ESSENCE

Politeness Strategies in Netizens' Comments on Public Figures: A Case Study on Fuji An's TikTok

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT

This study investigates the politeness strategies used by Indonesian netizens in TikTok comments directed at public figure Fuji An. As social media becomes a dominant space for public discourse, understanding how politeness and impoliteness are linguistically expressed is essential. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the research analyzed 40 purposively selected comments from one of Fujian's TikTok videos. The comments were categorized using Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, which includes bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record strategies. The findings show that positive politeness was the most frequently used strategy, indicating strong affective support from followers. However, instances of impoliteness and verbal attacks, particularly those targeting religious aspects and personal identity, were also present. These results suggest that TikTok comment sections represent a complex interactional space where empathy, criticism, and hostility coexist. The study concludes that digital politeness strategies are shaped by cultural proximity, public perception, and platform dynamics. The findings imply the need for greater digital literacy and ethical awareness to foster respectful online communication, particularly toward local public figures in Indonesia.

Keywords:
Politeness strategy, TikTok comments, Public figure, Pragmatics, Netizen interaction, Digital communication

Introduction

The development of digital technology has significantly changed the way people communicate, especially through social media. One platform that has experienced a rapid increase in its use is TikTok. Not only for entertainment, TikTok has also become a platform for communication between netizens and public figures. In TikTok's comment space, users are free to express their responses to uploaded content. The language used in these comments shows a variety of attitudes and communication patterns, which in the context of pragmatics, are closely related to politeness strategies (Putri et al., 2024).

Unfortunately, this freedom of speech is not always accompanied by the use of polite language. Many comments are direct attacks, use harsh language, or convey sarcasm in a sarcastic tone. One of the public figures who often receives comments with various expressions is Fujian. This raises the question of the form and type of politeness strategies used by netizens in conveying opinions or criticizing him through TikTok.

To understand this phenomenon, the framework of politeness strategy theory developed by Brown and Levinson (1987) can be used. This theory explains that speakers choose certain strategies to maintain the face of the interlocutor, either through direct or indirect means, with four main types of strategies: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record.

Several previous studies have discussed politeness strategies in social media. Widya Mandala and Iriana Sari (2023) studied positive politeness in TikTok user comments. Jodi (2024) examines the incivility strategies that appear in netizen comments. Samsulhadi and Sabardila (2025) highlighted the dominance of sarcasm elements in the comment's column on controversial figures. Meanwhile, research by Istikomah (2019) and Novira et al. (2024) highlighted the use of politeness strategies on other social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube.

Although there have been many studies on politeness on social media, it is still rare to find studies that specifically discuss politeness strategies in comments addressed to young female public figures in Indonesia, such as Fuji An, especially on the TikTok platform. In fact, the accounts of public figures such as Fuji are real examples of active interaction between the public and celebrities in the digital space, and therefore become important to be studied more deeply (Gigik et al., 2025).

This study aims to identify and analyze the forms of politeness strategies used by netizens in Fujian's TikTok comment section. With this focus, the research is expected to be able to map how polite (and impolite) forms of interaction occur in the comment space. Theoretically, this research is expected to add to the literature in the field of pragmatics, especially related to the use of politeness strategies in communication.

Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach because it aims to understand the form and meaning of politeness strategies used by netizens in TikTok comments. This approach was chosen because the data being studied is in the form of language and its meaning is analyzed in depth, rather than in the form of numbers or statistics. With this approach, researchers can see how netizens express their opinions through polite word choices or otherwise (Wulandari et al., 2021).

This study took data from one TikTok video belonging to Fujian, which was chosen because it had high interaction, such as many comments, likes, and views. The comments

analyzed were public comments that were openly accessible. The researchers used purposive sampling, which involves selecting comments that meet certain criteria. The selected comments had to meet three criteria: they had to be written in Indonesian, contain expressions about Fujian (either supportive or critical), and demonstrate the use of politeness strategies or the opposite. From the selection results, 30 comments were used as research samples (Setyawan & Amalia, 2020). The researcher acted as the main tool (human instrument) for data collection, selection, and analysis. The data collection process was carried out by opening Fujian's TikTok account, selecting one uploaded video, and then copying comments that met certain criteria into a text document. The identities of TikTok users were not included to maintain research ethics. All data was collected over a period of one week in a structured and organized manner.

After the data was collected, the researcher classified the comments based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness strategies.

This theory divides politeness strategies into four categories:

1. Bald on record – conveying information directly without beating around the bush,
2. Positive politeness – trying to build closeness or a warm relationship,
3. Negative politeness – respecting someone's rights or privacy,
4. Off record – conveying messages indirectly or implicitly. Each comment was analyzed and assigned to one of the four strategies.

After that, the researchers counted the number of each type of strategy that appeared to determine which strategy was used most often. The researchers also explained the meaning and purpose of each strategy in the context of conversations about public figures through comments. The analysis was conducted in a structured manner so that the results could be reliable and replicable by other researchers.

This classification approach was also used in other pragmatic studies examining digital comments (Nuraini et al., 2022; Widodo et al., 2023). To ensure accuracy, the researchers compared their findings with theory and previous research results. With this method, it is hoped that the research can describe how netizens use politeness strategies in digital communication, as well as show forms of politeness or impoliteness in social media comments about local public figures such as Fujian.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

This study analyzes 40 comments made by TikTok users about Fujian by classifying the comments into four types of strategies: positive politeness, bald on record, off record (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and impoliteness (Culpeper, 1996). Each strategy is explained and illustrated with 10 examples of comments to provide a representative understanding.

Strategy	Number of Comments	Percentage
Positive Politeness	10	25%
Bald on Record	10	25%
Off Record	10	25%
Impoliteness	10	25%
Total	**40**	**100%**

Table 1. *Distribution of Politeness and Impoliteness Strategies*

1. Positive Politeness (10 comments – 25%)

Description:

This strategy is used to build social closeness, show empathy, and reduce the threat to the interlocutor's face. In the context of comments on Fujian, this strategy appears in the form of support, praise, and positive expectations. These comments reflect the solidarity of netizens towards public figures who are under pressure or criticism. Example comments:

a. *Tetap semangat ya Kak Fuji, kami selalu dukung."*

b. *"Cantik banget deh asli, makin hari makin anggun."*

c. *"Bangga banget sama kamu, bisa kuat sejauh ini."*

d. *"Kamu hebat kak, tetap rendah hati ya."*

e. *"Semangat terus yaa, jangan dengerin omongan orang."*

f. *"Kak Fuji tetap ceria ya, kamu inspirasi banyak orang."*

g. *"Makin hari makin dewasa, keren banget perjuanganmu."*

h. *"Suka banget liat cara kamu merespon haters, elegan."*

i. *"Kamu tuh cantik luar dalam."*

j. *"MasyaAllah, kuat banget kamu."*

2. Bald on Record (10 comments – 25%)

Description:

This strategy is characterized by direct and blunt messaging. Comments using this strategy often involve criticism or sharp judgments toward Fujian. Netizens express their opinions openly, which can sometimes come across as rude or aggressive in digital communication.

Example comments:

    a. *"Lebay banget sumpah, gak penting banget videonya."*

    b. *"Capek liat kamu nangis terus, move on lah."*

    c. *"Pansos mulu, bosen."*

    d. *"Gak usah banyak drama deh, biasa aja kali."*

    e. *"Sok kuat padahal keliatan caper."*

    f. *"Nangis mulu tiap hari, bikin ilfeel."*

    g. *"Gak usah sok tabah, semua orang juga punya masalah."*

    h. *"Video beginian tuh cuma cari simpati."*

    i. *"Asli, udah males liat konten dia."*

    j. *"Dikit-dikit drama, capek liatnya."*

3. Off Record (10 comments – 25%)

Description:

This strategy reveals the intention indirectly, usually through sarcasm, insinuation, or double meanings. In comments about Fujian, this strategy is used by netizens who want to criticize but still maintain a polite or non-confrontational impression. Ambiguous and rhetorical sentences often appear in this type of comment.

Example comments:

    a. *"Kalau bukan karena tragedi itu, mungkin gak setenar sekarang ya…"*
    b. *"Netizen pintar kok, bisa nilai sendiri siapa yang asli siapa yang settingan."*
    c. *"Kayaknya semua ini terlalu direncanakan, gak natural."*
    d. *"Ada aja ya yang dimanfaatin biar viral."*
    e. *"Bukan maksud apa-apa, tapi kok kayak dibuat-buat?"*
    f. *"Mirip sinetron ya, dramanya dapet banget."*

    g. *"Orang bisa pura-pura kuat di depan kamera, tapi siapa tahu ya."*
    h. *"Tiap ada konten baru, pasti ada drama baru."*
    i. *"Yang begini nih kadang sengaja biar trending."*
    j. *"Ada-ada aja netizen digiring opininya."*

4. Impoliteness (10 comments – 25%)

Description:

    The impoliteness strategy involves direct statements that attack, insult, or belittle. Comments in this category not only criticize behaviour but also touch on sensitive issues such as religion, moral values, and personal insults. Netizens who use this strategy do not make any effort to maintain politeness or save face.

Example comments:

    a. *"Fuji Maghrib? Astaga, udah hilang akal demi konten."*
    b. *"Ngapain sih bawa-bawa waktu Maghrib? Cari sensasi murahan."*
    c. *"Pakai nama agama buat konten? Makin jijik liatnya."*
    d. *"Cuma bisa nangis dan nyari simpati, gak ada prestasi."*
    e. *"Influencer settingan, cuma jual drama."*
    f. *"Astagfirullah, kontennya makin gak ada adab."*
    g. *"Gak pantes jadi panutan, kelakuannya norak."*
    h. *"Drama murahan tiap minggu, bosan ah."*
    i. *"Gak ada isi, cuma pamer nangis doang."*
    j. *"Haram konten beginian ditonton anak-anak."*

Discussion

    The results of this study indicate that TikTok netizens use various communication strategies when interacting with Fuji An's content. Positive politeness strategies dominate the comments, indicating a tendency for netizens to provide emotional support and build solidarity. These findings are consistent with the results of a study by Gigik et al. (2025), which states that netizens in digital spaces show empathy toward public figures through verbal support.

    Furthermore, bald on record and off record strategies appear in the form of direct criticism or subtle sarcasm. This is in line with Mahsusi's (2023) research, which reveals that social media as an open space allows people to express criticism freely without conventional norms. Comments using the off-the-record approach tend to avoid direct confrontation while still expressing disagreement or doubt about the uploaded content.

    The most striking are comments employing impoliteness strategies, which often contain personal insults and even bring up religious issues, such as in the case of the term "Fuji Maghrib." This strategy reflects the increasing prevalence of hate speech on social

media. These findings reinforce the results of Nisa et al.'s (2024) research, which states that digital platforms are now increasingly vulnerable.

Conclusion

This study reveals that TikTok users employ a range of politeness strategies when commenting on local public figures such as Fuji An. The analysis of 40 selected comments showed that users commonly use positive politeness to show support and empathy, while others prefer bald on record or off record strategies to deliver direct or indirect criticism. A notable portion of comments also contained impoliteness in the form of mockery and verbal attacks, reflecting how expressions of support and hostility coexist in Indonesia's digital public sphere.

However, this study has certain limitations. The dataset was limited to one video and one figure, which may not represent the full dynamics of digital communication across various contexts. Moreover, the comments were not analyzed in relation to demographic factors such as age, gender, or region, which could influence language choices. Future studies should consider larger samples, compare multiple platforms, or analyze interactions over a longer period to gain deeper insights into digital politeness in Indonesia.

The findings of this research suggest the need for stronger digital literacy and pragmatic awareness, especially in managing how users interact with public figures online. As TikTok becomes a central space for public discourse, understanding and guiding online communication behavior becomes increasingly important. Educational efforts and further research should focus on promoting respectful discourse, particularly in emotionally charged or culturally sensitive contexts.

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