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Politeness Strategies in Digital Motivational Discourse: A Pragmatic Analysis of Maudy Ayunda's Thoughts on Insecurities and Imposter Syndrome

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ABSTRACT

The increasing use of digital platforms has transformed how motivational messages are communicated and consumed. YouTube, in particular, provides a platform for public figures to share personal experiences, offer inspiration, and discuss psychological issues. This study examines the politeness strategies employed in Maudy Ayunda's video Thoughts on Insecurities and Imposter Syndrome, focusing on their types and pragmatic functions in motivational discourse. A descriptive qualitative design was employed using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory as the analytical framework. The data consisted of utterances containing politeness strategies extracted from the video transcript. Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), comprising data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings identified 37 utterances containing politeness strategies: 21 positive politeness, 9 negative politeness, 5 off-record, and 2 bald on-record strategies. Positive politeness was the dominant strategy, reflecting the speaker's efforts to establish solidarity, empathy, and emotional connection with the audience. The strategies served complementary pragmatic functions: positive politeness established rapport, negative politeness respected audience autonomy, off-record strategies encouraged self-reflection, and bald on-record strategies conveyed direct messages. The study demonstrates that politeness strategies contribute to constructing supportive and considerate motivational discourse in digital communication.

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1. Introduction

Language is an essential means of expressing ideas, emotions, identities, and social relationships. The development of digital technology has transformed communication, making platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and podcasts important spaces for sharing information and personal experiences. Digital discourse differs from face-to-face communication through asynchronous interaction, limited contextual information, and geographically dispersed participants (Tagg, 2015). These characteristics also influence interpersonal relationships and facework in online environments (Virtanen & Lee, 2022).

Pragmatics examines how speakers communicate and interpret meaning within particular contexts (Cutting, 2002). Taguchi (2015) emphasizes the importance of contextual understanding in pragmatic communication. One central concept in pragmatics is politeness, which concerns how individuals maintain interpersonal relationships and social harmony. Brown and Levinson (1987) conceptualize politeness through positive and negative face and identify four strategies: bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. These strategies involve directness, solidarity, respect for autonomy, and indirect communication. Locher and Graham (2010) further emphasize relational work in politeness, while Virtanen and Lee (2022) highlight the role of social identities and power relations in online facework. Empirical studies by Rimang et al. (2026) and Aziz (2024) also demonstrate the importance of politeness in digital interactions and YouTube communication.

Politeness is particularly relevant to motivational discourse, which frequently addresses sensitive issues such as insecurity, anxiety, failure, and self-confidence. Speakers need to communicate encouragement and advice while maintaining interpersonal consideration. Dörnyei, Muir, and Ibrahim (2014) explain how meaningful goals and emotional experiences sustain motivation, while Leech (2014) emphasizes the importance of considerate linguistic choices in managing interpersonal relationships. One relevant psychological issue is the impostor phenomenon, characterized by persistent self-doubt and difficulty recognizing personal achievements despite evidence of competence. Clance and Imes (1978) initially investigated this phenomenon among high-achieving women. Subsequent studies have examined its prevalence, predictors, and implications for psychological well-being (Bravata et al., 2020), its multidimensional characteristics (Gullifor et al., 2024), and its manifestations across organizational and social contexts (Tewfik et al., 2024).

In this context, Maudy Ayunda's YouTube video Thoughts on Insecurities and Imposter Syndrome provides an interesting subject for pragmatic analysis. Through personal reflections, encouragement, and advice, she addresses psychological experiences related to self-doubt, self-worth, and personal achievement. Previous research has investigated politeness in classroom interactions, public speeches, interpersonal conversations, and digital communication. Aziz (2024), Rimang et al. (2026), and Virtanen and Lee (2022) demonstrate the relevance of politeness and facework in digital environments. Research on Indonesian YouTube influencers has also

explored pragmatic strategies, politeness, and audience engagement (2025). However, limited attention has been given to how all four politeness strategies operate collectively in motivational YouTube monologues addressing psychologically sensitive issues.

Therefore, this study analyzes Maudy Ayunda's Thoughts on Insecurities and Imposter Syndrome using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. Its novelty lies in examining all four politeness strategies in motivational digital discourse and exploring their pragmatic functions in expressing empathy, establishing solidarity, providing encouragement, and promoting self-reflection. Specifically, this study aims to identify and classify the politeness strategies employed by Maudy Ayunda, analyze their pragmatic functions, and examine their contribution to constructing supportive, considerate, and persuasive motivational messages. The findings are expected to contribute to pragmatic research and digital discourse analysis, particularly regarding the role of politeness in communicating sensitive personal experiences through digital platforms.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Pragmatics and Digital Discourse

Pragmatics examines how speakers communicate intended meanings and how listeners interpret expressions within specific contexts (Cutting, 2002). In digital environments, communication is characterized by asynchronous interaction, limited nonverbal cues, and geographically dispersed participants (Tagg, 2015). Consequently, pragmatic analysis must consider communicative intentions, interpersonal relationships, and technological contexts. Recent studies by Rimang et al. (2026) and Az-Zahra and Nurfithri (2026) demonstrate how politeness strategies operate in social media interactions, particularly in managing interpersonal relationships and public communication.

2.2 Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory

Brown and Levinson (1987) conceptualize politeness through face, consisting of positive face (the desire for appreciation and acceptance) and negative face (the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition). They identify four strategies: bald on-record, involving direct communication; positive politeness, emphasizing solidarity and empathy; negative politeness, minimizing imposition; and off-record, conveying intentions indirectly. Locher and Graham (2010) emphasize politeness as relational work, while Leech (2014) highlights the importance of considerate linguistic choices in maintaining interpersonal harmony. Furthermore, Fauzi (2026) identifies Brown and Levinson's framework as a dominant approach in digital politeness research, emphasizing the influence of cultural and platform contexts on politeness practices.

2.3 Politeness in Digital Motivational Communication

Motivational communication uses language to encourage individuals, influence attitudes, and promote personal development. It frequently combines personal narratives,

emotional expressions, and advice, requiring empathy and interpersonal consideration (Dörnyei et al., 2014). Research by Munaro et al. (2021) demonstrates the relationship between influencers' linguistic styles and audience engagement, while Munaro et al. (2024) identify storytelling, personal experiences, motivation, and guidance as important linguistic styles in YouTube content. Similarly, Luik et al. (2024) highlight the contribution of empathetic content to inspirational communication, while O'Donnell et al. (2023) demonstrate the potential of TikTok content to educate and inspire audiences. Although these studies examine digital engagement and motivational content, further investigation is needed into how politeness strategies construct solidarity, communicate advice, respect audience autonomy, and encourage self-reflection.

2.4 Insecurity and the Impostor Phenomenon in Motivational Discourse

The impostor phenomenon refers to persistent feelings of intellectual inadequacy and difficulty internalizing personal achievements despite objective evidence of competence. Clance and Imes (1978) initially examined this phenomenon among high-achieving women. Subsequent research has explored its prevalence, predictors, and potential treatments (Bravata et al., 2020), its multidimensional characteristics in workplace contexts (Gullifor et al., 2024), and its manifestations across organizational and social environments (Tewfik et al., 2024). Cokley et al. (2024) further emphasize the influence of social and cultural experiences on impostor feelings. These findings demonstrate the sensitivity of insecurity and impostor experiences as motivational topics. In this context, politeness strategies provide linguistic resources for establishing solidarity, minimizing the imposition of advice, encouraging personal reflection, and emphasizing motivational messages.

3. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to examine politeness strategies in Maudy Ayunda's YouTube video Thoughts on Insecurities and Imposter Syndrome. A qualitative approach was selected because the study focused on identifying, describing, and interpreting linguistic expressions within their communicative contexts rather than measuring variables statistically (Creswell, 2018). The primary data source was the selected YouTube video, while the data consisted of utterances containing politeness strategies. Secondary sources included books, journal articles, and previous studies related to pragmatics, politeness theory, digital communication, and motivational discourse.

Data were collected through repeated observation of the video and transcription of its verbal content. First, the researcher watched the video several times to understand its overall context and communicative purposes. Second, the complete video transcript was prepared. Third, utterances containing politeness strategies were identified and highlighted. Finally, the selected utterances were classified according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework, comprising bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies.

The researcher served as the primary research instrument, responsible for observing the video, identifying relevant utterances, classifying politeness strategies, and interpreting their pragmatic functions. Supporting instruments included a video player and transcription sheets to facilitate data collection and organization. The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During data condensation, irrelevant utterances were excluded, and relevant expressions were categorized according to the four politeness strategies. The categorized data were subsequently organized into tables and descriptive explanations to identify recurring patterns and pragmatic functions. Finally, conclusions were drawn and verified by examining the consistency between the linguistic data, their interpretations, and the theoretical framework.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Types of Politeness Strategies Used in Thoughts on Insecurities and Imposter Syndrome

The analysis identified a total of 37 utterances containing politeness strategies in Maudy Ayunda's motivational YouTube video. Based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, the utterances were categorized into four types of politeness strategies: positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record strategies, and bald on-record strategies. The distribution of the strategies is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Politeness Strategies

Type of Politeness Strategy	**Frequency**
Positive Politeness	21
Negative Politeness	9
Off-Record (Indirect)	5
Bald On-Record	2
Total	**37**

The findings indicate that positive politeness was the most frequently used strategy, accounting for more than half of the identified utterances. Negative politeness ranked second, followed by off-record strategies and bald on-record strategies. This pattern suggests that Maudy Ayunda prioritizes establishing interpersonal closeness and emotional connection when communicating motivational messages to her audience.

a. Positive Politeness

Positive politeness was identified as the most dominant strategy in Maudy Ayunda's motivational video, with a total of 21 occurrences out of 37 identified politeness strategies. This finding indicates that Maudy primarily seeks to establish solidarity, empathy, and emotional connection with her audience when discussing sensitive topics such as insecurity and imposter syndrome. Positive politeness functions to satisfy the

hearer's positive face by creating a sense of closeness and shared understanding between speaker and audience.

Table 2. Representative Positive Politeness Strategies

No.	Representative Utterance	Sub-Strategy	Pragmatic Function
1.	"Many of us experience this feeling."	Use of Inclusive Language	Building solidarity
2.	Sharing personal experiences of insecurity and self-doubt	Sharing Common Ground	Creating empathy
3.	"You are not alone in feeling this way."	Showing Understanding	Providing emotional support

The first example demonstrates the use of inclusive language through the phrase many of us. By including herself within the group experiencing insecurity, Maudy minimizes social distance and positions herself as a fellow experiencer rather than an authority figure. This strategy helps viewers feel understood and accepted.

The second example involves sharing personal experiences related to insecurity and imposter syndrome. Self-disclosure serves as a positive politeness strategy because it establishes common ground between speaker and audience. By revealing her own struggles, Maudy demonstrates authenticity and encourages viewers to relate their experiences to hers.

The third example illustrates how positive politeness can provide emotional support. Through expressions of understanding and reassurance, Maudy validates the feelings of her audience and reduces potential feelings of isolation. Such validation is particularly important in motivational discourse because it strengthens audience engagement and trust.

The dominance of positive politeness suggests that motivational communication relies heavily on interpersonal closeness and emotional connection. This finding supports Brown and Levinson's (1987) argument that positive politeness is employed to create solidarity and satisfy the hearer's positive face needs. Furthermore, it demonstrates that empathy-oriented communication plays a central role in discussing sensitive psychological topics effectively.

b. Negative Politeness

Negative politeness was the second most frequently used strategy, occurring nine times throughout the video. This strategy was primarily realized through hedging expressions, indirect suggestions, and personalized advice. Negative politeness functions to respect the hearer's autonomy and minimize imposition by allowing audiences the freedom to accept or reject the speaker's perspective. In the context of motivational discourse, this strategy is particularly relevant because discussions of insecurity and imposter syndrome involve personal feelings and individual experiences. By avoiding overly direct or prescriptive statements, Maudy creates a conversational space in which

viewers can reflect on her suggestions without feeling judged or compelled to follow them.

Table 3. Representative Negative Politeness Strategies

No.	Representative Utterance	Sub-Strategy	Pragmatic Function
1.	"I think this happens to many people."	Hedging Opinion	Respecting autonomy
2.	"For me, this approach has been helpful."	Personalizing Advice	Minimizing imposition

The first example employs the hedge I think, which reduces the certainty of the statement and signals that the opinion is subjective rather than universally applicable. This allows viewers to evaluate the claim independently without feeling pressured to agree.

The second example uses the phrase for me, which personalizes the advice and presents it as an individual experience rather than a prescriptive recommendation. This strategy respects audience autonomy by acknowledging that different individuals may have different experiences and solutions.

The frequent use of negative politeness demonstrates Maudy's awareness of the sensitive nature of insecurity and imposter syndrome. Rather than imposing solutions on her audience, she presents suggestions in a respectful manner that preserves the viewers' freedom of interpretation and decision-making. This finding aligns with Brown and Levinson's (1987) view that negative politeness minimizes face-threatening acts by respecting individual autonomy.

c. Off-Record Strategies

The analysis identified five instances of off-record strategies. These strategies were realized through metaphors, rhetorical questions, and personal narratives that conveyed meanings indirectly. Off-record strategies allow speakers to communicate messages without explicitly imposing interpretations on their audience.

Table 4. Representative Off-Record Strategies

No.	Representative Utterance	Technique	Pragmatic Function
1.	"The insecurity has less power over you because you spotlighted it."	Metaphor	Encouraging reflection
2.	Reflective questions concerning self-doubt and self-worth	Rhetorical Question	Inviting interpretation

The first example uses metaphorical language to describe insecurity as something whose power diminishes when acknowledged openly. Rather than directly instructing viewers to confront their insecurities, Maudy conveys the idea indirectly through

figurative language. This encourages audiences to interpret the message and apply it to their own experiences.

The second example involves rhetorical questions that invite viewers to reflect on their personal experiences. Instead of providing direct answers, these questions stimulate self-examination and critical thinking.

The use of off-record strategies contributes to the effectiveness of motivational communication because it encourages active audience participation in meaning construction. Viewers are not merely passive recipients of advice but are invited to engage cognitively and emotionally with the message. This finding highlights the persuasive potential of indirect communication in motivational discourse.

d. Bald On-Record Strategies

Bald on-record strategies appeared least frequently, with only two occurrences identified in the data. This limited use suggests that Maudy generally avoids highly direct communication when discussing emotionally sensitive topics. Nevertheless, bald on-record strategies serve important communicative functions when clarity and emphasis are required.

Table 5. Representative Bald On-Record Strategies

No.	Representative Utterance	Pragmatic Function
1.	Direct statement encouraging acknowledgement of insecurity	Providing clarity
2.	Explicit motivational assertion	Emphasizing key message

The first example demonstrates direct communication intended to provide clarity regarding the importance of recognizing feelings of insecurity. The message is delivered straightforwardly without significant mitigation.

The second example consists of a direct motivational statement designed to emphasize a key point within the discussion. Such directness ensures that important messages are clearly understood and remembered by the audience.

Although bald on-record strategies were used sparingly, they contributed to communication effectiveness by preventing ambiguity and reinforcing central ideas. Their limited occurrence reflects the speaker's preference for empathetic and supportive communication, while their strategic use highlights moments where directness is necessary to achieve communicative goals.

4.2 Pragmatic Functions of Politeness Strategies

The analysis revealed that the four politeness strategies served different pragmatic functions in Maudy Ayunda's motivational discourse. Positive politeness primarily functioned to establish solidarity, empathy, and emotional connection. For example, the utterance "Many of us experience this feeling" uses inclusive language to create a sense

of shared experience. Similarly, "You are not alone in feeling this way" provides emotional reassurance and validates audience experiences. These expressions position the speaker as someone who understands the audience rather than an authority figure.

Negative politeness functioned to respect audience autonomy and minimize the imposition of advice. This is evident in the expressions "I think this happens to many people" and "For me, this approach has been helpful." The use of "I think" and "For me" presents opinions as personal perspectives rather than universal recommendations, allowing audiences to interpret the messages independently.

Off-record strategies encouraged self-reflection through indirect communication. The metaphorical expression "The insecurity has less power over you because you spotlighted it" illustrates how figurative language communicates motivational meanings without imposing direct instructions. Reflective questions concerning self-doubt and self-worth also invite audiences to examine their personal experiences. Meanwhile, bald on-record strategies functioned to provide clarity and emphasize important motivational messages through direct statements. Although less frequent, these expressions reinforced the central ideas of the discourse.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that politeness strategies perform complementary pragmatic functions, including establishing solidarity, expressing empathy, respecting autonomy, encouraging reflection, and providing clarity. These functions support Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory that politeness strategies help speakers manage interpersonal relationships and potential face-threatening acts.

4.3 Contribution of Politeness Strategies to Motivational Communication Effectiveness

The findings indicate that politeness strategies contribute to constructing supportive and engaging motivational discourse. Positive politeness, as illustrated by "You are not alone in feeling this way," creates emotional closeness and reassures audiences experiencing insecurity. Negative politeness, through expressions such as "For me, this approach has been helpful," communicates advice without imposing personal perspectives, thereby respecting individual differences.

Furthermore, the off-record expression "The insecurity has less power over you because you spotlighted it" encourages audiences to reconsider their perceptions of insecurity through metaphorical communication. This indirect approach promotes personal interpretation and self-reflection. In contrast, bald on-record strategies provide directness and emphasis when communicating important motivational messages.

The combination of these strategies creates a balance between empathy, respect, indirectness, and clarity. In discussing insecurity and imposter syndrome, such linguistic choices enable Maudy Ayunda to communicate sensitive experiences without disregarding audience autonomy. Therefore, politeness strategies contribute to the communicative potential of motivational discourse by establishing interpersonal connections, encouraging self-reflection, and presenting advice in a supportive and considerate manner.

5. Discussion

The findings indicate that politeness strategies contribute to constructing motivational discourse by establishing solidarity, respecting audience autonomy, encouraging reflection, and communicating direct messages. Positive politeness was the most frequent strategy, with 21 occurrences. Expressions such as “Many of us experience this feeling” and “You are not alone in feeling this way” demonstrate the use of inclusive language and emotional reassurance to establish common ground. This supports Brown and Levinson’s (1987) concept of positive face and Locher and Graham’s (2010) view of politeness as relational work. Similarly, Sarila et al. (2023) found that positive politeness predominated in Japanese and Indonesian social media interactions. The use of personal experiences and empathetic expressions also reflects Luik et al.’s (2024) finding that empathy-oriented YouTube content can strengthen different dimensions of inspiration.

Negative politeness appeared in nine utterances, demonstrating the speaker’s consideration of audience autonomy. Expressions such as “I think this happens to many people” and “For me, this approach has been helpful” illustrate how hedging and personal perspectives reduce the imposition of advice. This corresponds with Brown and Levinson’s (1987) explanation of negative politeness and Leech’s (2014) emphasis on considerate language in interpersonal relationships. Rimang et al. (2026) similarly demonstrate the relevance of positive and negative politeness in digital interactions, particularly when contextual and nonverbal cues are limited.

Off-record strategies occurred five times and encouraged audiences to interpret messages and reflect on personal experiences. The metaphorical expression “The insecurity has less power over you because you spotlighted it” illustrates how indirect language conveys motivational meanings without explicitly imposing advice. This supports Brown and Levinson’s (1987) view of off-record strategies as providing interpretive freedom and Thomas’s (1995) argument that pragmatic meaning depends on context and communicative intention. Meanwhile, bald on-record strategies appeared only twice, serving to communicate important messages directly. Although less frequent, these strategies complement empathetic and indirect expressions by maintaining clarity (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

The findings also highlight the relevance of linguistic choices in digital content. Munaro et al. (2021) identify linguistic style, emotional orientation, and content characteristics as factors associated with YouTube engagement. Their subsequent study identifies storytelling, personal experiences, motivation, guidance, and coaching as distinctive communication styles associated with varying engagement patterns (Munaro et al., 2024). These findings provide context for understanding Maudy Ayunda’s use of personal experiences, encouragement, and reflective expressions. However, the present study focuses on the pragmatic functions of politeness rather than measuring audience engagement directly.

Overall, the four strategies perform complementary functions: positive politeness establishes solidarity, negative politeness respects autonomy, off-record strategies encourage reflection, and bald on-record strategies provide clarity. Their combination

produces motivational discourse characterized by empathy, consideration, and directness when necessary. This interpretation reinforces Leech's (2014) perspective on politeness and Locher and Graham's (2010) concept of relational work.

The findings further demonstrate the applicability of Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework to asynchronous digital communication. Although originally developed to explain interpersonal interaction, the framework helps identify facework in motivational YouTube monologues. Nevertheless, digital communication involves limited immediate feedback, reduced nonverbal interaction, and geographically dispersed audiences (Tagg, 2015). Virtanen and Lee (2022) likewise emphasize the importance of examining facework in relation to online social relationships and communicative expectations. Therefore, politeness in digital motivational discourse should be understood through the interaction between linguistic choices, communicative intentions, and platform characteristics.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the use of politeness strategies in Maudy Ayunda's motivational discourse on insecurities and imposter syndrome through Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework. The findings identified 37 utterances comprising positive politeness (21 occurrences), negative politeness (9), off-record (5), and bald on-record (2). Positive politeness was the dominant strategy, indicating the speaker's preference for establishing solidarity and emotional connection through inclusive language and reassurance. Negative politeness respected audience autonomy, off-record strategies encouraged self-reflection, while bald on-record strategies provided clarity and emphasis.

These findings demonstrate that politeness strategies serve complementary pragmatic functions in digital motivational discourse. Their combination constructs communication characterized by empathy, consideration, and directness when necessary. The study also illustrates the applicability of Brown and Levinson's politeness framework to asynchronous YouTube communication. However, since the analysis focused on linguistic expressions, it did not measure audience responses or the actual effectiveness of the messages. Future research could examine audience reception across different digital platforms to further understand how politeness strategies contribute to motivational communication.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Authors' Contributions

Saryanty Dessi Kause: Conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, and writing – original draft.
Oce A. Langkameng: Supervision, validation, and writing – review and editing.
Rudolof Jibrael Isu: Supervision, validation, and writing – review and editing.

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