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Directive speech acts in Jordanian hotel Encounters: A pragmatic analysis of politeness Strategies for cross-cultural service excellence

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Abstract

This paper explores the directive speech acts employed by hotel service counter staff in Jordan, specifically examining the politeness strategies utilized when addressing foreign guests. Despite extensive research on politeness strategies in Western and Asian contexts, few studies examine directive speech acts in Arab hospitality settings using naturalistic data. This study fills this gap by analyzing 95 audio-recorded interactions in Jordanian hotels, revealing that staff frequently employ direct imperatives (63.5% of directives), which may conflict with tourists' expectations of indirect politeness. The findings highlight the need for culturally adaptive training programs to mitigate pragmalinguistic breakdowns in global hospitality. The research is based on audio recordings of interactions between non-native English-speaking staff, seven Jordanian receptionists holding bachelor's degrees in either English language or hotel management, some of whom hold higher diplomas after their bachelor's degrees, and their guests. The findings indicate that the directives issued by the staff are often quite direct, which may come across as blunt or discourteous, potentially threatening the social face of the participants. This directness suggests that staff do not provide guests with the option to decline requests and overlook the imposition their directives may entail. The study concludes that this prevalent use of direct speech acts can be attributed to the nature of institutional interactions, where staff possess greater authority due to their expertise in providing necessary services and information. Additionally, the staff's preference for direct communication may stem from a need for clarity and efficiency when issuing directives. The research underscores the importance for hotel managers and training supervisors to equip new employees with effective communication techniques outlined in guest manuals. This training would aid staff in striking an appropriate balance of directness in their interactions with foreign guests, thereby minimizing potential social misunderstandings and avoiding pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic breakdowns.

Keywords: Cross-cultural communication, Directive speech acts, Hospitality language, Hospitality training, Jordanian front office Staff, Power dynamics, Sociopragmatic Failure.

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1. Introduction

Conversation is a fundamental aspect of human interaction, serving as a primary means through which individuals communicate and achieve various objectives. In everyday life, politeness plays a crucial role in facilitating smooth interactions, yet the perception of what constitutes polite behavior can differ significantly across cultures. This variability can lead to misunderstandings, especially in service encounters, which are common in many people's lives. These encounters often involve essential activities such as filling out forms, making claims, processing payments, inquiring about services, subscribing to new accounts, and making purchases. Each of these transactions is inherently social, involving direct communication between individuals [1].

In the dynamic hospitality industry, where customer satisfaction reigns supreme, implementing effective communication strategies is a pivotal determinant of success. Within this multifaceted arena, the deployment of politeness strategies emerges as a cornerstone in fostering positive interactions between guests and service providers. As the global hospitality landscape evolves to accommodate diverse clientele and heightened consumer expectations, understanding the nuanced role of politeness strategies becomes imperative for ensuring enhanced guest satisfaction. In addition, politeness, as a sociolinguistic construct, encompasses a multitude of verbal and non-verbal behaviors aimed at maintaining social harmony and fostering amicable relationships among the guests and hosts [2]. In hospitality, politeness is manifested through greetings, attentive listening, empathetic responses, and the staff's respectful conduct, all of which serve to welcome guests and engender trust and rapport. Ensuring guest satisfaction is paramount and encompasses factors such as service quality, ambiance, interactions, and overall experience [3, 4]. Thus, accommodation and dining services deeply rely on exceeding expectations and fostering positive perceptions.

In recent years, the hotel industry has become a vital sector of Jordan's economy. The availability of affordable flights has transformed the country into an attractive destination for numerous tourists from Western countries each year. Within Jordanian international hotels, staff typically converse in Arabic with Arab guests and switch to English when interacting with foreign visitors. As English has emerged as the key mode of communication with international clientele, it plays a significant role in both the hotel industry and the broader hospitality sector. However, many hotel employees encounter challenges related to their limited proficiency in English. To address these issues, international hotels in Jordan generally seek to employ individuals with bachelor's degrees in fields such as English, hotel and tourism management, or public administration. Preference is often given to candidates with advanced diplomas in hotel management, as these individuals are assumed to possess a strong command of the English language, which is crucial for effective communication with foreign guests. Face-to-face service encounters (SEs) in hotels are typically characterized by concise and clear exchanges focused on directives, with well-defined roles, rights, and responsibilities for all parties involved [5]. Moreover, such encounters often take place between individuals who are strangers and are not expected to interact again. Nevertheless, there are exceptions, particularly in hotel settings where guests may stay for several days, enabling the establishment of interpersonal relationships and rapport between them and the frontline staff.

Natural data gathered from field notes or audio recordings have been the primary method of SE research. To capture "a faithful representation of reality," SE studies should utilize natural data [6]. However, several studies have also compared large numbers of participants using role-plays or discourse completion tasks [7, 8]. These investigations revealed pragmatic variations across different SEs.

In this type of relationship, staff members are said to possess a "power of control" Brown and Levinson [2] over guests, as their institutional roles grant them legitimate authority to exert influence. Conversely, guests also hold power as the paying customers [9]. Consequently, politeness strategies and customer satisfaction are closely intertwined. Studies have shown that guests perceive politeness from service providers as a sign of respect and attentiveness, which influences their overall satisfaction. Furthermore, politeness mitigates conflicts, fosters positive memories, and strengthens customer loyalty and endorsements. Given the impact of globalization, cultural factors shape the effectiveness of politeness strategies, necessitating nuanced deployment. By navigating cultural sensitivities, service providers can enhance customer satisfaction by aligning communication styles with clients' backgrounds. While prior studies have explored directives in hotel settings, they predominantly focus on Asian or Western contexts and rely on artificial data, e.g., DCTs. To date, there is a lack of scholarly work on how Arab hotel staff navigate their roles within the context of a high power distance culture [10]. In particular, little is known about how they balance institutional authority with cross-cultural politeness in authentic service encounters. This study addresses this gap by analyzing naturalistic interactions in Jordan, a growing tourism hub where staff-guest communication directly impacts economic outcomes.

Currently, research on politeness strategies employed by hotel staff in directing guests during service interactions, particularly in Arab contexts, remains limited. Aside from studies conducted by Blue and Harun [11], few investigations have examined the language used by hotel staff in guest interactions. This study seeks to fill these gaps by analyzing the pragmatic aspects of communication at hotel service counters, with a particular emphasis on the English directives utilized by Jordanian hotel staff (non-native speakers) in their interactions with guests. To guide this inquiry, the study poses the following research question: To what extent do Jordanian hotel service counter staff use direct language in their English directives?

2. Literature Review

Pragmatic research has primarily focused on understanding how speakers execute speech acts, particularly in relation to politeness strategies. Most existing studies have utilized methods such as discourse completion tests (DCTs) [4, 6, 9, 12]. Or role-play scenarios [13]. However, there remains a notable gap in the literature regarding the examination of authentic directives in real-life interactions, which would provide insight into genuine speech act performance [14].

Ervin-Tripp's seminal research [15] was one of the first to investigate the formulation of directives, specifically examining how native English speakers construct these directives and how faculty members interpret student requests, particularly regarding their positive or negative impact on recipients. Building on this foundational work, Blum-Kulka et al. [12] analyzed request strategies in Hebrew and identified several critical elements influencing these strategies, including power relations, the goals of requests, and the age of the requester. Furthering this line of inquiry, Blum-Kulka et al. [16] undertook a cross-linguistic study of requesting behavior, demonstrating that both direct and indirect request strategies exist across different languages, albeit with varying frequencies. For example, Australians generally favor conventional indirect strategies, while direct approaches are more prevalent among Argentinians and Hebrew speakers. Al-Khatib [4] explored how individuals from various cultural backgrounds navigate meaning in email communications, finding that American students typically utilize more indirect politeness strategies compared to their Jordanian counterparts.

In a similar vein, El-Dakhs et al. [17] investigated how Saudi EFL learners articulate requests in both Arabic, their native language, and English, their foreign language. This study involved 240 Saudi undergraduate students and employed a discourse completion task featuring 12 scenarios divided equally between the two languages. The analysis of the participants' responses indicated a significant inclination towards using the conventionally indirect "query preparatory" strategy in both languages. Notably, participants tended to make more direct requests in Arabic compared to English and employed a greater number of non-conventional indirect requests in English. Furthermore, the study found that participants apologized more often in English, while expressions of promises and prayers were more prevalent in Arabic. Additionally, the use of downgrading modifiers was markedly higher in English. The findings indicate that the participants were sensitive to social dominance across both languages.

Similarly, we investigated the politeness strategies employed by Iraqi Arabs and Iraqi Kurds when declining invitations from superiors. Using a Written Discourse Completion Task (WDCT) with 40 undergraduates, the study analyzed refusal strategies across varying social distances, applying [18] semantic formulas and Brown and Levinson's [2] politeness framework. The findings revealed that both groups relied heavily on positive and negative politeness strategies, highlighting how cultural norms shape directive communication in hierarchical settings. These insights are particularly relevant to Jordan's high-power-distance culture [19], where institutional power asymmetries [20] often legitimize directness in service encounters. However, Western tourists, accustomed to negative politeness strategies Brown and Levinson [2], may perceive such directness as abrupt or impolite. This tension between macro-cultural norms and micro-interactional expectations underscores the need to examine how Jordanian hotel staff navigate these diverging communicative demands.

Al-Khatib [19] examined how individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds negotiate meanings in email communications. The analysis is based on a corpus of 120 emails written by two groups of university students: 60 emails from Jordanian students and 60 from American students, all addressed to hypothetical friends. Employing a qualitative approach, the study primarily utilizes discourse analysis alongside politeness theory and cultural stereotypes. Findings revealed that American students tend to employ more indirect politeness strategies compared to their Jordanian colleagues. The insights gained from this study highlight the distinct politeness strategies utilized by each group and underscore the necessity of incorporating pragmatic and intercultural communication training in language education.

contributed significantly to the research on politeness in the context of teaching English as a second language (TESOL) by investigating how requests and apologies are expressed by native Saudi Arabic speakers, Saudi learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), and British native speakers. The study involved 160 university students who participated in discourse completion tests, revealing distinct differences in strategic approaches across the six participant groups. Utilizing Brown and Levinson's politeness theory Brown and Levinson [2] along with coding systems from the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Research Project (CCSARP), the analysis showed that both male and female Saudi participants preferred direct strategies for making requests, whereas the EFL and British speakers tended to use more indirect methods. Notably, Saudi speakers employed a higher frequency of modifiers, such as religious softeners and prayers, indicating that the directness observed among Saudi participants does not equate to impoliteness, thereby challenging certain assumptions made by Brown and Levinson [2].

examined directives issued by Chinese hotel staff and noted a distinction between conversational, informal styles and more institutional, formal expressions. Certain directives addressed to guests exhibited a significant degree of directness, frequently utilizing syntactic features like imperatives and "want" statements. In contrast, other directives reflected a more conventional indirectness, characterized by a higher frequency of mitigating modifiers to soften the request. Yuen pointed out that using overly direct directives without adequate mitigation could be perceived as inappropriate in staff-guest

interactions. He emphasized that effective directive delivery in contexts where relationships are asymmetrical or ambiguous necessitates advanced pragmatic skills and a nuanced understanding of language use.

Investigated the relationships between employees' politeness strategies, customer membership status, perceived co-recovery, and subsequent happiness following online recovery experiences, emphasizing the interactive nature of customer engagement. Their findings revealed that perceived co-recovery significantly influenced online post-recovery happiness, with members displaying more positive perceptions than non-members. Additionally, while non-member customers typically preferred negative politeness strategies, member customers leaned towards positive ones. This research provides valuable insights for online service providers aiming to improve their recovery performance.

Investigated the nature of requests in corner stores in Argentina, finding that both vendors and customers predominantly used elliptical imperatives and direct requests. This usage highlighted the informal and cohesive relationship between the participants. In a similar vein, he examined the requests made by Hispanic and Anglo-American customers at a taco stand in Pennsylvania. He observed that Anglo-American customers generally preferred conventional indirect requests, while Hispanic customers were more likely to utilize affirmative requests and imperatives, which fostered a more interactive and friendly atmosphere.

Holmes and Wilson [20] observed that individuals in higher institutional roles often use direct language when the responsibilities of their listeners are clearly defined. However, when making requests to superiors, a greater degree of politeness is typically expected. Supporting this perspective, it is highlighted that requests directed upward generally necessitate more mitigation, as emphasized by.

3. Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design to examine directive speech acts used by Jordanian hotel service counter staff when interacting with foreign guests. The research is based on naturalistic data collection through audio recordings of authentic service encounters.

3.1. Participants

Participants in this study were chosen through purposive sampling based on specific criteria. These criteria included (i) a bachelor's degree in either English language or hotel and tourism management, with some participants holding a postgraduate diploma, and (ii) a minimum of five years of experience in the hotel industry. The sample included individuals who had experience working in international hotels as well as those who had never traveled outside of Jordan, resulting in a diverse range of English language proficiency and age among the participants. Nonetheless, most exhibited English skills that were classified as intermediate to advanced. The directives issued were intended for foreign tourists, and the communication style employed by hotel staff was characterized as formal yet approachable, with occasional transitions to a more casual and conversational manner.

Table 1.
Participants' Profile.

Participants	Nationality	Program	Gender	Hotel Experience
Participant 1	Jordan	Higher diploma in Hotel Management	Male	18Years
Participant 2	Jordan	Hotel Management	Male	10Years
Participant 3	Jordan	Hotel Management	Male	12Years
Participant 4	Jordan	Hotel Management	Female	9Years
Participant 5	Jordan	Higher Diploma in Hotel Management and	Male	15years
Participant 6	Jordan	Hotel Management	Male	12Years
Participant 7	Jordan	Hotel Management	Female	7Years

3.2. Procedures

This study analyzed directive speech acts used by Jordanian hotel staff during interactions with foreign guests, focusing on their pragmatic appropriateness in authentic service encounters. To investigate this, audio recordings of 95 naturally occurring staff–guest exchanges were collected over three months (December 2022–March 2023) across three Jordanian hotels. The dataset included check-in/check-out procedures, information requests, and instructions, involving Jordanian front-office staff (non-native English speakers) and international tourists.

Ethical protocols were strictly followed: all participants provided informed consent, with guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality, and encounters containing sensitive information (e.g., billing disputes) were excluded from the analysis. Recordings were transcribed using Jeffersonian conventions to capture paralinguistic features (pauses, intonation, overlaps), which are critical for assessing politeness strategies. To ensure ecological validity, data were collected during peak operational hours (10 AM–2 PM, 6–9 PM) over 12 weeks. Participants were unaware of the study's specific focus on directives to minimize observer bias.

3.3. Data Analysis

The data analysis process included the identification of each directive head act present in the encounters. Each directive was meticulously examined and classified according to its level of directness, which encompassed direct directives, conventionally indirect directives, and non-conventionally indirect directives (including hints, as well as strong and weak versions).

To facilitate this categorization, the frameworks established by Blum-Kulka et al. [16] and Misty [21] were adapted to classify the various directive strategies effectively.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis revealed that a significant proportion of the directives were formulated using direct strategies, accounting for 63.5% of the total, while conventionally indirect strategies comprised 55%. In contrast, non-conventionally indirect directives represented a smaller fraction, at just 0.05% (see Table 2).

Table 2.

The strategies used by the staff upon giving directives to the guests.

Type of strategy	Classification	Percentage %
Direct directives	Imperatives	
	Conventional imperative	30 / 200..... (0.15%)
	Embedded imperative	10 / 200..... (0.05%)
	Elliptical imperative	25 / 200..... (0.125%)
	Need and want statements	62 / 200 (0.31%)
	Total	127 / 200 (63.5%)
Conventional indirect directives	Query preparatory	110/200 (55 %)
Non-conventional indirect directives	Hints (strong, weak)	10/200..... (0.05%)

4.1. Reactions of Guest to Directives

While staff predominantly used direct imperatives (63.5%), guest responses revealed pragmatic discomfort. In Extract 1, the guest's minimal feedback ("Okay... thanks") after a bald-on-record imperative ("don't use the room...") suggests strained compliance. Conversely, hints (e.g., Extract 8) elicited more engaged responses ("Sounds good"), aligning with Brown and Levinson [2] that off-record strategies preserve face. This divergence underscores the risk of directness in cross-cultural encounters.

4.2. Direct Directives

In the analysis, two categories of direct directives were identified: imperatives and need statements, as detailed below.

4.2.1. Imperatives

The imperatives identified in the data were classified into three distinct categories: conventional imperatives, elliptical imperatives, and embedded imperatives.

4.2.1.1. Conventional Imperatives

In Brown and Levinson [2], conventional imperatives are identified as directed imperatives and represent clear examples of bald-on-record speech [2]. Out of the 200 directives analyzed, 30 employed this form of imperative. The following interaction illustrates this usage:

Extract One: A guest complaining about a noisy air conditioner

1. G: The air conditioner is too noisy. I can't sleep.
2. FO: Oh, I see. Let me check your room number.
3. G: It's 312.
4. FO (Manager): Okay... okay, I will send maintenance right away.
5. FO: It might be a minor issue, but we will fix it for you.
6. G: Okay... okay.
7. FO: Thank you for letting us know, and next time, don't use the room before making sure the air conditioner is working well to feel rested.
8. G: Thanks.

The guest raises a concern about the noise from the air conditioner, prompting the Front Office Manager to promptly arrange for maintenance, stating, "I will send maintenance right away" (Line 4). Additionally, the manager advises the guest to refrain from using the room until the air conditioner has been confirmed to function properly. The directive "don't use the room before making sure the air conditioner is working well" serves as a conventional imperative, explicitly instructing the guest on how to avoid similar issues in the future. This imperative is softened by providing a rationale ("to feel rested," Line 8), which acts as a mitigating strategy. This interaction demonstrates how conventional imperatives can mitigate face threats when paired with justifying reasons, blending institutional authority with repressive action [2].

Extract Two: A guest checking out and requesting a printed receipt

1. FO: This is your bill for the last three nights.
2. G: Yes.
3. FO: Can I have your card?
4. G: Okay.
5. FO: The total is 375.5 JD.
6. G: Can I have a printed receipt, please?
7. FO: Of course, here you go.

At check-out, it is standard practice for guests to sign the bill as a form of confirmation. In this interaction, the Front Office staff initially presents the bill for the previous three nights, stating, "This is the bill for the last three nights" (Line 1), and subsequently requests an alternative payment method by asking, "Can I have your card?" (Line 3). The Front Office staff then prompts the guest to confirm the bill by signing it, utilizing the imperative phrase "here you go" (Line 7). The staff's imperative, softened by the preceding "of course," exemplifies how conventional directives maintain transactional efficiency while acknowledging guest autonomy through lexical mitigation [2]. This directive, though imperative in nature, is preceded by "of course," which functions as a concluding remark, seeking the guest's cooperation [2]. The request, supplemented with a non-verbal cue, serves as a polite yet direct prompt for the guest to sign the invoice.

Extract Three: A guest asking for restaurant recommendations

4. G: Could you recommend a good restaurant nearby?
5. Concierge: Sure, what type of food do you prefer, please?
6. G: Italian.
7. Concierge: I suggest La Bella, just 10 minutes away.
8. G: Sounds great. Do they need a reservation?
9. Concierge: Yes, would you like me to book a table for you?
10. G: Yes, please.
11. Concierge: Done! Your table is reserved for 7 PM.

During this interaction, the guest asks the guest relations representative to recommend a good restaurant nearby. The officer says, "What type of food do you prefer?" (Line 5) and, after the guest chooses the restaurant, the FO suggests, "I suggest La Bella" (Line 7). This is a conventional imperative often associated with command-like directive strength. However, the addition of "please" mitigates the force of the directive, demonstrating deference and respect toward the guest [2]. This linguistic strategy aligns with sociolinguistic research emphasizing the role of politeness markers in softening directives [2]. Additionally, the phrase "What type of food do you prefer, please?" exemplifies a repressive strategy that allows the GRO to maintain authority in directing the interaction while ensuring a considerate approach to the guest's experience. This form of deference highlights the nuanced dynamics of host-guest interactions in the hospitality context [22]. While the suggestion ("I suggest La Bella") functions as a conventional imperative, the embedded consultation ("what type of food?") and use of "please" demonstrate strategic positive politeness to counterbalance the directive force.

4.2.1.2. Embedded Imperatives

Embedded imperatives were identified in 10 of the 200 analyzed interactions. In these instances, hotel staff clearly specify the agent responsible for the action, whether it be the guest or the staff member themselves. By placing the agent at the forefront of the imperative, the emphasis is placed on the individual carrying out the action. The following example illustrates the Front Office staff employing an embedded imperative to provide instructions.

Extract Four: Arranging an airport shuttle service

1. FO: You have booked the airport shuttle.
2. Guest: Where do I wait for it?
3. FO: Just outside the main entrance.
4. Guest: How long does it take to get to the airport?
5. FO: Around 40 minutes.
6. G: Okay, that's good.

Here, the Front Office staff utilized an embedded imperative, initiating the statement with the second-person pronoun "you" ("You have booked the airport shuttle," Line 1). The importance of the guest paying attention to the process is emphasized by this hearer-based instruction. This deliberate choice creates a hearer-based directive, placing responsibility on the guest to understand and follow the outlined procedure. By framing the statement this way, the FO not only informs the guest but also reinforces the expectation that they must actively engage with the instructions provided [23]. This interaction exemplifies effective communication in a hospitality setting, showcasing how clear directives, affirmations, and expectation management contribute to a positive guest experience. Such nuances in communication are essential for front-office staff to master in order to facilitate smooth interactions and ensure guest satisfaction. The embedded imperative ("You have booked...") exemplifies hearer-focused direction that maintains institutional control while distributing responsibility through pronoun selection, characteristic of high-power-distance service contexts.

4.2.1.3. Elliptical Imperatives

Elliptical imperatives are situations in which the verb and/or agent are left out, leaving just the essential details. Of the 200 instructions, 25 employed elliptical imperatives. Since omitting the agent or person is personalization, which is a statement of negative politeness, Brown and Levinson claim [2] that using ellipsis is a politeness strategy.

Extract Five: At the Front Desk — A guest is checking out

4. FO: This is the total of your bill, ma'am.
5. G: Okay. (Looks at the bill)
6. G: What is the total amount?
7. FO: This is the bill to sign.
8. FO: The total bill is 420 JD. Here is the bill to sign.
9. G: Thank you.

In Line 8, the Front Office staff makes a specific request for the guest to review and sign the bill by stating, "This is the bill to sign." Notably, the agent is not explicitly mentioned, which reduces the intensity of the directive. This phenomenon is referred to as "agent indirection," as described by Ervin-Tripp [15]. The use of indirect language diminishes the weight of the request, making it particularly useful in hierarchical contexts. According to the impersonal phrasing conveys a sense of inexplicitness, thereby alleviating some of the pressure on the guest since the responsible party is implied rather than directly stated.

The aforementioned examples show how hotel employees utilize imperatives to ask for things, specify needs, and provide directions. When hotel employees give visitors instructions or suggestions, these are the most common instances in the documented hotel contacts. Imperatives explicitly express actions and are usually employed by more authoritative individuals when addressing less powerful interlocutors. In the context of this study, the importance of clarity and efficiency in task-oriented communications surpasses the necessity for indirectness. Both staff and guests have a common understanding of their respective roles, which promotes effective communication. This mutual recognition enables the frequent application of direct imperatives. The incorporation of polite expressions, such as "please," and other politeness strategies distinguishes the directives issued by staff from authoritative commands. The elliptical imperative ("Here is the bill to sign") employs agent deletion as a negative politeness strategy, reducing imposition through syntactic indirection while maintaining transactional clarity.

4.2.2. Statements of Need and Want

Hotel employees explicitly communicate their personal requirements or the needs of the visitors via "need" interrogatives or need/want statements. The statements are consistent with Grice [23]. Out of 200 directives, 62 utilized need and desire expressions.

Extract Six: Checking in at the front desk

1. FO: Good evening. How may I assist you?
2. G: I'd like to check in for four nights.
3. FO: Four nights? Let me confirm.
4. G: Yes, that's correct.
5. FO: You will be staying until the 14th.
6. G: Yes, perfect.
7. FO: May I have your ID or passport to make the reservation?
8. G: Sure, here it is.

This analysis highlights how the Front Office (FO) staff effectively use need statements during the check-in process. The interaction begins positively, with the FO greeting the guest warmly and inquiring, "How may I help you?" When the guest expresses their intention to check in, the FO acknowledges the request and transitions smoothly into a need statement by requesting the guest's ID or passport ("May I have your ID or passport for the reservation," Line 7).

The request "May I have your ID" illustrates how modal interrogatives can reframe institutional demands into negotiable appeals, thereby safeguarding the guest's negative face through conventional indirectness [2]. As the conversation advances, the Front Office's following statement employs a bald assertion a straightforward expression of necessity that typically reflects the speaker's needs. According to Brown and Levinson's politeness theory [2], such bald-on-record strategies may be viewed as face-threatening actions. Nevertheless, the Front Office mitigates this potential risk by providing a rationale for the request immediately after stating the need.

Overall, this interaction highlights how clear communication enhances the guest experience and maintains a respectful atmosphere. The FO's ability to manage requests effectively meets operational needs while emphasizing the importance of transparency in guest interactions [10].

4.3. Conventional Indirect Directives

Conventional indirect directives are frequently conveyed through modal statements or modal interrogatives. In the context of hotel staff interactions, these modal directives often incorporate verbs such as "could" and "can." The analysis indicates that modal verbs were employed in 110 out of 200 directive situations. These modals primarily serve deontic functions, acting as polite forms that express a sense of weak obligation while simultaneously signaling politeness.

Holtgraves elaborates Holmes and Wilson [20] on the connection between the mechanisms used for making indirect requests and the felicity conditions that underpin those requests. Furthermore, as noted by Brown and Levinson [2], the use of conventional indirect directives exemplifies a strategy of negative politeness, which minimizes the imposition on the listener while maintaining respect and consideration in the interaction.

Extract Seven: The FO assists a guest during check-in

1. FO: Good afternoon. Welcome.
2. G: Good afternoon.
3. FO: You have a reservation under the name Smith, correct?
4. G: Yes.
5. FO: Non-smoking bedroom?
6. G: Yes, please.
7. FO: Can I have your passport?
8. G: Just a minute, here it is.
9. FO: May I have your receipt?

10. FO: Thank you, everything is set.

In the provided interaction at the front desk, the Front Office (FO) staff effectively uses modal interrogatives to request necessary documentation from the guest during the check-in process. In particular, "May I have your passport?" (Line 7) and "May I have your receipt?" (Line 9) provide examples of how to employ modals, which are essential for expressing civility and promoting effective communication.

The shift from "can" to "may" in modal requests reflects contextual adaptation in politeness register, where increasing formality signals heightened face-work during sensitive procedural moments. In the first request, the word "may" is used to convey the FO's capacity or consent to get the passport while also making the request seem less formal [20]. This supports the results of those who observe that modal verbs, especially "can" and "may," serve as polite forms that convey respect for the visitor while expressing a weak commitment.

In contrast, a more official approach is indicated by the inclusion of "may" in the second request ("May I have your receipt?"). Using "may" is an example of negative politeness, which tries to minimize the imposition on the listener, according to Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness [2]. By using this model, the FO maintains a degree of civility that respects the guest's comfort and autonomy while acknowledging the request's possible discomfort. As is typical in these kinds of exchanges, the guest's reaction, "Passport, eh, eh... eh... moment" (Line 8), implies a brief hesitancy as they find their passport.

In summary, the use of modal interrogatives by the FO during the check-in process effectively conveys requests in a polite manner while adhering to the principles of effective communication. This approach not only fulfills operational requirements but also fosters a positive atmosphere conducive to guest satisfaction [2, 20]. The interaction exemplifies best practices in hospitality communication, emphasizing the importance of clarity, politeness, and respect in service encounters.

4.4. Non-Conventional Indirect Directives

The speaker makes partial references to the directive act, the object, or the recipient's involvement through non-conventional indirect instructions [21]. In this scenario, the listener usually needs to infer the meaning of these unconventional indirect commands from the surrounding context. Hints can be categorized as either strong or mild/weak. As noted by Blum-Kulka et al. [16], a hint represents a prevalent yet non-standardized indirect form of speech act within the language. For the listener to accurately deduce the speaker's intentions behind a hint, they must engage in additional inferencing. According to Brown and Levinson [2] politeness model, "hints" are considered an off-record strategy that epitomizes their approach to super politeness [2]. This strategy of employing non-conventional indirect directives was identified in 10 out of 200 directives examined. An example from the collected data is provided below.

Extract Eight: The guest requests a late check-out

3. G: Can I check out later today?

4. FO: You booked for three nights.

5. G: Yes, but I'd like a late check-out.

6. FO: No problem. You can use the VIP lounge while waiting.

7. G: Sounds good.

8. FO: Thank you, we hope to see you again soon.

9. G: Thank you.

In this front desk interaction, the guest clearly expresses a desire to extend their check-out time after enjoying the VIP lounge, stating, "I'd like to check out later" (Line 5). The front office staff (FO) responds by anticipating the guest's next step, saying, "You can use the VIP lounge while waiting" (Line 6), which implies that the guest should go to the lounge instead of proceeding directly to check out. The staff's hint serves as an off-record strategy that upholds the guest's autonomy while also fulfilling institutional objectives through pragmatic inference. This illustrates a sophisticated form of face-work in scenarios involving refusals. Rather than issuing a direct command, the FO's response subtly directs the guest towards returning to the front desk to finalize the check-out, employing a non-conventional indirect directive that necessitates the guest to infer the speaker's intention [21]. The guest acknowledges this cue with a simple, "Sounds good" (Line 7), indicating their comprehension of the implicit message. The FO then wraps up the exchange with, "Thank you, we hope to see you again soon" (Line 8), reinforcing the expectation that the guest will return to the front desk without directly commanding them to do so, thereby ensuring a courteous and accommodating interaction [16].

In summary, the directives examined in the data can be categorized into three primary types: 1) direct directives, which are presented as imperatives; 2) conventional indirect directives, which make use of modal verbs; and 3) non-conventional indirect directives, commonly known as "hints." Directives in the form of imperatives represent the most explicit method of communication, typically conveying a stronger illocutionary force. In contrast, indirect directives allow hotel staff to communicate desired actions in a more nuanced and implicit manner, thereby reducing the likelihood of causing offense by softening their requests. Consequently, these indirect forms inherently possess a weaker illocutionary force. Among indirect directives, 'query preparatory' forms (e.g., "Can I have your passport, please?") are less direct than 'preparatory statements' (e.g., "I can give you Room 212"). The former approach suggests a possibility of refusal, thereby honoring the guest's autonomy.

As the least direct type of directive, hints convey the weakest illocutionary force. The choice of directive form reflects the hotel staff's understanding of their authority in relation to the guests and the degree of imposition involved. For example, a more assertive directive may indicate that the staff perceives themselves as having greater authority, whereas a softer directive suggests an acknowledgment of the power dynamics at play [24]. The explicitness of directives and their illocutionary strength are crucial for effective communication, often correlating with different levels of politeness. Brown and Levinson [2] define direct imperatives as a "bald-on-record" politeness strategy, positioning them as the most

straightforward approach on the politeness continuum. In contrast, conventional indirect directives that utilize hedged modal verbs either in 'query preparatory' or 'statement preparatory' forms are generally less forceful and exhibit higher politeness, employing on-record strategies to support the guests' positive or negative face. Furthermore, Hassall [13] suggests that in contexts where the proposed action is beneficial to the hearer, using an imperative may be viewed as politer than an interrogative. This perception arises because imperatives signal greater awareness of the hearer's needs and preferences, fostering a sense of belonging within the group. Imperatives are favored when positive politeness is prioritized, while interrogatives are more suitable when there could be potential threats to the hearer's negative face. Hints, being the most implicit directives that require guests to draw inferences from the context, are often seen as the politest forms and are classified as off-record strategies. Both modal and hint directives help guests perceive their responses as voluntary [2], thereby facilitating a more tactful and respectful interaction.

5. Limitations

Despite offering valuable insights, the study has several limitations. First, the sample was restricted to mid-range Jordanian hotels, meaning the findings may not generalize to luxury or budget establishments, where communication patterns could differ. Additionally, the analysis focused on a limited number of front-desk interactions from a single location, potentially overlooking the diversity of directive types and communication styles present in other hotel settings or cultural contexts. The study also excluded other critical communication channels, such as interactions with room service, concierges, or restaurant staff, which may involve distinct politeness strategies. Another potential limitation is the limited consideration of cultural variations, which may influence the interpretation and use of politeness techniques. This is especially relevant in the global hospitality industry where staff and guests often come from diverse backgrounds. For instance, norms perceived as polite in one culture may be seen as overly formal or even impolite in another. Cross-cultural comparisons, such as between Arab and non-Arab staff in multinational chains, could help disentangle cultural and institutional influences. Furthermore, the study focused solely on verbal communication, neglecting nonverbal cues like gestures, tone, and facial expressions, which play a crucial role in conveying politeness [25]. Future research should incorporate video recordings to examine how verbal and nonverbal communication interact, providing a more comprehensive understanding of politeness strategies in hospitality encounters.

5.1. Suggestions for Further Research

To address these limitations, future research could expand the scope of the study by examining a larger and more diverse sample of interactions, including different types of hotels (e.g., budget, luxury, international chains) and hotel locations (e.g., urban, rural, tourist hotspots). This would allow researchers to assess how politeness strategies vary across different settings and how factors such as the class of the hotel or the geographical region influence communication patterns. Moreover, examining interactions in various hotel departments such as concierge, room service, and restaurant staff could reveal whether different teams use distinct politeness strategies, particularly when addressing guests in various contexts (e.g., check-in, service requests, problem resolution).

Additionally, future research could explore the role of cultural differences in shaping politeness strategies, particularly in multinational and multicultural hospitality environments. Researchers can learn more about how language usage and social expectations affect the efficacy of politeness tactics in hotel interactions by contrasting the communication styles of employees and visitors from different cultural backgrounds. This might help in the creation of culturally aware training curricula for hotel employees, enabling them to handle encounters with foreign visitors more skillfully. Further research into how nonverbal communication influences civility in encounters with hotel workers is also recommended. Body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions are examples of nonverbal cues that may greatly influence how politeness and instructions are interpreted. Future research might look at how these two aspects of communication interact to produce courteous, productive service interactions by combining verbal and nonverbal data. Lastly, longitudinal research may be helpful in understanding how politeness tactics are used in hotels over time and how they affect patron loyalty and satisfaction. Examining the effects of teaching hotel employees' civility techniques on the quality of service and visitor experience would provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of communication training. It would also be intriguing to investigate how the hospitality industry's increasing use of technology (such as chatbot and self-check-in kiosks) affects the use of politeness techniques, particularly in automated or digital environments.

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