
**POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN PASSPORT INTERVIEWS AT CIREBON
IMMIGRATION OFFICE**

Ade Layung Sari

Institute of Prima Bangsa Cirebon

ade28032003@gmail.com

Article History:

Accepted 03 October 2025;

Revised 23 December 2025;

Approved 13 January 2026.

Abstract: This study investigates the types of politeness strategies used by immigration officers and passport applicants during passport service interactions at the Class I Immigration Office (TPI) in Cirebon, Indonesia. It also examines how these strategies are influenced by sociological variables, namely social distance, relative power, and degree of coercion, within the context of institutional communication. This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach with a pragmatic approach. Data consisted of utterances obtained from ten audio-recorded passport interview conversations involving five officers and ten applicants. Data were transcribed and coded based on Brown and Levinson's politeness strategy framework. Coding reliability was ensured through iterative analysis and category consistency checks. The findings indicate that direct politeness strategies (51%) and positive politeness strategies (47%) dominated the interactions, while negative politeness was minimal (2%) and indirect strategies were absent. Officers tended to prioritize directness for administrative efficiency, while applicants used politeness markers to maintain interpersonal harmony. This study shows that politeness in immigration services functions as a negotiated practice, shaped by institutional goals and local sociocultural norms that prioritize respect. By situating Brown and Levinson's framework within the context of Indonesian public services, this study contributes to applied pragmatics and institutional discourse studies, highlighting the need to strike a balance between efficiency and interpersonal considerations in government service communication.

Keywords: Politeness Strategies, Passport Services, Pragmatics, Immigration Communication

INTRODUCTION

Language plays a crucial role in institutional communication, particularly in public service settings where authority, efficiency, and interpersonal relationships intersect. In institutional communication, interaction is not only used to convey information, but also to carry out administrative tasks that are regulated by formal rules and specific organizational structures (Drew & Heritage, 1992). Immigration offices represent a highly regulated institutional environment where officers and citizens engage in face-to-face interactions governed by formal procedures. In such contexts, linguistic choices reflect issues of politeness, power, and social distance, as well as institutional demands that emphasize clarity, accuracy, and compliance with procedures.

Politeness is a key concept in pragmatics that concerns how speakers manage social relationships and mitigate potential face-threatening acts (FTAs) through language (Brown & Levinson, 1987a). According to their model, speakers choose politeness strategies based on sociological variables such as relative power, social distance, and coercion ratings. This framework has been widely used to assess institutional interactions and public services because it provides a systematic classification of strategies. However, this model is also considered to tend to assume politeness as a universal phenomenon and to lack consideration of cultural variations and specific social contexts (Scollon & Scollon, 2001; Watts, 2003).

Recent studies on politeness reveal that politeness should be understood as a social practice that depends on cultural norms and interaction situations, rather than as a static linguistic strategy (Locher & Watts, 2005; Watts, 2003). This approach views politeness as the result of social negotiation between speakers and respondents, influenced by context, interaction goals, and existing social relations. In Asian cultures, politeness often serves to maintain social harmony and show respect for the social order (Scollon & Scollon, 2001).

In the Indonesian context, politeness is strongly influenced by cultural values such as respect and avoiding open confrontation. These values influence how speakers express politeness in institutional interactions. These cultural values shape the habits of officials and the community, influencing their choice of forms of speech that are considered polite, appropriate, and acceptable in daily interactions. Therefore, applying Brown and Levinson's model to the interactions of Indonesian citizens requires contextualization within local sociocultural norms, so that politeness analysis is not based solely on individualistic cultural assumptions.

Previous studies on politeness strategies have explored educational environments, digital communication, and service interactions. However, research focused on immigration services in Indonesia is rare. Immigration offices are crucial because they involve asymmetrical power relations and high-stakes administrative procedures. In such situations, communication must be efficient and clear, while maintaining respect and good interpersonal relationships in order to preserve social harmony. Understanding how politeness is realized in this context can provide insight into the dynamics of institutional discourse.

This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the politeness strategies used by immigration officers and passport applicants during passport service interactions. Specifically, this study addresses two research questions: (1) What types of politeness strategies do officers and applicants use in passport service interactions? and (2) How do sociological variables influence the choice of these

strategies?. By placing Brown and Levinson's politeness framework in the Indonesian social and institutional context, this study is expected to contribute theoretically and practically to applied pragmatics and institutional discourse studies.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative research approach with a descriptive design and pragmatic methods to analyze politeness strategies in communication between passport officers and applicants. This approach was chosen because it allows for in-depth analysis of language use in the context of formal public services that occur naturally. As mentioned by Creswell, (2014), qualitative research focuses on understanding the meaning constructed by individuals on a social phenomenon, conducted in a real context, with the researcher as the main instrument.

1. Data Sources and Collection

The data used in this study were recordings of interactions between passport service officers at the Class 1 Immigration Office of TPI Cirebon and passport applicants. The location was chosen because it provided an institutional context for observing direct communication between state officials and the public. Conversations were recorded in audio form, and supporting data was collected through direct observation of the interaction situation to understand the context of institutional conversation. Data collection was carried out over a period of 2 months, from November 30, 2024, to December 30, 2024, involving 5 immigration officers and 10 passport applicants with various passport application purposes.

The data collected consists of recordings of interactions without researcher intervention, so that the data reflects communication practices that occur naturally in public services. The recording procedure was carried out as follows: 1. Requesting permission from the officer and applicant. 2. Recording, which was done from the beginning of the interaction using a smartphone. 3.) Replay, where the recording was listened to carefully and attentively to ensure the accuracy of the identification of politeness strategies. 4.) Data transcription, where all data, including the identities of the participants, were encrypted and anonymized, such as Officer 1 and Applicant 1. Audio recording allows researchers to capture important linguistic elements such as pauses, intonation, and overlapping speech that are not always visible through direct observation (Sugiyono, 2017).

2. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive qualitative methods with three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Sugiyono, 2017).

2.1 Data Reduction

The unit of analysis in this study is the utterance, which is a meaningful unit of speech produced by one speaker in one turn of speech. From 10 conversations, 244 relevant utterances were obtained.

Each utterance was coded based on Brown & Levinson, (1987) politeness strategies, namely bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record. The coding was carried out sequentially and carefully, with repeated readings to maintain consistency. Parts that were not relevant to the service context were omitted. The analysis was conducted by one researcher, reinforced by recording all data and consistently rechecking the categories.

2.2 Data Presentation

The data is presented in the form of analytical narratives, frequency tables of strategies, and selected data quotations. Each example is also given a consistent code to maintain data traceability. In addition to single expressions, this study also presents sequential interaction snippets (questions-answers-follow-up responses) to show how politeness strategies develop in the flow of institutional conversation.

2.3 Conclusion, Drawing, and Verification

Conclusions are drawn by linking linguistic findings to the institutional context and politeness theory. Validation was carried out through triangulation of methods, which compared recorded data, transcriptions, and observations (Denzin, 1978). Ten conversations were considered sufficient because the data had reached saturation, marked by the absence of new politeness strategy patterns in the final data.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

This study integrates Brown and Levinson's Brown & Levinson, (1987) politeness theory and conversation analysis (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). Politeness strategies are understood as ways in which speakers manage potential face threats in bureaucratic contexts, while conversation analysis is used to examine turn-taking patterns. The choice of strategy is influenced by institutional roles and the context of public service. This framework helps explain how administrative efficiency and interpersonal relationships are negotiated through language.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

This study analyzed ten recorded interactions between immigration officers and passport applicants at the Class I Immigration Office TPI Cirebon. Based on Brown & Levinson, (1987) framework, twelve politeness strategies were identified. The findings address the first research objective by identifying the types of politeness strategies used.

To provide a clearer overview of the distribution of politeness strategies, the findings are presented both quantitatively and qualitatively. A total of 244 utterances were analyzed from ten passport service interactions involving immigration officers and applicants. Table 1 presents the frequency and percentage of politeness strategies identified in the data.

Table 1: Distribution of Politeness Strategies in Passport Service Interactions

| Politeness Strategy | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| Bald on Record | 124 | 51% |
| Positive Politeness | 115 | 47% |

| | | |
|---------------------|------------|-------------|
| Negative Politeness | 5 | 2% |
| Off-Record | 0 | 0% |
| Total | 224 | 100% |

The table shows that bald on record strategies are the most frequently used, followed closely by positive politeness strategies. Negative politeness strategies appear only minimally, while off-record strategies are not found in the data.

- a) Bald on record strategies are predominantly used by immigration officers, particularly when requesting documents, confirming personal information, or giving procedural instructions. These utterances are direct and explicit, reflecting the officers' institutional authority and the need for administrative efficiency.

Example :

Officer: "KTP-nya mana?"

This utterance is direct and unmitigated, reflecting the officer's institutional authority and the need for efficiency. The applicant does not perceive this as impolite because it aligns with bureaucratic norms.

- b) Positive politeness strategies are used by both officers and applicants. Officers employ these strategies through familiar address terms such as "mbak" and "mas," expressions of reassurance, and cooperative language to create a comfortable service atmosphere. Applicants, in turn, use positive politeness to show respect and alignment with institutional expectations.

Example :

Officer : "*Baik, mbak, bisa diisi dulu ya.*"

The address term *mbak* and the softener *ya* function as politeness markers that create familiarity and comfort while maintaining procedural clarity.

- c) Negative politeness strategies occur infrequently and are mostly produced by applicants when asking for clarification or making requests that potentially interrupt the service process. The absence of off-record strategies indicates that clarity and explicitness are prioritized in passport service interactions.

Example :

Officer : "*Baik, sudah ada surat pengantar dari kantornya mba? Karena apabila ingin membuat paspor dengan tujuan jatah liburan dari kantor itu harus ada surat pernyataan...*"

Applicant : "*Wah, saya belum buat pak tetapi apakah bisa menyusul ya?*"

This is negative politeness. The applicant doesn't simply answer directly, but instead uses the mitigation strategy of "*wah*" and the indirect question "*apakah bisa menyusul ya?*" to maintain politeness.

DISCUSSION

This section will discuss the second objective of the study, which is to determine how sociological variables such as power, social distance, and cultural context influence the use of politeness strategies in passport service interactions.

1. Institutional Power and Bureaucratic Efficiency

The results show that the bald-on-record strategy dominates over other strategies, reflecting the strong institutional power in the context of immigration services. The administrative process demands speed, accuracy, and compliance, making direct expression a pragmatic necessity. In this study, officers have the authority to direct passport applicants to answer questions or perform certain actions, while applicants are in a subordinate position and are required to comply.

Example:

Officer: "Sidik jarinya disini."

The high rank of imposition in this action justifies the use of the bald on record strategy, because the use of indirect speech has the potential to hinder the service process.

2. Power imbalance between officers and applicants

This study shows that power imbalance influences the choice of politeness strategies. Officers are freer to use direct strategies (bald on record), while applicants adjust themselves by using short responses, positive politeness, or negative politeness to show obedience and respect for authority. This can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Examples of Politeness Strategies Reflecting Power Asymmetry

| Strategy Type | Conversation | Explanation |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Bald on record by officer | Officer: "KTP-nya mana?" Applicant: "Ini pak, maaf tadi lupa saya bawa." | The officer gave direct instructions without mitigation, demonstrating his authority, and the applicant responded briefly, adding an apology to show compliance. |
| Positive politeness by applicant | Officer: "Baik, mbak, bisa diisi dulu ya." | The applicant used a respectful form of address in accordance with cultural norms (Pak) and responded cooperatively to the |

| | | |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| | Applicant: “Iya, Pak, saya lengkapi dulu.” | officer. The response given showed respect for the officer. |
| Negative politeness by applicant | Officer: “Sudah ada surat pengantar dari kantornya, mba?” | The applicant uses mitigation (exclamations and indirect questions) that show awareness of their mistake and attempts to maintain respect for the officer. This strategy demonstrates compliance with authority while minimizing the potential for face-threatening acts resulting from errors or negligence. |
| | Applicant: “Wah, saya belum buat pak, tetapi apakah bisa menyusul ya?” | |

These findings are in line with what (Purnomo, 2025; Victoria, n.d.) revealed, that speakers with less power tend to use strategies that show obedience and respect for authority, while those in power are more flexible in choosing strategies and are direct in institutional communication.

3. Managing Social Distance through Positive Politeness

Although interactions between officers and passport applicants are natural and formal, social distance is still managed through positive politeness. The use of the terms “Pak” and “Mbak” reflects local norms of politeness rooted in Javanese culture, particularly the principle of *unggah-ungguh*, which focuses on showing respect and harmony.

Example:

Applicant: “Iya pak, saya lengkapi dulu”

This statement shows acceptance of authority as well as a cooperative attitude that indicates a good and harmonious social relationship.

4. The Socio-Cultural Context of Cirebon

Cirebon is an area influenced by Javanese culture, which has norms of politeness that emphasize the use of honorifics such as “Pak,” “Mbak,” and others, as well as the avoidance of direct confrontation. However, this study shows that these cultural norms adapt to the demands of bureaucracy, where not all speakers use honorifics. Thus, politeness in passport services does not fully follow traditional cultural politeness, but forms institutional politeness, which is a combination of efficient interaction during the execution of bureaucratic tasks and linguistic expressions of respect.

5. Absence of Off-Record Strategies

The absence of off-record strategies indicates that ambiguity and implicature are not appropriate in the context of immigration services. Administrative procedures require clear communication in

order to avoid errors or misunderstandings. This also reinforces Brown & Levinson, (1987) view that off-record strategies are less relevant in contexts that demand clarity and high efficiency.

Overall, politeness strategies in passport service interactions are influenced by the demands for speed and accuracy, power relations, and local cultural norms. Bald on-record strategies dominate due to administrative needs, while positive politeness serves as a counterbalance to maintain harmony in interactions. Negative politeness appears only in limited, sensitive situations, and off-record strategies are absent because they have the potential to hinder service efficiency. These findings not only confirm Brown & Levinson, (1987) theory but also expand the study of institutional discourse Drew & Heritage, (1992) in the context of public services in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study examines politeness strategies in passport interviews at the Cirebon Immigration Office using a pragmatic qualitative approach. Conversation recordings from 5 officers and 10 passport applicants were collected and classified into politeness strategies based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework. The results show that the bald-on-record strategy dominated interactions with a percentage of 51%. This indicates that communication in passport interviews emphasizes clarity, accuracy, and speed of information. Officers asked questions directly, and applicants provided brief and clear answers in accordance with applicable administrative procedures. Positive politeness strategies appeared with a percentage of 47%. This was seen through the use of greetings such as pak and mba, which are related to politeness or regional culture, expressions of gratitude, and polite responses. These findings indicate that even in formal and bureaucratic situations, officers and applicants still try to maintain mutual respect.

The negative politeness strategy was only found in 2% of cases. This was found when the response sounded cautious, for example, when explaining document deficiencies or requesting additional explanations. Meanwhile, the off-record strategy was not found in this study. This shows that indirect or ambiguous speech is avoided because it can hinder the clarity of the service process.

This study shows that courtesy in immigration services is a combination of administrative efficiency and efforts to maintain polite and cooperative relationships. The bald on record strategy is used to ensure smooth procedures, while positive courtesy helps create more humane interactions in the context of public services. This study uses relatively small data and focuses only on one immigration office in Cirebon. Therefore, further research is recommended to use larger data, wider coverage, including other types of service offices, in order to obtain stronger findings and enable generalization of the research results.

REFERENCE

- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987a). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. New York, NY, US: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987b). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California, USA: SAGE Publications.
- Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*. New York, USA: McGraw-Hill.
- Drew, P., & Heritage, J. (1992). *Talk at Work: Interaction in Institutional Settings*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 580.
- Locher, M. A., & Watts, R. J. (2005). Politeness theory and relational work. *Journal of Politeness Research*, 1(1), 9–33.
- Purnomo, B. (2025). A Pragmatic Study of (Im)Politeness Strategies and Institutional Power in Indonesian Hotel Telephone Conversations. *Journal of Language Education, Linguistics, and Culture*, 5(3).
- Sacks, H., Schegloff, E. A., & Jefferson, G. (1974). A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking for conversation. *Language*, 50(4), 696–735.
- Scollon, R., & Scollon, S. W. (2001). *Intercultural Communication: A Discourse Approach*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Sugiyono. (2017). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D*. Alfabeta.
- Victoria, M. (n.d.). *Power and politeness : a study of social interaction in business meetings with multicultural participation*.
- Watts, R. J. (2003). *Politeness*. Cambridge University Press.