



Research Article

Politeness and Rapport Management in Classroom Interaction: A Sociopragmatic Analysis

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Abstract

This study aimed to identify what politeness strategies were employed and how they address the rapport management's face and sociality rights. Grounded in Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport management framework, the study explored how language use contributed to relational dynamics in educational settings. Data collection consisted of classroom observations and semi-structured interviews conducted at a non-sectarian private institution in Davao City, which were analyzed using descriptive analysis. The results showed that positive politeness was the prevailing strategy used, often conveyed through in-group identity markers such as 'anak' and 'langga', as well as engagement and participation-driven offers and promises. These approaches addressed students' face needs and sociality rights, promoting inclusion while alleviating anxiety and building harmonious relationships within the classroom atmosphere. It was also found that educators deliberately balanced authoritative and empathetic discourse, thereby strengthening rapport and communicative efficacy between teachers and students. These findings underscore that teachers' use of positive politeness fosters inclusion, eases anxiety, and strengthens rapport, while balancing authority with empathy to enhance classroom communication.

Keywords: education, politeness, rapport management, sociopragmatic, linguistic strategies, classroom interaction, Davao City



1. Introduction

Classroom participation is essential for student learning and engagement; however, many students hesitate to contribute to discussions due to tension when prompted by teachers, fear of mispronunciation, anxiety about public speaking, and fear of criticism from their peers and teachers (Ahmad, 2021; Murad & Jalambo, 2019). Additionally, low participation may result from teachers rarely asking questions, which reduces engagement (Afzal & Rafiq, 2022). These challenges indicate that students are frequently unwilling or unable to participate actively, despite the importance of their involvement in the learning process.

Multiple studies highlight how rapport and politeness significantly enhance classroom interaction. Rapport has been shown to increase motivation and engagement (Sherif, 2020), while politeness helps maintain relationships and fosters a supportive classroom environment, thereby encouraging students to participate without fear (Jumanto & Rahayu, 2020; Rahayuningsih et al., 2020; Mahmud, 2019). Such an environment promotes open communication and active engagement (Culpeper & Kan, 2020; Nurmawati et al., 2019). The importance of politeness also extends to digital contexts, where strategies employed on platforms such as WhatsApp help preserve relationships (Hassan et al., 2022; Mulyono et al., 2019), supporting Beißwenger and Pappert's (2019) claim that politeness mitigates communication challenges in digital learning. In the Philippines, teachers employ politeness strategies to minimize Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) and enhance student confidence (Syting & Gildore, 2022; Urbis et al., 2022). Collectively, these studies indicate that strategic language use is fundamental to building rapport and promoting participation.

While politeness and rapport have been widely studied, most research treats them separately. No study to date has combined Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory with Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport management to analyze classroom interaction in the Philippine context. This gap limits our understanding of how linguistic choices simultaneously fulfill face needs and sociality rights. Combining these frameworks reveals how teachers and students use language to build rapport..

This study seeks to identify which politeness strategies, as defined by Brown and Levinson (1987), are commonly employed by teachers in classroom interactions. It further examines how these strategies address the face needs and sociality rights of students as outlined by Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport management framework. By addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute to the literature on politeness and rapport management, promote effective communication that enhances intercultural skills and relationships, and foster a respectful and harmonious educational environment. Additionally, the

study aligns with the objective of quality education by encouraging teachers to cultivate strong relationships with students.

2. Materials and Methods

This section presents the study's methodological framework, describing the research participants and their selection criteria, outlining the instruments used for data collection, and detailing the research design and procedures to ensure rigour and transparency.

2.1 Research Participants

The study participants were 12 teachers from a private, non-sectarian school in Davao City. The researchers selected the participants through purposive sampling, aligning with qualitative research that focused on smaller sample sizes to understand the depth of individual experiences (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Subedi, 2021). To mitigate bias, participants for the observations and interviews were selected separately (Cochran & Rubin, 1973). Three teachers were observed for six hours, divided into two-hour sessions, which is considered to be sufficient for qualitative observational research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The researchers conducted comprehensive interviews with the remaining nine participants and reached data saturation (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). In total, all 12 interview and observation participants met the inclusion criteria of at least one year of teaching experience.

2.2 Research Instruments

Two instruments were employed in this study: an observation checklist and a semi-structured interview guide. The primary objective was to identify how teachers utilize politeness strategies to address students' face and sociality rights during classroom interactions. The checklist comprised columns for the type of politeness strategy, its description, and the specific aspect of rapport management addressed. This format enabled direct observation and documentation of politeness strategies. An interview guide was developed to cross-check the observed behaviors, containing eight main questions supplemented by additional probing questions to elicit thoughtful reflection. The interviews were designed to provide information that would complement and confirm the observed strategies. Integrating findings from both instruments enabled methodological triangulation, thereby enhancing the validity and depth of the collected qualitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

To establish the reliability of the instruments and ensure alignment with the study's objectives, a panel of experts reviewed and validated them, consistent with the criteria outlined by Korstjens and Moser (2017), which emphasize credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in qualitative research.



2.3 Research Design and Procedure

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically sociopragmatic analysis, a subfield of pragmatics examining the social orientation in language. It focuses on how relationships, culture, norms, and communication expectations influence language (Syting, 2025; Spencer-Oatey, 2008). This approach provided a clear framework to understand how teachers' linguistic choices marked politeness strategies and managed rapport in interactions. To initiate the research process, an approval letter was obtained from the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences as part of the ethical research protocol. Prior to data collection, participants briefly received explanations of the study's aim, methodology, and data use. Participants then confirmed voluntary participation by signing consent forms. Researchers ensured confidentiality and anonymity at all stages, and each participant was informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

The research combined classroom observations and semi-structured interviews through methodological triangulation to enhance validity (Hurst, 2023; Denzin, 2017). Classroom observations were arranged with teachers to reduce disruption and maintain a natural lesson flow. These sessions took place in familiar settings, allowing genuine interactions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). During observations, verbal politeness and strategies were evaluated using a structured checklist by tracking utterances, categorizing them by politeness strategy, and identifying the face or sociality rights involved.

Observations were documented through field notes and full video recordings obtained with informed consent. This material supported further analysis and triangulation (Agustina, 2021; Thompson, 2020; Driscoll, 2011). After observations, researchers conducted semi-structured interviews to supplement the existing data. These interviews used open-ended questions to explore student-teacher interactions, politeness strategies, authority dynamics, and classroom communication (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

As a final step, the researcher transcribed data from classroom recordings and interviews, using a descriptive qualitative design with methodological triangulation. Following Miles and Huberman's (1984) approach, analysis began with data condensation: the researcher classified teachers' utterances into politeness sub-strategies using tables based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory. Each utterance was also analyzed to identify which face and sociality rights were addressed, using Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport management framework.

These two theories together show how politeness strategies build rapport in classroom interactions. To validate findings, the researcher cross-referenced coded behaviors with teachers' stated sociopragmatic intents from interviews. This triangulation ensures qualitative validity and provides a comprehensive

analysis of social dynamics (Purba, 2024). Finally, an independent data analyst reviewed the coding tables to confirm intercoder reliability. The agreement between coders confirmed consistent categorization, strengthening the credibility of the findings (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

3. Results

The findings showed that three politeness strategies of Brown and Levinson (1987) occurred in teachers' classroom utterances. These are positive politeness, negative politeness, and the off-record strategy. The sub-strategies in each of the strategies involved the following: positive politeness involved notice, attend to H, exaggerate, use of in-group identity markers, seek agreement, avoid disagreement, offer, promise, include both S and H in the activity, and give reasons; negative politeness involved be conventionally indirect, question, hedge, minimize imposition, and impersonalize the S and H; and off-record strategy involved give association clues, presuppose, understate, be ironic, and be vague.

Table 1. Positive Politeness and Rapport Management in Classroom Interaction

Politeness strategies	Sub-strategies	Sample Utterance	Rapport Management	
			Face	Sociality Rights
Positive Politeness	Notice, attend to Hearer	'How's life?'		
		'How's your vacation?'		
		'You did so great!'		
	Exaggerate	'Thank you for always trying your best!'		
		'Dear'		
		'Anak'		
	Use In-group identity markers	'Langga'		
		'Guys'		
	Seek Agreement	'So, here's what you're about to say, you've mentioned that...'	Quality Face, Social Identity, Relational Face	Association Rights, Equity Rights



	<i>'Yes, right, your letter must be clear and concise'</i>
Avoid Disagreement	<i>'What about you try again?'</i>
	<i>'Alright, if you can perfect your examination, I will move the deadline.'</i>
Offer, promise	<i>'Okay, as long as you participate, I'll give you a grade.'</i>
Include both Speaker and Hearer in the activity	<i>'We can improve our writing when we keep practicing'</i>
	<i>'Everyone, let's go'</i>
	<i>'Why? Where's your excuse letter?'</i>
Give reasons	<i>'Why were you not able to check my announcement in BBL?'</i>

As shown in Table 1, teachers employed a range of positive politeness sub-strategies to affirm students' need for appreciation and approval, reflecting a deliberate approach to classroom rapport management.

Teachers expressed interest in students' personal lives by noticing and attending to the hearer; for instance, questions such as "how's life" and "how's your vacation" were used to foster a relaxed atmosphere and establish interpersonal connections prior to academic instruction. Building upon this rapport, teachers often utilized exaggerated praise during academic engagement.

Statements like "You did great!" and "Thank you for always trying your best!" were designed to positively evaluate competence and effort and to sustain motivation to participate in future discussions. This rapport was further reinforced through the frequent use of in-group identity markers. Terms of endearment and collective nouns, such as "anak," "langga," "dear," and "guys," bridged the hierarchical gap between a teacher and a learner by acknowledging them as integral, valued members of the classroom community.



During direct instruction, teachers prioritized seeking agreement to establish common ground with students. Responses such as “So, here’s what you’re about to say, you’ve mentioned that...” and “Yes, right, your letter must be clear and concise” reflected respect for student contributions by emphasizing collaborative dialogue rather than unilateral instruction.

When students provided incorrect answers, teachers typically avoided direct disagreement. Instead, corrections were framed as gentle encouragement, as in “What about you try again?”, transforming feedback into a positive prompt and indicating that the student's reasoning was valid but required further development.

To further support students and reduce the burden of academic tasks, teachers frequently made offers and promises. Statements such as “Alright, if you can perfect your examination, I will move the deadline” and “Okay, as long as you participate, I’ll give you a grade” introduced positive reinforcement by negotiating workload and providing equitable incentives.

Similarly, the strategy of including both the speaker and the hearer in an activity mitigated the pressure of expectations and fostered collective responsibility. Utterances such as “We can improve our writing when we keep practicing” and “Everyone, let's go” employed inclusive pronouns to present learning as a collaborative process, thereby fostering group cohesion.

Additionally, teachers encouraged cooperation by inviting students to explain their actions, as evidenced by questions such as “Why? Where’s your excuse letter?” and “Why were you not able to check my announcement in BBL?” Soliciting these explanations enabled teachers to address behavioral concerns while maintaining positive classroom rapport.

The integration of positive politeness sub-strategies enables effective classroom rapport management by addressing students' face wants and sociality rights. Through the establishment of interpersonal connections, affirmation of competence, and use of inclusive language, teachers support students' quality face, social identity face, and relational face.

Concurrently, these strategies protect students' sociality rights by fostering a collaborative and supportive environment that promotes belonging, and by honoring equity rights through negotiated workloads, individualized consideration, and fair opportunities for explanation rather than immediate penalties.

Table 2. Negative Politeness and Rapport Management in Classroom Interaction

Politeness strategies	Sub-strategies	Sample Utterance	Rapport Management	
			Face	Sociality Rights
<i>Negative Politeness</i>	Be conventionally indirect	<i>'Maybe you would like to follow our suggested structure.'</i>		
	Question, hedge	<i>"Maybe you can think more?"</i> <i>"Maybe it could?"</i>	Quality Face, Relational Face	Association Rights, Equity Rights,
	Minimize the imposition	<i>'Alright, I will not force you to perfect your draft today, but just make sure to start working on it.'</i>		
	Impersonalize the S and H	<i>'Unfortunately, some will be getting an automatic zero in the exam'</i>		
		<i>'Sometimes, people forget to cite their sources properly'</i>		

As shown in Table 2, teachers also relied on negative politeness. This approach emphasizes student autonomy and minimizes imposition. Teachers often used conventional indirectness to soften instructions. As seen in the utterance, "Maybe you would like to follow our suggested structure," instead of a direct command, softens the instruction and preserves the student's autonomy. Building on this, teachers used hedging to reduce the assertiveness of their requests. Utterances such as "Maybe you can think more?" and "Maybe it could?" show deliberate tentativeness. This transforms direct correction into a possibility and leaves room for the student's agency.

Furthermore, teachers minimized impositions to avoid overwhelming students. For example, in the utterance "Alright, I will not force you to perfect your draft today, but just make sure to start working on it." By clearly acknowledging students' wishes for less pressure, the teacher balances progress with a manageable workload. Lastly, impersonalizing the speaker and hearer shifts the focus from individuals during corrections. Phrases such as "Unfortunately, some will be getting an automatic zero" or "Sometimes, people forget to cite their sources" avoid direct pronouns and frame expectations as general rules rather than personal confrontations.

These negative politeness sub-strategies help manage rapport, softening authority and avoiding direct accusations to protect students' relational and quality face. These approaches uphold equity and association rights by respecting agency and keeping corrective interactions respectful and non-coercive.

Table 3. Off-record Strategy and Rapport Management in Classroom Interaction

Politeness strategies	Sub-strategies	Sample Utterance	Rapport Management	
			Face	Sociality Rights
Off Record	Give association clues	<i>'Oh, the projector hasn't been turned on yet, has it?'</i>		
	Presuppose	<i>'Have you not read my announcements again on BBL?'</i>	Social Identity, Relational Face	Equity Rights
	Understate	<i>'You might want to revisit this part of your paper, it's just a bit unclear'</i>		
	Be ironic	<i>'Late comers, good morning!'</i> <i>'You were all very good'</i> <i>'I'm chill, guys, I'm still chill.'</i>		
	Be vague	<i>'I received a message last night-'</i>		

As shown in Table 3, the results demonstrate that teachers employ off-record strategies to communicate meaning indirectly, thereby addressing sensitive issues while minimizing potential face threats through ambiguity. Teachers frequently use association hints to prompt student action without direct confrontation, as seen in the utterance, "So far, only half of the class has passed their assignment." By presenting this as a general observation, the directive is implied rather than explicit. Similarly, teachers employ presuppositions by framing reminders as rhetorical questions to guide students toward a desired conclusion without issuing a direct command, as seen in the utterance "Have you not read my announcements again on BBL?" Additionally, teachers often downplay the seriousness of an issue to soften critiques and maintain a supportive atmosphere, as shown by suggestions such as, "You might want to revisit this part of your paper; it's just a bit unclear." This approach positions feedback as a minor adjustment rather than harsh criticism.



In classrooms where teachers and students share more familiar relationships, teachers employ irony to maintain harmony through humor. Phrases such as “Late comers, good morning!”, “You were all very good,” and “I’m chill, guys, I’m still chill” enable teachers to deliver critiques in a lighthearted manner. This approach softens the message, allowing students to recognize the underlying point without feeling directly targeted. Additionally, the use of vague statements permits teachers to hint at issues or reminders without confrontation. Statements like “I received a message last night” were not explicit, shifting interpretation to the listener and enabling teachers to avoid direct accusations.

These off-record sub-strategies work together to manage rapport by preserving both face wants and sociality rights. By using indirectness, general observations, and vague hints, teachers preserve students’ quality face and protect them from direct personal blame. The use of shared humor and irony affirm the students’ social identity and build a cohesive relational face. At the same time, these strategies nurture association rights by treating issues as collective concerns and keeping interactions collaborative. Equity rights are upheld by avoiding direct impositions and trusting students to self-correct.

4. Discussion

The findings reveal that teachers rely on a dynamic, multi-layered approach to politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987) to balance pedagogical demands with students’ interpersonal needs. Politeness in the classroom functions not merely as a social convention but as a strategic mechanism for preserving classroom harmony and managing rapport (De Vera & Jajalla, 2025). Because classroom interactions inherently involve Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) such as corrections and behavioral directives, teachers must constantly negotiate communication styles to maintain a positive learning environment (Aporbo et al., 2024; Briones & Liwanag, 2023). Effective rapport management requires mitigating these FTAs to prevent student disengagement and ensure that students’ social needs and rights are consistently met (Adhari & Sesmiyanti, 2022; Syting, 2025). Ultimately, the strategic interplay of these linguistic choices directly influences classroom organization and the overall efficacy of student learning (Mourad, 2021).

Positive politeness strategies serve as foundational tools for deconstructing traditional classroom hierarchies and building collaborative solidarity. By utilizing in-group identity markers and expressions of shared experience, teachers actively nurture the students’ quality face while fulfilling their association rights (Luthfi, 2022; Syting & Gildore, 2022). Recognizing students as valued, capable members of the classroom community reduces interactional friction and establishes mutual respect (Suwarni & Bestari, 2021).

Furthermore, validating learners through praise and reason-giving has been shown to positively impact students' academic motivation and self-efficacy (Fitriyani & Andriyanti, 2020; Laiche, 2024). Establishing this relational baseline ensures that subsequent instructional directives or critical feedback are received collaboratively, fostering a participatory environment (Maslucha et al., 2022; Rahayuningsih et al., 2020).

While positive politeness builds closeness, negative politeness is crucial for safeguarding professional boundaries and respecting student autonomy. The frequent use of conventional indirectness and hedging protects students' equity rights by presenting tasks as choices rather than coercive demands (Latrech & Alazzawie, 2023; Zhang, 2022). Additionally, minimizing impositions through softened instruction or apologies gives students the space to decide, reinforcing their freedom of action (Banat et al., 2024; Beschieru, 2021). Teachers also impersonalize failure by avoiding direct pronouns or stating FTAs as general rules, which shields the students' social identity face from public embarrassment (Sembiring et al., 2023; Wijayanti et al., 2020). This linguistic caution balances the power dynamics of the classroom, ensuring that authority is maintained without resorting to patronizing or authoritarian language (Mourad, 2021).

Off-record strategies represent the most complex pragmatic tools, enabling teachers to navigate highly sensitive issues through strategic ambiguity. By embedding critiques within humor or irony, educators can guide behavior while preserving the student's relational face and minimizing confrontation (Lu'mu et al., 2023; Syting, 2025). Furthermore, utilizing vague association clues or presuppositions shifts the cognitive load of interpretation to the student, honoring their equity rights by treating them as capable of self-correction (Aeni et al., 2022; Ismail et al., 2022). This indirectness effectively protects students' quality face from public blame, often displacing the hearer to maintain neutrality in communication (Ginting & Pasaribu, 2023; Urbis et al., 2022). Because these strategies frame issues as collective observations rather than individual failings, they actively nurture association rights and prevent the escalation of tension while still achieving necessary pedagogical goals (De Vera & Jajalla, 2025).

5. Conclusion

This study has shown that teachers actively employ various politeness strategies, as outlined by Brown and Levinson (1987), including positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record politeness, which are commonly used to maintain interpersonal harmony within the classroom. These politeness strategies are also found to address face and sociality rights in rapport management, as introduced by Helen Spencer-Oatey (2008). This highlights the crucial role of educators in playing both authoritative and relational figures who



deliberately use language to enhance the relationship between students and teachers.

During the interviews and classroom observations, positive politeness was the most prevalent, often used in conjunction with other strategies. Teachers were found utilizing a variety of in-group identity markers when communicating with their students. For example, using colloquial endearments such as 'anak' and 'langga' helped establish a common ground with their students. It was also found that teachers often use offers or promises as a strategy to encourage students to participate in class. These positive politeness strategies directly address the relational face of the students, ensuring they feel included and connected to their teachers. To balance this closeness with academic authority, teachers seamlessly integrated negative politeness to protect students' equity rights, and off-record strategies to address sensitive issues without threatening their face and sociality rights.

The study successfully identified the politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) and the types of rapport management they address, as outlined by Helen Spencer-Oatey (2008). Through the integration of classroom observations and interviews, the findings revealed clear connections between teachers' linguistic choices and the preservation of students' quality of face, relational harmony, and rights to equity and association. The study's results strongly align with Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory and Spencer-Oatey's Rapport Management Framework, confirming that teachers strategically manage interactions to balance authority with empathy, thereby enhancing both communication and classroom rapport.

Practically, the findings suggest that effective classroom management goes beyond behavioral rules; it is deeply tied to linguistic pragmatics. Therefore, it is highly recommended that educational institutions incorporate specific training on rapport strategies and politeness into teacher pedagogy workshops. Equipping educators, especially pre-service teachers, with the awareness of how their words impact students' face and sociality rights can lead to more inclusive, engaging, and anxiety-free learning environments.

6. Limitations of the Study

While this study provides valuable insights, it is limited to a traditional, face-to-face classroom setting in a specific region. To address current gaps in the literature, future researchers should explore how these linguistic strategies adapt to different environments. Specifically, investigating how politeness and rapport are negotiated in highly multilingual settings, or how these frameworks translate



to digital and online classrooms, would significantly expand our understanding of modern educational discourse.

While this study provides valuable insights into teachers' pragmatic linguistic choices, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the research is contextually bound to a single non-sectarian private institution in Davao City, utilizing a small, localized sample size of only 12 participating teachers. Second, the data analysis was restricted to a qualitative, descriptive approach to explore the communicative phenomena, rather than employing quantitative statistical coding to measure the exact frequency or variance of the strategies used. Consequently, these methodological and contextual constraints limit the overall generalizability of the findings. The politeness strategies and rapport management dynamics observed may reflect the specific sociocultural and institutional culture of this school and, therefore, may not fully represent the discourse patterns prevalent in larger public educational systems or across different academic demographics.

Supplementary Details

Supplementary Materials & Data Availability Statement:

The data that support the findings of this study, including interview and observation transcripts, are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Video recordings and raw identifiable data are not publicly shared to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants.

Author Contributions:

Emierldwreen O. Seno: The first author led the conceptualization of the study, carried out data collection, and was responsible for transcribing the gathered data. This author authored the materials and methods section and edited the results and discussion. Additionally, the first author prepared the reference entries adhering to the required citation style and comprehensively edited the entire manuscript to align with the format and guidelines of the International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies in Higher Education

Keziah Antopina: The second author drafted the introduction of the manuscript. Furthermore, this author assisted in the data collection process, contributed to the transcription of the collected data, and formulated the initial drafts outlining the limitations of the study.

Katrina Marie Tibay: The third author was responsible for drafting the results and discussion sections. In addition, this author actively participated in both the collection and transcription of the research data.



John Harry Caballo: The fourth author supervised the overall research process, ensuring methodological rigor, theoretical alignment, and scholarly quality throughout the study. As the research adviser, this author provided critical oversight during the conceptualization and execution phases, guided the analytical direction, and contributed to the critical revisions of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest:

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Disclosure Statement:

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used ChatGPT and Grammarly solely to refine the language, organize the structure, and improve readability. These tools were not used to conceptualize the study, analyze data, or draw conclusions. All AI-assisted content was thoroughly reviewed and validated by the authors, who take full responsibility for the content and findings presented in this final manuscript.

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