

**A Pragmatic Study of (Im)Politeness Strategies and Institutional Power in Indonesian Hotel Telephone Conversations****Budi Purnomo**Universitas Surakarta  
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**Abstract**

This study examines how (im)politeness strategies and institutional power are dynamically negotiated in Indonesian hotel telephone conversations an interactional domain that remains underexplored in pragmatic and hospitality communication research. Drawing on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory and Culpeper's impoliteness framework, the analysis investigates not only the types of strategies used but also how front-desk operators reaffirm institutional authority, manage guest dissatisfaction, and perform pragmatic repairs when interactions risk escalating. Data were collected from naturally occurring telephone conversations in several hotels in Surakarta, Indonesia, and analyzed using a qualitative pragmatic approach. The findings show that (im)politeness is an ongoing negotiation shaped by hierarchical service roles, shifting communicative goals, and institutional expectations. Operators predominantly employ positive and negative politeness to maintain professionalism, yet they occasionally shift to off-record strategies, withholding, or mitigated impoliteness to indirectly enforce hotel regulations or handle guest resistance. These moves are typically followed by face-restoring acts to re-establish interactional harmony and protect both individual and institutional face. The study demonstrates that (im)politeness in hotel discourse functions simultaneously as relational management and institutional power performance. Pedagogically, the findings offer insights for developing ESP materials that enhance pragmatic competence in hospitality service communication.

**Keywords:** (Im)politeness, institutional power, hotel discourse, pragmatic study, hospitality communication**Citation:**

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## INTRODUCTION

Politeness plays a central role in institutional and service-oriented communication, particularly in the hospitality industry, where successful interaction depends on the careful alignment of friendliness, authority, and professional standards. Hotel telephone conversations constitute a distinctive setting for pragmatic negotiation because both staff and guests perform potentially face-threatening acts within a hierarchical and service-driven framework. Front-desk staff must manage a wide range of requests, inquiries, and complaints efficiently while maintaining politeness, deference, and institutional professionalism. These interactions frequently require a delicate interplay of politeness and impoliteness strategies to meet operational demands, ensure customer satisfaction, and uphold the hotel's credibility.

From a pragmatic perspective, face management has long been recognized as central to service encounters. However, the mechanisms through which politeness and impoliteness operate in institutional hierarchies remain insufficiently explained. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory provides a foundational account of how speakers attend to positive and negative face, yet its focus on cooperation offers limited insight into moments when institutional authority necessitates non-cooperative, indirect, or strategically ambiguous responses. Conversely, Culpeper's (1996, 2011) impoliteness framework foregrounds the interactional emergence of face threats, whether intentional or unintentional, as part of power negotiation. When employed together, the two frameworks highlight the adaptive shifts hotel staff must perform between politeness work, impoliteness mitigation, and strategic indirection to balance interpersonal harmony with organizational obligations.

Institutional pragmatics further illuminates how communicative behaviour is shaped by organizational norms, role expectations, and asymmetrical power relations. Scollon and Scollon's (1995) concept of "systems of face" underscores that institutional roles constrain what counts as appropriate language. Mills (2003) emphasizes that politeness in workplace settings is inseparable from institutional identity, while Spencer-Oatey (2008) situates relational management within broader structures of hierarchy and obligation. These perspectives clarify that hotel telephone interactions cannot be viewed merely as polite exchanges between individuals; rather, they are governed by institutional constraints that influence how authority is enacted, resisted, or softened through language.

Telephone-mediated communication intensifies these pragmatic demands. The absence of visual and gestural cues eliminates nonverbal resources for signalling deference, calibrating politeness, or gauging affective stance. As a result, operators must rely solely on verbal strategies prosodic cues, lexical mitigation, sequential devices, and strategically positioned directives to manage face and maintain institutional authority. This sensory limitation makes telephone discourse a crucial site for analysing how (im)politeness is constructed, repaired, or escalated through purely linguistic means.

Existing research on (im)politeness in Indonesian contexts has focused predominantly on everyday conversation, classroom interaction, or digital communication (Supriyadi, 2021; Nadar, 2019; Wijayanto & Laila, 2016). While these studies offer valuable insights, they do not address professional and institutional contexts where communicative choices have operational consequences. Research on tourism and business communication (Purnomo, 2023; Hartono, 2020) contributes relevant observations, yet hotel telephone interactions despite their frequency and high institutional stakes remain underexplored. Given the lack of multimodal cues, such interactions rely heavily on verbal negotiation of face, authority, and institutional obligations, making them an essential domain for pragmatic inquiry.

Furthermore, the interface between (im)politeness and institutional power has received limited attention in Indonesian hospitality discourse. Power asymmetries determine who may impose requests, how refusals must be formulated, and the extent to which politeness is required to maintain professionalism. Vertical relationships between guests and operators or supervisors and subordinates demand different pragmatic strategies compared with horizontal interactions among peer staff. Understanding these dynamics is not only theoretically significant for institutional pragmatics but also practically important for training hotel personnel to respond appropriately in diverse service scenarios.

This study investigates how (im)politeness strategies and institutional power are realized in Indonesian hotel telephone conversations. Specifically, it explores how front-desk staff construct politeness, manage emerging impoliteness, and reaffirm authority when responding to guests' requests, complaints, or inquiries. Data were drawn from 500 authentic telephone conversations in three-star hotels in Central Java, representing diverse interactional pressures and service contexts. The analysis

draws on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, Culpeper's (2011) impoliteness framework, and institutional-pragmatic perspectives (Scollon & Scollon, 1995; Mills, 2003; Spencer-Oatey, 2008).

The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of institutional (im)politeness in Indonesian hospitality discourse. They illuminate the adaptive linguistic strategies used by hotel staff to negotiate hierarchical expectations, manage face-threatening acts, and maintain organizational professionalism. Beyond theoretical implications, the results offer practical insights for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) education, particularly in designing training modules that prepare students to negotiate hierarchy, manage conflict verbally in the absence of visual cues, and develop pragmatic sensitivity in high-stakes service encounters.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design situated within a pragmatic and institutional interaction framework to examine how (im)politeness strategies and power asymmetries are realized in naturally occurring hotel telephone conversations. The approach was interpretive rather than statistical, aiming to describe how linguistic choices reflect interpersonal sensitivity, institutional authority, and service-related constraints.

The analysis integrated Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and Culpeper's (2011) impoliteness model as complementary lenses for understanding face management in hierarchical service encounters. Brown and Levinson's framework was used to examine how receptionists attend to guests' positive and negative face needs, while Culpeper's model illuminated moments when institutional obligations require the performance or mitigation of face-threatening acts, such as enforcing regulations or denying requests. To situate these patterns within broader relational and institutional expectations, Spencer-Oatey's (2008) Rapport Management model and Scollon and Scollon's (1995) intercultural-institutional orientations were incorporated. Together, these frameworks provided an adaptive analytical foundation for examining pragmatic negotiation in time-sensitive, telephone-mediated hospitality interactions.

### **Research Subjects**

The data consisted of 500 naturally occurring telephone conversations between hotel receptionists and guests from three star-rated hotels in Central Java, Indonesia. The corpus represented diverse communicative functions, including room reservations, inquiries, booking confirmations, troubleshooting interactions, service requests, and complaint handling. Conversations were included based on the presence of complete openings and closings, identifiable participant roles, and clear transactional purposes aligned with hospitality operations.

The hotels were selected for their standardized service protocols and multilingual operational environments. The dataset reflected the linguistic diversity of Central Java: approximately 77% of the calls were conducted fully in Indonesian, 21% involved mixed Indonesian–English exchanges, and 2% were conducted entirely in English, mostly with foreign guests. All linguistic varieties were retained because code choice is central to how staff negotiate face needs, authority, and institutional identity.

### **Ensuring the Naturalness of Data**

To maintain ecological validity, the study relied on hotels' existing call-recording systems, which operate routinely for service quality monitoring. Institutional consent was obtained, but neither receptionists nor guests were notified about which specific calls would later be analysed. This procedure minimized observer's paradox and ensured that communicative behaviour remained unaffected.

No external recording devices were introduced, and data were drawn from recordings collected several weeks before the analysis commenced. A brief post-factum confirmation with participating receptionists indicated that their communicative patterns remained natural, as monitoring is integrated into their daily routines. These methodological safeguards ensured that the dataset accurately reflected authentic hotel communication practices.

### **Research Instruments**

Data collection involved hotel-authorized call recordings complemented by brief field notes documenting operational routines and interactional context. All conversations were transcribed

verbatim and anonymized for confidentiality. The primary analytical instrument was a coding guide adapted from Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies, Culpeper's impoliteness taxonomy, and Spencer-Oatey's rapport management framework. This guide provided operational definitions for classifying linguistic strategies within institutional service settings.

### **Differentiating Negative Politeness and Institutional Deference**

A key feature of the coding guide was the distinction between negative politeness and institutional deference. Negative politeness was understood as personalized mitigation oriented toward the guest's individual face wants. This category included linguistic behaviours such as hedging, minimizing imposition, offering tailored apologies, and using indirect formulations that directly addressed the guest's subjective needs and expectations. Institutional deference, by contrast, referred to formulaic politeness mandated by organizational protocols. It comprised scripted greetings, obligatory honorifics, standardized apologies, and other routine expressions embedded in hotel service procedures rather than shaped by the immediate interactional context.

The distinction between the two was operationalized through three criteria, namely the degree of personalization, the extent to which the expression was calibrated to the specific circumstances of the conversation, and its traceability to documented service scripts. To ensure consistency, coding reliability was strengthened through peer debriefing with two linguistics experts who reviewed the operational definitions, coding decisions, and sample extracts.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis followed Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) three-stage qualitative model, adapted for pragmatic and institutional discourse analysis. The process began with data reduction, during which each utterance was segmented and coded using the refined (im)politeness categories. Coding decisions were informed by contextual checklist details such as participant roles, hierarchical cues, service activity types, and the linguistic code used in the exchange.

The reduced data were then organized into thematic displays that visualized how strategies were distributed across interactions, how they functioned pragmatically, and how they aligned with institutional expectations as well as guest behaviour. These matrices enabled the researcher to observe emerging patterns and trace shifts between politeness and impoliteness across cases.

Conclusion drawing involved interpreting how linguistic strategies indexed relational management, enacted or mitigated institutional power, and responded to interactional pressures that occasionally prompted strategic movement between politeness and impoliteness. Analytical depth was enhanced through cross-case comparison and integration with established scholarship in institutional pragmatics. Credibility of the findings was supported through triangulation, including expert validation, comparison of contrasting cases, and the use of NVivo 12 software to ensure systematic coding and transparent analytic procedures.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

This section presents the results of the pragmatic analysis of 500 hotel telephone conversations and examines how (im)politeness strategies are shaped by institutional power relations in Indonesian hospitality settings. The dataset includes interactions between telephone operators and hotel guests, as well as internal staff interactions at Lorin Hotel Solo, Kusuma Sahid Prince Hotel, and Hotel Asia Solo. The analysis draws on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, Culpeper's (1996, 2011) impoliteness framework, and Scollon and Scollon's (1995) institutional discourse principles.

Five representative extracts, presented below, illustrate the key interactional patterns identified in the corpus.

#### Data 1. Interaction Between Telephone Operator and Hotel Guest

Context : Guest requests to be connected to another room.  
 Guest : *Hallo. Bisa bicara dengan Bapak Cheng di kamar 129?* (Hello. May I speak with Mr. Cheng in room 129?)  
 Operator : *Mohon tunggu sebentar...* (One moment, please...)

- Operator : *Maaf, nomor masih sibuk. Apakah Bapak ingin menunggu?* (I'm sorry, the line is busy. Would you like to hold?)  
 Guest : *Tidak apa-apa, saya telepon lagi nanti.* (It's okay, I'll call back later.)  
 Operator : *Baik, terima kasih, Pak.* (Alright, thank you, Sir.)

The first conversation occurs when a guest requests the operator to connect a call to another room. Within a service context that prioritizes guest comfort, the operator employs a series of negative politeness markers, including mitigated directives through lexical choices such as *mohon* ("please"), apologetic expressions like *maaf*, and the use of formal address terms such as *Bapak*. The question *Apakah Bapak ingin menunggu?* ("Would you like to wait?") functions as a minimizing-imposition strategy that preserves the guest's right to decline while allowing the operator to retain procedural control over the connection process. This pattern demonstrates how operators must manage the guest's face needs while simultaneously maintaining institutional control, consistent with politeness expectations in Indonesian hospitality settings.

Data 2. Interaction Between Telephone Operator and Hotel Guest

- Context : Guest insists on reaching another guest, Mr. Suryono.  
 Guest : *Hallo. Bisa disambungkan ke kamar Pak Suryono?* (Hello. Can I be connected to Mr. Suryono's room?)  
 Operator : *Mohon ditunggu sebentar... Kok di sini tidak ada tamu yang menginap atas nama Bapak Suryono ya?* (Please wait a moment... It seems there's no guest by that name?)  
 Guest : *Lho gimana sih hotel ini. Pak Suryono sudah check in seperempat jam yang lalu!* (What's wrong with this hotel? Mr. Suryono checked in fifteen minutes ago!)  
 Operator : *Oh maaf, Bu. Kalau begitu coba saya sambungkan ke resepsionis.* (Oh, I'm sorry, Ma'am. I'll connect you to the receptionist.)

The second interaction reveals a more complex dynamic when a guest insists that the intended person has already checked in. The operator's initial response, *Kok di sini tidak ada tamu...?*, contains the particle *kok*, which is often associated with surprise or epistemic challenge and may index potential impoliteness. As the guest responds with a stronger complaint, interactional pressure intensifies, illustrating how *Consumer Power* can shift the power balance, enabling the guest to demand certainty and compel the operator to adjust their communicative stance. The operator immediately performs a repair through *Oh maaf, Bu...*, a face-restoring move that reinstates institutional politeness and maintains the hotel's professional image. The swift shift from potential impoliteness to a formal apology demonstrates the operator's capacity to recalibrate politeness strategies responsively under emotional pressure and service expectations.

Data 3. Internal Interaction Between Telephone Operator and Receptionist

- Context : The receptionist requests a connection to housekeeping.  
 Receptionist : *Tolong sambungkan ke Housekeeping, ya.* (Please connect me to Housekeeping, okay?)  
 Operator : *Sebentar, ya...* (One moment, okay...)  
 Receptionist : *Terima kasih.* (Thank you.)  
 Operator : *Sama-sama.* (You're welcome.)

The third interaction illustrates communication between staff members of equal status. Here, expressions of solidarity appear through brief responses such as *ya* and through efficient exchanges with minimal mitigation. *Bald-on-record* directives are used naturally because a shared understanding of workflow and task urgency is assumed. The presence of camaraderie markers such as *ya* or *sebentar* strengthens the symmetrical relational character that prioritizes efficiency and professional familiarity. These characteristics align with Holmes (1995) and Mills (2003), who note that workplace interactions among colleagues tend to emphasize solidarity and effectiveness rather than formal politeness formulas.

Data 4. Interaction Between Operator and Front Office Supervisor

- Context : Supervisor instructs the operator about an incoming VIP guest.  
 Supervisor : *Tamu VIP akan check in sekarang.* (The VIP guest will check in now.)  
 Operator : *Baik, Pak. Akan saya siapkan salurannya.* (Alright, Sir. I will prepare the line.)  
 Supervisor : *Pastikan tidak ada gangguan sinyal.* (Ensure there's no signal interference.)

Operator : *Siap, Pak.* (Understood, Sir.)

The fourth interaction shows a clearer hierarchical structure when the supervisor gives instructions regarding the arrival of a VIP guest. The power asymmetry is reflected in the use of direct commands such as *Pastikan tidak ada gangguan sinyal* (“Make sure there is no network interference”). This form highlights the supervisor’s authority to set standards and reinforces operator accountability. The operator’s responses *Baik, Pak* and *Siap, Pak* constitute deference-based politeness that carries ritualized compliance. These expressions function not only as politeness strategies but also as manifestations of institutional discipline and reinforcement of the chain of command, a common feature of professional workplace culture in Indonesia.

Data 5. Tense Interaction Between Telephone Operator and Impatient Local Guest

Context : Guest complains about delayed service.  
 Guest : *Saya sudah minta sambungan dari tadi!* (I’ve already asked to be connected earlier!)  
 Operator : *Iya, iya, sebentar...* (Yes, yes, one moment...)  
 Guest : *Harusnya operator itu lebih sigap!* (The operator should be more responsive!)  
 Operator : *Mohon maaf, Bu. Kami sedang dalam antrean sambungan.* (I’m sorry, Ma’am. We’re currently handling a queue of connections.)

The fifth interaction takes place under heightened tension as a guest complains about slow service. The operator’s initial response, *Iya, iya, sebentar...*, signals possible fatigue or irritation, particularly because it lacks formal address and includes repetitive that may trigger negative interpretation. The guest’s sharper complaint *Harusnya operator itu lebih sigap!* (“Operators should be more responsive!”) intensifies the face threat and heightens emotional pressure. The operator subsequently repairs the lapse through *Mohon maaf, Bu...*, where the verb *mohon* indexes a stronger degree of deference. This sequence demonstrates that emotional tension can amplify the perceived authority of the guest and narrow the operator’s range of response options, compelling them to employ stronger negative politeness strategies to restore interactional harmony.

**Summary of Interactional Patterns**

Across the dataset, politeness strategy selection is closely tied to institutional power gradients. Both guests and supervisors consistently receive deferential forms that reflect their positions within the hierarchical service structure. Meanwhile, interactions among colleagues show a preference for solidarity and efficient communication. Emotional intensity, as seen in Data 5, amplifies guest dominance and requires the operator to quickly adjust their communicative strategies. The following table summarizes these strategic patterns:

**Table 1. Summary of (Im)Politeness Strategies in Hotel Telephone Interactions**

Data	Interaction Type	Power Relation	Politeness Strategy	Pragmatic Markers	Evaluation
1.	Guest ↔ Operator	Guest > Operator	Negative Politeness	<i>Maaf, Apakah Bapak ingin...</i>	Polite; aligns with SOP and face-saving strategies
2.	Guest ↔ Operator	Guest > Operator	Mixed: Potential Impoliteness → Negative Politeness	<i>Kok...ya?, Maaf, Bu</i>	Initial impoliteness mitigated by repair; face-threatening act softened
3.	Receptionist ↔ Operator	Equal (Staff–Staff)	Bald-on-record, Solidarity	<i>Sebentar, ya, Sama-sama</i>	Neutral-to-polite; informal interaction among equals
4.	Supervisor ↔ Operator	Supervisor > Operator	Deference (Negative Politeness)	<i>Baik, Pak, Siap, Pak</i>	Highly polite; formal hierarchy respected
5.	Guest ↔ Operator (Tense)	Guest > Operator	Immediacy → Negative Politeness (Repair)	<i>Iya, iya..., Mohon maaf, Bu</i>	Impoliteness under pressure, mitigated by apology

Table 1 demonstrates that the choice of politeness strategy is closely linked to the relative institutional power of the interlocutors. For instance, negative politeness is consistently employed in guest–operator and supervisor–operator exchanges to mitigate potential impositions, while solidarity-oriented bald-on-record strategies appear among peers of equal status. This highlights the dynamic and context-sensitive nature of (im)politeness in hospitality discourse, showing that operators constantly calibrate their linguistic behavior to balance service efficiency, relational harmony, and institutional expectations.

While Table 1 summarizes the observed (im)politeness strategies, it does not explicitly highlight the underlying institutional power dynamics that shape these strategies. Table 2 addresses this gap by examining the manifestations of institutional power across the same five interactions. By linking specific indicators of power such as guest authority, supervisor positionality, and situational urgency with the corresponding politeness strategies, Table 2 provides a more nuanced understanding of how hierarchical and relational structures influence linguistic choices in professional hotel communication.

**Table 2. Institutional Power Dynamics in Hotel Telephone Interactions**

Data	Interaction Type	Power Relation	Indicators of Institutional Power	Implications for Politeness Strategy	Notes
1	Guest ↔ Operator	Guest > Operator	Guest status, reservation authority	Operator uses negative politeness to mitigate imposition	Aligns with SOP; maintains guest face
2	Guest ↔ Operator	Guest > Operator	Guest's assertive questioning ("Kok...?")	Operator repairs potential impoliteness with apologies	Shows reactive politeness adjustment
3	Receptionist ↔ Operator	Equal (Staff–Staff)	Peer status, same institutional level	Bald-on-record, solidarity markers; minimal mitigation	Informal rapport, no hierarchy pressure
4	Supervisor ↔ Operator	Supervisor > Operator	Supervisor's positional authority	Deference, formal negative politeness; concise confirmations	Reflects vertical power; strict adherence to hierarchy
5	Guest ↔ Operator (Tense)	Guest > Operator	Urgency, emotional pressure	Initial immediacy, later mitigated with apology	Power asymmetry heightened by stress

Table 2 illustrates that institutional power is a crucial factor in determining the form and intensity of politeness strategies. In interactions with guests or supervisors, operators consistently employ deference and formal negative politeness, while interactions among peers rely on solidarity markers and minimal mitigation. Moreover, high-pressure situations, such as tense guest complaints, require adaptive strategies that temporarily combine immediacy with face-saving repairs. Together, Tables 1 and 2 reinforce the central argument that (im)politeness strategies are not merely individual choices but are intricately shaped by power hierarchies, institutional roles, and cultural norms.

## Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that power asymmetry and interactional context are the central determinants shaping (im)politeness in hotel telephone conversations. As illustrated by the patterns summarized in Table 1 and elaborated in the case analyses, guest–operator and supervisor–operator interactions consistently feature negative politeness strategies, typically realized through formal address terms, apologies, and mitigated requests. Peer interactions, in contrast, rely more heavily on solidarity-oriented strategies such as mildly softened bald-on-record forms. In high-pressure moments especially those involving complaints operators often shift rapidly from immediacy to mitigation sequences to restore the guest's face. This fluidity aligns with Brown and Levinson's view of context-sensitive facework and supports Culpeper's conceptualization of impoliteness as a dynamic process open to real-time repair.

Beyond institutional hierarchy, the data highlight the important role of local cultural norms particularly the Javanese principle of *unggah-ungguh* in shaping linguistic behaviour. *Unggah-ungguh* manifests not as an abstract cultural ideal but as a micro-pragmatic system embedded in lexical choices,

particles, sequential design, and prosodic cues. Mitigating verbs such as *mohon*, *mohon maaf*, and *tolong* illustrate how speakers linguistically calibrate deference: *mohon* appears predominantly in interactions where the operator speaks upward (guest or supervisor), while *tolong* is more common among colleagues of equal rank. Unmitigated imperatives *pastikan*, *jangan* tend to be reserved for supervisors, signaling legitimate institutional authority.

Microparticles such as *ya*, *kok*, and *loh* further index affective stance and interpersonal alignment. *Ya* frequently softens requests or conveys convergence, while *kok*, when used by operators, risks implying challenge or skepticism and therefore carries potential impoliteness, as evident in Data 2. Such particles often trigger immediate repair moves apologies, clarifications, or the reinstatement of honorific address forms to restore relational harmony (*rukun*) and re-align respect (*tepa selira*). These patterns reveal how even minimal linguistic items can shift the emotional intensity and power dynamics of service encounters in culturally salient ways.

Interactionally, operators also rely on structured action sequences to manage face. A common pattern apology externalization offer of alternative appears across several datasets. By framing disruptions as systemic rather than personal (e.g., “the line is still busy”), operators strategically shift agency away from themselves, preserving institutional face and reducing personal blame attribution. Sequential and prosodic adjustments likewise reinforce relational alignment: rising intonation in mitigated questions distributes decision-making authority to the guest, whereas falling intonation in supervisor directives asserts hierarchical rights.

Theoretically, integrating *unggah-ungguh* into the analysis enriches existing literature on vertical politeness. From a Brown & Levinsonian perspective, negative politeness emerges not as a culturally neutral repertoire but one filtered through local norms that redefine the purpose of mitigation from protecting individual autonomy to maintaining collective relational harmony. From the standpoint of Culpeper and scholarship on vertical politeness, the data show how increasing power asymmetry corresponds with more formulaic and standardized mitigation resources (e.g., *mohon*, honorifics, ritual confirmations). The shifts documented in Data 5 demonstrate how emotional pressure intensifies guest authority and compresses the operator’s available pragmatic space, prompting immediate and heightened repair.

Taken together, these findings support an adaptive model linking three interdependent components: (1) the structure of vertical politeness shaped by institutional hierarchy; (2) the dynamics of impoliteness and repair that emerge in real time; and (3) the cultural filter of *unggah-ungguh*, which governs micro-linguistic resources such as particles, mitigating verbs, prosodic patterns, and responsibility-shifting constructions. Table 2 serves as a conceptual map illustrating how specific power indicators correlate with particular pragmatic choices.

The pedagogical implications of this study are significant for ESP hospitality training. Effective instruction must extend beyond teaching formulaic polite expressions, incorporating sensitivity to pragmatic particles, repair sequences, and responsibility redistribution strategies that protect institutional face. Simulation-based training using scenarios such as Data 2 and 5 can help staff identify face-threatening cues especially the culturally salient use of *kok*, *loh*, *ya*, or evaluative tones and practice appropriate mitigation in real time. Workshops can guide trainees through structured apology formats, voice modulation, and the strategic reintroduction of respectful address forms. Interactions like those in Data 4 offer models for hierarchy-responsive communication and the ritual discipline expected in supervisor–operator exchanges. A casebook of authentic recordings drawn from this dataset could serve as a reflective tool to strengthen pragmatic awareness.

Overall, the findings illustrate that (im)politeness in Indonesian hotel telephone interactions is not a static set of strategies but a continually negotiated resource shaped by institutional hierarchy, situational pressures, and deeply embedded cultural norms of *unggah-ungguh*. Operators dynamically adjust their linguistic behaviour as power relations shift across turns, demonstrating that politeness, impoliteness, and repair operate on a fluid continuum rather than as discrete categories. This culturally grounded pragmatic model offers a richer explanation of how Indonesian institutional actors navigate face, respect, and responsibility in service encounters.

Future research may extend the model by quantifying prosodic features pitch, tempo, voice quality to examine how subtle stance shifts are encoded acoustically. Comparative studies across Indonesian regions would further clarify how local variants of *unggah-ungguh* recalibrate

(im)politeness judgments, thereby assessing the broader sociocultural applicability of the adaptive model proposed here.

## CONCLUSION

This study advances the theorization of (im)politeness in Indonesian institutional communication by proposing an adaptive model shaped by three interdependent elements: (a) vertical institutional hierarchy, (b) moment-to-moment impoliteness and repair dynamics, and (c) culturally embedded filters rooted in Javanese *unggah-ungguh*. The findings demonstrate that telephone operators' linguistic choices are not merely spontaneous responses to face threats but are systematically patterned by role obligations, interactional goals, and cultural expectations governing relational harmony.

Across guest–operator, peer–peer, and supervisor–operator interactions, operators draw on a continuum of pragmatic strategies from negative politeness and solidarity-oriented forms to impoliteness repair to manage service accountability and interpersonal alignment. Mitigating verbs (e.g., *mohon*, *maaf*), pragmatic particles (e.g., *ya*, *loh*, *kok*), strategic turn-taking, grammatical externalization, and prosodic modulation collectively function as micro-linguistic resources that enable operators to recalibrate stance and restore equilibrium when interactional tension arises. These patterns confirm that power asymmetry strongly shapes the degree of deference, with guests and supervisors consistently receiving higher levels of mitigation compared to peers.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the growing recognition that universal politeness frameworks must be understood through culturally specific lenses. Negative politeness, deference, and repair sequences in Indonesian hotel discourse acquire their pragmatic force through norms of collective face and relational balance characteristic of *unggah-ungguh*. The adaptive model developed in this study integrates these cultural dynamics with institutional hierarchy and repair trajectories, offering a more nuanced account of face negotiation within service encounters.

Practically, the findings underscore the importance of embedding pragmatic competence into hospitality-focused ESP training. Rather than relying solely on formulaic polite expressions, training should cultivate sensitivity to culturally indexed particles, mitigation strategies, and repair mechanisms that frontline staff must deploy in real time. Developing such competence can enhance communicative professionalism, reduce interactional friction, and improve guest satisfaction in Indonesian hotel settings.

Overall, this study provides a culturally grounded and interactionally sensitive account of (im)politeness in Indonesian hotel telephone conversations. By conceptualizing politeness as a shifting alignment rather than a fixed set of strategies, the adaptive model offers a new lens for examining how institutional actors negotiate respect, authority, and relational expectations across turns. Future research may refine this model through multimodal analysis and comparative studies across different Indonesian regions to further explore how local variants of *unggah-ungguh* recalibrate (im)politeness practices

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