

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of The Study

The hospitality sector is heavily relied upon by the global economy, with tourism growth, job creation, and economic expansion being driven in many countries (Burke, 2018). In addition to being used as accommodation facilities, hotels are also utilized as service centers where service providers are connected with clients from diverse backgrounds. In this setting, receptionists often serve as the first point of contact in the space where relationships with guests naturally begin and first impressions take shape. This stage is widely regarded as essential in forming initial perceptions that may later influence customer loyalty and satisfaction (Paramitha P et al., 2022).

As the hotel's public face, the front desk is responsible for greeting guests, managing grievances, completing check-ins and check-outs, and giving them any information they might need while they are there. Therefore, verbal communication is seen as an essential tool for preserving cordial relationships between hotel employees and visitors as well as assisting in averting any disputes that may result from Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs). Employees are expected to have strong communication skills since they not only improve customer happiness but also help the hotel build a solid reputation in a cutthroat industry.

Using civility and pragmatism techniques is an important part of verbal communication on the front desk. While politeness techniques aid in managing social interactions, particularly when handling Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs), pragmatic thinking plays a part in comprehending how meaning is expressed and interpreted in many communication circumstances. Face-Threatening Acts are when someone's face, whether it be a guest or employee, is threatened by a speech. Effective communication and civility techniques must be used in this circumstance to prevent

miscommunications or discomfort, preserve the hotel's good reputation, and guarantee visitor contentment.

When front desk staff use good courtesy techniques, they can establish positive relationships with guests, show professionalism, and modify communication to meet different cultural norms. As a result, the hotel's reputation is enhanced and the quality of service is improved, ensuring that guests feel appreciated and comfortable during their stay. Therefore, the hotel sector needs to give careful thought to the research of pragmatics and politeness tactics in front office communication in order to support both operational effectiveness and client happiness.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), Face-Threatening Acts may be committed when the "face" or self-image of another person is threatened by a speaker's words or actions. A balance between professional service and guest comfort can be maintained through the use of politeness strategies such as negative politeness (which involves maintaining formality and minimizing imposition) and positive politeness (which involves demonstrating friendliness and building rapport).

The importance of linguistic civility in front desk staff communication and its impact on hotel reputation has been highlighted by previous research. In the study conducted by (Ab et al., 2024) the use of linguistic politeness, both verbal and nonverbal, was found to have a substantial impact on service quality and guest satisfaction. However, this study specifically focuses on verbal politeness strategies, particularly in managing face-threatening acts (FTAs) in front office interactions. Similarly, practical restaurant service strategies were examined by (Kim & Lee, 2019) with particular emphasis placed on the role of indirect speech acts in fostering positive customer relationships. However, only a limited number of studies have specifically addressed the use of civility strategies in minimizing verbal Face-Threatening Acts within hotel front desk interactions. Compared to encounters in restaurants or airlines, hotel front desk contacts are frequently longer and more complex, necessitating ongoing relationship-building efforts and flexibility to meet a range of guest backgrounds. To address this gap, this

study explicitly examines how front office staff use politeness strategies in verbal communication with hotel guests to manage face-threatening acts (FTAs).

1.2 Research Question

Thus, the research question guiding this study is as follows:

1. What types of face-threatening acts (FTAs) occur in verbal communication between front office staff and hotel guests?
2. What politeness strategies are employed by front office staff to manage face-threatening acts in guest interactions?
3. What challenges are encountered by front office staff in managing face-threatening acts through politeness strategies in guest interactions?

1.3 Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify and explain how front office staff manage face-threatening acts (FTAs) through politeness strategies in verbal communication with hotel guests, as well as to explore the challenges they encounter in applying these strategies. These strategies are aimed at minimizing potential threats to the guest's positive face (the desire to be appreciated) and negative face (the desire to be free from imposition).

1.4 Significance of The Study

This research provides valuable insights for various stakeholders in the hospitality industry:

1. **For Hotel Management:** These findings offer insights for communication-focused training, ultimately helping to improve visitor satisfaction and retention.
2. **For Front Office Staff:** The application of civility strategies contributes to more effective and professional responses by front desk personnel when dealing with difficult situations.

3. **For Linguistic and Hospitality Researchers:** The application of linguistic theories to real-world hospitality contexts contributes to the advancement of pragmatic and politeness studies.
4. **For the Hospitality Industry:** Effective politeness strategies can strengthen a hotel's reputation and service standards, leading to increased customer loyalty.
5. **For Future Research:** This research paves the way for further exploration of how cultural differences in politeness strategies shape verbal interaction.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

This research examines verbal interactions between front office staff and guests at Hotel Aston Inn Batu, with a particular focus on the use of politeness strategies to manage face-threatening acts. The scope is limited to face-to-face communication and excludes non-verbal elements or interactions from other hotel departments.

1.6 Definition of The Key Terms

1. **Pragmatics** – The study of language use in context, focusing on how meaning is constructed beyond literal word meanings.
2. **Politeness Strategies** – According to Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, politeness strategies are communicative approaches employed to mitigate face-threatening acts and to maintain interpersonal and social harmony.
3. **Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs)** – Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) are communicative actions that can threaten an individual's self-image or disrupt the social balance between interlocutors.
4. **Front Office Staff** – The responsibilities of front office personnel include managing check-in and check-out procedures and responding to guest concerns or complaints.
5. **Verbal Communication** – Information is communicated verbally between guests and front office employees as part of routine service interactions.

6. **Speech Acts** – Greetings, requests, and apologies are regarded as critical communicative acts in hotel front desk interactions, as they help maintain professionalism and rapport with guests.
7. **Cross-Cultural Pragmatics** – Cross-cultural pragmatics explores the ways in which pragmatic norms and communication styles differ among cultures, especially in service-oriented environments like hospitality.

