

## LINGUISTICS EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS: A SOCIO-LINGUISTIC STUDY

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### Abstract

Politeness is considered as a strategic communicative tool used to construct identities and build relationships in online communication. Present study examines how women entrepreneurs use language in their captions and posts to promote their business on Instagram. It also intends to identify how these linguistic choices help to represent themselves on social media platforms. In the current study, the data is collected from captions and posts of fifty Instagram accounts of Pakistani businesswomen. This research adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative frequency analysis of their occurrence in Instagram captions with qualitative analysis of politeness strategies. Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness (1987) is used to analyze data and classify politeness strategies into four types. A sample of captions is chosen to identify and analyze, bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. The findings reveal that positive politeness strategy is frequently used among business women to show solidarity and friendly connection. In negative politeness, women give indirect commands and respect other's freedom. While the off-record, and bald-on-record strategies use hints and rhetorical questions to avoid direct commands, and different linguistic choices show urgency. The businesswomen use polite language which helps to construct Identity and self-presentation.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

According to Hill, Ide and Ikuta (1986), "Politeness is one of the restraints on human collaboration, whose purpose is to study others emotional state, to found levels of mutual ease and to promote relationship.". Yule (1996) expresses that face can be shown by an appearance, a look, non-verbal communication or verbal communication. Politeness is considered significant part of human communication. It helps people collaborate easily, have good relationships, and avoid dispute. Similarly, Gibson (2009) explains politeness as an action that shows concern for others and avoids placing burden on them.

This show that politeness can include both being friendly and keeping a respectful distance. Politeness can be expressed through words and sentences also through facial expression, body language, tone and gestures. Sometimes, people use mixture of both verbal and non-verbal communication to show politeness and solidarity. In ordinary life, people easily judge others due to their behavior. For example, using gratitude expressions like "thank you", "please" which show polite behavior. In contrast, disturbing others when they are speaking or give direct commands to elders which show impolite behavior. Local

speakers often make sensible efforts to talk politely because they wish to leave a good impact on others. Though, describing politeness is not easy. The word polite derives from the Latin word *politus*, meaning “refined” or “elegant.” Politeness usually means being kind, thoughtful, and respecting social patterns. It reflects proper behavior and good manners. The central goal of politeness is to make people feel calm during communication, even though in some situation, polite actions can also be used to ignore or embarrass others. Politeness is considered significant aspect in digital communication and it also show courteous and develop trust.

In addition, Lakoff (1975) describe politeness as a social instrument that helps to reduce pressure and dispute in collaboration. Language plays an important role in this procedure. She also highlighted that people use linguistic choices according to need and context to supporting relationship. She argued that we should avoid imposing on others and use polite forms to reduce pressure. According to Takano (2005), language is formed by the circumstances, and at the same time, it helps to explain the bond between the speaker and the listener. This shows that politeness helps maintain control, distance, and relations during communication. He explains that digital communication reduces social distance and helps to establishing relation between listener and speaker. He also proposes that both positive politeness and negative politeness are important for successful communication. Positive politeness helps reduce gap and build rapport, whereas negative politeness illustrate respect and continue formality. People select distinctive politeness strategies depending on the circumstances and the bond between speakers. People use different politeness strategies during communication that can lead to self -presentation and creating identities. So, politeness plays an essential role in building relations with others and engaging diverse audience during digital communication.

Moreover, nowadays, social media is considered significant for business communication and used by women entrepreneurs to promote their business. On Instagram, they use inclusive language such as “we” and “us” and gratitude

expressions to show solidarity and friendly connection. The business women use polite language in their captions to engage their audience. Politeness is considered essential part of human communication that helps to create social relationship and maintain harmony among people. Some people think politeness is just about being polite or courteous but it also about making linguistic choices according to purpose and listener background. Due to the development of science and technology people try to shift communication from face-to-face interaction to digital spaces and they use different strategies during communication with their followers and customers. Actually, they construct their identities through use of indirect language and polite forms on digital platforms. During online communication, people use emojis, symbols and polite language just to show politeness and engaging their audience in respecting way. Therefore, they deeply depend on polite forms, discourse markers and visuals features during online interaction. These features play an important role in understanding and intercepted messages. In digital communication speaker show value and respect for their audience. Digital platforms play an essential role in professionalism and building trust between speaker and listener. People develop friendly environment in online communication and promoting their goals and reduce social distance.

### 1.1 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study may make a significant impact to the field of pragmatics and digital communication and clear us how businesswomen use different politeness strategies just to gain professional goals. This study may also examine how different linguistic choices and polite forms construct the identities of businesswomen in online communication and also highlight how they maintained their identities on public digital platforms. this study also tells us about how women entrepreneurs manage huge audience with their profession by using soft and polite language that show value and respecting others. This research can be useful for a broad range of shareholders. This study provides deeper insight into contemporary language use that can help

researchers and educators. Furthermore, businesswomen and ambitious businessperson can use these understanding to improve their own communication ways, that can boost their presence in digital spaces and create stronger bond with their followers. The study also helps companies in developing more comprehensive and valuable communication principles that indicate contemporary digital ways. Eventually, by focusing on how language system work among businesswomen on Instagram, this study may provide a wide range of understanding how identity create in this modern era and helpful in both educational and business-like domains.

### 1.2 Research Objectives:

- To identify politeness strategies used by business women on Instagram.
- To find out most frequent type of politeness strategy used by business women.

### 1.3 Research Questions:

1. What are different strategies of politeness used by women entrepreneurs on Instagram?
2. Which politeness strategy is frequently used by women entrepreneurs on Instagram?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Politeness and Language Use

Politeness is considered a social process and every language has its own rules and expressions. The conceptualization of politeness also varies within cultures. In Britain it is mostly associated with care of others, good behaviors and manners, depends on keeping space and valuing other secrecy, whereas in Greece and Russia with care of others through kind-heartedness, passion and friendliness (see Sifianou 1992, Larina 2009). According to Leech (1983), politeness means showing respect, care and avoiding dispute during conversation between speaker and listener. According to him, politeness emphasis more on kindness for the other person rather than the self. He also introduced six maxims, and these maxims decide how to phrase request offers or comments to promote friendliness and solidarity. Brown and Levinson (1987), introduced four strategies of politeness which include, positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on record and off record

strategies to avoid the face threatening act that can harm other people's face. Politeness is an important part of communication because it helps in building and maintaining social relationships. It plays a central role in human interaction and is necessary for cooperation in society. Due to its importance, politeness has been studied by many scholars in different fields of social sciences. There are three main theoretical approaches to the study of politeness in language: politeness as social rules, politeness as adherence to maxims, and politeness as face management (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

The first approach describes politeness as a set of social conventions that influence individual manners in society. According to this approach, politeness means respecting socially agreed norms of speaking and behaving, which are often shaped by people of higher social position. In many societies, expression like "please" and thank you" are mentioned in etiquette books, and these expressions are used in public and formal settings to show respect and consideration. These rules vary according to culture it means polite words in one culture may be convey different meaning in another culture. So, these rules are considered culture-specific. Ide explains politeness as "discernment," where speakers linguistic choices depend on social relationship and positions. (Ide, 1989; Watts et al., 1992). In this viewpoint, social classification is associated with politeness and it is considered significant part of language use.

The second approach describe politeness as something depends on general maxims rather than strict social norms. This viewpoint is depended on Grice's Cooperative Principle, which recommends that people should be cooperative with each other in conversation that make conversation smooth and effective. (Grice, 1975). He proposed four principles or maxims that guide conversation and associated with politeness, it includes quality, quantity, relevance, and manner. Building on this idea of Grice, Lakoff suggested three rules which are associated with politeness and explains why people use indirect language and avoid direct terms. These rules include, don't impose, give options to listeners, and be friendly (Lakoff, 1973). In the same way, Leech (1983) presented six principles of politeness to reduce impolite terms

and maximize polite expression. It includes tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. These terms help us to maintain social bond and avoid us from dispute. This approach explains when speakers move away from these principles, listeners can easily understand inferred meanings. This approach also focuses on minimizing dispute and establishing social bond and harmony in communication. The third approach based on concept of face proposed by Erving Goffman (1967). He describes face as a public self- image and people try to maintain their face in society and avoid from circumstances that damage it. According to him people have two types of face needs: positive face, which want to be liked and appreciated by others, and negative face, which want to have freedom and personal space and not be interrupted by others. Thus, politeness means maintaining social relations and protecting both the speaker's and the listener's face.

## 2.2 Business Communication on Social Media

People rapidly sift toward digital business communication rather than face to face and it can easily connect with diverse audience from different region and reduce social distance. Different studies show that digital business communication is very influential and helps in achieving goal and promoting products. De Veirman et al. (2017), highlight that Instagram play a crucial role in inspiring audience opinions and trust, especially in the perspective of influencer marketing. Basically, this study reveals the importance of digital communication and tell us about how Instagram helps businessperson in managing their audience or customers. Through their captions and post they build trust also respecting customer opinions. According to Abidin (2016), he investigated that businesspersons use different strategies on digital spaces and construct their identities and establishing relationship with audience. This research show that communication is not just about getting information but also identity focused. Similarly, Locher (2010), highlight that politeness can also help us to avoiding misunderstanding and constructing relations. These studies suggest that when we communicate on digital platforms our linguistic choices play an

essential role in getting both social and business goals.

## 2.3 Gender Identity and Politeness

According to Lakoff (1975), men and women speech styles are different from each other because women use hedges, tag questions, intensifiers in their speech. He argues that women use polite forms and indirect commands during conversation and avoid from explicit command. For example, women said "would you mind closing the window?" instead of "close the window", this show women use polite forms and respect other face. Holmes (1995), explains women use polite language and hedges ("sort of") to show solidarity, politeness and build rapport whereas men use direct speech. Women focus more on politeness and relationship while men focus on status (Tannen, 1990). These studies show that how women use politeness strategies to develop relationship and rapport. El Popolo Marchitto (2025), analyzed gender stereotypes in politeness perception and highlight that women use indirect requests and male prefer direct forms. By indicating that politeness is socially created as a feminine attribute in Russian and that gender stereotypes analytically affect politeness beliefs. Lutfiah et al. (2025) examines that how men and women use politeness strategies in daily communication. The findings reveal that women use direct forms and hedging expressions such as "I believe", "would you please" and men employ direct and informal expressions. He also found that in Javanese tradition women often use "karma" (a respectful language) and Indonesian women prefer words like "sorry", "thank you" and "please" in every day communication.

## 2.4 Politeness in Digital Communication

Hassannudin and Abdul Jabar (2025) have examined how politeness and impoliteness strategies are used by people on Facebook, to convey their ideas and expand their ideologies. The analysis of Greta's speech exposed a clear "child versus adult" speech and a change in power, where Greta, boldly used a bald on-record strategy when speaking to world mentors. This explicit approach prompted various negative responses from

Facebook users, who replied using many politeness and impoliteness strategies. When all strategies were counted together, impoliteness strategies were used frequently than politeness strategies. This shows that in digital communication, FTAs are obvious, as they are in face-to-face interaction. Aini and Simatupang (2024), examined positive politeness strategy play a significant role in 30 mails interactions between Detrack Systems and its customers. The findings reveal a constant application of positive politeness strategies to cross-cultural communication distinctions and promote friendly connections. The study shows Detrack and its customers promote positive and cooperative communication. They focus on positive politeness indicate the significance of keeping humble and helpful relation in business communications, mainly in the situation of technical funding and service distribution

Diebel-Fischer (2018) informs that digital communication principles involve many things, specifically the use of language, timeliness and the use of emotions. The use of language, involves a choice of words and sentences that are not violent, do not have double meanings irony, and fulfill with appropriate social norms. When we response to a message or leave a comment, it shows regularity and relate to good manners. He also tells us about use of particular emotions must be performed sensibly because they can establish boundaries of attitude, deeds, explain the meaning of the message to be carried and can produce a pleasant atmosphere. Moreover, Marcel (2017) and Pan's (2022), focuses on seven components during conversation on online platform. It involves focus on communication time, begin with polite expressions, use polite and respectful words, message should be clear, focus on typing to avoid error, encourage two-ways communication. These components help us to make online communication polite for others. Although previous studies investigate difference between politeness strategies used by male and female rather than women entrepreneurs. These studies focus on social platform like Facebook and email but recent study focus on politeness strategies use by business women on Instagram

### 3. Methodology

This research used both quantitative and qualitative research approaches because both approaches give more understanding and help to identify the frequency and interpretation of politeness strategies.

#### 3.1. Research Design

This study used mixed- method approach, which includes both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. According to Creswell (2014), mixed method approach integrates both qualitative and quantitative data for deeper understanding. The quantitative approach helps us to calculate the frequency and percentage of politeness strategies through tables and bar graphs. Whereas, the qualitative approach interprets the findings of the quantitative approach. It explains the politeness strategies with examples and indicates how women present themselves. Both approaches give richer and deeper information.

#### 3.2 Data Source

The data were collected from 50 captions of Pakistani business women using Instagram. They communicate with customers through captions, and posts. They promote their products through Instagram captions where they used polite expressions and discourse markers to show solidarity and trust and engage customers.

#### 3.3 Analytical Framework

This research used Brown and Levinson's (1987), "politeness theory," and it involves four politeness strategies, which helps us in the analysis of the present study. It involves:

- **Bald on-Record:** Direct, clear- cut, and straightforward (e.g. "Help me", "give me the book") often used among close friends or in urgent situation. The speaker clearly conveys their message without any fear because of friendly environment. People use this type of strategy where there is no risk of conflicting or damaging. Even though, it looks impolite but acceptable in situations where there is no risk.
- **Positive Politeness:** This type of strategy aims to save face and reduce social distance and show kindness, solidarity and friendliness (e.g.,

"You're so good at this, could you help me?"). This type is commonly used by friends and peers.

- **Negative Politeness:** It aims to save negative face and reduce imposition by showing deference and respect for independence. People use apologies, hedges, modal verbs just to shows respect and value for listener independence. (e.g., "I'm sorry to bother you, but could you help me?").
- **Off-Record (Indirect):** In this type of strategy, people hinting or using ambiguous language and does not directly show intentions but give suggestions. (e.g., "It's getting cold in here," implying someone should close the window). These strategies help people to maintain social bond and avoid from conflicting. Basically, these

strategies are used to manage face-threatening acts.

#### 4.Data Analysis

This section shows the results of the study by examining Instagram captions of women entrepreneurs to find out politeness strategies and discourse markers. Brown and Levinson (1987), categorized politeness strategy into four types such as positive politeness, negative politeness, Off-Record and bald-strategy. The analysis revealed that how business women present themselves through different linguistic choices. This section identified the frequency of politeness strategies and examined which type of politeness strategy is frequently used by business women on Instagram during communication.

Table 1: Types of Politeness and Frequency of Use

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Positive politeness	16	32%
Negative politeness	13	26%
Off-Record	11	22%
Bald-on-Record	10	20%
Total	50	100%

The frequency analysis revealed that positive politeness strategy is most common in 16 captions (32%) and negative politeness occur in 13 captions (26%). Then Off-Record strategy occurs in 11 captions (22%) and Bald-on-Record strategy appeared in 10 captions (20%). So, the analysis

revealed that positive politeness strategy is frequently used by business women and to developed friendly connection and engaged their audience, while other politeness strategies are used less.

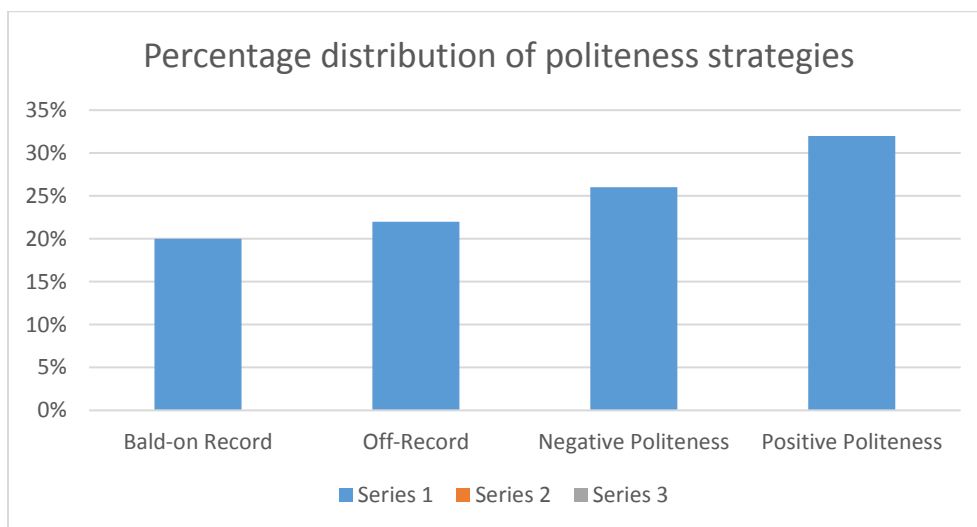


Figure 1: Variation in the use of Politeness strategies

Graphical representation in figure 1 shows that positive politeness strategy is most commonly used by women entrepreneurs on Instagram.

#### 4.1 Positive Politeness Strategy

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), positive politeness refers to when speaker use polite language and making listener feel good and helps to developed friendly connection. The Pakistani business women use polite language such as “we”, and “us” and expressions of gratitude on Instagram when they communicate to their customers. For example, “New collection drops tomorrow – can’t wait to hear your thoughts!”, “We hope you love your cupcakes- don’t forget to tag us in your photos.” Through these language choices business women present themselves as humble and customer-focused not profit – focused. These linguistic choices help to maintaining harmony and friendly environment to their customers on Instagram.

#### 4.2 Negative Politeness Strategy

It means when speaker uses indirect command and give respect and freedom to listener without pressuring them (Brown and Levinson, 1987). The analysis revealed that Pakistani business women avoided direct command and used hedges, and positive directives show respect and care for their customers. For example, “If you have any questions, feel free to message us”, “Your feedback helps us improves! Please share your thoughts.”, “Please confirm your order details before checkout”. Through these linguistics choices they avoid directly commanding and respect other freedom.

#### 4.3 Off-Record Strategy

The results show that business women avoided direct commands and used different techniques like hints, metaphors and rhetorical questions for conveying meaning. They use hints to protecting face of customers, for example, “Can’t reveal yet... but something amazing is coming!”, “Something fun is coming...can you guess?”, “Our new collection drops tomorrow.... stay tuned”. They reduce pressure and maintaining politeness through hints and indirect language. Business

women use hints and ambiguous language to reduce pressure and engaging customers.

#### 4.4 Bald-on-Record Strategy

The analysis also highlights that business women use language choices, which show urgency and clarity. For example, “Order close tonight at 9pm”, “Don’t miss our Eid sale”, “Last chance to order for this week”. These examples show that message is obvious. Both qualitative and quantitative analysis revealed that positive politeness was used commonly and helps to build trust and rapport during communication with customers.

#### 5. Discussion and Findings

The results of this study highlight that politeness plays a significant role in shaping businesswomen’s identities. The analysis shows that most captions depend on politeness strategy because they actively use polite forms and inclusive language such as “we” and “us” to build rapport and trust. They show solidarity with customers through polite expression and promote their products and brands. They use language wisely and focus on the choice of words, which show gratitude and gives freedom to the customer and avoids from explicit commands and gives respect to their customers. This finding relates to a previous study (Aini & Simatupang, 2024), which explored that positive politeness is frequently used in digital communication because it develops trust and relations with customers. Politeness is also developed through discourse markers used in captions of businesswomen, for example, “please,” “thank you,” “dear.” These markers make requests softer and show politeness. Businesswomen use the negative politeness strategy for instructions, while bald- on- record strategy is used for urgency, such as “order closes at 9:00 pm.” In off- record strategy, women use hints and metaphors to protect customer face. So, the findings show that speech style plays a major role in online entrepreneur; women’s use of politeness in their speech reflects feminine traits such as respect, kindness, and collaboration. These traits help to promote products, brands and customer involvement. Businesswomen use polite and indirect language on Instagram to build trust, maintaining harmony

and engaging their audience through their captions. This study also show that women have capability to manage professionalism and engaging audience on public communication platforms. In this modern era, women can easily communicate with their customers and convey information easily. They use different types strategies and develop friendly bond with their customers and also value their opinion. This research proves that politeness is not just a linguistic choice but is used as a strategy to maintain customer connection.

### 6. Conclusion

This research investigated how Pakistani businesswomen use politeness strategies in their captions on Instagram. The quantitative analysis show that positive politeness is frequently used by businesswomen. While qualitative analysis interprets all politeness strategies and explains how these strategies construct identities and self-presentation. However, politeness strategies and discourse markers play an important role in a self-presentation and customer involvement. They use polite forms and discourse markers that help them to shape their identities that are friendly and helps to enhance their business. This study show that business women use different strategies to maintain harmony during interaction with their customers on Instagram. Women entrepreneurs use soft and polite language that helps in achieving their social and commercial objectives. Further studies may examine in detail: Firstly, further research may examine the difference between male and female entrepreneurs on different social media platforms. Secondly, multimodal analysis of emojis, visuals, and hashtags used by women entrepreneurs on Instagram. Thirdly, comparing the politeness strategies across different cultures from different countries.

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