analysis, the writers find that there are some similarities and differences, notably in expressing positive politeness. Some comments using jokes which are considered as positive politeness in politeness₂, for instance, become sarcasm, criticism, insult, and satire in politeness₁. In conclusion, despite the lasting influence of Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, it still has some notable flaws, notably with universality and multiple interpretations of the strategies by different individuals, among others.

Keywords: Instagram; politeness strategies; politeness₁; politeness₂.

INTRODUCTION

Politeness strategy has been a linguistic issue often discussed in terms of its application inside the world society. Most famously developed by Brown & Levinson (1987), who believed that politeness is universal or is widely accepted by nations and cultures around the world (as stated by Watts, 2003, p. 12), the theory of politeness strategy had played an influential role in the society until the end of the 20th century, when numerous linguists began to examine their arguments on many other contexts and settings. One of the most notable critiques of this theory, Watts (2003), who calls Brown & Levinson's (1987) notion of linguistic politeness as **politeness₂**, claims that what is considered as politeness by Brown and Levinson (1987) may not be the case in reality (p. 12) because different society has different standards on how people's speech and action are considered polite. Watts (2003) states that politeness itself is very dependent on the interpreters or the witnesses (called as **politeness₁**). Thus, readers need to judge what is considered as polite or impolite based on their respective understandings (p. 9).

This problem not only applies to oral communication but also relates to written communication, notably

social media (in this case, Instagram). As Pratama (2019) has argued, as time changes, so has politeness, meaning that the standards of the previous century may not be the same as the ones in this century (p. 21). As society has entered globalization, the traditional way of communication is also changed, from direct face-to-face to mediated communication. Brown and Levinson's (1987) definition of 'face' here is no longer related to the physical face or immediate show-off of emotion, but 'face' has to do with the people's inner self, specifically their pride and identity. The way people deliver their comments towards something (i.e.: being direct or indirect, or formal or informal) greatly affects the 'face': their reputation and self-image put on the line.

Instagram has been one of the most popular forms of social media in this century, as noted by Kuligowski (2020) that it has one billion users per 2020 (para. 8). It is also a frequently used social media for culinary business promotion, as proven by Gabrielli (2020) that 30% of the millennials avoid restaurants that have "a weak Instagram presence" (para. 2). In Indonesia, one of the most notable culinary business promoters is @kulinersby, who has more than 6,000 posts and 420,000 followers (Kuliner Surabaya, n.d.). Established in 2014 as the first reviewer and promoter of

culinary businesses in Surabaya, it is also a recommended account for those who wish to enjoy Surabaya's cuisine, while looking for discounts and giveaways as well (Kuliner Surabaya, n.d.). The commenters in @kulinersby's Instagram are from various cultural backgrounds; therefore, the idea of politeness might be different among the commenters. This is as stated by Watts (2003): different people may have different evaluation on how polite or impolite a person is, based on their respective culture (as stated in O'Keeffe, Clancy, & Adolphs, 2011). Thus, @kulinersby's Instagram account has been chosen as the object of this research with the focuses on finding the types of politeness₂ in the comments concerning @kulinersby's promotion and which comments included in politeness₂ are considered as politeness₁.

The writers hope that the findings of this research can help people to understand that politeness is not to be simply understood linguistically since people need to look behind the context of the sentences uttered (the true intention behind the opinion). There may be some similarities in terms of the intention behind what a person is saying to other people, but in some occasions, that person may have a hidden intention or objective behind his or her opinion.

This research uses the framework of Watts (2003), who contrasts two different definitions of politeness. Politeness₁ is a situation where the involved speakers interpret the information received as either socially acceptable or unacceptable actions; thus, it depends on humans' capability to conceptualize their own definition of politeness (Watts, 2003, p. 11). On the other hand, politeness₂ is regarded as the conceptualized and universal definition of politeness, just like what Brown and Levinson (1987) have explained earlier (Watts, 2003, p. 49). To compliment Watts' (2003) framework, Magnis-Suseno's (2003) elaboration of Indonesian (Javanese) culture is chosen to support Watts' (2003) definition of politeness₁.

The reason why the writers chose Javanese culture as a representative of Indonesian culture was that the account itself, @kulinersby, represented many Javanese followers since the account promoted culinary businesses in Surabaya, East Java. The commenters were from adult age groups, mostly between 18 and 55 years old. Although the exact identity of each person involved was unknown since they did not provide or share any private information in Instagram for the sake of their privacy or personal safety, most of them were from Java, shown from most of the Javanese words they wrote the comments in the data.

In defining linguistic politeness (politeness₂), Brown and Levinson (1987) divide politeness strategies into four: bald on record, positive, negative, and off-record (pp. 69-70). However, only positive and negative politeness strategies, based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) face-saving view, are applied in this research because they have the most strategies that are related to the digital society, as proven by Maricic (as stated in Yus, 2011, p. 276), who remodeled Brown and Levinson's (1987) elaboration in the concept of digital communication. Positive politeness simply aims to minimize the threat to the positive face by having both the speaker and the hearer sharing the same wants, while negative politeness targets to minimize the threat to the negative face by having the speaker distancing himself or herself from the hearer's face as a form of respect (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 70). Threatening the positive face means that the speaker does not want to have the hearer's wants, while threatening the negative face means that the speaker, intentionally or unintentionally, threatens the hearer's freedom (Brown & Levinson, p. 65).

Meanwhile, the folk interpretation of politeness (politeness₁) is solely relied on how individuals interpret politeness based on the norms in their cultures, whether it is considered as polite or impolite (Watts, 2003, p. 11). Since different cultures may result in different interpretations and many of the participants in @kulinersby are Javanese, as shown in many of the Javanese terms used in their written communication, Magnis-Suseno's (2003) principle of Javanese culture is used as the model for politeness₁. Like other Eastern cultures, Javanese culture is indirect, collective, and non-confrontational, as shown by Magnis-Suseno (2003) in his book, *Etika Jawa (Javanese Ethics)*, in which he mentions that one of the two principles in Indonesian (Javanese) culture is conflict avoidance (*kerukunan*). There are two dimensions in the *rukun* principle that should be maintained. The first one is it must not disturb the existing harmony in the society, but it must stay as what it is, as calm as the surface of the sea (Magnis-Suseno, 2003, p. 39). In line with his first point, the second one is it does not concern with the internal condition (mental state) of human beings, but it concerns how people interact with each other within the society (Magnis-Suseno, 2003, p. 40).

To prevent direct conflicts, Indonesian (Javanese) people must be able to politely expressing a desirable 'yes (*inggil*)' while avoiding a direct 'no (*mboten*)' (Magnis-Suseno, 2003, p. 42). In achieving that consensus, participants are demanded to let go off their own ego or personal interests. It means that expressions such as "I think (*raos kula*) or "maybe (*mbok menawi*)"

are to be avoided at all cost (Magnis-Suseno, 2003, pp. 41-42) because those expressions indicate suddenness and spontaneity, showing that the speaker is immature (Magnis-Suseno, 2003, p. 42). In addition, direct answers (in the form of revealing facts) must also be avoided to keep the harmonious nature of discussion so that the discussion can expand further (a variation of *éthok-éthok*/pretension) (Magnis-Suseno, 2003, p. 44). However, when a conflict erupts, then *jothakan* (a silent protest by not doing anything, with the hopes that conflicts can be resolved) is the last way to solve the problem (Magnis-Suseno, 2003, p. 56).

Besides giving vague or indirect answers, Magnis-Suseno's (2003) *éthok-éthok*/pretension is used in reacting to undesirable things, especially towards people other than their own core family. This form of 'high' and 'positive' art is described by Geertz (1981) when he reports a statement of an informant, saying that one of the village's principal candidates never expresses what in his head is (as stated in Magnis-Suseno, 2003, p. 43). When being visited by someone he hates, the candidate always expresses his warm smile (Geertz, 1981, as stated in Magnis-Suseno, 2003, p. 43). When grieving over a deep sadness, he also smiles despite his broken heart (Geertz, 1981, as stated in Magnis-Suseno, 2003, p. 43). This shows that the application of *éthok-éthok*/pretension aims to keep the harmony level mildly stable while conceiving all the emotions inside effectively (Geertz, 1981, as stated in Magnis-Suseno, 2003, p. 43). The response given by the candidate above perfectly describes Watts' (2003) concept of politeness₁.

This study is conducted to figure out the types of politeness₂ found in @kulinersby's promotion of culinary business sellers. Moreover, this study also aims to discover which comments included in the politeness₂ are considered as politeness₁. The first problem deals with linguistic politeness, which is represented by the theory of Brown and Levinson (1987), while the second one deals with Watts' (2003) construction on politeness, supported by Magnis-Suseno's (2003) explanation on Javanese culture.

Politeness and business promotion (persuasion) can be related when there is a bridging third party: the customer. While persuasion is the art of convincing people to do an action that the persuader believes is right, politeness is the way we use our language in society, meaning that politeness concerns more on norms and ethics in language. This is proven in a study conducted by Laksmiati, Maharani, and Candra (2020) who clearly explained the phenomena. Based on their findings concerning a hotel reputation, when the

customer wrote that the food and beverages served were in great quality, then it would give judgement to the public that the price was worth the quality of the products, therefore, helping the hotel to reduce the damage to its reputation or 'face' (Laksmiati, Maharani, and Candra, 2020, p. 81). It would be a completely different matter if, for example, the guests did not state anything about the quality of the products, affecting other customers' judgement that the restaurant might be the hotel's weakness because it was overpriced, damaging the hotel's 'face'.

METHODS

This research applied a qualitative research method to collect, analyze, and interpret the data as supported by Creswell (2002, p. 21), particularly in determining which comments were included as politeness₂ and politeness₁. The research design was content analysis since the data were not taken from people directly, but from texts recorded in social media. The sources of data, which were taken from March 1, 2021 to March 15, 2021 were taken from all the published comments from the posts of an Instagram (IG) account: @kulinersby. Since there were many posts, the writers limited only to video-based posts which had a lot of people's comments (100 comments or more) on @kulinersby's culinary business promotion. The writers only focused on sentences as the unit of analysis. Although sentences consisted of a subject, a verb, and an object, there were some situations where a single word was just enough to be considered a sentence because the subject and the object could be understood contextually (i.e.: the words "Go!" and "No!")

In executing the research, the writers simply acted as an observer, not participant since the data had been present for quite some time (ranged between days to even years). Moreover, the writers also conducted a qualitative research method to break a belief claimed by Brown and Levinson (1987) who argumentatively emphasized the universal nature of politeness, and to support Watts' (2003) point of view which countered their argument by saying it was not the case. This was based on Morse's (1991) elaboration on the minimum conditions to execute qualitative research, one of which was that the existing theories did not comply with the individuals or groups that are being studied (as mentioned in Creswell, 2002, p. 23).

In doing the research, first, the writers searched for a public or open-access Instagram account (discussion forum: @kulinersby). After joining the public forum, the writers scrolled thoroughly through the forum's

posts and discussions. The focus of the data centered not only on the public's comments towards the promotion, but also the responses of the promoter or the owner (owners) of the promoted business, if available. The writers planned on collecting twenty comments from 15 posts which had 100 comments or more from the corresponding account. They were selected because they represented the contemporary issues of politeness in the 21st century, such as the universality of politeness, politeness and digital society, and politeness in Eastern (specifically Southeast Asian) culture. From March 1-15, 2021, the data were collected by taking screenshots containing all the published comments in the selected posts which were already available in the account for at least three months before selecting twenty samples, the ones that are related to business promotion, as well as the problems being solved. The main reason why the data collection was allocated for only two weeks was to give time for the writers to analyze and interpret the data as well.

A simplified table summarizing the findings of the research was provided to make the findings more understandable for the readers. The table consisted of two main columns: "Politeness₂" and "Politeness₁". Under the former column were the sub-columns "Positive Politeness Strategy", "Negative Politeness Strategy", and "Strategy". The sub-column "Positive Politeness Strategy" contained the major strategy CCG (claiming common grounds). Meanwhile, the "Negative Politeness Strategy" contained the major strategies found: CI (being conventionally indirect), APA (avoiding presumption or assumption), and CSW (communicate speaker's want). Each of the major strategies of the Positive and Negative Politeness consisted of some strategies and these strategies were noted in the "Strategy" column next to "Negative Politeness Strategy", explaining which strategy the commenter applied in writing his or her comments. The writers noted the strategies in each of the appropriate columns.

The other main column, "Politeness₁", explained the similarities or the differences of the strategies with the concept of the Indonesian (Javanese) people. The notes were not the types of strategies of politeness₁, but they represented the true intentions of the commenters in publishing their comments. The intentions might be similar or different from what Brown and Levinson (1987) had expected. A note was attached below it, explaining each abbreviation the writers used in the table.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Findings of the Analysis: Similarities and Differences between Politeness₂ and Politeness₁

Politeness ₂		Politeness ₁
Positive Politeness Strategy	Negative Politeness Strategy	
CCG	Intensifying interest to hearer	Similarities: Intensifying interest to hearer, praise Differences: Criticism, sarcasm, indirect persuasion, expression of hate or frustration, complaint
CCG	Avoiding disagreement: Token agreement	Similarities: A soft criticism Differences: Praise, warning, indirect persuasion, protest, indirectly stating the FTA as the general rule
CCG	Joking	Differences: Sarcasm, satirizing, criticism, insult
	CI Using the word 'please'	Differences: Criticism behind request
	APA Hedging	Similarities: Protest Differences: Praise, criticism
	CSW State the FTA as the general rule	Similarities: Criticism and giving evidence to support criticism
	CSW Impersonalizing speaker and hearer	Differences: Criticism behind request

Note: CCG (Claiming Common Grounds), CI (Conventionally Indirect), APA (Avoiding Presumption or Assumption), CSW (Communicate Speaker's Want)

As seen in Table 1, the summary of the findings, politeness₂ found in the analyzed data contains both positive and negative politeness strategies. As stated by Kádár & Haugh (2013) and Brown and Levinson (1987), positive politeness strategies are used to satisfy one's desire by being at the same ground/position/wants as the hearer's and are used to build friendly relationships, even between strangers. This is the same as the case in the comments concerning @kulinersby's promotion of the culinary businesses. The commenters use positive politeness strategies because they want to make themselves a part of the community or discussion forum, even though they may not follow the account.

In Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, there are three types of positive politeness strategies: claiming common grounds, conveying that both the speaker and hearer are cooperators, and fulfilling the hearer's want for something; however, the commenters, who are mostly Javanese people, only use claiming common grounds.

It is because they want to convince others about their belief/opinion that the commented products are indeed worth trying, that is, by sharing their own experiences while highlighting the product's uniqueness through their stories. Besides, the commenters use various strategies of claiming common grounds, namely: intensifying interest to hearer (which is done via 'making a good story' or exaggerating certain facts); avoiding disagreement (such as expressing suggestions/a soft disagreement towards other people's belief, saying that the product people consumed is good, but could be improved better to balance the taste); and joking. These findings show that the commenters like to stress on the importance of friendly relationship among the community, which is in line with Magnis-Suseno's (2003) belief about Javanese people who like having friendly relationship and are indirect in expressing their rejection towards a request.

Each strategy of politeness₂ has similarities and differences with politeness₁. Intensifying interest to hearer in Politeness₂, for example, is the same as in politeness₁ and is considered as a praise. However, in politeness₁, intensifying interest to hearer can also be considered as criticism, sarcasm, indirect persuasion, expression of hate or frustration, and complaint. Avoiding disagreement in politeness₂ is similar to a soft criticism in politeness₁, but can be as praises, warning, indirect persuasion, protest, and indirectly stating the FTA as the general rule. Joking in politeness₂ becomes sarcasm, satirizing, criticism, and insult in politeness₁.

Besides positive politeness strategies in politeness₂, negative politeness strategies are found as well, namely: CI (Conventionally Indirect), APA (Avoiding Presumption or Assumption), CSW (Communicate Speaker's Want) as seen in Table 1. Similar to the positive politeness strategies of politeness₂, the negative politeness strategies of politeness₂ have both similarities and differences with politeness₁ as seen in Table 1. All of the findings concerning the politeness strategies and the similarities and differences between politeness₂ and politeness₁ as the focus of this study are discussed in the following examples.

Comment 1: @hadiiprnm: *Pecel Rawon* (Javanese salad with peanut sauce and black soup)

The commenter @hadiiprnm posts his comment in a post which promotes *pecel rawon*, food originated from Banyuwangi, East Java. Unfortunately, the promoter (@kulinersby) mistakenly tells the audience that *pecel rawon* is a dish from Surabaya, East Java. Unknowing the fact that she actually promotes another kind of East Javanese cuisine, many people think that she only bases her knowledge on the widespread popularity in Surabaya and she rarely travel outside

Surabaya. Clearly this mistake seems obvious, but it is what makes her video becomes one of the most memorable and most actively discussed in her Instagram account.

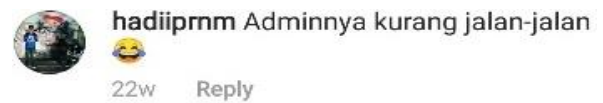


Figure 1. The Comment of @hadiiprnm

Source: Kuliner Surabaya [@kulinersby]. (2020, November 28). *PECEL PAKE KUAH RAWON?* [Javanese salad with peanut sauce and black soup?] [Video]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CIIwWSyFL4/>

In the context of linguistic politeness, when the commenter says "*adminnya kurang jalan-jalan*" (the admin lacks travelling), he thinks that the promoter's lack of knowledge towards Javanese cuisine, particularly East Javanese cuisine, is ridiculous since everybody knows that *pecel rawon* is from Banyuwangi, not Surabaya. Another thing that makes him think it is a ridiculous mistake is because she 'partly fails' her job as a promoter due to the misinformation. As a promoter, he expects that the person researches and analyzes the product carefully before promoting it, and that includes the origins of the product (i.e.: when it is created, where it originates from, and who creates it). When a promoter is careless in doing that task, it means that the promoter does not do his or her job properly because it is his or her job to make sure that the product is described and its uniqueness is highlighted. In other words, the promoter here has already made a rookie mistake.

Interestingly, instead of directly criticizing the promoter, he decides to use humor with the hopes to ease the promoter's 'face', especially after receiving many comments highlighting the mistake she has made. The phrase "*kurang jalan-jalan*" (lacks travelling) indicates an indirect suggestion that she needs to travel and find out more about Javanese cuisine in general, specifically East Javanese cuisine. This also implicitly indicates the commenter's willingness to help the promoter to introduce her to the cuisine of East Java, especially the ones from Banyuwangi. Thus by using humor as a positive politeness strategy, @hadiiprnm intends to help the promoter to improve her knowledge.

In the context of politeness₁, however, there is a sharp contrast. Analyzing the context of the comment more critically, he does not merely intend to ridicule the promoter's mistake. He is actually criticizing her mistake, and her ignorance towards the truth. He thinks that in doing promotion, no matter how good a product is, if the promoter does not execute a thorough market or product research, then it can endanger the consumers as there is a high risk that they can be

tricked. Although @kulinersby does not have the intention to do so, still her mistake can be considered as careless. Luckily enough, many people who realize the mistake she has done immediately correct her. Her silence in responding to the issue shows her silent agreement that she has made a big mistake in promoting the business.

It has been explained by Magnis-Suseno (2003) earlier that *rukun* principle emphasizes its participants to cease any forms of direct conflict, and one way to do so is by applying *éthok-éthok*/pretension. Joking is a good example of *éthok-éthok*/pretension because the strategy can be used to deliver indirect criticism (normally in the form of satire or sarcasm). As shown in the phrase “*kurang jalan-jalan*” (lack of travelling), the commenter indirectly reprimands the promoter to make sure that she has adequate knowledge about the product she promotes before proceeding to publish her promotional video about the food stall and the product it sells. As a result, it can be concluded that the commenter's intention in delivering his comment is not to ease the promoter, but to actually criticize her carelessness.

Comment 2: @erna.w.auwwalina: *Lumpia* RKZ (RKZ Spring Rolls)

This commenter publishes her comment in @kulinersby's post that promotes a fried *lumpia* (*lumpia* or spring rolls) food stall. Selling near RKZ (a notable hospital in Surabaya), it receives mixed reviews as customers have different opinions on how the *lumpia* should taste like. One of the reviewers who thinks it is good, but not the best is @erna.w.auwwalina, who says “*sudaahh (sudah), tapi menurutku aq (aku) masih suka beli yg di taman bungkul*” (I have tried it, but I still prefer buying the one in Bungkul Park).



Figure 2. The Comment of @erna.w.auwwalina
Source: Kuliner Surabaya [@kulinersby]. (2021, February 8). LUMPIA TERKENAL DI SURABAYA [Well-known spring rolls in Surabaya] [Video]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CLBUkCOFzY-/>

Looking at her comments, she applies Brown and Levinson's (1987) strategy of avoiding disagreement (specifically token agreement). Normally, this strategy is used to give a soft criticism or suggestion to a person, hoping that the hearer listens to the comment and willingly improves the product's or service's quality,

in this case. The sentence structure for this strategy, which is “yes...but...”, resembles the true art of giving criticism since they have to be delivered in a constructive and friendly manner instead of going frontal and discouraging.

There are two reasons why she posts that comment. The first one is that she likes it and thinks it has some uniqueness that her favorite spring roll/*lumpia* does not have. In the case of culinary business, the unique points that differentiate one food seller from another are normally laid behind little details such as spice or seasoning mixture, cooking methods, or even presentation. Looking at @erna.w.auwwalina's comment, it is understood that she likes the food, but she still thinks the one in Bungkul Park is better.

The second possibility is she does not like the food, but does not dare to say it directly to avoid hurting the business' reputation. Though she does not exactly state the weak points of the product she has tried, by saying that another business can do it better, she thinks that the food she tries needs some improvements in order to be the most standout *lumpia* in Surabaya. This simply means that she disagrees with @kulinersby and the majority of the people that tells her that it is delicious, but she delivers her objection by stating that the business should have learnt from its competitors in other places in order to do better in the future. By avoiding direct disagreement with the majority of the commenters, she successfully avoids threatening the face of the business.

Interestingly, this form of disagreement expression is in line with a variation of *éthok-éthok*/pretension, a technique which Magnis-Suseno (2003) describes as a perfect example to execute the *rukun* (conflict avoidance) principle since it redeems all forms of direct conflict (p. 43). She says ‘*sudaahh*’ (I have already tried it), but stays neutral by not saying whether she likes it or not, and continues her statement by saying ‘*tapi menurutku aq (aku) masih suka beli yg di taman bungkul*’ (but for me I still prefer buying the one in Bungkul Park). By stating her personal preference, it is very clear that the product is not the most memorable one she has ever had. However, one question remains: if she says that one business does better than the other, then why she does not say something to make the other businesses produce food as good as her favorite food stall? This is where Javanese culture plays its role.

By applying *éthok-éthok* strategy, she successfully reduces further threats to the business' face. This way, she lets the business know that their product is good and different from other businesses, although it is not the best one. This is not an easy way to do since many

people tend to criticize the business directly with the hopes that the owner listens and produces foods they like. This decision, however, is a very authoritative way since even though there is a saying that ‘customers are always right’, eventually the one who has the rights to control the business is the owner. The customers are just serving their role as judges, not business owners.

Another interesting finding here is that there is a connecting line between the theories of first-wave approaches (in this case, Brown and Levinson’s (1987) theory) and the contemporary theories of the second-wave approaches (in this case, Watts’ (2003) theory, supported by the cultural theory of Magnis-Suseno (2003)). This means that as much as the linguists of the 21st century criticizes the weakness of the old theories, they still respect the theory and use it as an inspiration to develop their own models, including Watts (2003). The application of disagreement avoidance as an example to execute the Javanese technique of *éthok-éthok*/pretension is one good example to prove that the theories of first-wave approaches is still very influential in shaping the contemporary history of linguistics. This means that the framework of Brown and Levinson (1987), even though it is judged as highly subjective by many linguists today, is still applicable in some ways in executing the simpler, more understandable framework of Watts (2003). Thus, this comment is considered as another example of how politeness₂ and politeness₁ have similar intentions, with Brown and Levinson’s (1987) avoiding disagreement strategy can be utilized as a way to execute *éthok-éthok*/pretension.

Comment #3: @galeri_kembang_cantik: *Es Permen Karet (Gum-Flavored Ice)*

This person is the only one who notices a worker’s carelessness in obeying the health protocol during the COVID-19 pandemic. The worker, who is a server at a drink stand, only covers her mouth with her face mask, though the government regulation insists that both the mouth and the nose have to be covered. Ironically, besides @galeri_kembang_cantik, no one else gives comment regarding the problem.



Figure 3. @galeri_kembang_cantik’s comment towards the violation of health protocol (left)

Source: Kuliner Surabaya [@kulinersby]. (2021, February 4). ES PERMEN KARET [Gum-flavored ice] [Video]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CK3AHOpIhjj/>

The left figure above illustrates exactly how the worker violates the health protocol, and because of that, the commenter says “*hidungnya tutup masker donk yg ngaduk Es nya (esnya)... Virus masih bisa muncrat ke dalam es... Ya jd es covid de...*” (For the one mixing the ice, please cover your nose with mask. The virus can still spread into the ice. Yeah... It becomes COVID ice...). The comment is divided into two parts because it applies two politeness strategies at once. The first part contains the first and second sentence, which applies negative politeness strategy (by stating the face threatening act (FTA) as the general rule), while the second part that contains only the last sentence executes joking as a positive politeness strategy.

The first part stresses the importance of obeying the health protocol properly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The protocol (as the general rule) is everyone must wear a face mask when going outdoors, and that the face mask must cover both the mouth and the nose. When the worker disobeys the rule, then a deadly consequence can happen, as shown in the second sentence (“The virus can still spread into the ice.”). The commenter criticizes the worker’s recklessness not because it is the commenter’s standard or want that everybody has to wear a face mask, but it is because the government has established the rule. Consequently, the commenter has no choice but to support the government’s regulation by using it as a toll for executing FTA, although the commenter has no intention to do so.

In Javanese culture, however, this is seen as a breach of the *rukun* principle since it is a form of direct statement. When expressing a criticism or suggestion, it is expected that people deliver it in a polite manner, meaning that they have to deliver the criticism or suggestion without causing any threat to the hearer’s face. It has been mentioned by Magnis-Suseno (2003) that in order to maintain the existing harmony in the Javanese society, any forms of frontal or direct communication must be ceased at all cost (pp. 39-40). The way the commenter delivers the criticism by referring to the FTA can be considered as a form of direct communication because even though the commenter has a good intention to give a gentle reminder to the worker, the execution is almost like giving someone a harsh criticism despite the fact that the sentence is not structurally imperative. It can be seen clearly that stating an FTA as a general rule can be considered as a form of direct criticism in Javanese culture, which is against the *rukun*/conflict avoidance principle proposed by Magnis-Suseno (2003).

The second part of the comment has a completely different execution since it applies joking as a positive

politeness strategy, indicated by the words “*Es Covid*” (COVID Ice) which combines two existing facts: the product (gum-flavored ice) and the COVID-19 virus. Linguistically, the joke sounds funny. Combining two existing facts or events to make a new term is not actually a new technique to deliver humor, but it is still commonly used until now to help people to wonder what context and what issue the speaker is talking about. Sometimes, the new term can be puzzling, but when the hearer successfully decodes the meaning behind the term, it should be easy to understand the joke.

Humor or joking in Javanese culture is often seen as a way to criticize someone. This method, often called satire or sarcasm, is one of the politest and most indirect ways in delivering opinions since the intention is very implicit. When someone uses satire, it means the commenter has a problem that s/he wishes to let the hearer know and fix (i.e.: poor service or poor quality products). Instead of saying the problem directly in front of their face, they prefer to utilize humor in order to ‘camouflage’ their true intention, with the hopes that the receiver does not suffer any major threats to the face while understanding what issue the commenter intends to tell. If the receiver successfully decrypted the joke, then it is expected that the problem is solved immediately. Based on this explanation, it can be concluded that the commenter’s intention in politeness₂ (makes someone feel better) and politeness₁ (criticism through satirizing) is different.

Comment #4: @etlinda_intn: Chocolate Ice

This account is among the commenters who criticize a chocolate ice drink truck. Though it has established itself as one of the top selling drink trucks in Indonesia, today it has lost many of its loyal customers due to its wrong decision making. Its signature chocolate drink is now mixed with coconut milk, a decision which is met with many criticisms from customers, with many citing it tastes weird and causes sore throat. For that reason, this commenter says, “*ini buat org baeek tulung (tolong) yg bisa bikin es coklat itu penjualnya diajaaariiiiiinnnn ooo biar bisa enak dan ga seriiiiikkk soalnya kasian udh bukaa udh cari oghasilan (penghasilan) dari situuu...*” (For those who would be so kind, if you can make chocolate ice, please teach that seller so he can make it delicious and it does not cause sore throat because it is pathetic that he has already opened the business and gotten profit from there...). This comment is structurally one of the most complex since it applies two negative politeness strategies: being conventionally indirect and communicating speaker’s want (by impersonalizing the speaker and hearer).



Figure 4. @etlinda_intn's comment

Source: Kuliner Surabaya [@kulinersby]. (2020, November 8). NGE ES SIANG SIANG DULU YUK [Let's drink ice in the afternoon first] [Video]. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CHUdXqql_Fo/

The expressions she used at the start of her statement, “*ini buat org baeek tulung...*” (for those who would be so kind, please...), prove to be a good example in how to be direct without further damaging the business’ face. This indicates that she understands the difficulties the business is facing at that time and the adjustments it has to make for the business to survive. However, she insists that the business maintain its consistent quality in their products, just like what they did back then, and that having to adjust so many things is just not a strong reason for failing to meet the customers’ expectations. By using the word ‘please’, she shows her intention to indirectly go bald on record, meaning that she has a strong desire to do something, but at the same time restrains herself from heavily threatening the owner’s face.

Another interesting aspect from her comment is the way she impersonalizes the subject (the drink seller). In addition to being conventionally indirect (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 132), she further makes herself politer by avoiding the use of the pronouns ‘I’ and ‘you’, as seen in her request “*tulung (tolong) yg bisa bikin es coklat itu penjualnya diajaaariiiiiinnnn ooo biar bisa enak dan ga seriiiiikkk*” (those who can make chocolate ice, please teach the seller so he can make it delicious and not sore to the throat). Though she hates the drink, she still attempts to be very polite and to encourage in posting her comment since she does not want to hurt the seller’s reputation, especially because it has built its fame for years already. Her avoidance of using the pronouns ‘I’ and ‘you’ (the latter refers to the business) is not only what makes her comment sound indirect, but also more persuasive since she does not attempt to directly insult or hurt the business’ reputation. This is just one example of the variations explained by Brown and Levinson (1987), but this example is a solid evidence that the ‘impersonalizing speaker and hearer’ strategy can help in reducing further threat to the business’ face.

Both of those strategies are very important in building the concept of indirectness in Javanese culture since the combination of both being direct and communicating speaker’s want (by impersonalizing the speaker and

the hearer) represents the unique way of Javanese people in delivering their disagreement (polite ‘no’). In normal circumstances, people sharply say, “it is just not good enough!” or “it is very, very bizarre, and words just cannot explain how bad this is”. These expressions, however, are considered as very direct and impolite for Javanese people since those two sentences may consequently disturb the harmony the people have created in the society. Instead of going direct with a bald on record strategy, they make a complex structure of their own in delivering their ‘no’ answers by combining indirect answers and removing any ‘I’ factors to make it sound as less threatening (to the face) as possible. That is why the comment of @etlina_intn is actually a form of very polite criticism to the drink seller.

Comment #5: @hadigunawan168: Tahu Petis (Shrimp Paste Tofu)

This person posts his comment in a post promoting a *tahu petis* food stall, which is considered as one of the most popular tofu stalls in Surabaya, even though some commenters express their own preferences. However, unlike other commenters, this account only says, “*Ketok e enak ya*” (Well, I think it looks good), causing some thoughts that he may only assume about how good the product is since he only tells how good a product is without tasting it.



Figure 5. The Comment of @hadigunawan168
Source: Kuliner Surabaya [@kulinersby]. (2021, February 1). BUKAN TAHU PETIS BIASA! [Not an ordinary shrimp paste tofu!] [Video]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CKwAj4LFtFx/>

There is one word, however, that indicates his avoidance towards assumption or presumption: “*ketok e...ya*” (“Well, I think it looks...”). There are several reasons why he only compliments the physical appearance of the seemingly plain fried tofu. First, he has an allergy to soy beans, which is one of the most common forms of food allergies in the world. Second, he dislikes fried foods because it can immediately cause him to cough and get a sore throat, which again is a quiet common problem, notably in Indonesia. Third, which is more subjective comparing to the others, is that he dislikes *tahu petis* because he has a bad experience in eating it at another food stall before.

The arguments explained above may give some insight on why his comment avoids any direct assumption or presumption towards the product. However, in Javanese, this kind of hedging word is considered as a

form of directness since it shows that the speaker forcefully prioritize himself to be heard to the others. The word ‘*ketok e*’ is equivalent to the word ‘*mbok menawi*’ (*barangkali* or maybe), another word that indicates suddenness and spontaneity (Magnis-Suseno, 2003, pp. 41-42). It has been explained that this form of self-expression must be avoided at all cost because it not only displays a sudden, direct expression, but also shows signs of the speaker’s immaturity since he or she is not willing to let go of his or her ego in public discussion (Magnis-Suseno, 2003, pp. 41-42). This shows that even though he has a good intention of praising the product, the commenter does not really understand how to deliver a polite comment in the context of Javanese culture.

Some people, when it comes to buying certain products, are heavily dependent on the testimony of other customers about how good the product is. This common perception is called word of mouth promotion since it heavily relies on the opinion of the customers who has experience in trying the product. In the case of social media however, notably Instagram, not all commenters actually have the actual experience in buying or trying the product, especially when it comes to edible products such as food and beverages. Still, somehow, the comments prove to be an effective strategy to help the business expand further. The comment of @hadigunawan168, although he has no idea how it tastes exactly like, also plays a role in attracting the attention of customers who have never tried the product before, as well as convincing customers who want to buy it that it is worth a try. Despite that, still this comment is a good example in elaborating how politeness₂ (making predictions) is interpreted differently in politeness₁ (praising the visual of the product).

Comment #6: @aris_yulianto90: Tahu Petis (Shrimp Paste Tofu)

This is another commenter who is involved in the discussion about *tahu petis*. Different from the previous commenter, he has experienced eating the product before. However, the problem is the stall is so crowded that many people cannot stand the long queue. Thus, he comments: “Huh... This tofu (stall) is so crowded, oh my God, especially during this rainy season I quit queuing and decided to fry my own tofu myself, but the flavor is different...”

At a glance, he seems to intensify his interest to other people, which is emphasized in the exaggerative phrase ‘*rame ne masyaa Allah*’ (so crowded oh my God). Here, the word ‘so’ (in Javanese, a verb plus *-e* or *-ne* suffix) already expresses exaggeration because ‘so’ is a word to show that something has happened to

an extent that it becomes an extraordinary event. The word 'so' alone, however, sometimes is just not enough to stress exaggeration. There is another expression that @aris_yulianto90 uses: oh my God. When someone has intentionally or unintentionally calls out God's name when encountering a shocking fact, it means that something has happened out of control that even in normal conditions, normal people cannot easily handle it.



Figure 6. The Comment of @aris_yulianto90, and the administrator's (@kulinersby) reply
Source: Kuliner Surabaya [@kulinersby]. (2021, February 1). BUKAN TAHU PETIS BIASA! [Not an ordinary shrimp paste tofu!] [Video]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CKwAj4LFtFx/>

His comment may sound like a story complaining an overcrowded food stall, but truthfully he does not have any intentions to complain. This is indicated in the last part of his comment, '*sampe males antri tak belani nggoreng tahu dewe...tapi rasane seje...*' ('I quit queuing and decided to fry my own tofu myself, but the taste was different'). In general, when a business is crowded, it indicates that the stall serves good-quality products, so good that not all people are able to replicate their dishes. Because of this, the commenter praises the stall's ability to attract so many customers just by serving a very simple product.

Moreover, in the traditional belief, there is a term called '*hukum tapak tangan*' (the palm rule), in which different people, even though they are cooking with exact ingredients, may produce different results. That is exactly what happens to the commenter. There is a possibility that he has already figured the secret behind the tofu's delicacy, but he may not have figured the proper technique in executing it perfectly. That is why he complains not only about how crowded the business is every day, but also his incapability to replicate the product. His failure is confirmed by the promoter herself, who says "*beda banget pasti*" (surely it is different).

All in all, despite his complaining tone, this commenter actually praises the business. His story itself also indicates that the business serves a simple but unique product that attracts many customers' attention.

Therefore, despite his being impatient in queuing and his failure in duplicating the product, he still wholeheartedly compliments the business. This is in line with the *rukun* principle in which every person has to redeem any forms of directness, including forms of negativity towards something (Magnis-Suseno, 2003, pp. 39-41). Therefore, in this case, politeness₂ and politeness₁ have similar intentions.

To sum up, the analyzed data show that both positive and negative politeness strategies in politeness₂ are applied in the comments concerning @kulinersby's promotion of numerous culinary businesses. Positive politeness strategy is used because by sharing the uniqueness of the products through their shared stories, people want to persuade and convince others about their ideas that the products they commented are indeed worth trying. The negative politeness is essential in helping business to expand, normally through constructive criticisms. However, not all of the comments included as politeness₂ have the same connotation as politeness₁, since politeness₂ is concerned only with conceptualized and universal definition of politeness as argued by Watts (2003).

Politeness₁ is concerned with the understanding of the involved participants' socio-cultural background (in this research, Javanese culture); therefore, what is considered polite in politeness₂ can be similar or different in politeness₁. For example, the use of 'avoiding disagreement' in politeness₂ can have similar meaning in Javanese (as politeness₁), namely: a soft criticism, but can also connote the meaning of praising, warning, indirect persuasion, or protest as has been discussed previously.

Compared to previous studies which mostly discuss about politeness₂ such as the one done by Laksmiati, Maharani, and Candra (2020) that analyzed customers' comments of a certain hotel in Sanur, Bali, from the point of view of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory only (politeness₂ only), the findings of this study is unique since it attempts to find out whether politeness₂ is also applied to Indonesian (Javanese) culture as politeness₁. Thus, it is expected that the findings of this study can help people understand that politeness in the context of Javanese culture might not be the same as politeness in general context.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that politeness₂ and politeness₁ have not only some similarities in common, but also some differences, most notably in the application of positive politeness such as joking, intensifying interest to hearer, and avoiding disagreement. Some comments

using jokes which are considered as positive politeness in politeness₂, for instance, become sarcasm, criticism, insult, and satire in politeness₁. This shows that the construction of new politeness theories is still heavily influenced by the framework of their predecessors. The theory of Brown and Levinson (1987) may be considered as obsolete by many linguists, but they still give an influential impact to linguists of the 21st century.

The research concerning social media and the decoding of politeness in the reality is very rare since not many researchers focus on developing this field. However, if any are interested, then it is suggested that they can modify the framework by using different theories or social media platform. There are many other notable linguistic theories besides the two theories applied in this research. Social media too also has many good examples that can be used for this research, from the common ones such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to the less common ones such as Telegram, Discord, and WeChat. Another possibility is to use the same theory, but narrower focus (i.e.: analyzing positive or negative strategy only).

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