

## Politeness Strategies Seen in Customers' Reviews of *The Plaza New York Hotel on Booking.com*

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### ABSTRACT

This qualitative research aims to see the types of politeness strategies used in the customers' reviews (good and poor) of *The Plaza New York* hotel on Booking.com. This research uses Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory about politeness strategies, as cited in O'Keeffe et al. (2011). The customers' reviews the writer uses are the newest ones on Booking.com, from January 2024 to February 2025. The data collected are 20 good and 10 poor reviews containing politeness strategies. The writer finds that both data use all types of politeness strategies, however, poor customers' reviews use only one sub-strategy in Negative Politeness (Don't presume/assume). The good customers' reviews use Bald on Record and Off Record to convey their disappointment, while poor customers' reviews use Positive Politeness and Negative Politeness to deliver their praises. The writer suggests that other researchers interested in politeness strategies can investigate other fields and use other theories to be more focused on the culture that influences the customers' choices of politeness strategies.

**Keywords:** booking.com, online customer's reviews, politeness strategy, the plaza new york hotel

### INTRODUCTION

As technology evolves, all the industries move forward so that they can reach lots of potential customers using communication. The Internet has also given travelers or customers the medium to express their opinions and thoughts (Chowdhury & Deshpande, 2020). As this trend continues, online reviews have finally become the most important thing to do before the customers book a hotel for their stay. Because of this matter, the hotel industry also takes this matter seriously and also focuses on managing their online reviews effectively and efficiently (Chowdhury & Deshpande, 2020). As the hospitality industry evolves to accommodate diverse customers and increase customers' expectations, understanding the role of courtesy strategies becomes necessary to ensure increased guest satisfaction (Noorani, 2024). Here, the writer wants to analyze the customers' politeness strategies in both their bad and good reviews on online platforms.

Politeness is a strategy that includes verbal and non-verbal behaviors used to avoid difficult situations and maintain a friendly relationship (Brown & Levinson, 1987). According to Priya et al. (2024), the hospitality industry demonstrates politeness through welcoming, careful listening, responsive empathy, and courteous staff behavior. With these behaviors, the hospital industry aims to improve customer satisfaction. Satisfaction includes interactions, service quality, atmosphere, and overall experience (Arhin & Cobblah, 2024). By providing great services, the hotel hopes the customers will give feedback in return, especially on the online platforms, to give reviews, stars, or ratings for their services.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), as cited in O'Keeffe et al. (2011), "if an FTA (Face Threatening Act) has to be performed, then the speaker has five communicative choices: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, off record and don't perform the FTA (these choices form the so-called 'superstrategies')" (p. 64).

Based on Watts (2003), as quoted in O'Keeffe et al. (2011), politeness is divided into two concepts, that is, politeness<sub>1</sub> and politeness<sub>2</sub>. Politeness<sub>1</sub> by Watts refers to the culture, folks, lay, or commonsense interpretations of politeness (O'Keeffe et al., 2011). Watts' politeness<sub>2</sub> is the same as

Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, which refers to "the 'politeness' as a technical term used in both the pragmatic and sociolinguistic study of spoken and written language" (O'Keeffe et al., 2011, p. 76). Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is focused only on the language aspects and not related to the culture. In this research, the writer focuses on Watts' politeness<sub>2</sub> because the writer analyzed the written text only. For the rest of the thesis, the term politeness is used to refer to Watts' politeness<sub>2</sub>.

The writer got insightful ideas from two previous studies that had similar scope: politeness strategies. They are *Positive Politeness Strategies Used by Visitor in Tripadvisor Review of Garuda Wisnu Kencana Cultural Park* (Parmita & Putri, 2023) and *Politeness Strategies in Restaurant Reviews on Tripadvisor* (Pinay-an & Buslon, 2019). However, both studies had different platforms from the writer's and the first study only investigated positive politeness strategies.

The writer's study aims to analyze the types of politeness strategies used in customers' reviews. More precisely, the writer examines the politeness strategies employed by the customers who have experienced *The Plaza New York* hotel's services. The writer chooses *The Plaza New York* hotel because of its iconic and long-standing reputation for luxury in the hospitality world (Lowe, 2023). *The Plaza New York* hotel opened on October 1, 1907 (The Plaza New York Hotel, 2023). As explained by their website, *The Plaza New York* hotel has been the number one hotel for over 100 years (The Plaza New York Hotel, 2023). The more luxurious the hotel is, the more professional and polite it is (Noorani, 2024). Therefore, the writer has decided to use *The Plaza New York*, a globally trusted hotel, which has received a variety of reviews.

Being respectful goes beyond in-person encounters as technology becomes increasingly integrated into the hospitality industry (Noorani, 2024). Seeing the increasingly sophisticated developments of the era, many people prefer to use online travel agents (OTA) (Amalia et al., 2023). Therefore, the writer uses Booking.com (<https://booking.com>) to collect data (customers' reviews) from *The Plaza New York* hotel. The writer used only one online travel agent (OTA) platform to be more consistent and in-depth, making it easier to analyze without having to differentiate formats across multiple platforms.

Online travel agent websites, more precisely Booking.com, allow the customers to give or leave reviews or comments after they have used the hotel services. The customers are allowed to share their reviews, whether it is good or bad. This feature allows the customer to interact with their hotel so their complaint or compliment can be delivered well, and they mostly do it online. Online reviews play an important role in maintaining, repairing, and promoting a hotel's image, which will, in turn, have an impact on other potential customers' choice of hotel to choose their stay in a hotel and repeat visits of a guest (Chuang et al., 2012). This study aims to analyze the types of politeness strategies used by customers in reviews of *The Plaza New York* hotel.

## **METHOD**

For this study, the writer used a qualitative approach. The data was the good and bad reviews, excluding the passable ones, that contain politeness strategies, from *The Plaza New York* hotel on Booking.com. If the writer still included these five until six stars, it became invalid because they were counted as two descriptions with the same number. The units of analysis included phrases and statements, with emojis only as a support to help the writer analyze when the customers' reviews were not clear, such as, '☺ The room'. The writer used politeness theory from Brown and Levinson (1987), as cited in O'Keeffe et al. (2011). The writer collected the data orderly starting from one-star reviews and continuing onward, then pasting them into Google Docs. Booking.com states that 'very poor' rating is one to two stars, 'poor' rating is three to four stars, 'good' rating is seven to eight stars, and 'superb' rating is nine to ten stars (Booking.com, n.d.). Therefore, the writer used the ratings of very poor, poor, good, and superb. To simplify the ratings in this thesis, the writer combined ratings one to

four stars into poor ratings and seven to ten stars into good ratings. The writer's focal point was all the responses from Booking.com collected from 2024 to February 2025 because Booking.com only displays reviews from the last 36 months (Booking.com, n.d.). The writer included 10 poor customers' reviews and 20 good customers' reviews and did not include those labeled as 'passable.' The writer only got 10 poor customers' reviews because the hotel kept growing and improving from the feedback they received from the customers. While the 20 good customers' reviews were the newest ones, representing all the good reviews this hotel got from their customers. For foreign customers, since their reviews were written in their first language, the writer used Booking.com's translation feature to translate them into English.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the data, the writer found that customers' reviews used all of the politeness strategies as suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987), as cited in O'Keefe et al. (2011), that is, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, Bald on Record and Off Record Strategies.

Table 1

Findings on Politeness Strategies Observed in the Customers' Reviews of *The Plaza New York* hotel

No.	Customers' Reviews	Types of Politeness Strategies											
		PP			NP					BON-R		OFF-R	
		CCG	CC	F	BD	DPA	DC	C	R	NM	M		
1.	Good Reviews (7-10 stars)	√			√	√	√	√			√	√	√
2.	Poor Reviews (1-4 stars)	√				√					√	√	√

Abbreviations:

PP	: Positive Politeness.	CCG	: Claim Common Ground.
CC	: Convey that S and H are cooperators.	F	: Fulfil H's want for some X.
NP	: Negative Politeness.	BD	: Be Direct.
DPA	: Don't presume/assume.	DC	: Don't coerce H.
C	: Communicate S's want to not impinge on H.	R	: Redress other wants of H's.
NM	: Cases of non-minimization of the face threat.	BON-R	: Bald on record.
M	: Cases of FTA-oriented bald-on-record usage	OFF-R	: Off record.

From Table 1, it can be seen that it clearly shows that good customers' reviews also contain complaints through Bald on Record (BON-R) and Off Record (OFF-R). At the same time, poor customers' reviews also have compliments through Positive Politeness (PP) and Negative Politeness (NP).

### 1. Types of Politeness Strategies Observed in The Plaza New York Hotel's Good Customers' Reviews

The writer found that four types of Politeness Strategies were used in the good customers' reviews, that is, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, Bald on Record, and Off Record. Each of these strategies has a different way to let the hearer understand the speaker. From 20 good customers' reviews, customers mostly use Positive Politeness; however, it still has some complaints in it.

#### 1.1 Positive Politeness

Positive Politeness is a strategy to save or consider someone's positive face, where they want to know the hearer's desires, behaviours, or values (Brown & Levinson, 1987). By this, it means that the speaker (S) wants to show to the hearer that they share the same desires or interests, that is why

they can give something positive in return and save their positive face by giving great compliments towards the hearer.

### 1.1.1 Claim Common Ground (CCG)

Data 30.3.10, "*A really special experience, and it was great that the hotel stopped public access to avoid getting busy.*"

This statement shows that the speaker uses the exaggerated phrase "*a really special experience*" to express that S approves of what the hotel has been giving them, with a great experience. It also shows that S uses the exaggerated word '*special*' to emphasize the emotional impact of staying at this hotel. With this statement, it gave approval to H, making H believe that S and H share the same value of getting and giving the special experiment. Here, the customer uses *Strategy 2: Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with the hearer)* to show his compliments towards the hotel.

Other than that, this statement also shows that the speaker saying "*great that the hotel stopped public access*" implies that both S and H share the same experience, that is, avoiding the crowds by stopping the public access. It shows that both S and H have the same needs because the moment happened when they were celebrating Christmas and the hotel, as the tourist attraction, became fuller and disturbed their customers. They (S and H) did not want the crowd to have a bad impact towards them, so they shared the same desires, avoiding the crowd. Here, the customer also uses *Strategy 7: Presuppose/raise/assert common ground* to indicate that they do have the same needs, that is, avoid the crowds.

## 1.2 Negative Politeness

Negative Politeness is contradictory with Positive Politeness, where Positive Politeness shares the same interest to the hearer, Negative Politeness is more focused on reducing the impact of a FTA (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

### 1.2.1 Claim Common Ground (CCG)

Data 23.3.9, "*My only complaint would be the wait times for the elevators.*"

The speaker uses more polite language by saying "*my only complaint*", showing that the speaker's complaint is not blatant. It makes the statement that has been said by S become softer, even though his first purpose is to disturb H's face. Nonetheless, with S using this strategy, it helps S to convey his disappointment while still being respectful to H, so it does not harm H and still hopes for better service, just as S said before. Here, S says 'only' to minimize what he actually wanted to say, while actually, there are still other complaints that he wanted to say after this. To help the speaker do what he needs, S uses *Strategy 1: Be conventionally indirect* to show that S is trying not to disturb H's face by being indirect.

### 1.2.2 Don't Presume/Assume (DPA)

Data 20.12.8, "*Overall it's a decent historical hotel, but it's not that super nice worth paying for.*"

This statement shows that S avoids criticism directly by hedging it with "*it's not that super nice.*" S reduces the strength of the complaint by saying something that is not too bad, but also not that amazing. While S is still being respectful to H, H still can understand what S implies to and S can say what he wanted to say even though it was reducing the strength of the statement. By using this hedge, it helps S to convey his statement and still respecting the negative face of H, and here, S uses *Strategy 2: Question, hedge* to help him achieve what he needs.

### 1.2.3 Don't Coerce H (DC)

Data 27.3.10, "*These are only small details, like making available in the rooms a kettle with tea and coffee (it lacks a little when jumping out of the bed) and also in room 1538, the toilet door remains a little open..*"

This statement shows that the speaker tried to reduce the face threat by saying “*These are only small details,*” This statement may imply that the issues weren't that serious, while actually the speaker is disappointed about this matter, so he complained to the hotel about it. The word “*small details*” here conveys its literal meaning, which narrowly limits the scope of the FTA and makes it less of a burden for the hearer to overcome. Here, the speaker uses *Strategy 4: Minimize the imposition, Rx* to help him deliver his statement.

#### **1.2.4 Communicate S's want to not impinge on H (C)**

*Data 27.3.10, “These are only small details, like making available in the rooms a kettle with tea and coffee (it lacks a little when jumping out of the bed) and also in room 1538, the toilet door remains a little open..”*

This statement avoids using direct complaint to respect the hearer by not using ‘*I*’ and ‘*you.*’ The speaker uses imperatives to suggest a general desire to avoid open reference. Here, the speaker uses *Strategy 7: Impersonate S and H* to show his respect to H's negative face.

### **1.3 Bald on Record**

Bald on Record is a strategy where the speaker can directly say something that the speaker wanted to say in the first place, without avoiding the hearer's negative face (O’Keeffe et al., 2011). This strategy is usually used to give a complaint or to deliver S's disappointment to H and definitely disturb H's negative face (O’Keeffe et al., 2011).

#### **1.3.1 Cases of Non-Minimization of the Face Threat**

*Data 29.1.10, “The bathroom was dirty when we arrived.”*

This statement shows that the speaker clearly states a complaint and their disappointment by directly mentioning the problem. This statement also shows how the customer was direct and blunt that the bathroom was dirty when they arrived at the hotel and the customer did not mitigate or soften the statement. It shows that the customer is really disappointed with the bathroom and hopes that the hotel can take responsible action for this case.

#### **1.3.2 Cases of FTA-Oriented Bald-on-Record Usage**

*Data 21.2.9, “Recommend providing residents with complimentary tea and coffee in the room.”*

This statement shows that the speaker gives a direct complaint toward the hearer using 'recommendation' as an excuse. By giving this recommendation, S actually complains about the hotel service that does not provide complimentary tea or coffee in the room while S has paid an expensive price. Therefore, S uses the word 'recommend' instead, to be more respectful to the hearer (the hotel), not to burden H and not to force H to give the complimentary things.

### **1.4 Off Record**

Different from the other strategies, Off Record is a way for a speaker to give an unclear statement and leave the meaning of the statement to the hearer, without having a responsibility to explain more to the hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

*Data 21.1.9, “Luxurious but missing at least meals or breakfast.”*

This statement shows that the speaker uses a contradiction by saying “*Luxurious but missing...*” In here, the speaker does not directly state a criticism, but more like being honest to the hearer. The speaker indeed complimented the hotel by saying it is a luxurious hotel, however, they still have something to add to the hotel's services, which includes the meals or breakfast to the package. Here, the customer uses *Strategy 7: Use contradictions* to show his honesty and his statement to the hearer.

## **2. Types of Politeness Strategies Observed in The Plaza New York Hotel's Poor Customers' Reviews**

In this research, after doing the analysis the writer found that four types of Politeness Strategies are used in the poor customers' reviews, that is, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, Bald on Record, and Off Record. These strategies hold their meaning differently to let the hearer interpret them. From 10 poor customers' reviews, Bald on Record is the highest that the customers used; however, it still has some compliments in it.

### **2.1 Positive Politeness**

A strategy to consider the hearer's (H) positive face is a strategy called positive politeness. The speaker wants to know H's desires, behaviours, or values to save their face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Therefore, this strategy means to show that S and H have the same desires or interests, so that S can save H's face by giving a compliment to the hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

#### **2.1.1 Claim Common Ground (CCG)**

*Data 9.1.4, "Nice service at the Hotel reception."*

This statement shows that the speaker gives the needs that the hearer wants, that is, to get praise from the customer. By using the words "Nice service," it shows that the speaker is satisfied with the service given by the hotel as the hearer. With that being said, the customer uses *Strategy 1: Notice, attend to H (his interests, wants, needs, goods)* to show his interest towards the hearer.

### **2.2 Negative Politeness**

Contrary to positive politeness, negative politeness is focused more on minimizing the impact of the FTA to the hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This strategy is often used for indirectness, hedging, and also polite pessimism (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

#### **2.2.1 Don't Presume/Assume (DPA)**

*Data 10.1.4, "A bit dated."*

This phrase softens the criticism by using "a bit," implying that the issue is minor and can be overlooked or improved later by the hotel. With this being said, the customer believes that H wants to cooperate with him, to improve the hotel and make it to be newer. Here, the customer uses *Strategy 2: Question, hedge* to deliver his meaning to the hearer.

### **2.3 Bald on Record**

The speaker who uses bald on record can directly say something as he wants to, without avoiding H's face (O'Keeffe et al., 2011). This strategy is mostly used to give a complaint or deliver the speaker's disappointment to H (O'Keeffe et al., 2011).

#### **2.3.1 Cases of Non-Minimization of the Face Threat**

*Data 10.2.4, "Minibar was warm, bathtub broken. Key card did not work several times."*

This statement shows that the speaker directly addresses the problem by listing the issues one by one without softening the language, making it a straightforward and complete complaint. Here, the speaker's main purpose is to show his disappointment that the speaker has experienced himself, so in return, S does not need to redress the FTA.

#### **2.3.2 Cases of FTA-Oriented Bald-on-Record Usage**

*Data 3.2.2, "Stained carpet Room chair."*

This statement clearly points out the issues by naming the dirty items. Though the customer does not explicitly say, "This is bad," the hearer can infer that these items are the reason for the bad

rating. Here the speaker says something without the urgency, as he says stained carpet is not that urgent matter, but it is still something bad that makes S feel disappointed.

#### 2.4 Off Record

This strategy makes a way for the speaker to be unclear and leave the meaning or let H to interpret the meaning on his own, and have no responsibility to explain more about it to H (Brown & Levinson, 1987). With this strategy, S can perform the FTA ambiguously and avoids the responsibility, so S can leave the meaning of the statement to H on himself (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

*Data 2.1.1, "It has lost the glamour it had and is full of tourists entering to take pictures."*

This statement implies that the hotel (the hearer) has lost its former charm. The speaker does not directly say, "I don't like it" or "The tourists have ruined the hotel." Instead, he subtly suggests that the hotel has changed and the speaker did not like it. Here, the customer uses *Strategy 1: Give hints* to give the clue towards H that S felt dissatisfied with the experience.

### 3. The Writer's Interpretation

After having done the research, the writer has found that in reality, good customers' reviews still have complaints inside, and poor customers' reviews also still have compliments inside. This can be seen through the strategies used by the customers when they want to praise or give a negative comment. Based on the writer's interpretation, this also can lead to the interpretation that the customers does not want to give such a bad impression towards the hearer (the hotel) or give dishonest reviews towards the hotel as the hearer, so that the hotel can keep growing and improving from the reviews that they have received.

As seen in Table 1, it is clear that not all good reviews are filled with praise and not all poor reviews are also filled with complaints. Both of the reviews (good and poor) used the same strategies to convey their compliments or complaints, however, the small strategies that they used are showing differences. Based on the findings, both good and poor customers' reviews mostly use Bald on Record with the sub strategy, Cases of Non-Minimization of the Face Threat, and use Off Record, to give their complaints towards the hearer (the hotel). Positive Politeness, with the sub strategy Claim Common Ground, is used by both good and bad customers' reviews to deliver their compliments to the H. Negative Politeness is also conveyed by the customers, however, poor customers' reviews lack variation of the sub strategies, since they only use one sub strategy (Don't presume/assume), unlike good customers' reviews that use four sub strategies (Be Direct; Don't presume/assume; Don't coerce H; and Communicate S's want to not impinge on H). It can be concluded that the customers still pay attention to the H's face.

## CONCLUSION

From section findings and discussion, it can be concluded that both good and poor customers' reviews use all types of politeness strategies, however, poor customers' reviews use only one sub strategy in Negative Politeness (Don't presume/assume). The speakers who leave the good reviews mostly use Positive Politeness strategies to show their gratitude towards the hearer (the hotel), while the ones who leave the poor reviews mostly use Bald on Record strategies to show their disappointment to the hearer. On the other hand, as explained in findings, good customers' reviews still leave complaints, and poor customers' reviews also still leave compliments to the hearer. Here, the writer interprets that all the customers do have their own experiences while visiting the hotel; however, they still do not want to be rude or give too much praise because every hotel has its plus and minus sides as well. Therefore, it also helps the customers to be more honest when giving out the reviews to *The Plaza New York* hotel.

This research hopefully has given an understanding about Politeness Strategies, especially in Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, as cited in O'Keeffe et al. (2011). Despite that, the writer's findings in this research are only related to the hospitality industry and are wrapped up into a

linguistic focus that has been analyzed. Therefore, the future researchers could analyze politeness strategies in other fields of service, such as a restaurant, an amusement park, or other places where the customers' reviews can be seen for further research. Future studies can also analyze politeness strategies from other theories, such as from Watts' politeness<sub>1</sub>, which are more focused on the cultural differences that influence the customers' choice of politeness strategies in expressing satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

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