

An Analysis of Linguistic Politeness in the Comment Sections of TikTok Social Media

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze linguistic politeness in the comment sections of the social media platform TikTok. TikTok, as one of the most popular social media platforms today, serves as a space for users to express themselves and interact directly through the comment feature on creators' video content. However, the anonymity and freedom within these comment sections often lead to various forms of language use, including those that violate politeness principles. This research seeks to explore how TikTok users either adhere to or violate the principles of linguistic politeness in their comments. The findings reveal that while polite language and respect for others' opinions are still widely observed, numerous comments exhibit violations of politeness, such as the use of harsh words, derogatory remarks, insults, and sarcasm. Although politeness in language can still be found, the greatest challenge in maintaining ethical communication on social media lies in the high level of anonymity, which often triggers impolite and disrespectful language behavior. This study underscores the importance of digital literacy to raise awareness about the significance of politeness in communication.

Keywords: Linguistic Politeness; TikTok Comments; Digital Communication Ethics

INTRODUCTION

Language serves as the most effective tool for human communication, enabling individuals to express messages, thoughts, emotions, and goals while fostering cooperation and understanding. As inherently social beings, humans rely on language to build and sustain relationships through interaction and dialogue.

Speakers play a vital role in communication by performing pragmatic functions through their utterances, shaping the effectiveness of interpersonal exchanges (Yule, 2017). However, using language appropriately is not always a straightforward process. Language can carry both positive and negative connotations, and at times, intentions to convey positive messages may be expressed through words with negative implications. Effective communication requires thoughtful use of language to avoid misunderstandings and foster harmony in relationships (Holmes & Wilson, 2020).

Politeness in language is a fundamental element that ensures interactions occur respectfully and constructively. It governs the norms of speech acts, helping to maintain interpersonal connections. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory outlines strategies that minimize threats to the listener's "face," emphasizing three key principles: positive politeness (expressing friendliness and appreciation), negative politeness (respecting personal boundaries), and off-record strategies (implying meaning indirectly). Politeness functions as a guide to regulate communication and prevent offense in interpersonal interactions (Culpeper, 2016). In today's digital era, advances in communication technology have transformed how individuals interact, allowing for long-distance communication through social media platforms. These platforms facilitate global connections, enabling individuals to interact freely across regions and even internationally. TikTok, a highly popular social media platform, exemplifies this trend. With users ranging from children to the elderly, TikTok serves as a creative space for self-expression, particularly through short video content (Anderson & Jiang, 2018).

The widespread use of social media, however, brings both benefits and challenges. Social media platforms influence linguistic etiquette, as users often adopt trending phrases and slang, some of which may lack politeness or carry negative connotations. This phenomenon is particularly concerning among younger audiences, such as school-age children, who are more susceptible to adopting language that violates norms of politeness (Tagg et al., 2020). The shift toward informal and less courteous language on platforms like TikTok has broader implications for societal communication and interaction norms. This study explores how TikTok influences linguistic politeness in its users' interactions, particularly in comment sections. The analysis highlights the role of digital platforms in shaping communication patterns and emphasizes the importance of fostering awareness about the value of politeness in maintaining respectful and effective communication in the digital age.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that examines how meaning is conveyed and interpreted in specific contexts of communication. Taguchi (2019) defines pragmatics as the study of language use in context, focusing on how speakers adjust

their communication to fit the situational, cultural, and social dynamics. This perspective emphasizes the importance of understanding the social cues that influence communication and highlights how politeness is integral to preventing misunderstandings or harm during interactions.

Politeness Theory

Leech's (2014) updated framework of politeness theory introduces a broader understanding of how politeness functions in communication. Politeness is defined as a mechanism to reduce potential conflict and enhance interpersonal harmony. The theory emphasizes strategic communication to uphold social values and relationships. On TikTok, for example, users frequently utilize polite and friendly expressions to maintain positive relationships. However, instances of offensive or insensitive language persist, showcasing a duality in how politeness is applied in digital spaces.

Impoliteness Theory

Recent developments in impoliteness theory, as discussed by Bousfield and Locher (2015), examine how individuals use language, either intentionally or unintentionally, to offend or harm others. This perspective expands the focus from isolated individual actions to include the broader social and cultural contexts that influence impolite behaviors. Culpeper (2021) further elaborates on contemporary strategies of impoliteness, categorizing them into distinct forms. Direct impoliteness refers to explicit and unfiltered verbal attacks on others. Positive impoliteness involves actions that harm a person's self-esteem or positive face, often through insults or mockery. Negative impoliteness, on the other hand, infringes on an individual's autonomy or personal space. Sarcasm or mock politeness uses seemingly polite language with ironic or critical intent, while ignoring expected politeness entails failing to meet societal norms for politeness in specific situations. These strategies offer valuable insights into how impoliteness manifests in TikTok comment sections, where anonymity and reduced accountability often exacerbate such behaviors. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for mitigating offensive interactions and fostering a more respectful digital communication environment.

Stereotype Theory

Stereotype theory, as revisited by Fiske (2018), highlights how stereotypes arise from cognitive shortcuts and are reinforced through repeated exposure to biased information. Stereotypes can create barriers to effective communication by fostering prejudice and misunderstanding. On platforms like TikTok, stereotypes influence how individuals express themselves and perceive others in public interactions, often leading to biased or prejudiced comments. Politeness in communication is essential for fostering constructive interactions. Suh et al. (2020)

note that social media interactions are shaped by cultural and societal contexts, emphasizing the need for users to practice ethical communication.

Similarly, Rahman and Ali (2021) assert that politeness in online comments reflects collective societal values and cultural identity. On TikTok, users often demonstrate their identities through their comments, either strengthening social bonds through positive interactions or undermining them with negative language. Recent studies, such as those by Andini and Setiawan (2023), stress the importance of teaching digital etiquette early to promote responsible and respectful online communication. On TikTok, comments generally fall into two categories: positive and negative. Positive comments exemplify politeness, fostering harmony and productive dialogue. In contrast, negative comments, such as insults or derogatory remarks, reflect a lack of politeness and can disrupt social dynamics, creating challenges for meaningful interaction.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This research on linguistic politeness in TikTok comment sections is a qualitative study. It employs a descriptive research design, which focuses on analyzing data without using numerical or statistical measures. Instead, the study emphasizes qualitative data, which is presented in the form of words rather than numbers. The data analyzed in this research consists of linguistic politeness speech acts found in comments made by TikTok users. The data source is derived directly from observations of interactions on TikTok.

Instrument and Procedures

The primary instrument for this qualitative research is the researcher, who plays a central role in collecting and analyzing data. Data collection techniques involve observation and documentation. Observation is conducted by carefully reading and analyzing the comments posted by TikTok users in the comment sections of various videos. Documentation involves capturing relevant comments through screenshots or screen captures using a mobile device. These captured comments are then systematically recorded for further analysis.

Data Analysis

The analysis process focuses on identifying and categorizing linguistic politeness acts within the collected comments. Comments are examined for elements that align with politeness principles, as well as those that violate them. The data are qualitatively analyzed to uncover patterns, themes, and insights into how users adhere to or deviate from politeness norms in TikTok comment sections. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of the dynamics of digital communication and linguistic behavior on social media platforms.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study examines both positive and negative politeness strategies in TikTok comment sections. Positive politeness reflects efforts to build rapport, express support, and maintain harmonious relationships, while negative politeness demonstrates a failure to adhere to politeness norms, often leading to conflict or harm.

Positive Politeness

Positive politeness is evident in TikTok comments that aim to foster goodwill, provide encouragement, or build supportive relationships. These interactions contribute to a constructive and respectful online environment. The positive politeness which is found in this comments are praise, directive statement, suggestion, request for help, encouragement and support.

Praise

Praise is a significant aspect of positive politeness, where commenters acknowledge and appreciate the creator's attributes or actions. For example, the comment "*Kak plssss masyaAllah cantik banget mukanya cerah*" expresses admiration for the creator's appearance. The use of "*masyaAllah*" as a culturally significant phrase emphasizes genuine appreciation and admiration. Such interactions not only uplift the recipient but also strengthen interpersonal connections, promoting positivity within the TikTok community.

Directive Statements

Directive statements can reflect positive politeness when framed constructively and respectfully. For instance, the comment "*Menurut gue, lebih baik mulai sekarang lo siapin diri buat belajar bahasa asing*" provides actionable advice for self-improvement. By suggesting steps to enhance personal growth, the commenter shows concern for the recipient's well-being and societal contribution, aligning with the principles of positive politeness.

Suggestions

Suggestions are another form of positive politeness that offer helpful recommendations for improvement. For example, the comment "*Nanti kalau ada rezekinya beli gendongan m shape cuddle me aja ya maaa*" suggests a specific baby carrier to enhance the comfort of the creator's child. This thoughtful advice reflects support and care, fostering collaboration and constructive interaction.

Requests for Help

Polite requests for assistance demonstrate respect for the other person's autonomy. An example is the comment "*Yang mana tolong jawab make bahasa Indonesia, ini ga paham kronologi nya gua,*" where the commenter politely asks for clarification using the word "*tolong*" (please). This request maintains a respectful tone, encouraging cooperative communication.

Encouragement and Support

Encouragement and support are central to positive politeness. Comments like “*Semangat terus dek, calon orang sukses nantinya*” inspire and motivate the subject of the video. By reinforcing the recipient’s efforts and potential, these interactions promote optimism and a sense of community within the TikTok platform.

There is also negative politeness. Negative politeness is characterized by violations of politeness norms, including insults, demeaning remarks, and prejudice. These behaviors disrupt constructive communication and contribute to a toxic digital environment.

Insults

Insults are a clear example of negative politeness, where commenters use language to degrade or offend others. The comment “*Anaknya magrib*” employs derogatory slang to describe dark skin tone, perpetuating harmful stereotypes. Such remarks undermine the dignity of the subject and disrupt the respectful tone expected in online interactions.

Demeaning Remarks

Demeaning remarks belittle or dismiss others, as seen in the comment “*Emang ada versi berhasilnya?*” This dismissive statement questions the creator’s abilities, discouraging their efforts and creating a hostile communication environment.

Prejudice

Prejudiced comments make baseless assumptions about others’ motives or actions. For example, “*Biar apa biar rame*” accuses the creator of seeking attention without evidence. The creator’s clarification shows the judgment to be unfounded, yet such comments foster unnecessary conflict and harm the trust within the online community.

This study highlights both positive and negative politeness strategies in TikTok comment sections, contributing to an understanding of how linguistic politeness manifests in digital communication. Positive politeness strategies, such as praise, directives, suggestions, requests for help, and encouragement, reflect efforts to foster constructive and supportive interactions. These findings align with previous research by Suh et al. (2020), who emphasized the importance of politeness in maintaining harmonious online communication and strengthening social bonds. However, this study expands on earlier findings by demonstrating how TikTok’s unique features, such as its interactive comment sections, amplify the visibility and influence of both positive and negative politeness strategies.

A novel finding of this research is the nuanced use of directive and suggestion strategies. For instance, users on TikTok often frame directives or advice as collaborative, supportive suggestions, a phenomenon less frequently documented in previous studies like Leech’s (2014) exploration of politeness in traditional

contexts. This adaptation of linguistic politeness to the informal yet highly interactive nature of TikTok reflects the platform's role in shaping new communication norms. Moreover, the frequent use of culturally rooted expressions, such as *masyaAllah* in praise, highlights the interplay between global digital platforms and localized cultural expressions, an area warranting further exploration.

Negative politeness strategies, such as insults, demeaning remarks, and prejudice, reveal the darker side of online interactions. This finding aligns with Bousfield and Locher's (2015) assertion that digital anonymity often reduces accountability, enabling impoliteness to flourish. However, the prevalence of specific slang, such as *magrib* as a derogatory term for skin tone, underscores how platform-specific language evolves to facilitate both positive and negative expressions. This study contributes to the discourse on impoliteness by providing a deeper understanding of how these dynamics play out on TikTok, which remains underexplored compared to platforms like Facebook or Twitter.

The implications of these findings are significant. For digital communication scholars, this research highlights the evolving nature of linguistic politeness and impoliteness in the context of short-form video platforms. It also underscores the importance of examining platform-specific linguistic trends and their impact on user interactions. For educators and policymakers, promoting digital literacy and ethical communication is crucial to mitigating the effects of impoliteness and fostering a healthier online environment. Encouraging users to adopt positive politeness strategies can enhance social cohesion and minimize the disruptive impact of negative interactions.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, it focuses exclusively on TikTok, limiting the generalizability of its findings to other platforms with different user dynamics. Second, the study relies on qualitative analysis of comments, which may not capture broader trends or statistical variations in user behavior. Finally, the cultural context of TikTok comments in Indonesia may differ from that of other regions, suggesting the need for comparative studies to understand cross-cultural variations in politeness strategies.

Future research should address these limitations by expanding the scope to include multiple platforms and conducting quantitative analyses to uncover larger patterns in user behavior. Additionally, exploring the role of platform design in shaping politeness norms could provide deeper insights into how social media interfaces influence communication styles. By building on these findings, scholars can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of digital politeness and its implications for online interactions.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the dual nature of linguistic politeness in TikTok comment sections, encompassing both positive and negative strategies. Positive politeness,

demonstrated through praise, directives, suggestions, requests for help, and encouragement, fosters constructive and supportive interactions, enhancing the quality of communication on the platform. In contrast, negative politeness, characterized by insults, demeaning remarks, and prejudice, disrupts communication and contributes to a toxic digital environment. The findings emphasize how TikTok's interactive and informal nature shapes unique expressions of politeness and impoliteness, with users adapting their language to the platform's norms and cultural context. The study also reveals the significant role of anonymity in enabling impolite behaviors while showcasing the potential of culturally rooted expressions to enhance positive interactions. These insights underscore the importance of promoting digital literacy and ethical communication practices to cultivate respectful and constructive online interactions. While this study provides valuable contributions to understanding politeness in digital communication, its focus on TikTok and qualitative analysis limits the generalizability of findings. Future research should explore cross-platform comparisons and quantitative patterns to expand our understanding of politeness dynamics in diverse digital environments.

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