

Politeness Utterances Analysis of Comment Structure on Adrian Brody's Oscar Victory in Instagram from BBC News

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ABSTRACT

This study examines politeness and impoliteness strategies in Instagram comments responding to BBC News' post about Adrian Brody's Oscar win. Using a qualitative pragmatic approach, the study analyzes user-generated comments and classifies them based on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, while sarcastic or ridiculing expressions are interpreted using Culpeper's impoliteness framework. The data consist of publicly available comments that are relevant to the post and contain analyzable linguistic features, while irrelevant or non-linguistic comments are excluded. The findings reveal four main strategies: positive politeness, negative politeness, bald-on-record, and mock politeness. Positive politeness appears in supportive and congratulatory comments, while negative politeness is used to express criticism in a mitigated manner. Bald-on-record strategies convey direct and often harsh criticism, whereas mock politeness reflects sarcasm through indirect expressions. The results also indicate that users' responses are influenced by the controversy surrounding Brody's behavior and by the interactive nature of Instagram, which encourages spontaneous and emotionally driven communication. This study contributes to digital pragmatics by demonstrating how politeness and impoliteness coexist and interact in shaping online discourse.

INTRODUCTION

In the digital era, social media has become a central platform for public communication, enabling users to express opinions, emotions, and identities in real time. Platforms such as Instagram provide spaces where individuals can respond to public events, including viral moments involving celebrities. These interactions reflect not only personal opinions but also broader social values and communication norms within diverse online communities (Chandra, 2021).

However, communication in digital environments often leads to contrasting responses, particularly when public figures are involved. Viral events tend to generate polarized reactions, where users express both support and criticism. This diversity of responses can result in interactional tension and challenges in maintaining harmonious communication (Ferreira & Ferreira, 2025; Kluknavská & Macková, 2024).

From a pragmatic perspective, language use in context plays a crucial role in shaping meaning and interaction (Ma & Li, 2024). In online settings, politeness strategies are essential for managing interpersonal relationships and minimizing conflict. Previous studies have shown that politeness in digital communication helps maintain social harmony, even in environments characterized by rapid and emotionally driven interaction (Bi & Marsden, 2020a).

Recent research in digital pragmatics highlights the complexity of politeness strategies on social media. Locher and Bolander (2021) argue that online comments function not only as expressions of opinion but also as tools for constructing social identity. Similarly, Alqarni (2020) emphasize that public figures are particularly relevant for studying politeness and impoliteness, as audience responses often involve emotional and multimodal elements. Furthermore, Hirayama & Matthewson (2022) notes that indirect expressions, such as empathy or mitigation, can help maintain relationships across culturally diverse users.

Despite these contributions, several limitations remain in previous studies. Many studies focus primarily on positive politeness and overlook the interaction between politeness and impoliteness strategies in digital discourse. In addition, existing research often lacks specific contextual analysis, particularly in institutional media settings such as BBC News, which attracts a global audience. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to the structure of comments and the real-time dynamics that emerge during viral events on platforms like Instagram.

These gaps indicate the need for a more integrated analysis of how politeness and impoliteness strategies coexist and interact in digital communication. In particular, viral events involving public figures provide a valuable context for examining how users negotiate meaning, express attitudes, and respond to controversy in online environments.

Based on these considerations, this study investigates politeness strategies in Instagram comments on BBC News' post about Adrian Brody's Oscar win. The study aims to (1) identify the types of politeness and impoliteness strategies used in the comments, (2) analyze how these strategies interact in shaping user responses, and (3) examine the factors influencing communication in this digital context.

The novelty of this study lies in its combined analysis of politeness and impoliteness within the comment structure of a global media platform. By applying Brown and Levinson's politeness theory alongside Culpeper's impoliteness framework, this study contributes to the development of digital pragmatics by providing empirical insights into how online interactions are shaped in contemporary social media environments.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design using a pragmatic approach to analyze politeness strategies in digital discourse. The data were drawn from user comments on an official Instagram post published by BBC News reporting Adrian Brody's Oscar win. In this study, the "participants" were not individual respondents in the traditional sense, but Instagram users whose publicly available comments constituted the data. The unit of analysis was the textual content of the comments rather than the identities of the users. The data consisted of comments that were directly relevant to the post and contained analyzable linguistic features related to politeness or impoliteness. Comments that were categorized as spam, irrelevant, duplicated, or lacking clear linguistic content were excluded from the analysis. A set of selected comments was analyzed based on relevance and linguistic analyzability.

The primary analytical instrument of this study was a classification framework based on (Oteng Acheampong & Kwarteng, 2021) politeness theory, which includes positive politeness, negative politeness, and bald-on-record strategies. In addition, comments containing sarcasm, ridicule, or indirect criticism were analyzed using Culpeper's (2021) impoliteness framework, particularly in identifying mock politeness. Data were collected through a documentation technique by retrieving publicly accessible comments from the selected BBC News Instagram post. The comments were then manually screened based on relevance to the research topic. After the selection process, each comment was categorized according to its linguistic features and pragmatic functions.

The data were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive method within a pragmatic framework. Each selected comment was examined to identify the dominant politeness or impoliteness strategy it employed. Oteng Acheampong & Kwarteng (2021) framework was used to classify strategies such as positive politeness, negative politeness, and bald-on-record expressions. Meanwhile, Culpeper's (2021) framework was applied to interpret mock politeness and sarcastic or ridiculing comments. The analysis focused on three main aspects: (1) the emergence of politeness and impoliteness strategies in the comment section, (2) the interaction between these strategies, and (3) the contextual factors influencing users' responses in digital communication.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of Instagram comments on BBC News' post about Adrian Brody's Oscar win reveals the use of several politeness and impoliteness strategies. These include positive politeness, negative politeness, bald-on-record strategies, and mock politeness. The findings demonstrate how users express support, criticism, and mixed attitudes toward the event. Overall, most comments aim to maintain social harmony, particularly through supportive and congratulatory expressions. However, a significant number of comments also contain criticism, sarcasm, and tension, reflecting the complexity of digital interaction. The use of emojis, informal language, and multimodal elements further strengthens the expression of these strategies in the Instagram comment section.

Positive politeness is reflected in comments that express support, build social relationships, and maintain harmony among users. The most common forms include praise, congratulatory statements, and expressions of pride. These strategies are used to create solidarity and strengthen social bonds within the online community. In many cases, users not only praise Adrian Brody's achievement but also express broader appreciation for the film industry. Positive politeness is often reinforced by the use of emojis, such as hearts or thumbs-up symbols, which enhance emotional expression and create a friendly tone. These comments frequently include personal references, such as mentioning Brody's previous films or career journey, which adds depth to the interaction. This indicates that users are not only reacting to the current event but also engaging with Brody's broader professional identity. From the analysis, positive politeness plays an important role in reducing potential conflict in digital interactions. When negative comments appear, other users often respond with supportive messages, functioning as a form of social balancing mechanism that maintains a more harmonious discussion environment.

Praise is commonly expressed through comments such as "Congratulations, you deserve it!" and "Well done, Adrian! Your performance was outstanding." These comments show

recognition of Brody's achievement and contribute to a positive atmosphere in the comment section. In some cases, praise is delivered with specific references to Brody's roles or performances, indicating that users have followed his career over time. This type of comment not only reflects appreciation but also encourages further interaction among users, such as replies and engagement.

Congratulatory expressions, such as "So proud of you, Adrian!", are frequently used to show emotional support and personal connection. These statements often go beyond simple congratulations by conveying pride and admiration. Some users combine congratulatory messages with personal reflections or past experiences related to Brody's work, creating a more meaningful interaction. Additionally, comments often include multilingual elements, reflecting the global nature of Instagram users and the international audience of BBC News.

Negative politeness appears in comments that express criticism or disagreement in a mitigated and indirect manner. For example, comments such as "I'm sorry, but I can't stand him" demonstrate the use of hedging expressions to soften criticism. Users often include phrases like "I'm sorry," "maybe," or "I think," which function to reduce the potential threat to others' face. This strategy allows users to express disapproval while still maintaining a degree of politeness and respect. The findings indicate that negative politeness is frequently used by users who previously supported Adrian Brody but later expressed disappointment, particularly regarding his behavior during the award event. In many cases, criticism is directed more toward his personal actions than his professional achievements. This strategy also plays a role in maintaining balance in online interaction. Compared to direct criticism, comments using negative politeness tend to receive more positive engagement, such as likes and replies, suggesting that this approach is more socially acceptable in digital communication.

Bald-on-record strategies are characterized by direct and unmitigated expressions of opinion. Comments such as "Adrian Brody stars in the most unwatchable movies" and "He made himself look very self-important" represent this type of strategy. These comments are often harsh, exaggerated, and sometimes contain elements of sarcasm or hyperbole. Unlike negative politeness, bald-on-record expressions do not attempt to soften criticism, which increases the risk of conflict and polarization in the comment section. The analysis also suggests that such comments are often associated with anonymous or less identifiable users, which may reduce social accountability and encourage more direct and aggressive expression. While this strategy is effective in attracting attention, it may also contribute to the escalation of negative discourse and reduce the quality of constructive interaction in online spaces.

Mock politeness refers to comments that appear polite on the surface but actually convey sarcasm or ridicule. For instance, comments such as "If the past can teach us anything, it's to prepare your speech in advance" function as indirect criticism disguised as advice. Similarly, comments like "When are you going to post about the best documentary? 🙄 😊" This comment indirectly satirizes accounts or individuals who have not posted about the winner of the best documentary category. Use of blinking eyes and face emojis (🙄 😊) use humor and emojis to deliver subtle sarcasm. These expressions create ambiguity, as they can be interpreted as either genuine or ironic depending on the context.

This strategy allows users to criticize without appearing openly aggressive, often avoiding direct confrontation or moderation. However, it can also create misunderstanding, especially among users from different cultural backgrounds. Mock politeness highlights the complexity of

digital communication, where meaning is often implied rather than explicitly stated. It demonstrates how politeness strategies can be manipulated to convey hidden criticism while maintaining a seemingly positive tone.

Table 1. Types of Politeness Strategies in Instagram Comments

Politeness Strategy	Description	Representative Example
Positive Politeness	Expressions of support, solidarity, and appreciation that aim to maintain social harmony	Congratulations, you deserve it!" <i>"Well done, Adrian! Your performance was outstanding."</i> <i>"So proud of you Adrian!"</i>
Negative Politeness	Indirect or mitigated criticism using hedging or apologetic expressions	<i>"I'm sorry, but I can't stand him."</i>
Bald on Record	Direct and unmitigated criticism, often harsh or explicit	<i>"He made himself look very self-important."</i>
Mock Politeness	Seemingly polite expressions that convey sarcasm or hidden criticism	<i>"Maybe next time prepare your speech in advance."</i>

The findings of this study demonstrate that Instagram comments on BBC News' post about Adrian Brody's Oscar win exhibit a wide range of politeness and impoliteness strategies. These findings highlight the complexity of digital communication, where users simultaneously express support, criticism, and sarcasm in a highly interactive environment (Fatmawati & Ningsih, 2024; Ren, 2024). This study supports previous research in digital pragmatics, which suggests that social media platforms function not only as spaces for opinion sharing but also as sites where social relationships and identities are negotiated (Tsoumou, 2023). In this context, politeness strategies play a crucial role in shaping how users position themselves in relation to others within public discourse, particularly through stance-taking and identity signaling in comment interactions (Olusegun Oladele Jegede, 2024; Yusuf & Resha, 2025).

Positive politeness strategies are primarily realized through expressions of praise, congratulations, and emotional support. Comments such as "Congratulations, you deserve it!" and "So proud of you, Adrian!" reflect users' attempts to build solidarity and maintain harmonious interaction. These findings are consistent with Chandra (2021), who argues that social media serves as a platform for expressing positive affect and reinforcing interpersonal relationships. In addition, positive politeness contributes to creating a supportive communication environment, particularly in response to significant public events such as award ceremonies. Beyond simple expressions of appreciation, positive politeness also functions as a social balancing mechanism. When negative or critical comments emerge, other users often respond with supportive messages, helping to reduce potential conflict and maintain interactional stability.

Negative politeness strategies are used by users to express disagreement or criticism in a mitigated and indirect manner. For instance, phrases such as "I'm sorry, but..." indicate an

effort to soften potentially face-threatening acts. This finding aligns with Komariah & Wahyuni (2021), who note that users in online communication often employ hedging strategies to minimize confrontation. In this study, negative politeness is frequently used by users who express disappointment toward Brody's behavior while still attempting to maintain respect. The use of negative politeness reflects a balance between freedom of expression and social consideration. It allows users to voice criticism without fully disrupting the interactional harmony of the comment section.

Bald-on-record strategies are characterized by direct, explicit, and unmitigated expressions of criticism. Comments such as "He made himself look very self-important" demonstrate how users express strong opinions without attempting to soften their statements. This supports Schwartz dkk (2021) argument that online disinhibition encourages more direct and sometimes aggressive communication. The absence of face-to-face interaction reduces social constraints, allowing users to express opinions more freely. However, while this strategy can attract attention and generate engagement, it also increases the risk of polarization and conflict. Bald-on-record comments often shift the discussion from constructive dialogue to more confrontational exchanges.

Mock politeness represents a more complex strategy in which users convey criticism indirectly through sarcasm or ironic expressions. Comments such as "Maybe next time prepare your speech in advance" illustrate how politeness can be used as a vehicle for hidden criticism. This finding is in line with Bi & Marsden (2020), who highlights the role of humor and sarcasm in online discourse. Mock politeness allows users to criticize without appearing overtly aggressive, thereby maintaining a degree of social acceptability. At the same time, this strategy introduces ambiguity, as the intended meaning may not always be clearly interpreted by all users. Cultural differences and contextual understanding play an important role in how such comments are perceived.

Several factors contribute to the emergence of both polite and impolite comments in the data. First, the controversy surrounding Adrian Brody's behavior during the award ceremony serves as a primary trigger for negative and critical responses. When public figures are perceived to violate social expectations, audiences tend to respond with stronger emotional reactions, particularly in highly visible digital environments (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Sujon dkk., 2025). Second, the interactive nature of Instagram as a platform facilitates rapid and spontaneous communication, allowing users to express opinions with minimal constraints or moderation (Olusegun Oladele Jegede, 2024). Moreover, the visibility of comments and engagement metrics, such as likes and replies, may reinforce certain types of responses, particularly negative or provocative ones, as these are more likely to attract attention and further interaction (Kim dkk., 2024; Shao dkk., 2026). This creates a cycle in which users are motivated to produce more attention-grabbing comments. Overall, the combination of situational factors (controversy) and platform characteristics (interactivity and visibility) plays a significant role in shaping the dynamics of politeness and impoliteness in online communication (Fatmawati & Ningsih, 2024).

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the data were limited to comments from a single Instagram post published by BBC News. As a result, the findings may not fully represent broader patterns of politeness and impoliteness across different platforms or contexts. Second, the analysis focused solely on textual data without considering

users' demographic backgrounds, such as age, gender, or cultural identity, which may influence communication styles and interpretations.

Third, the interpretation of comments was based on pragmatic analysis, which relies on contextual understanding and may involve subjective judgment. Therefore, different interpretations may be possible depending on the analytical perspective. Future research is encouraged to explore a larger dataset, include cross-platform comparisons, and integrate user-related variables to provide a more comprehensive understanding of digital politeness.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that Instagram comments on BBC News' post about Adrian Brody's Oscar win demonstrate a range of politeness and impoliteness strategies, including positive politeness, negative politeness, bald-on-record expressions, and mock politeness. These strategies reflect the complex dynamics of digital communication, where users simultaneously express support, criticism, and sarcasm.

Positive politeness is primarily used to build solidarity and express appreciation, while negative politeness allows users to convey criticism in a mitigated and socially acceptable manner. In contrast, bald-on-record strategies reflect direct and unfiltered criticism, and mock politeness illustrates how sarcasm is used to deliver implicit negative evaluations.

The findings also indicate that users' responses are strongly influenced by two main factors: the controversy surrounding Brody's behavior during the award ceremony and the interactive nature of Instagram as a platform. These factors encourage both supportive and critical engagement, resulting in diverse and often polarized forms of online discourse.

Overall, this study contributes to digital pragmatics by highlighting how politeness and impoliteness strategies coexist and interact in shaping communication within social media environments. It demonstrates that online interaction is not only a space for expressing opinions but also a dynamic arena where social relationships and meanings are continuously negotiated.

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