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RESEARCH JOURNAL

ALUPE UNIVERSITY MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH JOURNAL

journal website: aujournal.au.ac.ke

A Publication of Alupe University



ALUPE UNIVERSITY
Bastion of Knowledge

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.65466/bz9bgx82>

eISSN: 3106-0013

Politeness approaches employed in Lubukusu verbal compliments

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ARTICLE INFO

KEYWORDS

*Compliment,
Strategies,
Ethnographic approach,
face needs,
Seamless communication*

ABSTRACT

This paper investigated the use of politeness strategies in Lubukusu compliments. It was specifically interested in how politeness is verbally expressed and how it is socially woven in the cultural fabric of the Bukusu community. Politeness is pivotal since it lays the foundation to seamless communication among interactants. It is thus upon this premise that the paper examined how varied politeness strategies are expressed through compliments. Data from field observations as well as audio recordings of conversations that occurred naturally from respondents in Bungoma County, Kenya was collected through an ethnographic technique. A total of 200 compliments were collected and analyzed using the tenets of Politeness theory by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987).

Findings reveal that politeness strategies are culture specific and Lubukusu speakers employ varied kinds of politeness strategies in their daily conversations. The paper thus concludes that politeness strategies play a crucial role in ensuring that effective communication takes place, apart from taking care of the face needs of those involved in the communication process.

Background information

Politeness which plays varied functions such as expressing respect, promoting social balance and managing dyadic communication is a key concept in linguistics. Akpan (2003) contends that politeness is

characterized by incidences of courtesy and dexterity in speech and is geared towards eliciting responses that are positive in nature. In communicative exchanges, individuals strive to uphold a favorable self-image by acting considerably toward others and anticipating reciprocal respect. This view is corroborated by Hu and

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Zhou (2024) who argue that even though politeness varies across variables such as culture, context and even among individuals, it plays a crucial role in adhering to social conventions and enhancing social balance. The study of politeness therefore reveals that language choices are used by speakers to make and negotiate meaning in varied conversational contexts. Shen *et al.* (2023) acknowledges the importance of politeness in conversations and assert that politeness, a key feature of communication, entails a variety of social and linguistic behaviours that enhance a smooth flow of conversations while also preserving social norms.

There are different techniques used to achieve politeness or mitigate threats to the face of an individual. Algiovan (2022) contends that among the strategies that interactants employ to express politeness are positive and negative politeness strategies as well as Bald on record and off record. The implementation of these approaches is intentional driven by various factors such as the relative power of the participants, institutional position, social distance, age as well as cultural background. Ingato *et al.* (2020) note that effective speech relies on politeness strategies to cultivate shared understanding among people using speech for interaction; these approaches foster social harmony through mutual consideration and respect rather than through imposition.

There are four major politeness techniques that interactants employ when they engage in conversations these are positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on record and off record (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Fathi, 2024). These techniques play the role of managing the face needs of individuals engaged in conversations in order to achieve cohesion and social equilibrium within discourse. Effective communication necessitates the use of different politeness strategies geared towards achieving concord while also reducing the likelihood of conflicts in conversations. These strategies are crucial because they

promote interactions that are relaxed hence expediting consensus during communication.

Numerous studies have been carried out on the notion of politeness; some of them ascribe to the school of thought that politeness is a universal entity while others ascribe to the school of thought that it is a culture specific phenomenon (Brown & Levinson 1978, 1987; Leech, 2016; Ide, 1989; Watts, 2003). Furthermore, studies have demonstrated the importance of using authentic data and context-sensitive analysis to understand the rich and dynamic nature of politeness in communication. Hu and Zhou's (2024) study further revealed that language is used to manage social relationships and establish social hierarchies in communication. Additionally, politeness strategies aid in effective communication by ensuring that respect is upheld in various contexts. It is evident that politeness is a culturally sensitive concept that requires a comprehensive analysis (Shen *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, there is need for further research to develop more comprehensive and culturally sensitive politeness strategies. It is therefore against this backdrop that the current study sought to analyze the politeness strategies employed in Lubukusu compliments and their role in maintaining social harmony.

Objective of the study

This study was guided by one specific objective which was to analyze the politeness strategies employed in Lubukusu compliments and their role in maintaining social harmony.

Literature review

Basing on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, a qualitative descriptive approach was adopted by Safitri and Ambalegin (2022) to identify and analyze the politeness strategies used in the conversational exchanges

among the characters in the “*17 Again*” movie script. The study revealed that the key roles of politeness strategies are to save face of both the speaker and the addressee thereby ensuring that harmony is achieved in interpersonal communication; to promote cohesion and advance solidarity among those involved in conversation and to ensure that participants engage in a fruitful communication that takes place seamlessly. The study further noted that there were 15 politeness strategies found in the movie script, which were divided into: positive politeness (4), negative politeness (2), bald-on record (6), and off record (3). This study is crucial to the current in that it provides sufficient information on politeness, its significance as well as its approaches. It also gives information on Politeness theory, the analytical framework upon which the current study is grounded. It however diverges from the current one in the sense that while it focuses is on conversational exchanges among characters in a movie script, the current concentrates on naturally occurring conversations in which verbal compliments are employed by Lubukusu speakers. Additionally, while the previous looks at politeness strategies used in conversations among fictional characters, the current examines politeness strategies used in real life conversations among Lubukusu speakers of Kibingei ward, Bungoma County.

Musyafa’ah *et al.* (2022) carried out a study on Politeness Strategies of the Main Characters of *Pride and Prejudice* Movie. This study employed a descriptive qualitative method to analyze politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). The study found out that four politeness strategies such as bald-on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategy were employed. Out of these, positive politeness which occurred 98 times from 149 data was the most frequent. The study further revealed that the patterns of politeness strategies applied are in declarative, interrogative, imperative, and exclamatory sentences. Additionally, all

types of sentences contain bald-on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. The study concluded that politeness strategies make people appreciate their interlocutors so that the conversation is well-maintained. This study is crucial to the present since it provides important information on the notion of politeness strategies which is the current study’s area of interest. Additionally, it enriches the current with regard to the theoretical framework that is employed in data analysis. This previous study however differs from the current in a number of ways: while it is based on a film, the present examines Lubukusu compliments in naturally occurring everyday conversations among the inhabitants of Kibingei ward in Bungoma County. There is thus a diversion from politeness strategies employed by actors to those made use of by speakers in real life contexts. While *Pride and Prejudice* is entrenched in the Western context, Lubukusu verbal compliments in which various strategies are used to express politeness is centered on the African context.

Joni and Dharmayanti (2025) carried out a study on Politeness Strategies used by ELE Pre-Service Teachers during Classroom Teaching Practices. The data was taken from video recordings of teaching performances conducted by ELE pre-service teachers (PSTs) of FKIP Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar during their teaching practices in SMK Rekayasa Denpasar. The study revealed that the ELE PSTs used various politeness strategies in managing their classrooms. It noted that positive politeness strategies were the most employed, followed by negative politeness strategies. The ELE PSTs also used bald-on-record strategies. However, they rarely used off-record strategies. This study showed that ELE PSTs used politeness strategies to maintain social relationships with the students, create supportive learning environment, and encourage students’ active participation. This study informed the current with

regard to sufficient literature on politeness strategies as well as on the theoretical framework on which the study was anchored. It further brought to perspective the essence of using politeness strategies that is, to create social balance and maintain harmonious communication among interactants. However, it differs from the present in relation to the participants who took part in the study for instance, while the previous study involved undergraduate students on teaching practice, the present involved respondents of varied ages who took part in naturally occurring conversations. Moreover, data for the previous study was taken from video recordings while that of the present study were derived from field observations as well as audio recordings of naturally occurring candid exchanges. In addition, the geographical contexts were different with the previous taking place in Denpasar, Indonesia while the current in Bungoma County, Kenya.

Ngo *et al.* (2025) conducted research in which politeness strategies and politeness maxims employed by engineering students at a private higher education institution in Davao City, Philippines were investigated. This study adopted a descriptive-qualitative approach. The researchers collected and analyzed 100 screenshots of online conversations between students and their teachers. The study noted that the students employed positive and negative politeness strategies as well as bald-on-record, and off-record. Of these strategies, positive politeness and tact maxims were the most frequently employed. The study further revealed that the use of in-group identity markers is pivotal for enhancing unity. Additionally, tact maxims were common in requests and academic inquiries directed towards instructors. The study thus concluded that in virtual academic settings politeness strategies play an important role in promoting smooth communication between students and teachers. This study informs the current by providing crucial information into how applicable Politeness theory of

Brown and Levinson is in communication that happens in varied contexts. It is also instrumental to the present by providing adequate information on negative politeness which is one of the strategies that the current study examines.

Anchored on the theory of Brown and Levinson (1987), Thanh *et al.*, (2022) carried out a study investigating the types and degrees of politeness strategies employed by English major students when making requests for help. The study surveyed 100 third-year English major students enrolled in a High-Quality Program and adopted a qualitative descriptive research design. Data were collected through a questionnaire utilizing the Google Form support tool and descriptive statistical methods were used in data analysis. The study revealed that the politeness strategy that students used mostly when interacting with peers and with teachers while making requests for help is the negative strategy. The researchers noted that students used same strategies across divergent contexts. The frequent use of negative politeness strategies between peers and in the interactions between students and teachers was attributed to power relations that exist in organizations as well as in learning institutions. Culturally, the need to show respect to authority especially when addressing teachers is also attributed to the frequent use of negative politeness strategies by students. This study is central to the present since it enriches it with valuable literature on the concept of politeness strategies that the current study is interested in. Additionally, it provides valuable insights into the applicability of Brown and Levinson's framework in academic communication, particularly in understanding how power dynamics and social distance shape politeness behavior. However, the present research diverges in both focus and sociocultural orientation.

The point of divergence however between Thanh *et al.* (2022) and the current study is that while the former

examined the politeness strategies employed by students in an academic setting, the current investigated the strategies used in divergent contexts in day-to-day conversations. The Lubukusu verbal compliments in which politeness strategies are embedded advocate for communal face saving; additionally, they emphasize on promoting social cohesion with the aim of achieving harmonious communication. The specificity of Bukusu cultural norms which promote communal solidarity in face saving is brought to the fore. From the present research, it is evident that politeness strategies are culture specific.

Grounded on Politeness theory, Njuki and Ileri (2021) carried out a study on Positive and Negative Politeness Strategies Used by Kenya's Members of National Assembly. The data was downloaded from the Hansard and analyzed using content analysis method. This paper used purposive sampling technique where only the utterances with positive and negative politeness strategies were selected for inclusion. Descriptive qualitative research technique was used in the analysis of data. Data was collected for a period of five parliamentary sessions in order to obtain adequate data for analysis. Extracts from the 12th parliament proceedings were retrieved from Hansard and then content analysis of the speeches was done in order to identify relevant excerpts that contained politeness strategies. This study noted that Members of the National Assembly use positive and negative politeness strategies during their interaction in the August house for the purposes of saving their faces and as well as those of the addressees. Out of the politeness strategies identified, positive politeness strategies were the most commonly used (39 occurrences). Those that were identified were in the form of claiming a common ground, giving/asking for reasons, including speaker and hearer in the activity, intensifying interest to hearer, giving gifts to hearer, being optimistic, using in-group identity markers, jokes, seeking

agreements, giving offers and attending to hearer's interests and needs. The negative politeness strategies on the other hand, were few (17 occurrences) and they were in the form of being apologetic, giving deference, impersonalizing, using general rules, minimizing imposition, hedging and being indirect. This study is pivotal to the current in that it provides crucial insights into the concept of politeness and the strategies employed to achieve it. Moreover, it provides adequate information on politeness theory which is the theoretical framework upon which the current study is grounded. It however differs from the current with regard to the respondents used which in this case were members of the Kenyan national assembly while the current used Lubukusu speakers in Bungoma County. Another difference was on the type of data collected; while this study used extracts from the 12th parliament proceedings, the present used naturally occurring conversations.

Dozie (2020) examined speech acts such as requests, reprimands and expressions of apology among others in the Igbo community and how they are governed by social and cultural contexts of the community in question. The study revealed that in the African community generally and the Igbo one specifically, politeness is a collective undertaking; it is the duty of an individual to save face for another in a conversation as a way of reinforcing solidarity. The study also revealed that politeness is not a universal entity as propagated by Brown and Levinson in their politeness model. Rather, it is a concept that is community and context specific. These findings are corroborated in another study carried out by Dozie *et al.* (2022) which aimed at investigating the Igbo native speakers' worldview of request and linguistic politeness. In this study the researches purposively selected 2748 undergraduate Igbo speakers from different Federal and state universities. Data was collected using a 10 item Discourse Completion Task (DCT) questionnaire. It was noted that negative politeness/ indirectness strategy was

frequently used among interlocutors who were equals. The study further revealed that directness was the prominent request strategy employed in interactions. These two studies are crucial to the present because they not only provide adequate literature on politeness but also bring to perspective communal living and the principle of oneness that is deeply embedded in the Igbo community and which is also replicated in the current study which focuses on Bukusu society.

The studies by Dozie (2020) and Dozie *et al.* (2022) are also important to the current since they distinguish how politeness is expressed in the African culture as opposed to the Western one. In the former, it is every person's responsibility to save the other's face as a way of upholding the person's dignity while in the West face saving is an individual's responsibility. The studies differ however from the current in a number of ways for instance, the instruments used in data collection are different while Dozie *et al.* (2021) used a Data Completion Task questionnaire to collect data the current used an observation schedule and audio recording of naturally occurring conversations. The geographical locations in which the studies were conducted also differ with Dozie (2020) carrying out hers in Nigeria among the Igbo while the current in Kenya among the Bukusu. Also, she focused on politeness strategies used while making request among undergraduate students who are native speakers of Igbo while the current focused on similar strategies used in Lubukusu verbal compliments.

Basing on a combination of politeness theory by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Austin's Speech act theory (1975), a study was carried out in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania by Mwambapa and Msuya (2022). In this study, the researchers examined how teachers employ compliments in classroom interactions. The respondents for the study were selected purposively while observations and interviews were employed to elicit data. This study

revealed that teachers make use of varied compliments such as direct ones, compliments used together with expressions of gratitude as well as those used with congratulatory remarks. These compliments it was noted, enhance smooth communication leading to mutual understanding. Moreover, when students are complimented, they exude confidence, actively take part in the classroom and develop a feeling of being valued thus promoting a conducive learning environment. This study informs the current with regard to vital literature on compliments and how they are used to enhance social equilibrium and cohesion in academic institutions. This study differs from the present on varied fronts for instance, while it pays attention to compliments used in an institution of learning, the current is interested in verbal compliments used in everyday conversations among interactants in a Bukusu society. Additionally, while this study used two analytical frameworks (Politeness theory & Speech Act theory) to analyze data, the current employs only one theory which is the Politeness theoretical framework. Also, while this study was conducted in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, the current took place in Kibingei ward, Bungoma County, Kenya.

Employing snowball and purposive sampling techniques to collect data from students' interactions on WhatsApp platforms, Gervasio and Ireri (2019) carried out a study to investigate the politeness strategies employed by Chuka university students on WhatsApp, a digital platform. The research design adopted was a qualitative descriptive one. The study revealed that the students employed all the four politeness strategies exemplified By Brown and Levinson that is positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on record and off record. The study further noted that these politeness strategies were used to promote harmony in communication and to advance cohesion among participants in conversations. This study is pivotal to the current in the sense that it enriches it by providing sufficient information on compliments and the roles that

they play in interactions. It also provides adequate information on politeness theory which is the analytical framework on which the current study is anchored. The two studies are similar with regard to their geographical contexts since both of them are carried out in Kenya. There is a difference between this and the present study. Whereas data for the previous study was elicited from a digital platform, the current study's data was elicited from naturally occurring conversations among respondents whose native language is Lubukusu. As such, the form of interaction takes a cultural perspective bringing to the fore attributes such as respect, responsibility and social balance which are reminiscent of communicative environments of Lubukusu speakers.

Theoretical framework

This study was guided by the Politeness Theory by Brown and Levinson (1987; Culpeper, 2011; Fathi, 2024).

Politeness theory

According to Culpeper (2011), Fathi (2024) and Brown and Levinson 1987, Politeness theory is founded on two crucial principles that are vital for the analysis of a compliment. The first principle is the notion of face which they note is the public image that an individual displays or purposes to display during an interaction. The scholars further posit that people engaged in a conversation generally try as much possible to protect one another's face. The essence of doing so is to promote respect and solidarity among interactants. Brown and Levinson contend that there are two types of face namely: positive and negative. The positive face has desires to be liked, accepted and treated as a member of the group. Negative face on the other hand, desires to be respected not interfered with. The notion of face comes in handy in conversations for instance, when offering a compliment, the complimentee and complimenter should

all be aware of each other's face and the need to protect it so that one's dignity is upheld.

The second principle posits that interlocutors are rational agents who strategically employ language to achieve goals while maintaining face. Since communication often involves Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) that may endanger either the speaker's or hearer's face, speakers use politeness strategies to mitigate potential threats (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Fathi, 2024). As Dozie (2020) notes, this involves managing face, minimizing imposition, and maintaining engagement through linguistic tact. Although compliments typically function as positive politeness strategies, they can paradoxically threaten face. As Brown and Levinson observe, a compliment may impose on the recipient by creating social indebtedness or suggesting envy or desire. Thus, recipients often respond strategically to balance the positive intent of the compliment with the need to protect their negative face.

Politeness theory is key to the analysis of Lubukusu verbal compliments because it provides a lens through which face concerns are not only comprehended but also managed in day-to-day interactions. Since verbal compliments in Lubukusu are culturally rooted, the notion of politeness is regarded as a communal rather than an individual affair therefore, cultural norms which promote respect, social balance and solidarity align with the tenets of Politeness theory. Lubukusu compliments play a dual role in some instances, they take care of the hearer's positive face while in others they threaten it. For example, when a person praises another's way of dressing or the ability to perform a task skillfully, the compliment in this instance is used to enhance social cohesion. On the contrary, the same compliment may threaten the hearer's negative face in an instance where the speaker expects the hearer to reciprocate the compliment given. In sum, compliments play vital roles not only in showing

gratitude but also in reinforcing values interwoven in the cultural fabric of a community.

Research Methodology

This study was conducted in Kibingei ward. The target population in this paper was all conversational contexts found in Kibingei Ward, Kimilili constituency. The conversational contexts targeted were those where speakers were using Lubukusu as a medium of communication at the time of data collection. The paper identified thirteen conversational contexts from which ten contexts were randomly sampled. The participants in the study were men and women in the age group of 20-73. This age group was deemed appropriate because those below twenty years were believed to be still undergoing socialization additionally, their language is full of codeswitching between English and Kiswahili.

The study's location was selected through simple random sampling. A total of 200 compliments were selected purposively for analysis. The data was collected through participant observation, field notes and audio recordings of naturally occurring conversations. The study adopted an ethnographic research design because it is best suited for the collection of authentic data used in daily interactions and also because it captures both social and cultural contexts in which politeness strategies manifest in interpersonal communication.

Discussion

This study sought to analyze the politeness strategies employed in Lubukusu compliments and their contribution to the maintenance of social harmony. Specifically, it examined how these strategies are linguistically encoded and contextually realized in everyday interactions. The first strategy which was the positive politeness was illustrated in the excerpts below.

This conversation takes place at the home of a neighbor where community members had gathered to learn about contemporary farming practices aimed at improving agricultural yields. The informal yet goal-oriented nature of the event provides a socially cohesive environment that encourages open interaction among participants. Within this context, the exchange occurred between acquaintances, whose familiarity allowed for the use of polite language forms. Such a setting fosters the application of positive politeness strategies, since participants are inclined to maintain solidarity, express mutual respect, and reinforce social harmony while engaging in casual conversations during the training session. It must be noted that the translations from Lubukusu to English in the discussions that follow are loose and not precise or word-for-word translations. Illustration:

Guest A: *Mwaandike kamasina musitabu?* Have you written your names in the book?

Guest B: *Eeeee, kosi.* Yes, all the names.

Guest A: *Mbone, mala oandika bulayi po.* Let me see, she writes very well.

Guest: *Asandi Judy.* Thank you, Judy.

The above compliment was given by one of the guests appreciating another person for having a good hand writing. From the conversation, the two interlocutors are known to each other very well. The complementor used a positive politeness strategy when complimenting the addressee. Her intention is to attend to the addressee's positive face. She wants the addressee to feel appreciated because of her skills (fine motor and visual-motor integration skills). By mentioning the complementor's name, the addressee's intention is to strengthen the bond and establish emotional intimacy between interlocutors. Additionally, the addressee mentions the complementor's

name as a way of honouring her identity by acknowledging her personhood. The main aim of positive politeness is to minimize the social distance between the hearer and the speaker. The positive politeness strategy here is notice and attend to H, which the complementor does by noticing the good handwriting of the addressee. Further, the complementor uses an intensifier aimed at exaggerating the attribute that the addressee possesses. The intensifier here is *po(very)* which amplifies the goodness of the handwriting thereby highlighting the emotional force that the compliment carries.

This second interaction took place in the same context as the previous one:

Guest A: *Wolile?* You have arrived?

Guest B: *Nolile, abelenacha Sudan.* Yes, I was in Sudan

Guest A: *Olia bulayi wandase.* You have been eating well my brother.

Guest B: *wase. Atiti.* Not at all.

The addressee is being complimented for his physical appearance when the complimenter says: 'you have been eating well my brother.' This physical outlook is also used as a parameter to gauge his health. In many African communities and among the Bukusu specifically, a person who is fat is regarded healthy. The complimenter thus attends to the positive face of the complementee by complimenting his physical appearance and in so doing fulfilling his desire to be appreciated and approved of by others. Additionally, the complimenter uses the word *wandase* (my brother) to give the addressee a sense of belonging. By using the in-group term 'my brother,' the complimenter solidifies the interpersonal bond with the complementee. He wants to demonstrate that they are peers and have no difference in power or distance thus,

the positive politeness strategy used here is in-group identity marker. Additionally, the compliment acts as a gift that is offered to the addressee.

The third conversation takes place in a market setting which has numerous individual stalls where assorted goods are sold. Even though the interactants are not in the same place, they are able to communicate effectively across short distances within the marketplace. These conversations involve participants of mixed gender and varying ages, with some customers also taking part in the conversations.

Speaker A: *Nalimile kamatore kamakali sana*-I have planted a lot of bananas.

Speaker B: *Lima khukhalie ewoo.* Just plant we shall get some from you.

Speaker A: *Ese mbana busa mala.* I have no problem, I just give.

Speaker B. *Mayi omurundi kwakhumanya-* You are a generous woman we know you.

Speaker B: *Orio.* Thank you

The addressee's generosity is being complimented thereby appealing to her positive face. The complimenter's intention is to make the addressee feel appreciated and good about herself. She accomplishes this by attending and noticing the addressee's generosity. The speaker also uses an in-group identity *mayi* (mother) to make the complementee feel a sense of belonging thereby minimizing social distance and encouraging her to share bananas when the time comes. She therefore uses this positive politeness strategy in order to nurture social closeness.

From the findings, it is evident that the most frequently used politeness strategy is the positive politeness

accounting for 65% (130 compliments) of all the verbal compliments used by Lubukusu speakers. This result is supported by Ngo *et al.* (2025), who similarly observed that positive politeness was the most prevalent strategy, used to affirm the addressee's positive face through expressions of respect, approval, and recognition. A similar result is advanced by Hussein and Rashid (2023) who also noted that of the four politeness strategies, the positive one was the most frequently used to foster solidarity and promote harmony among interactants who took part in their study. Additionally, Njuki and Ileri (2021) opine that positive politeness strategy was the most frequently used politeness strategy since the members of parliament value their colleague's desire to feel appreciated and approved of. The frequent use of positive politeness strategy implies that the Bukusu community values social equilibrium which advances harmony. By integrating compliments into daily dialogue, complimenting fulfills the deep-seated need for linguistic practices carried out on a daily basis. It can therefore be concluded that compliments are primarily positive face-enhancing acts whose delivery varies depending on context, power, and social distance.

Negative politeness strategy

According to Njuki and Ileri (2021), negative politeness strategies are avoidance based; they operate on the assumption that a speaker will be imposing on the hearer. Therefore, indirectness and hedging come in handy to reduce such impositions. The paper noted that negative politeness strategy was commonly used in interactions between the young and the elderly and it revealed contexts in which it was employed. For example, to express gratitude after an elderly man purchased several shirts from a young seller, the vendor refers to him as *Omwami* (king). This address is not only used as a sign of appreciation for the purchase but also of respect. Moreover, the complementor's aim is to enhance social balance by employing approaches that mitigate face acts

thereby safeguarding the complimentee's negative face. The compliment *Omwami* is thus used to show that the complimenter has respect for the addressee and holds him in high regard. This compliment is not only used to show deference but also to reduce friction in talk.

Off-Record

This is a strategy that is employed when a speaker performs a face-threatening act (FTA) in a manner that allows multiple possible interpretations, thereby avoiding explicit commitment to any single communicative intention. As Brown and Levinson observe, "a communicative act is done off record if it is performed in such a way that it is not possible to attribute only one clear communicative intention to the act" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 211). This strategic ambiguity enables the speaker to mitigate responsibility for the FTA, transferring the interpretive burden to the hearer. In doing so, the speaker preserves both their own face and that of the hearer by reducing the direct imposition inherent in the message. However, this indirection also introduces the risk of misinterpretation, as the hearer may fail to grasp the intended meaning or purpose of the utterance. Theoretically, off-record politeness thus exemplifies the maximization of face-saving potential in interaction achieved through indirectness, implicature, and strategic vagueness that allow the speaker to maintain politeness while minimizing social friction.

The following fourth conversation takes place between two young people (male and female) who were charged with the responsibility of cooking during a bride price negotiation ceremony:

Speaker A: *Mala ewe wama wae*-Where do you come from?

Speaker B: *Nama karibu wo mukasa*- I live near the village elder's home.

Speaker A: *Ese nama wamaeni-* I come from Maeni's home.

Speaker B: oooh

Speaker A: *Ewe liliachichi.Omundu kakhubolelakho?*
You have a wasplike shape, has anyone told you before?

Speaker B: *Bambolelanaga* they tell me always.

While the guests enjoyed their meals, two strangers struck up a casual conversation captured above in order to bridge the social distance between them. The complimenter uses an indirect compliment as an approach to mitigate face threatening acts that are likely to occur. The man expresses his admiration for the lady by acknowledging her physical appearance. The lady on the other hand, plays down the compliment as a way of expressing propriety and sticking to the dictates of established practices for the purposes of protecting both the complimenter's and the complementee's face. In Bukusu, off record compliments serve to balance praise with humility especially in conversations where participants are socially distant.

Bald-on-Record

These compliments are direct, short and unconditional and they are used for the purposes of portraying zeal and harmony among those involved in an interaction. Bald on record are common in interactions involving peers. They are normally applicable in instances where there are limited chances of offending the parties involved in a conversation. The interaction that follows involves two female acquaintances engaged in a conversation in a neighbour's home; the essence of this meeting is to learn about the best farm practices.

The data was collected during mealtime, prior to the commencement of the training session.

Lady A: *Nasike sanakhukhesisie ta.*

Nasike I haven't said hi to you

Lady B: *Khubela yaya* I forgive you my dear.

Lady A: Mungo mulayi A good home.

A guest in the conversation above acknowledged that she failed to greet the host. The host in turn takes no offence and accepts the apology that is offered. Acting in a manner that is direct and straight forward, the guest's compliments the host by acknowledging how beautiful her home is. In so doing, this guest uses a bald-on-record strategy. In Bukusu community, compliments in which the Bald on record strategies are used play the role of expressing honesty and closeness especially among interactants who are not only in social proximity but also those who take care of each other's face thus minimizing incidences where face threatening acts are allowed to thrive. The study revealed that the Bald on record strategies are clear cut and concise a finding that is corroborated by a study carried out by Njuki and Ireri (2021) who opine that the Bald-on-record strategy is expressed in a distinct, pithy and direct way in communicative contexts. It is also rampant in situations where there are unbalanced power relations, social distance is limited and the risks for face threats are minimal.

To arrive at the figures in the table below, the frequency was determined by the number of times a strategy occurred in the corpus (N). The percentage was calculated by the number of times a strategy occurred (N) divided by the total number of compliments (X) in the corpus multiply by one hundred. For example, $N(40)/X(200) * 100$. Table 1 shows the summary of the politeness strategies used in the 200 Lubukusu compliments that were collected in the study.

Table 1 Summary of the politeness strategies used in Lubukusu compliments.

Politeness Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Positive politeness	130	65%
Negative politeness	40	20%
Bald on Record	20	10%
Off Record	10	5%
Total	200	100%

As shown in Table 1, positive politeness strategies dominated, accounting for 65% of the compliments recorded. Negative politeness strategies made up 40%, reflecting their selective but important role in certain social contexts. Bald on record made up 20% of the compliments while Off record made up 10%. To sum up, this analysis shows that:

- **Positive politeness** is the most frequently used strategy which is geared towards taking care of the hearer's positive face by ensuring that his/her face needs are appreciated and approved thus reinforcing solidarity. It is common in instances where the social distance is minimal.
- **Negative politeness** exhibits unbalanced power relations and promotes respect and recognition for those in authority.
- **Bald-on-record compliments** are used in varied informal social contexts; are rampant among

peers and gives room for numerous possible interpretations.

- **Off-record compliments** are used for the purposes of praise and showing respect.

The findings revealed that while compliments generally function as positive face-enhancing acts, their expression varies according to contextual factors such as power relations, social distance, and situational setting. Four major patterns of politeness emerged from the analysis: positive politeness, negative politeness, bald-on-record, and off-record strategies. These strategies were identified across a range of conversational contexts.

Conclusion

This study concludes that politeness plays a pivotal role in enhancing solidarity and promoting harmonious communication. The findings also reveal the presence of all the politeness strategies with the positive politeness strategy taking the lead followed by negative politeness strategy. The Bald on record and Off record strategies are minimally employed in Lubukusu verbal compliments. Additionally, the study has revealed that politeness is a culture specific phenomenon and not universal as asserted by Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness model.

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