

POLITENESS PRINCIPLES IN ONLINE POLITICAL DISCOURSE: A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF YOUTUBE COMMENTS ON THE TURKISH PRESIDENT'S SPEECH

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This study investigates linguistic politeness in YouTube comments responding to the Turkish President's speech at the Palestine Solidarity Rally, as published on the TRT Arabi YouTube channel. As social media increasingly serves as a space for political discourse, studies examining linguistic politeness in online political interactions remain limited. Therefore, this study aims to identify the forms of linguistic politeness employed in the comments and examine their role in constructing political solidarity in digital communication. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using Geoffrey Leech's Politeness Principle as its theoretical framework. The data consist of linguistic expressions found in comments posted on the TRT Arabi YouTube channel and were collected through the non-participatory observation method. The data were analyzed through qualitative linguistic analysis based on Leech's politeness theory. The findings reveal that 105 comments comply with Leech's politeness principles, comprising one instance of the modesty maxim, ten of the tact maxim, twenty-one of the agreement maxim, twenty-eight of the sympathy maxim, and forty-five of the approbation maxim. The results indicate that linguistic politeness in comments on the TRT Arabi YouTube channel contributes to the construction of positive discourse surrounding the President of Turkey and represents widespread support for the Palestinian struggle. This study argues that linguistic politeness functions not only as an implementation of social norms but also as a political strategy for fostering collective cohesion in digital spaces.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, civility in online communication is a crucial aspect of fostering healthy and productive interactions. This is because the use of coarse language and insults can damage a person's reputation and trigger conflicts (Sari, 2024; Björkenfeldt & Gustafsson, 2023; Lu & Liang, 2024). On the other hand, polite language not only helps maintain an individual's positive image (Mislikhah, 2020), but the digital age has also brought about a more far-reaching impact as a strategy to strengthen the positive image of larger groups and communities. This phenomenon is clearly evident on the international media channel YouTube TRT Arabi (TRT, 2023), in its representation of the global stage, where there is a variety of polite public responses to the Turkish president's speech to the West and Israel at the "Solidarity with Palestine" meeting. The speech received widespread attention and sparked various pro and con comments. While some of these comments were expressed politely, the polite comments in this context were, in fact, responded to on a massive scale as a form of support for certain groups. This massive wave of polite comments undoubtedly occurred for clear reasons and reflects the ideological, cultural, and political perspectives of each YouTube user (Maghfiroh & Rahmiati, 2024).

The presence of impolite comments, which have significant implications for content, is common (Youssef & Ahmed, 2022; Etikasari et al., 2025). However, the presence of comments that adhere to politeness principles and impact content movement, such as the comments on the Turkish president's speech in this study, is certainly a distinction in politeness studies. This is because responses with negative narratives are usually stronger than positive narratives (Aljabar & Karim, 2022; Wildan, 2023). However, in the YouTube comment section of TRT Arabi, positive responses, based on the general hypothesis, were also frequently re-responded to. This dominance certainly has a purpose and impact on the desired direction of speech content among YouTube users. Therefore, this needs to be studied to determine the forms of polite language that tend to be used and the overall purpose of narratives expressed with politeness principles. Comments containing the principle of politeness in the TRT Arabi YouTube channel are relevant to be studied using Geoffrey Leech's principle of politeness because the principle of politeness expressed through certain maxims is in accordance with the purpose of this study to see the form of politeness in comments and the principles used to convey the implicative purpose of the comments (Leech, 1983). In this case, Leech expressed his principle of politeness through the maxims of tact, respect, humility, agreement, and sympathy (Leech, 1983). This principle is relevant to analyzing interactions in the comment column that are tendentious with expressions of opinions, criticism, and support for global issues.

Many studies have examined politeness in the comments sections of Arabic digital media. A study (Alshahrani & Vásquez, 2026) revealed comments that exhibit politeness in the form of praise for diplomats as influential figures. Likewise, if the topic discussed in the content has a positive image, such as the hijab (Heraki & Zaghouani, 2025), which symbolizes hospitality, or a certain humor (Youssef & Ahmed, 2022), comments on YouTube also elicit a positive response. This suggests that comments in digital media tend to be considered polite if the content represents characters and images that positively build individual personas. Polite comments arise because the content can inspire admiration through figures who do not conflict with the user's ideology. Impolite comments in Arabic digital media, on the other hand, tend to be found in political content that contradicts the user's opinions and perspectives. Research (Anis, 2020) reveals impolite comments on content against the regime, (Faisol & Rahmat, 2021)

explains impoliteness in policy-critical content, also on regular political TV talk shows (Hassan, 2019), or even towards groups that do not align with their political identity (Wulandari et al., 2025).

Building on the aforementioned research, this study is distinguished by its focus on politeness, which tends toward political content, such as the Turkish President's speech to the West and Israel. In this context, the gap between politeness and impoliteness can be balanced. However, politeness in political content is rare and rarely studied. For example, previous research has shown that politeness tends toward positive comments. Of course, politeness will not be present in political content unless the comments serve a greater purpose. Therefore, this study is urgent, specifically regarding the YouTube channel TRT Arabi's speech on the Palestine-Israel conflict. This issue is crucial given the significant public attention to the Palestine-Israel conflict and the sensitivity of the topic discussed. Based on this, this study will describe forms of compliance with politeness in comments using Geoffrey Leech's theoretical approach to uncover the goals and patterns of digital communication among YouTube users in responding to global issues through social media.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a linguistic analysis approach to describe compliance with the principles of politeness in language according to Leech's (1983) perspective. The research data consists of 300 Arabic comments taken from the comments section of a YouTube video on the TRT Arabi channel entitled "Turkish President's Message to the West and Israel at the Palestine Solidarity Meeting" uploaded on October 29, 2023 which can be accessed via the link <https://youtu.be/RU38AAoWYIM?si=Mdgypq82Xrg> (TRT, 2023). This speech was chosen because it was a significant speech during the initial momentum of the massive Palestinian issue that triggered an international response, so it is still relevant to study today because the Palestine-Israel conflict is still developing.

The data collection technique was carried out using the free listening method, where the researcher only acted as an observer without being involved in language interactions (Mahsun, 2005). Comments were collected using the YouTube Comments Downloader application, then selected according to the focus of the research, then listening to the use of language by reading. Data analysis was carried out using the matching method, namely connecting aspects of the text with the context by referring to Geoffrey Leech's politeness theory (Leech, 1983). In the work process, the analysis was also carried out using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data reduction was carried out by selecting relevant comments and classifying them into Leech's six politeness maxims, namely the maxims of tact, generosity, praise, humility, agreement, and sympathy (Leech, 1983). The categorized data were then analyzed based on the six maxims. Finally, conclusions were drawn by answering the form of politeness in language and the purpose and expression of each maxim according to Leech.

RESULT

In the speech of the Turkish President to the West and Israel, comments were found that were in accordance with the principles of politeness according to Leech's theory in 105 comments with 5 maxims as follows.

Table 1. Compliance with the Principle of Politeness in Comments According to Leech's Theory

Maxims observed in accordance with Leech's Politeness Principle	Frequency	Percentage
Compliance with the Maxim of Humility	1	0,95%
Compliance with the Maxim of Prudence	10	9,50%
Compliance with the Maxim of Agreement	21	20,00%
Compliance with the Maxim of Sympathy	28	26,67%
Compliance with the Maxim of Awards	45	42,86%

Compliance with the Maxim of Humility

The principle of humility states that each participant in a conversation should minimize self-praise and maximize self-criticism (Leech, 1983). Compliance with the principle of humility is identified through the following 1 excerpt.

سبحان الله.. أشعر بالخزي والفخر في نفس الوقت ، خزي مما نحن فيه من ذل وفخر بمن يقف شامخا يصدق بكلمة الحق نصرة لآخواننا

Glory be to God... I feel ashamed and proud at the same time, ashamed of our lowliness and proud of those who stand firm, speaking words of truth to support our brothers and sisters.

Excerpt 1. Compliance with the Maxim of Humility

In excerpt 1, the commentator uses the word *أشعر بالخزي* which indicates the meaning of shame, which the speaker uses to express his personal feelings. The sentence structure *أشعر بالخزي والفخر في نفس الوقت* has a structure that combines two opposing feelings, namely shame *الخزي* and pride *الفخر*. This structure shows the complexity of emotions felt by the speaker. Data 1 appeared in the context of the Turkish President's speech at the 'Palestine Solidarity' meeting, where Erdoğan explicitly voiced his support for Palestine. The account @Jutsme22244 expressed his feelings after watching the speech. The speaker felt ashamed *الخزي* because he felt he was not as great as Erdoğan, who dared to speak openly, while at the same time he also feels proud *الفخر* of Erdoğan attitude. This context shows that the commentator wants to express humility by admitting his inability to do the same thing as Erdoğan. Data 1 is included in the modesty maxim of humility because the speaker expresses shame towards himself and minimizes praise for himself. The main reason data 1 is included in the principle of humility is because the commentator openly admits his shortcomings *أشعر بالخزي* and compares them with Erdoğan's courage. This expression also contextually connects his aspirations with Erdoğan's image, so that the maxim of humility can elevate the image of Erdoğan's firmness.

Compliance with the Maxim of Prudence

The principle of prudence is based on the principle of minimizing harm to others and maximizing benefits to others (Leech, 1983). Compliance with the precautionary principle was found in 10 comments with the representation of one of the comments as follows.

ليت ان حكام آخرين يساندوا اردغان بهذه الوتيرة اعتقد سيكون تدخل عسكري إسلامي لدعم
اهل غزة ورفع العدوان

If other leaders supported Erdoğan with this kind of enthusiasm, I think there would be an Islamic military intervention to support the people of Gaza and end the aggression.

Excerpt 2. Compliance with the Maxim of Prudence

In excerpt 2, the commentator uses the word يساندوا , which comes from the word سَنَدَ (sanada), which means “support or support”. The commentator’s hope to support the Turkish President is followed by ليت , which is the equivalent of إِنَّ in the rules of nahwu, functioning as At-tamanni, which is hoping for something impossible or difficult to achieve. The statement by @user-vu8cl6ci3h appeared in the context of the Turkish President’s speech against the West and Israel in support of the Palestinian people. The commentator expressed his hope that if the rulers or leaders of other Muslim countries supported Erdoğan with the same enthusiasm, then Islamic military intervention might occur to help the people of Gaza and end the aggression they are experiencing. This commentator’s assumption includes remarks that show dissatisfaction with the lack of concrete action from other Muslim countries in dealing with the conflict in Gaza. The commentator sees Erdoğan as a vocal and active supporter of Palestine, and he hopes similar support from other leaders could bring about more significant change, even to the level of military intervention.

In the sentence “If only other leaders had supported Erdoğan in this matter,” the commentator maximizes the usefulness of his speech for the audience (the people of Gaza and supporters of Palestine) by proposing a concrete solution, namely military intervention as a solution to end the aggression, which directly aims to protect and help the people of Gaza. Furthermore, he encourages solidarity by citing Erdoğan as an example, encouraging other Muslim leaders to show the same solidarity, which can have a positive impact on the people of Gaza. His speech also aims to reduce the sense of loss suffered by the people of Gaza by ending the conflict and aggression through collective action. Thus, this statement reflects politeness in commenting because it does not only criticize but also offers a solution that can benefit the parties discussed (the people of Gaza) and encourage better action from others (Muslim leaders).

Compliance with the Maxim of Agreement

The principle of agreement adheres to the principle of minimizing differences of opinion between oneself and others and maximizing agreement between oneself and others (Leech, 1983). Compliance with the principle of agreement was found in 21 data represented in the following excerpt.

لا اله الا الله محمد رسول الله هيا على بركة الله

There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah. Let us come together with the blessings of Allah.

Excerpt 3. Compliance with the Maxim of Agreement

In excerpt 3, YouTube users use the word هَيَّا , which functions to invite Erdoğan and other YouTube users to do something together. The sentence هيا على بركة الله has a direct invitation structure هيا followed by a phrase containing prayer or hope على بركة الله. This structure shows emotional encouragement and hope for joint action. Data 3 appears in the context of support for Palestine, where YouTube user @hgtkjuy9211, agrees with the Turkish President in defending the Palestinian people oppressed by Israel. The commenter invites Erdoğan to act together with the phrase هيا على بركة الله . This context shows that the commenter wants to create agreement and cooperation in efforts to defend Palestine. This data falls under the politeness maxim of agreement because the commenter invites Erdoğan and also invites other YouTube users to agree and cooperate in a joint action. The main reason this data falls under the maxim of agreement is because the commenter maximizes agreement by using a positive and collaborative invitation هيا and minimizes the potential for disagreement. This expression demonstrates an attempt to unify views and actions, which aligns with the maxim of agreement in linguistic politeness.

Compliance with the Maxim of Sympathy

The principle of sympathy adheres to the principle of minimizing antipathy between oneself and others and maximizing sympathy between oneself and others (Leech, 1983). Compliance with the principle of sympathy was found in 28 comments represented in the following comments.

اللهم انصر عبدك الطيب أردوغان

O Allah, please help Your servant, the Thayyib Erdoğan

Excerpt 4. Compliance with the Maxim of Sympathy

The diction used in excerpt 4 is اللهم انصر عبدك. The word اللهم (Allahumma) comes from the word الله (Allah), which means God, with the addition of -م as a form of greeting or special request in prayer. The word انصر comes from the root word نصر , which means “to help or give victory.” Meanwhile, عبدك means “Your servant,” which in this context refers to the President of Turkey. The sentence structure اللهم انصر عبدك is a prayer that begins with a request to God, followed by a request to God to help “His servant.” This sentence uses an imperative pattern in the form of prayer, which is common in religious expressions to show hope and supplication to God. Contextually, the comment was expressed as a form of support for President Erdoğan regarding his speech on the Palestinian conflict. This prayer demonstrates concern for the leader and the hope that he will receive assistance in his struggle. This sentence is not only an expression of religiosity, but also a form of appreciation for the Turkish President’s attitude and actions in defending Palestine. Based on the principles of politeness in language, data 4 is classified as a sympathy maxim. The sympathy maxim emphasizes efforts to maximize sympathy for the commenter and minimize antipathy. In this case, the commenter shows sympathy for the Turkish President through prayers and appreciation that demonstrate concern and support. Therefore, this statement is in accordance with the sympathy maxim in politeness.

Compliance with the Maxim of Awards

The Appreciation Principle states that each participant in a conversation should minimize criticism of others and maximize praise of others (Leech, 1983). Compliance with the Appreciation Maxim was found in the 45 comments represented in the following excerpt.

أردوغان شجاع قوه هيبه

Erdoğan is a bold, strong, and charismatic figure

Excerpt 5. Compliance with the Maxim of Awards

In the excerpt, 5 YouTube users used the word شجاع, which means “steadfast, brave, steady, gallant, fearless, undaunted.” This word choice indicates that the commenter praised the Turkish president’s positive qualities. Furthermore, the sentence structure used by the YouTube user also consisted of complimentary words such as شجاع (brave), قوه (strength), and هيبه (presumably). This structure is simple, yet effective in conveying appreciation and respect for the positive characteristics being commented on. In this context, the YouTube user praised the Turkish President for his leadership qualities, which are considered strong and authoritative. The commenter used words such as قوه, شجاع, and هيبه to describe the Turkish President’s courage, strength, and authority. This context reflects the commenter’s attempt to provide a positive assessment and appreciate the characteristics being commented on, thereby strengthening social relationships and creating a good impression. This remark falls within the principle of polite language. The rationale is that YouTube users strive to maximize appreciation for their commenters by offering praise and appreciation, while minimizing criticism by using positive, non-derogatory language. Thus, this remark reflects polite comments and appreciation for those being commented on.

DISCUSSION

The findings on politeness in comments posted on the TRT Arabi YouTube channel indicate that, despite the increasing freedom of expression in the digital era (Kurniawan et al., 2021; Venus et al., 2024), Geoffrey Leech’s politeness principles continue to be applied in online communication, even within highly ideological and emotionally charged contexts such as the Palestine–Israel conflict. Although social media is often perceived as an unrestricted space, users are still able to demonstrate politeness when expressing their opinions. In this study, the approbation maxim was the most frequently observed. This finding suggests that users tend to express admiration, respect, and support for particular figures in this case, the President of Turkey through explicit praise, which appears to be the most accessible and dominant form of politeness. Such expressions further reinforce Erdoğan’s image as a courageous and outspoken advocate for Palestine, as reflected in the positive linguistic features employed by users from various countries. Moreover, these expressions strengthen the relationship between supporters of Palestine and Erdoğan as a figure possessing greater authority. As argued by Leech (1983), the primary function of the approbation maxim is to foster and reinforce social solidarity in communication.

In addition to the approbation maxim, several other politeness maxims were also found to shape respectful commenting practices toward the President of Turkey. One of

these is the sympathy maxim, which frequently appeared in the form of prayers and well-wishes. As noted by (Widyasari, 2022), expressions of prayer in digital spaces have become a common way of conveying sympathy and emotional support in contemporary online communication. The modesty maxim was also evident, as some commenters positioned themselves as having less authority than Erdoğan, acknowledging his leadership and influence. This finding resonates with (Purba, 2025) argument that recognizing one's own limitations can serve as a way of expressing confidence in and support for a respected authority figure. Furthermore, the tact maxim identified in this study aligns with (Rahmawati, 2021) view that prudent and considerate language is essential in digital interactions, as it encourages collective action while reducing the potential for unproductive verbal confrontation. In the present context, commenters employed the tact maxim to express solidarity with Palestine without directly attacking opposing groups. As a result, issues closely tied to collective identity and deeply held religious values, which often carry strong emotional weight (Hanif, 2025), could be articulated in a more strategic and constructive manner while minimizing the negative effects of impolite or confrontational discourse.

The expressions of politeness identified in this study extend beyond mere emotional responses. When viewed through the patterns of politeness employed by commenters, these expressions appear to serve a more purposeful and directional function. The comment section of digital media becomes a space where symbolic legitimacy is constructed for political actors perceived as representing the collective aspirations of Palestine supporters. This observation is supported by (Awad, 2021; Huda et al., 2022), who argue that efforts to gain support in digital media often consolidate figures with recognized authority and the capacity to represent group interests on a broader scale. It is therefore unsurprising that the approbation maxim emerged as the most dominant finding, given its strong potential to reinforce solidarity and social bonds (Leech, 1983). Within this context, Erdoğan is positioned as a moral voice articulating criticism of Western dominance and Israeli policies. This finding is consistent with (Yilmaz, 2024) observation that Erdoğan has maintained a relatively consistent narrative across his official speeches concerning the Gaza conflict. Moreover, (Dağlı & Köksal, 2026) demonstrate that Turkey's policy toward Palestine in recent years has increasingly emphasized international diplomatic engagement. Consequently, the public support expressed in digital spaces can also be understood as a strategic form of participation by Palestine supporters who may not be able to contribute directly to the conflict but can mobilize collective emotions to connect and amplify shared public aspirations.

Overall, the findings suggest that although social media is often characterized as a space for unrestricted expression, where reactions to conflict can easily become impulsive and emotionally charged, users in this context continued to employ polite language when articulating their political views. Politeness in online communication not only reinforces ethical language practices (Poneni, 2025), but also serves as an important mechanism for fostering social solidarity, particularly in relation to global issues such as the Palestine-Israel conflict. The findings demonstrate that support for Palestine can be constructed and communicated through polite forms of online engagement across a wide range of digital content. Such communication allows users to express solidarity without intensifying polarization, while at the same time increasing the likelihood that their messages will be accepted by more diverse audiences. From a theoretical perspective, this study extends the relevance of politeness theory within the field of pragmatics by illustrating its applicability to transnational digital political

communication, where collective identities and ideological affiliations play a significant role. This observation supports the arguments of (Adikwu, 2021; Hafifa et al., 2025), who view pragmatics not only as a set of norms guiding language use but also as a resource that can facilitate forms of global activism aimed at advancing broader political objectives. In this regard, pragmatic strategies may be employed either to construct negative representations of others (Macagno, 2022) or, as evidenced in the present study, to promote humanitarian values, collective justice, and solidarity through respectful political discourse.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that commenters' adherence to politeness principles in responding to the Turkish President's speech on the TRT Arabi YouTube channel represents, at a normative level, an expression of ethical language use grounded in pragmatic norms. At the same time, these politeness strategies also function as a means through which users express support for Erdoğan and position him as a figure capable of channeling public aspirations for Palestinian independence. The predominance of the approbation maxim and its solidarity-building function suggests that fostering collective cohesion in digital spaces is a crucial element in mobilizing public engagement and shaping connections with influential political figures. More broadly, the study suggests that linguistic politeness may function as a mechanism for constructing transnational solidarity and political support around international issues. Nevertheless, this study is limited to user comments on a single YouTube channel, TRT Arabi, and therefore further research is needed across different channels and digital platforms to provide a more comprehensive understanding of politeness patterns in online political communication. In addition, this study relies exclusively on the perspective of politeness theory within pragmatics. Future studies may benefit from incorporating more critical approaches that address cultural dimensions, power relations, ideology, and the construction of individual or collective identities in digital discourse.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors were involved in the preparation and design of the analysis. The first author was responsible for data collection, provision of data or analysis tools, implementation of the analysis, and writing of the manuscript. The second and third authors were responsible for editing, providing input and feedback to improve this scientific article.

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