



“K-Pop is Part of who I am”: Cultural Discourse in Politeness Strategies and Appraisal Expressions of Indonesian K-Pop Fandom

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Abstract

This study investigates how Indonesian K-pop fans interact in online discourse utilising politeness techniques and assessment expressions. Data were obtained using a qualitative approach with virtual ethnography, including questionnaires, social media observations, and textual analysis. Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) examines how fans preserve group cohesion and resolve problems, whereas Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) investigates how emotions, judgements, and evaluations influence fan interactions. The data show that supporters utilise positive politeness to foster unity, negative politeness to diffuse disagreements, and direct or indirect expressions in intense debates. Meanwhile, appraisal analysis reveals that fandom discourse incorporates emotional responses, idol evaluations, and aesthetic enjoyment. These findings demonstrate how K-pop fandom operates as a dynamic linguistic arena, with politeness and assessment tactics influencing digital discourse and cultural identity construction.

INTRODUCTION

K-pop has evolved into a global phenomenon that encompasses fashion, beauty, and online engagement. K-pop fan communities in Indonesia have grown into a vibrant online network where fans can connect, discuss, and showcase their identities. Earlier research on K-pop fandom focused on cultural hybridity and the analysis of cultural discourse, with K-pop seen as an influential force in the development of hybrid identities among Indonesian youth. Nonetheless, there has been a lack of emphasis on the use of language in fan interactions, particularly in terms of politeness strategies and evaluations. This study aims to explain and address the remarkable phenomenon of politeness in communication. The researchers concluded that there are, indeed, common principles that govern polite expressions across various cultural and linguistic boundaries over time and space. Beginning with the fundamental distinction between positive and negative politeness, it is

evident that the challenge of developing a comprehensive theory to systematically account for universal polite behavior necessitates a thorough examination of the linguistic details and differences found in diverse languages and cultures.

Language and culture are inseparable because they have a very close relationship and influence each other (Abusyairi, 2013). Language is a medium for maintaining culture. Meanwhile, culture will be understood and upheld if the community comprehends the language of the culture (Fauzia et al., 2022). From a sociological perspective, human life can be understood through static and dynamic aspects. The static aspect refers to a state where there is minimal interaction or change, whereas the dynamic aspect highlights continuous social interaction, adaptation, and transformation in line with human nature as social beings (Une, 2021). In the context of Indonesian K-pop fandom, this dynamic nature is evident in the way fans actively engage, negotiate, and reshape cultural discourse through digital interactions.

Changes and developments in society are manifested through social dynamics, particularly in online communities, where individuals constantly interact, exchange ideas, and construct shared identities. K-pop fandom serves as an example of how digital communities foster cultural engagement, allowing fans to integrate politeness strategies and appraisal expressions in their communication. Fans participate in discussions, defend their idols, critique performances, and express emotions, illustrating how social interaction within fandom is not static but continuously evolving. This ongoing interaction reinforces the role of cultural discourse in shaping digital identity and communication norms within Indonesian youth fandom culture.

This research also fills this void by examining the discourse within K-pop fandom through the lens of Politeness Theory and Appraisal Theory. Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) elucidates how fans cultivate harmony in their interactions, address conflicts, and develop social identities within fandom communities. On the other hand, the Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) explores how fans convey their emotions, opinions, and evaluations regarding their idols, music, and cultural impacts. This study aims to investigate how Indonesian K-pop fans interact in online discourse utilising politeness techniques and assessment expressions. The study seeks to answer the following research questions. How do Indonesian K-pop fans use politeness strategies in online interactions? And what types of appraisal expressions are commonly used by K-pop fans in expressing emotions and evaluations?

Politeness Strategies in K-Pop Fandom

The theory of Brown and Levinson in Politeness extensively uses as basic research by researchers in the field of not only in linguistics but also in Economic, Psychology, and so on. In the last three decades, the research on politeness strategies has increased significantly in terms of social and linguistic aspects. It is evident which comes from the various papers appear on the issues in the international journals and monographs. The politeness strategy proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) for oral discourse can be applied to interpret the scientific culture of scientific writing. Brown and Levinson developed a theory to explain phenomena related to the politeness on verbal communication and non verbal communication. In communicative cases, the term is universal but is used in specific cultures. It is characterized psychologically, philosophically and symbolically as "the positive social value that an individual effectively claims for himself following the line that others have adopted during a particular contact." Face generally involves mutual recognition of the interlocutors as members of society. The face can be lost, preserved, or strengthened and can communicate continuously (Goffman, 1963). In politeness theory, the concept of face has come to play an important role.

The politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1978) has become a paradigm for the study of politeness strategy. The central point of Brown's and Levinson's theory is the idea of the face, as suggested by Goffman (1967), who described the face as: "The positive social interest of an individual essentially claims for himself the line taken by others during a particular touch." The face is an image of oneself with accepted social attributes—albeit an image that others can share as if a person shows his occupation or religion with good shows for himself." (Goffman 1967:5). Indeed, politeness theory provides a framework to explain how politeness operates in digital discourse within K-pop fandom interaction. There are four types of politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987) as follows:

- a. Positive Politeness. Positive politeness is used to strengthen social bonds and express group solidarity by acknowledging and appreciating others' contributions (Sukarno, 2018). In K-pop fandom, fans frequently use inclusive pronouns ("kita," "kami"), terms of endearment, and supportive language to foster a sense of belonging. These expressions create a sense of unity within the fandom, reinforcing shared interests and strengthening emotional connections between fans. Positive politeness is essential in online fan communities, where maintaining harmony and support is a priority.

- b. **Negative Politeness.** Negative politeness strategies emphasize respect, indirectness, and minimizing imposition (Waziana et al., 2021). In K-pop fandom discourse, fans often use hedging (“*kayaknya*,” “*mungkin*”), indirect criticism, and apologies to avoid direct confrontation. By using negative politeness strategies, fans attempt to express their opinions while reducing the risk of offending others, especially in discussions where disagreements might arise.
- c. **Bald on Record.** This strategy occurs when a speaker does not attempt to minimize the threat to the listener’s face, often used in direct, unmitigated speech (Waziana et al., 2021). In K-pop fandom discourse, bald on record strategies appear in heated debates, urgent situations, or when fans express strong opinions about idols or fandom conflicts. While this strategy does not aim to save face, it reinforces fan loyalty and group identity, particularly in discussions involving idol criticism or fan wars. However, when used out of context, bald-on-record speech may escalate conflicts within fandom communities (Santoso, 2015).
- d. **Off-Record Strategies.** Off-record politeness strategies involve indirect speech that leaves room for interpretation, avoiding direct threats to face (Sukarno, 2018). In K-pop fandom, sarcasm, humor, and vague statements are often used to imply opinions without explicitly stating them. These strategies allow fans to criticize, joke, or express opinions indirectly, making it easier to navigate sensitive discussions while maintaining politeness.

From a broader perspective, politeness strategies in K-pop fandom contribute to the construction of cultural discourse, shaping the way Indonesian youth engage with global pop culture while negotiating local norms. According to Lakoff (1973), politeness involves giving options, not imposing, and making others feel good, principles that are evident in the way fans interact online. Similarly, Leech’s (1983) politeness principle highlights the importance of maintaining amicable social relationships, which is crucial in fostering a positive and inclusive fandom environment (Sukarno, 2018). In summary, the politeness strategies employed in K-pop fandom discourse reflect broader patterns of digital interaction and cultural negotiation. Whether through solidarity-building positive politeness, conflict-mitigating negative politeness, direct bald-on-record speech, or indirect off-record strategies, Indonesian K-pop fans actively shape their own linguistic and cultural identity within a globalized digital space.

Appraisal Expressions in K-pop Fandom

One of the approaches that has been used to conduct discourse analysis is the Appraisal Theory. This framework is part of the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1985), and it tries to explain “how evaluation is established, amplified, targeted and sourced” (Martin & White, 2005: 9). The Appraisal Theory focuses on the interpersonal dimension of discourse to interpret “the subjective presence of writers/speakers in texts as they adopt stances towards both the material they present and those with whom they communicate” (Martin & White, 2005: 1). This research focuses on the interpersonal dimension, and will analyse Attitude, Graduation and Engagement. Attitude refers to the subsystem of evaluative meaning by which speakers take a positive or negative stance. Attitudinal meanings can be divided into three subtypes (White, 2015):

- a. Affect (Positive/negative assessment as emotional reactions).. According to Martin and White (2005), the Affect system offers resources for expressing negative and positive emotions (Herman and Silalahi, 2020). These emotions are typically influenced by cultural perceptions of whether a certain emotion is perceived as positive or negative (p.35). Feelings can be stated directly or implied implicitly, as in "I was torn to pieces." The speaker communicates his emotions directly in this statement. Such emotional expressions allow the reader or listener to empathize with the character expressing these emotions. This explicit affect contrasts with implicit affect, in which writers/speakers employ metaphors to infer their emotions; for instance, "He is as cold as ice" conveys that the character is feeling unwelcoming.
- b. Judgement (Positive/negative assessment of human behaviour by reference to ethics). Judgement is concerned with the resources used to evaluate the intelligence, loyalty, and trust of individuals. Judgement is a semantic resource for evaluating behaviour in the context of institutional norms (Körner, 2000, p.98). Martin and White (2005) proposed that judgement is directed to ethics, capability, and social behaviour (p.99). For instance, “To hit her [the plaintiff] when trying to hit the post would be a very bad aim on the part of the defendant.” It is a negative assessment of a boy’s ability to hit a very close target with a dart (Körner,2000).
- c. Appreciation (Assessment of objects, artefacts, etc. in terms of how they are assigned social value). Appreciation includes resources for evaluating phenomena: its value, worth, complexity, and quality (Christie & Martin, 2005, p.24). Consequently, this third field of

attitude focuses on the meanings that construct our evaluations of objects, products, performances, and natural phenomena. It can be activated by referencing aesthetic principles and other social value systems, for example in a sentence like ‘a beautiful woman’ (White, 2020), the process of appreciation focuses on the quality of the woman, as opposed to criticising her for what she accomplishes; hence, a beautiful lady, a gorgeous woman, a prominent figure, etc., are all examples of aesthetic appreciations.

METHODOLOGY

This research utilizes a qualitative methodology combined with a virtual ethnographic perspective to explore the online conversations within Indonesian K-pop fandoms. Data collection involved three primary methods: sending out an evaluative survey through Google Forms; monitoring social media interactions on platforms like Twitter (X), Instagram, and TikTok; and examining fan-created content, such as captions, comments, and multimodal texts. The research tools comprised structured surveys, virtual ethnographic notes, and analysis of textual content. To analyze the gathered data, this research employs Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) along with Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005). The Politeness Theory is utilized to explore how fans implement both positive and negative politeness strategies to uphold social harmony, address conflicts, and defend their idols within online communities. At the same time, the Appraisal Theory is applied to examine how fans convey affect (emotion), judgment (evaluation of behavior), and appreciation (aesthetic evaluation) during their discussions and digital interactions. This integrated approach thoroughly explains how language within K-pop fandom acts as a means of social engagement, identity negotiation, and cultural expression in the Indonesian digital context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Politeness Strategies and Appraisal Expressions in K-Pop Fandom

a. Positive Politeness

Data 1: “3 years of being confined to the same thing, suddenly I met EXO, in a few months I immediately learned Korean, immediately I even had a dream of continuing my S2 there”

This data reflects Positive Politeness, where fans express positive changes in their lives after joining the fandom. It also falls under the Affect category, as it shows how fandom contributes to boosting one's confidence and motivation. Interaction in the fandom, as well

as inspiration from idols, plays a role in building self-identity and ideals, even encouraging a person to broaden their cultural horizons by learning a foreign language and planning further education.

Data 2: *"Because of them, I can understand and appreciate others better. From them, I also learned to be grateful and sensitive to every little thing that happens in life."* This data is still in the Positive Politeness category, but it is more towards Appreciation. Fans not only appreciate the music or entertainment provided by idols, but also how K-Pop has helped them develop emotionally and socially. This shows that fandom is not only a place of entertainment, but also forms moral values and social consciousness for its fans.

Data 3: *"K-pop made me see how beautiful music can be in another language and how it makes me feel without knowing the lyrics."* This data reflects Positive Politeness and Appreciation. This phrase highlights how K-Pop fans appreciate the beauty of cross-language music, even though they don't understand the lyrics directly. This shows how fandom is changing one's perspective on music, where the listening experience becomes more emotional and subjective, regardless of language comprehension. In this data, there is a combination of Positive Politeness and Affect. Fans revealed how K-Pop songs provide a boost to be more confident and express themselves. This shows that K-Pop music is not just about entertainment, but it also has a profound psychological and emotional influence, giving its fans a sense of confidence.

Data 4: *"Many songs make me feel more confident and express myself through the songs."* This data reveals how K-Pop songs provide a boost to be more confident and express themselves. This shows that K-Pop music is not just about entertainment, but it also has a profound psychological and emotional influence, giving its fans a sense of confidence.

Data 5: *"Yes, I really want to cry. want to meet BTS, happy people who can meet BTS. I Love You BTS I Love You Guys..."* This data fully shows Positive Politeness and Affect. This sentence is full of strong emotions and emotional attachment to idols, showing how K-Pop fans feel great happiness just by being close to or watching their idols. This reinforces the concept that K-Pop fandom is an intense emotional space, where fans not only enjoy music but also build a psychological connection with their idols.

From this analysis, it can be concluded that K-Pop fandom is not just a community of music fans, but also a social space that supports personal development, identity, and emotional

expression. Positive Politeness dominates the interaction, as fans express their feelings in an inclusive and supportive way. Appraisal Expressions, especially in the form of Affect and Appreciation, show that fandom has a huge impact on fans' personal lives, both in terms of confidence, social awareness, and aesthetic experience of music. K-Pop fandom is a means for individuals to discover their identity, express their feelings, and get inspired in life, which makes it more than just an entertainment space, but also a community that shapes the emotional and social experience for its members.

b. Negative Politeness

Data 1: *"We are healed because we are their fans, even though they really store the pain that may not heal them"* Showing fans' awareness that fandom brings them happiness, but idols themselves often face emotional pressure that they don't show to the public. This is a form of Negative Politeness, as fans express their concerns in an indirect and non-confrontational way. From the perspective of Appraisal Expressions, this is included in the Affect category because this statement contains feelings of empathy and concern for idols. This shows that fandom is not only about fun, but also involves emotional reflection on the psychological state of idols.

Data 2: *"K-pop is a safe place for us fans but we never made them feel safe. we should be their comfort as they are for us but some fans don't think they (idols) are also humans and have feelings."* This data implies criticism of some fans who may be too demanding of their idols without giving them space to feel comfortable. This sentence uses Negative Politeness, as it conveys criticism in a more diplomatic and indirect way, avoiding potential conflicts with other fans. In terms of Appraisal Expressions, this is included in the Judgement, as it evaluates how fans treat their idols. This comment also seeks to foster awareness that idols are human beings who also have feelings and rights to feel safe in the entertainment industry.

Data 3: *"They are normal human beings, they also want to be happy as they want, fans are also one of their happiness but we as fans must also understand them, so don't misinterpret love"* This data emphasizes that idols are ordinary human beings who have the right to choose their own happiness. Negative Politeness in this sentence appears in the form of using more subtle and indirect language, to convey a message so that fans are not too demanding of idols in their personal lives. In Appraisal Expressions, this is included in

Judgement, as it evaluates fans' behavior and expectations towards idols. This statement highlights how the relationship between idols and fans should be more balanced and understanding.

Data 4: *"Fans of idols until we are selfish, I know it's very difficult to love them reasonably and please protect them as long as they are happy is enough."* This data acknowledges that there is a tendency for fans to become too possessive of their idols. Negative Politeness is used here because it seeks to convey criticism more carefully, using phrases like "I know this is very difficult..." to show understanding of the side of fans who may have difficulty controlling their emotions towards idols. In terms of Appraisal Expressions, this is included in the Judgement, because it evaluates the behavior of fans who tend to be too protective or demanding towards idols. This is also an invitation for the fandom to support idols in a healthy way without restricting them.

Data 5: *"K-pop makes you who you are, makes you feel saved, makes you more excited to live life. but the opposite is true for them."* This data contains a contradiction between the positive impact of fandom on fans and the pressure felt by idols. This sentence uses Negative Politeness because it avoids direct criticism, but still shows awareness that idols may face a heavier burden than fans. In Appraisal Expressions, this is included in Affect, as it expresses mixed feelings between the happiness that fans get and sympathy for idols who may experience the opposite. The use of contradictions in this statement also reinforces fans' emotional reflection on the imbalance in the K-Pop entertainment industry.

Overall, this analysis shows that K-Pop fandom not only consists of expressions of love and support for idols, but also has a layer of social reflection and criticism of the dynamics that occur in the relationship between idols and fans. Fandom is not only a place of entertainment, but also a space to study the boundaries in the relationship between idols and their fans and build awareness about the impact the entertainment industry has on the idols themselves.

c. **Bald on Record and Off Record Strategies**

Data 1:

Bald on Record: "Treat them like humans because they are!"

Off Record: "They're our safe place but they don't have safe place"

This data shows Bald on Record because it immediately confirms that idols should be treated as human beings, not just as objects of entertainment. This sentence does not have mitigation or effort to reduce potential conflicts, but instead demands that fans be more aware of their treatment of idols.

Data 2:

Bald on Record: “These comments are so annoying saying "wonyoung & friends, her backup dancers' or deliberately praising other members and leaving wonyoung out of it. This happened 3 years ago, get over it damn.”

Off Record: “I almost 10 years being kpopers but 2 years ago i decided to stop cause this industrial being toxic time to time, i always losing my fav idol (suli, moonbin, jonghyun) i dont wanna feel that again.” This data shows impatience and frustration that are immediately expressed without filters. This is a distinctive feature of Bald on Record, where the speaker directly criticizes without trying to mitigate the impact.

This data is an example of Off Record because the speaker did not directly mention whose fault it was, but provided an overview of how the K-Pop industry can have a negative impact on idols and their fans.

Data 3:

Off Record: “K-pop is safe place for us but traumatizing for many idols saved us but who saved them”

In this data, there is a contradiction that is deliberately used as a way to express criticism indirectly. This sentence does not explicitly blame anyone, but conveys the idea that even though K-Pop brings happiness to fans, idols themselves may face immense pressure that is not always visible.

Data 4:

Off Record: Ever since we lost Moonbin, I've lost any motivation I had to continue to be a K-pop fan. Innocent people constantly being attacked by the ones who are meant to love and protect them is just too cruel.

This data contains implicit criticism of fans who are supposed to support idols but can actually be a source of pressure for them. Off Record is used here because the speaker does not mention who is at fault, but implies that something is wrong in the dynamics of fandom and the K-Pop industry. In conclusion, the Bald on Record and Off Record

strategies show how K-Pop fandom can be a space full of strong emotional expression, both in the form of support and criticism of the dynamics in the entertainment industry.

The results of this study show that politeness strategies and appraisal expressions in the K-Pop fandom form a distinctive communication pattern. The use of Positive Politeness is very dominant, especially in interactions that express solidarity and support for idols and fellow fans. Fans often use expressions that show togetherness and emotional affiliation, such as in the statement "Oh my gosh, I really want to cry. I want to meet BTS, happy people who can meet BTS. I love you BTS I love you guys..." which reflects the strong emotional bond between fans and their idols. This shows that K-Pop fandom is not just an entertainment community, but also a space for individuals to find identity and social support. Although fandom is often thought of as a space full of support and love, it has also been found to use Negative Politeness in fan interactions. This strategy appears in more cautious and reflective expressions on the condition of idols, for example in the statement "We are healed because we are their fans, even though they are really harboring pain that they may not know how to heal." This sentence shows that there is an awareness that idols often face great pressure from the entertainment industry, while fans actually get comfort from their presence. Negative Politeness allows fans to express concerns and criticism of the industry without directly blaming any particular party, demonstrating a collective awareness of the dynamics between idols and fans.

In addition, there was also the use of Off Record, especially in the form of implicit criticism of the K-Pop industry and the way fandom treats idols. Phrases like "K-pop is a safe place for us but traumatizing for many idols. They saved us, but who saved them?" reflects an implicit criticism that requires further interpretation. This statement shows the contradiction in the K-Pop industry, where idols are often a source of inspiration and encouragement for fans, but they themselves face immense pressure that is not always acknowledged by the public. Off Record allows fans to express opinions without provoking direct confrontation, reflecting that Cultural Discourse in the K-Pop fandom is evolving as a space for social reflection regarding the global entertainment industry. In addition, in some cases, it has also been found the use of Bald on Record, where fans express their opinions directly without mitigation. This often arises in conflict situations or criticism of other fandoms' behavior, such as in the statement "These comments are so annoying. This happened 3 years ago, get over it damn." This sentence shows how K-Pop fandom not only serves as a support space but also as a place where debate and conflict occur.

Bald on Record allows fans to explicitly voice their opinions, both in defending idols and criticizing fandom behavior that is considered unethical.

In the context of Appraisal Expressions, it was found that Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation often appear in fandom communications. Affect dominates in fans' emotional expressions towards idols, such as feeling happy, inspired, or even sad when facing certain issues in the K-Pop industry. For example, "Ever since we lost Moonbin, I've lost any motivation I had to continue to be a K-pop fan. Innocent people constantly being attacked by the ones who are meant to love and protect them is just too cruel." shows an expression of deep sadness and loss towards the idol who has died. Meanwhile, Judgement is used to evaluate the behavior of fandom and the entertainment industry, such as in the statement "K-pop is a safe place for us, but do we ever make them feel safe?" which criticizes how idols often get pressure from their own fans. Appreciation, on the other hand, appears in the form of appreciation for the impact of K-Pop in the lives of fans, as in the statement "K-pop has made me more confident in expressing myself and learning new cultures."

From these findings, it can be concluded that communication in the K-Pop fandom is not just a form of appreciation for music or entertainment, but also part of a broader cultural discourse. The politeness strategy used reflects the social dynamics between fans, idols, and the entertainment industry, where the K-Pop fandom becomes a space for identity expression, social criticism, and solidarity-based interaction and emotional reflection. K-Pop fandom not only serves as a community of music fans but also becomes a complex communication ecosystem, where strategies of politeness and expression of judgment shape the social experience and dynamics within this global community.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that communication in the K-Pop fandom is not just a form of expression of appreciation for idols, but also reflects a broader cultural discourse. The use of Politeness Strategies in fandom interactions shows the various social dynamics that occur in this community. On the other hand, it shows how fandom is also a space for debate and conflict, especially when discussing sensitive issues or when there are disputes within the community. This research confirms that K-Pop fandom is not only an entertainment community, but also a complex social space in which social values, identities, and reflections flourish. Fan interactions within

these communities reflect how popular culture is not only consumed, but also produced and negotiated in the digital space. Therefore, K-Pop fandom can be understood as a form of Cultural Discourse, where language and communication are used to form meaning, negotiate social relationships, and criticize the entertainment industry system. While this study has identified patterns of Politeness Strategies and Appraisal Expressions in the K-Pop fandom, there are still various other aspects that can be explored further. In addition, future research can also examine the impact of politeness strategies on conflict dynamics in the fandom, for example how the use of Bald on Record and Off Record can affect the perception and response of fans to an issue that is currently viral in the K-Pop community. This research could be the foundation for a more in-depth study of how language and communication in the K-Pop fandom can reflect larger social changes, such as shifts in cultural norms, expectations of celebrities, and the dynamics of relationships between the entertainment industry

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