



**Politeness Strategies in YouTube Comments on PragerU's Video :
'Israelis or Palestinians – Who's More Tolerant?'**

THESIS

*Submitted to Fulfil a Partial of Requirements for S1 Degree
in The English Department Faculty of Humanities
Universitas Bung Hatta*

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2110014211008

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FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This is to certify the originality of this thesis which I now submit to fulfill a requirement for an S1 in The English Department Faculty of Humanities Universitas Bung Hatta. The content of this thesis is entirely my work. All assistance received in writing this thesis and the sources cited have been acknowledged within the text of my work.

Padang, 28 Agustus 2025



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ABSTRACT

This study examines politeness strategies in YouTube comments on PragerU's video "Israelis or Palestinians – Who's More Tolerant?" within the polarized discourse of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Guided by Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and Herring's (2004) Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis, 100 purposively selected comments were analyzed qualitatively. The comments were categorized into bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. Findings indicate that positive politeness, often used by pro-Israel users, fosters in-group solidarity, while negative politeness, more frequent among pro-Palestinian and moderate users, mitigates disagreement through indirectness. Bald-on-record strategies assert direct ideological stances, whereas off-record strategies like sarcasm and irony enable indirect critique across groups. The study concludes that politeness strategies not only manage face but also function as tools for ideological positioning and identity negotiation in online political discourse, offering insights into digital pragmatics in polarized contexts.

Keywords: politeness strategies, YouTube comments, ideological stance, CMDA, digital discourse

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I am fully aware that this thesis is far from perfect. Nevertheless, I sincerely hope that it will be useful for readers, particularly those who are interested in the study of pragmatics, politeness strategies, and digital discourse analysis. I also hope that this work can provide inspiration and serve as a reference for future research in similar fields.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

In the digital era, social media platforms such as YouTube are not only spaces for sharing information but also highly dynamic arenas for public debate. One crucial feature of these media is the comment section, where users are free to express their opinions, ideologies, and emotions both explicitly and implicitly (Burgess & Green, 2018, p. 112). This freedom of expression, however, creates a double-edged phenomenon that simultaneously democratizes discourse while potentially amplifying polarization. This phenomenon creates a unique linguistic environment, especially when the discussed topic is controversial and political (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016, p. 211).

The development of digital communication technology has fundamentally transformed the way humans interact, debate, and express their views on social issues (KhosraviNik & Unger, 2016, p. 207). What makes this transformation particularly significant is how it has dismantled traditional gatekeeping mechanisms in public discourse. Social media platforms and video-sharing sites like YouTube have created a virtual public sphere in which individuals from various backgrounds can engage in discourse on globally significant topics (Burgess & Green, 2018, p. 98). Unlike traditional media, which maintain a clear boundary between content producers and consumers, these digital platforms have fostered a participatory culture where users simultaneously create, share, and respond to content (Jenkins et al., 2018, p. 24). This blurred boundary between producer and consumer arguably creates more authentic but also more chaotic communicative environments. This participatory dimension is

especially evident in YouTube's comment sections, which serve as digital arenas where users engage in discussions, debates, and critiques of video content on a wide range of topics (Khan, 2017, p. 89).

In this digital landscape, the concept of politeness becomes highly important. Politeness, more than a matter of etiquette, functions as a complex socio-pragmatic system that enables speakers to mitigate face threats and navigate social interactions (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). The absence of traditional social cues in digital communication makes politeness strategies even more critical, as users must rely solely on textual choices to convey respect and manage interpersonal dynamics. In an online environment where non-verbal cues are absent and messages can easily be misinterpreted, politeness strategies are crucial for effective communication (Graham & Hardaker, 2017, p. 34). The linguistic choices in comment sections reveal how users negotiate interpersonal relationships despite spatial and temporal separation (Lorenzo-Dus et al., p. 115).

Research has shown that computer-mediated communication presents unique challenges for politeness theory, as users develop platform-specific strategies for expressing agreement, disagreement, criticism, and support (Linguistic Politeness Research Group, 2011, p. 78). These platform-specific adaptations suggest that digital politeness is not merely a translation of offline norms but represents an evolution of communicative behavior. YouTube comments, with their asynchronous nature and potential for anonymity, offer a particularly compelling case for examining how traditional politeness norms adapt to digital contexts (Bou-Franch & Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2014, p. 143). Marcoccia (2004, p. 119) further highlights that the technological affordances of digital platforms create distinct communicative

conditions that require users to develop adaptive strategies for managing interpersonal relations, especially when addressing contentious subject matter.

One example of content that sparks intense discussion is a video from the conservative channel PragerU titled *"Israelis or Palestinians – Who's More Tolerant?"* This video presents a highly sensitive political and cultural narrative, as it addresses the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine. In this approximately five-minute video, the speaker presents arguments supporting the view that Israel is more tolerant than Palestine, citing data on minority rights, religious freedom, and political representation. Narratives like this provoke emotional and ideological responses from viewers of various backgrounds. Such provocative content serves as a linguistic laboratory where competing worldviews collide, making it an ideal context for examining how politeness strategies function under ideological pressure. Locher and Watts (2005, p. 28) suggest that such politically charged discourse creates a "relational work" environment where participants must negotiate complex social positionings through their linguistic choices.

Discussions around politically sensitive topics provide rich material for analyzing politeness strategies, as these contexts often involve strong opinions, identity positioning, and the potential for face-threatening acts (KhosraviNik, 2017, p. 189). The Israel-Palestine conflict represents one of the most enduring and emotive geopolitical issues in contemporary discourse, generating intense debates across digital platforms (Kampf, 2020, p. 57). In such polarized discussions, users must navigate complex interpersonal dynamics as they express opinions that may challenge or affirm others' political, cultural, or religious identities. As Papacharissi (2015, p. 93) observes, digital spaces like YouTube comments sections become "affective publics"

where emotional expressions are intertwined with political argumentation.

YouTube comments on content related to the Israel-Palestine conflict reveal how users employ various linguistic strategies to position themselves in the debate, assert their viewpoints, and respond to opposing perspectives (Al-Rawi, 2019, p. 137). These comments often demonstrate a range of politeness and impoliteness strategies, from hedging and mitigation to direct confrontation and delegitimization of opposing views (Neurauter-Kessels, 2011, p. 205). The work of Culpeper (2011, p. 76) on impoliteness in digital contexts provides an additional framework for understanding how confrontational discourse functions within these politically charged exchanges.

The comment section of this video becomes a compelling discursive site for pragmatic analysis, particularly from the perspective of politeness strategies. As users engage in commentary on this sensitive issue, they are not merely expressing opinions but also managing both their own face and that of others through language. Strategies such as subtle sarcasm, apologies, friendly greetings, or even blunt, uncensored remarks are part of the face-threatening acts (FTA) phenomenon that is relevant for analysis. According to Hardaker (2010, p. 238), online platforms facilitate unique manifestations of face-work that may differ substantially from face-to-face interactions, particularly when users employ anonymity or pseudonymity in expressing contentious viewpoints.

However, as far as the researcher's investigation has shown, studies on politeness strategies in YouTube comment sections—especially in politically charged content like the PragerU video—are still scarce. Most previous research has focused more on formal interactions such as political speeches or institutional communication.

Although some studies, such as those by Herring (2004, p. 223) and Rosyidha et al. (2019, p. 64), have examined aspects of politeness in digital communication, there is still a gap in the literature regarding how politeness strategies are manifested in YouTube comment sections, particularly on topics laden with ideological and political content. Bednarek (2015, p. 112) notes that the intersection of politeness theory and political discourse analysis remains underexplored in digital media contexts, creating an opportunity for innovative research approaches.

This research is expected to contribute theoretically to the development of digital pragmatics and offer broader insights into the dynamics of language in ideologically charged virtual public spaces. By analyzing politeness strategies in the context of online discussion about the Israel-Palestine issue, this study can provide valuable insights into how social media users negotiate identity, ideology, and social relationships through their linguistic choices. Furthermore, as Androutsopoulos (2013, p. 49) argues, such analysis can reveal how digital communication practices reflect and potentially reshape broader social and political discourse norms.

The present research introduces an innovative approach by examining politeness strategies within ideologically charged online environments, particularly focusing on YouTube commentary regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict—a domain that remains significantly under-researched. Although prior investigations have separately explored politeness in digital contexts and political discourse, this investigation synthesizes these perspectives by employing established politeness frameworks (Brown & Levinson, 1987) within modern user-generated content platforms. Additionally, through analyzing how linguistic approaches mirror ideological positions and emotional attitudes in anonymous digital spaces, this research enhances the growing

field connecting digital pragmatics, political discourse studies, and identity formation. The study further enriches local scholarly discourse by integrating viewpoints from Indonesian pragmatic researchers.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the description of the introduction and background that has been described, this study asks the following research questions :

1. How are politeness strategies employed by YouTube users in comments on *PragerU's video : 'Israelis or Palestinians – Who's More Tolerant?*
2. What types of politeness strategies are most dominantly used in comments supporting either the Israeli or the Palestinian perspective?
3. How do these politeness strategies reflect the ideological positions and communicative attitudes of the commenters?

1.3 Purpose of The Research

This research aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To describe types of politeness strategies employed in YouTube comments on the PragerU's video.
2. To identify the dominant politeness strategies used in comments expressing support for either the Israeli or Palestinian side.
3. To analyze the relationship between the use of politeness strategies and the ideological positions adopted by the commenters.

1.4 Limitation of The Research

This study is limited to the analysis of YouTube user comments on a single video titled *“Israelis or Palestinians – Who’s More Tolerant?”* uploaded by the PragerU channel. The focus of this study is solely on the linguistic interactions that occur within the comments section and does not involve any analysis of the video content itself or the ideologies presented within it. The writer does not explore or interpret the visual, verbal, or narrative components of the video.

Furthermore, this study does not aim to discuss or take a stance on sensitive political, religious, or social issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, LGBTQ+ rights, or related ideologies. The sole focus is on identifying and analyzing the politeness strategies used by users when expressing their views or engaging in online interactions within the comments section. Only comments that contain indicators of politeness strategies—as theorized by Brown and Levinson (1987)—were selected for analysis. Comments that were not related to the pragmatic function of politeness were excluded from the data set.

In addition, this study was limited to the analysis of user-generated comments on the selected videos only, and did not include comment sections from other videos, platforms, or accounts. Therefore, the findings are context-specific and cannot be generalized beyond the discursive patterns and interactions observed in the comment sections of the videos mentioned above.

1.5 Significance of The Research

1. Theoretical Significance

This study contributes to the development of pragmatic theory by examining how politeness strategies function in online political discourse, specifically in YouTube comment sections. While Brown and Levinson's framework has primarily been

applied to formal or face-to-face communication, this study extends its relevance to anonymous and asynchronous digital interactions. It highlights how classic politeness strategies adapt in a digital context where non-verbal cues are absent and ideological conflicts are prominent. Furthermore, this research enriches the field of digital pragmatics by illustrating how politeness intersects with identity construction and ideological expression, particularly in discussions involving complex and sensitive topics such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

2. Practical Significance

Practically, the findings offer insights for educators, media literacy advocates, and content moderators in understanding how language shapes discourse in online platforms. The study may inform strategies for promoting respectful dialogue, guiding community moderation, and fostering critical awareness in digital citizenship education. This research also helps social media users reflect on their linguistic choices and encourages constructive engagement in polarized digital environments.