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Politeness and Speech Acts in Cross-Cultural YouTube Interview Discourse: A Comparative Study of Thai and Chinese Hosts and Guests

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how cultural norms influence English-language communication by examining speech acts and politeness strategies in informal digital discourse. Focusing on ten YouTube interviews—five from Thailand's KND Studio and five from China's ICON—the study analyzes how Thai and Chinese hosts and guests use English as a lingua franca. Guided by politeness theory and speech act taxonomy, the analysis found that both groups primarily used representative and directive speech acts, with positive politeness strategies being dominant due to the casual interview format. Notably, Thai hosts often adopted a relaxed and informal tone, reflecting Thai cultural values of approachability and friendliness, which some viewers perceived as less polite. In contrast, Chinese speakers were viewed as more formal and indirect, contributing to perceptions of higher politeness. To triangulate the findings, interviews were conducted with Thai undergraduate, graduate, and academic participants, who provided interpretations of politeness based on the clips. The study highlights the impact

of cultural values on English use in intercultural settings and supports the integration of pragmatic awareness into language education. It contributes to cross-cultural pragmatics and digital discourse analysis, while acknowledging limitations such as the small sample size and focus on only two Asian contexts.

Keywords: cross-cultural pragmatics, English as a lingua franca, politeness strategies, speech acts, YouTube interviews

Introduction

English today serves as a global lingua franca, facilitating cultural exchange and interpersonal communication across increasingly informal, digital contexts. Effective communication in these settings requires not only grammatical accuracy but also pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence—particularly the ability to interpret and convey meaning appropriately across cultures (Bachman, 1990; Canale & Swain, 1980). A key component of this competence is *politeness*, which helps speakers manage face and navigate social expectations. Drawing on Brown and Levinson's (1987) distinction between positive and negative politeness, and Leech's (2014) work on intercultural pragmatics, this study examines how politeness strategies are enacted and interpreted in real-world English as a lingua franca (ELF) communication.

Politeness norms vary widely across cultures, and mismatches can lead to unintended offense or misunderstanding. These challenges are especially salient in intercultural settings such as YouTube interviews, where informal, unscripted English is used by non-native speakers in socially visible ways. Despite YouTube's global influence, little research has focused on how politeness is expressed in such contexts by Asian speakers. Most existing studies emphasize classroom pragmatics (Estaji & Nejad, 2021), teacher training (Mugford, 2022), or native vs. non-native usage (Wang & Taylor, 2019), leaving a gap in understanding real-life ELF communication on digital platforms.

This study addresses that gap by examining how Thai and Chinese speakers use English to perform speech acts and invoke politeness strategies in YouTube interviews. These two groups were chosen for their contrasting sociolinguistic norms: Thai discourse typically emphasizes friendliness and humor, while Chinese interaction often favors restraint and indirectness. Both are classified as "low" or "very low" in English proficiency by the EF English Proficiency Index (2024)—Thailand ranking 106 and China 91—making their pragmatic choices in ELF contexts especially relevant for analysis.

In addition to analyzing discourse, this study incorporates audience interpretations gained from interviews with Thai university students,

graduates, and lecturers. These perception data offer insight into how politeness strategies are understood by real English users, grounding the study in both the production and reception of digital discourse. The findings contribute to intercultural pragmatics and offer practical implications for English language instruction, particularly in promoting pragmatic awareness and cultural sensitivity.

In addition to analyzing speech from YouTube content, this study includes semi-structured interviews with Thai university students, graduates, and lecturers. These interviews explore how politeness and impoliteness are perceived by real users of English in Thailand, offering a complementary perspective to the speech act data. Together, the two components aim to bridge the gap between *language production* and *reception*, highlighting how cultural norms influence expression and interpretation in global English use.

To this end, the study investigates two central questions: first, what types of speech acts and politeness strategies do Thai and Chinese speakers use in English-language YouTube interviews?; and second, how do Thai university students, graduates, and lecturers interpret the politeness or impoliteness of these speakers in intercultural conversations? By combining discourse analysis with audience interpretation, this research contributes to the field of intercultural pragmatics and offers important implications for English language teaching, particularly in raising awareness of pragmatic variation and fostering culturally sensitive communication in ELF contexts.

Literature Review

This review focuses on three key areas informing the analysis of politeness in English-language YouTube interviews involving Thai and Chinese speakers: speech act theory, theories of politeness and impoliteness, and intercultural pragmatics research in educational and media contexts.

Speech Act Theory

Austin's (1962) foundational work introduced the idea that language performs actions beyond mere description, distinguishing locutionary (literal), illocutionary (intended), and perlocutionary (effect) acts. Building on this, Searle (1969, 1976) categorized illocutionary acts into representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations, and highlighted indirect speech acts where intended meaning differs from literal expression—a key politeness strategy. In intercultural settings, especially English as a lingua franca (ELF), indirectness helps mitigate face threats and smooth social interaction. Analyzing Thai and Chinese speakers' speech acts on YouTube (such as greetings, requests, and compliments) offers insight into how social

relationships and intentions are managed pragmatically. Searle's taxonomy guides this study's categorization of speech acts, with special attention to indirectness—signaling politeness or strategic ambiguity.

Theories of Politeness and Impoliteness

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory remains central, focusing on positive face (desire to be liked) and negative face (desire not to be imposed upon). Their model outlines strategies from direct ("bald on-record") to indirect ("off-record") to navigate face-threatening acts (FTAs). In high-context cultures like China and Thailand, indirect and deferential strategies, especially negative politeness and off-record utterances, are most prevalent (Scollon & Scollon, 2001). Chinese politeness, rooted in Confucian values, emphasizes restraint, humility, and harmony (Pan & Kádár, 2011; Gu, 1990), favors formality and indirectness to avoid confrontation. Thai politeness similarly values face protection and social harmony but often features more casual and affective expressions, using humor and compliments as positive politeness tools (Bowe & Martin, 2007; Boonkit, 2010; Ukosakul, 2005).

Recent developments critique the static nature of earlier politeness models. Arundale (2021) proposes a relational approach where politeness is co-constructed through interaction. Cutting and Fordyce (2021), and Wang and Taylor (2019), extend politeness research by examining impoliteness, implicational strategies, and routinized expressions of rudeness (e.g., "Are you crazy?"). These insights are crucial in media contexts where politeness is both performed and interpreted publicly.

For this study, politeness is understood pragmatically as culturally influenced strategies that maintain interpersonal harmony and manage face in ELF interactions (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Kádár & Haugh, 2013). Combining traditional and relational frameworks enables analysis of how politeness is both produced by speakers and interpreted by viewers in intercultural digital communication. Drawing on traditional and contemporary frameworks, the study analyzes how speech acts in English are shaped by culturally informed politeness strategies and how these are perceived by Thai viewers. Brown and Levinson's (1987) model provides tools for analyzing how speakers manage face and mitigate potential threats in interaction. Arundale's (2021) co-constituted model of relational work complements this by offering a framework for understanding how politeness is co-constructed and interpreted by audiences. Together, these models enable a dual focus on the production and reception of politeness in digital intercultural communication.

Politeness in Chinese and Thai Cultural Contexts

Chinese politeness is deeply influenced by Confucian principles stressing hierarchy, social order, and deference (Gu, 1990; Pan & Kádár, 2011). Chinese speakers often employ indirect, formal language, downplaying personal opinions to maintain harmony and avoid face loss (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). Transferring these cultural norms into English use leads to cautious and formal communication styles (Yu, 2003). Thai politeness centers on *khwam klom-kluen* (harmonious interaction) and *kreng jai* (consideration), favoring indirectness and non-confrontation, often with a warm, casual tone (Holmes & Stubbe, 2015; Kirkpatrick, 2008). Positive politeness through humor and compliments is common, reducing social distance (Boonkit, 2010). While both cultures share collectivist values, Chinese politeness emphasizes formality and vertical social hierarchy, whereas Thai politeness tends to be more egalitarian and affectively warm.

Politeness and Intercultural Pragmatics in Educational and Media Contexts

In language education, politeness plays a crucial role in fostering positive classroom rapport. Estaji and Nejad (2021) found that Iranian EFL teachers adjusted their politeness strategies to better engage learners, while Mugford (2022) observed Mexican teachers adapting politeness norms to align with local expectations. In Chinese contexts, Caldero and Sun (2021) identified pragmatic failures in English messages from Chinese students to Western instructors, highlighting cross-cultural misalignments. Similarly, Pathanasin and Eschstruth (2022), analyzing instant messaging between Thai students and teachers, found that English proficiency influenced politeness: higher-proficiency students used more indirect forms, while lower-proficiency students relied on direct language, sometimes leading to unintended impoliteness.

Beyond the classroom, politeness in media discourse, especially on digital platforms, combines both scripted and spontaneous communication. Fu and Ho (2022) showed that Chinese TV hosts use hedging and mitigation to maintain face. Vignozzi (2022) noted that Western talk shows often rely on humor and indirectness as politeness strategies. On YouTube, Georgakopoulou (2016) and Garcia-Rapp (2017) documented how creators construct friendliness and politeness to appeal to global audiences, while Mohd Yunus and Ariffin (2022) highlighted how formal politeness is used in apology videos to manage a public image.

Although these studies show how politeness is adapted across genres and platforms, little is known about how Thai and Chinese speakers perform politeness in spoken intercultural YouTube interviews conducted in English. Much of the existing research on digital discourse centers on Western speakers or written interactions (e.g., online comments), rather than spoken interactions among non-native English speakers in Asian contexts.

Despite growing interest in English as a lingua franca (ELF), few studies have explored how Thai and Chinese cultural norms shape English use in informal, internationally-oriented digital content. For example, it remains unclear whether Thai speakers tend to use more negative politeness (e.g., avoiding imposition) than Chinese speakers, or how each group signals disagreement, praise, or humor. This gap limits educators' ability to offer culturally informed guidance for developing pragmatic competence in real-world English use.

While intercultural communication in Asia has gained scholarly attention, politeness strategies between Thai and Chinese speakers in English remain underexplored. Kirkpatrick and Liddicoat (2017) observed that Southeast Asian ELF users often develop localized pragmatic norms that diverge from Western expectations. In Thai-Chinese exchanges, indirectness, topic avoidance, and vague disagreement may reflect shared cultural preferences for harmony and face-saving (Chen, 2023). However, these strategies may still lead to misunderstandings if speakers interpret politeness cues differently.

For instance, Chinese speakers may use formal, indirect requests as a mark of politeness, which Thai interlocutors might see as distant or overly rigid. Conversely, Thai speakers' casual tone or humor might be perceived by Chinese listeners as inappropriately informal. Such divergences underscore the importance of cultural background in shaping second-language politeness and highlight the need for more research into how these dynamics unfold in real-time digital discourse, particularly in contexts like YouTube interviews.

Research Gap and Theoretical Integration

This study addresses key gaps in intercultural pragmatics by integrating speech act theory with politeness models to analyze both the production (YouTube discourse) and perception (audience responses) of politeness in digital, intercultural contexts. Focusing on English-language interviews with Thai and Chinese speakers, it explores how national cultural values shape politeness strategies in English as a lingua franca. Audience responses from Thai university participants provide a sociopragmatic layer, highlighting how non-native listeners interpret these strategies.

While digital politeness has been widely studied in Western contexts and written interactions, few have examined real-time, unscripted spoken ELF interactions among culturally distinct Asian speakers. Even fewer studies consider how these speakers draw on their own cultural norms when using English online. By analyzing spontaneous speech in English-language YouTube programs, this study fills a significant gap. It reveals how politeness is both enacted and interpreted across cultures, offering insights into digital discourse, second-language pragmatics, and intercultural facework. These findings have implications for English language pedagogy in Asian EFL settings, promoting pragmatic competence and cultural sensitivity through media-based learning.

Methodology

This qualitative study used stratified purposive sampling to examine speech acts and politeness strategies in English-language YouTube interviews by Thai and Chinese creators, combining analysis of selected video clips with semi-structured interviews of Thai university participants. This approach enabled triangulation between actual media interactions and viewer interpretations, providing a deeper understanding of intercultural politeness. YouTube was chosen for its accessibility, rich multimodal content, and growing role as a platform for authentic, naturally occurring English as a lingua franca (ELF) communication among non-native speakers, making it ideal for exploring politeness in real-world digital contexts.

Data Sources and Sampling

To explore the types of speech acts and politeness strategies used in intercultural communication, ten English-language interview videos uploaded between 2015 and 2023 were selected—five from the Thai YouTube channel *KND Studio* and five from the Chinese channel *ICON*. These channels were chosen not merely for their popularity (KND: approximately 1.2 million subscribers; ICON: approximately 1.35 million), but primarily for their consistency in format, cultural richness, and thematic alignment, which enabled meaningful cross-cultural comparison. Both channels feature informal, dialogic interviews with diverse guests (such as celebrities, professionals, and entrepreneurs) and are known for fostering candid, spontaneous discussions in English as a lingua franca (ELF). YouTube serves as a naturalistic platform for unscripted intercultural interaction, and the selected videos offered comparable content suitable for analyzing politeness strategies in informal ELF contexts.

The selection criteria were designed to ensure consistency and comparability across the Thai and Chinese data sets. Each interview had to follow a conversational, host–guest format rather than a scripted or monologic structure. English was required to be the primary language, although occasional code-switching was acceptable. Hosts were native Thai or Chinese speakers with proficient English skills, and each video had to be at least 10 minutes to provide sufficient interactional data. Guest diversity was also considered, with an emphasis on varying levels of English proficiency and professional backgrounds. Finally, to ensure topical alignment between the two channels interviews needed to address similar themes, such as personal development, education, career experiences, and cultural values.

Each video was downloaded and fully transcribed, capturing verbal and key non-verbal features, including turn-taking, intonation, pauses, overlapping speech, and laughter.

To answer the second research question, examining how politeness is interpreted, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten purposively selected Thai English users from various universities across Thailand. Participants included current students, recent graduates, and faculty members from diverse academic backgrounds, including engineering, music, Thai studies, and Chinese studies. To examine the potential influence of cross-cultural exposure on interpretations of politeness, participants were stratified into two groups: Group A comprised five individuals with formal exposure to Chinese culture or language, while Group B included five individuals without such exposure.

Each session lasted approximately 15–20 minutes and was conducted in either English or Thai, based on the participant's language preference. The interview protocol was informed by key concepts from speech act theory and politeness frameworks, rather than adapted from a standardized questionnaire. During the interviews, participants viewed selected video segments from the YouTube dataset and were asked to reflect on how polite or impolite they perceived specific expressions, tones, and forms of address. Topics explored included directness, formality, rapport, and perceived appropriateness in relation to Thai and Chinese cultural norms.

Data Analysis

The YouTube interview transcripts were analyzed using an integrated coding scheme based on Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) and Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The analysis proceeded in two stages: Stage 1 involved coding each utterance according to Searle's (1976) taxonomy of speech acts. Stage 2 involved identifying politeness strategies

within those coded speech acts, applying Brown and Levinson's categories: bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record.

Example of Coding

Utterance: "If you would like to choose a few words to describe yourself…" (Host, ICON 2)

- Speech Act: Directive (indirect)
- Politeness Strategy: Off-record
- Cultural Note: Mitigated request; avoids imposing a face threat

Speech act patterns and politeness strategies were compared across the Thai and Chinese interviews, focusing on how speakers managed face, negotiated social distance, and built rapport.

The semi-structured interview data underwent thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. After verbatim transcription, the data were repeatedly read for familiarization and initial note-taking. Codes were manually generated, identifying patterns in politeness, impoliteness, and ELT implications. These formed five themes: politeness perceptions, politeness in English communication, ELT emphasis, politeness instruction experience, and ELT practice suggestions. Cultural familiarity (e.g., Chinese culture experience) was noted for interpretive comparisons. Key quotes illustrated each theme. Participant references (e.g., P1-Fam for those familiar with Chinese culture; P2-Unfam for those unfamiliar) indicated background while preserving anonymity. Thematic interpretation was guided by the concepts of metapragmatic awareness (Kecskes, 2014) and positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990), which helped contextualize participants' reflections on politeness in terms of cultural background, perceived social roles, and communicative alignment.

Verification and Trustworthiness

To enhance the reliability of the analysis, both peer and expert validation procedures were employed. For *peer coding*, all ten interview participants were asked to code brief excerpts from the YouTube dataset according to speech act type and perceived politeness. The agreement rate with the researcher's coding was 70.32%, indicating general alignment with participant interpretations. For *expert coding*, three applied linguistics scholars independently coded 10% of the data. Intercoder agreement reached 99%, supporting the consistency and theoretical validity of the coding scheme.

Although the study adopted a qualitative approach, descriptive statistics (e.g., coding agreement rates) were incorporated to quantify

reliability measures and strengthen analytical transparency. These figures are presented not for generalization, but to underscore internal consistency.

Ethical Considerations

This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Kasetsart University (Approval No. COE66/090). All participants were fully informed about the study's aims and procedures, participated voluntarily, and retained the right to withdraw at any time. To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in all reporting and data were stored securely in accordance with ethical research protocols.

Findings

This section presents the main findings of the study in two parts: first, an analysis of speech acts performed by hosts and guests in selected YouTube programs, and second, interview insights on perceived politeness and its role in English Language Teaching (ELT).

Speech Acts in YouTube Interactions

Hosts' Use of Speech Acts

Across both the Thai (KND) and Chinese (ICON) YouTube channels, hosts predominantly used directives and representatives, which together accounted for approximately 65–85% of all speech acts per episode (e.g., 82.4% in KND5; 84.1% in ICON1). This reflects the informal, conversational style typical of YouTube talk-show content, where hosts guide discussions and share opinions. Directives, comprising 24–51% (e.g., 24.4% in ICON3; 50.8% in KND2), were primarily used to ask questions, invite responses, or manage turn-taking. Representatives, ranging from 21–59% (e.g., 20.6% in KND2; 59.1% in ICON5), were used to inform, comment, or share personal viewpoints. Expressives appeared less frequently, making up 11–29% of utterances (e.g., 10.9% in ICON1; 28.6% in KND2), often in response to guests or to convey surprise and approval. Commissives were extremely rare (less than 1%, e.g., 0.6% in KND5), and declarations were entirely absent across all episodes (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1

Distribution of Speech Acts among Thai Hosts (KND Program)

	KND1		KND2		KND3		KND4		KND5	
Types of Speech Acts	**DIR (%)**	**IN DIR (%)**	**DIR (%)**	**IN DIR (%)**	**DIR (%)**	**IN DIR (%)**	**DIR (%)**	**IN DIR (%)**	**DIR (%)**	**IN DIR (%)**
Representative	67 (46.2)	-	26 (20.6)	-	44 (48.9)	-	45 (39.1)	-	61 (34.7)	-
Directive	46 (31.7)	-	64 (50.8)	-	39 (43.3)	-	44 (38.3)	-	84 (47.7)	-
Commissive	1 (0.7)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1 (0.6)	-
Expressive	31 (21.4)	-	36 (28.6)	-	7 (7.8)	-	26 (22.6)	-	30 (17.0)	-
Declaration	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total (%)	145 (100)	-	126 (100)	-	90 (100)	-	115 (100)	-	176 (100)	-

Note. DIR = Direct speech act; INDIR = Indirect speech act.
According to Searle (1975), a direct speech act states the speaker's intention explicitly, while an indirect act relies on inference or context.

Table 2

Distribution of Speech Acts among Chinese Hosts (ICON Program)

	ICON1		ICON2		ICON3		ICON4		ICON5	
Types of Speech Acts	**DIR (%)**	**IN DIR (%)**	**DIR (%)**	**IN DIR (%)**	**DIR (%)**	**IN DIR (%)**	**DIR (%)**	**IN DIR (%)**	**DIR (%)**	**IN DIR (%)**
Representat-ive	48 (47.5)	-	11 (34.4)	-	26 (57.8)	-	46 (42.2)	-	39 (59.1)	1 (1.5)
Directive	37 (36.6)	2 (2.0)	10 (31.3)	2 (6.3)	11 (24.4)	-	45 (41.3)	-	19 (28.8)	-
Commissive	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Expressive	11 (10.9)	3 (3.0)	6 (18.8)	3 (9.4)	6 (13.3)	2 (4.4)	13 (11.9)	5 (4.6)	6 (9.1)	1 (1.5)

Declaration	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total	101		32		45		109		66	
(%)	(100)		(100)		(100)		(100)		(100)	

Note. DIR = Direct speech act; INDIR = Indirect speech act.
According to Searle (1975), a direct speech act states the speaker's intention explicitly, while an indirect act relies on inference or context.

A notable distinction in the use of speech acts between the two programs lies in the level of directness employed by the hosts, reflecting deeper cultural communication norms. Direct speech acts (DIR), which explicitly express the speaker's intention, were more commonly used by the Thai host of a KND program, who often used imperatives or assertive framing to steer the conversation. For instance, in *"So let's go back to where it all started"* (Directive, KND 3), the host used a clear and unmitigated directive to initiate a topic shift. This form of interaction aligns with Thailand's informal and often humorous discourse style, where directness within friendly contexts is not necessarily face-threatening, but rather a reflection of closeness and ease. Similarly, the representative act *"I'm sure people who are watching this show are rooting for you right now"* (KND 5) conveyed encouragement and empathy, asserting the presumed support of the audience. This strategy not only affirms the guest's value but also reinforces a sense of communal solidarity—typical of Thai *positive politeness* seeking connection through shared sentiment.

In contrast, the Chinese host of the ICON program occasionally favored more indirect and mitigated expressions, particularly in face-sensitive or potentially controversial contexts. For example, the formulation *"If you would like to choose a few words to describe yourself…"* (Directive, ICON 2) exemplifies a tentative and polite request, structured to reduce imposition. This use of conditional phrasing and second-person deference demonstrates a *negative politeness* strategy, aimed at respecting the guest's autonomy and avoiding pressure. Likewise, the representative act *"I guess our audience wouldn't be able to understand them (parental pushing/forcing attitudes), but maybe yes also if they have a strict father"* (ICON 4) reflects an indirect speech act (INDIR) characterized by hedging and perspective-taking. By embedding the statement within uncertainty ("*I guess", "maybe*"), the host managed a delicate topic without asserting judgment—an important tactic in maintaining harmony in Chinese communication, where face-saving plays a critical role (see Ivenz & Reid, 2022).

These differences point to broader cultural preferences in discourse style: the Thai host's relaxed, confident tone reflects conversational norms that prioritize emotional openness and playful informality, while the Chinese

host's more measured tone aligns with a communication culture emphasizing modesty, caution, and attentiveness to relational and hierarchical dynamics—even in casual, public-facing formats like YouTube talk shows. The hosts' use of speech acts and politeness markers thus facilitates dialogue and enacts culturally situated models of interpersonal interaction.

Guests' Use of Speech Acts

Guest speakers—both Thai and Chinese—primarily produced representative speech acts in response to host prompts, accounting for approximately 72% to 93% of their utterances. Thai guests' representative acts ranged from 72.5% to 92.6%, and Chinese guests from 74.1% to 93.1% (see Table 3). This pattern suggests that the talk-show platform was used chiefly for storytelling, opinion-sharing, and reflection—consistent with the genre's narrative orientation. Thai guests, however, demonstrated greater variation in speech acts, with directive acts ranging from 2.3% to 16.0% and expressive acts from 6.2% to 10.6%. These suggest higher spontaneity and emotional engagement, often triggered by humor or personal connection. In contrast, Chinese guests showed more limited use of these categories, with directive acts between 1.7% and 3.7% and expressive acts varying from 5.2% to 22.2%, the latter including a notable outlier. This more restrained pattern contributed to a generally measured tone. Such contrasts likely reflect cultural norms: Thai discourse encourages animated, informal expression, whereas Chinese discourse emphasizes restraint, modesty, and controlled emotional display.

Table 3

Distribution of Speech Act Types Among Thai and Chinese Guests

	The Thai guests' speech acts					**The Chinese guests' speech acts**				
Types of Speech Acts	**KND1 (%)**	**KND2 (%)**	**KND3 (%)**	**KND4 (%)**	**KND5 (%)**	**ICON1 (%)**	**ICON2 (%)**	**ICON3 (%)**	**ICON4 (%)**	**ICON5 (%)**
Representative	95 (72.5)	80 (85.1)	72 (80.0)	87 (92.6)	119 (91.5)	48 (88.9)	20 (74.1)	35 (85.4)	54 (93.1)	41 (87.2)
Directive	21 (16.0)	4 (4.3)	7 (7.8)	-	3 (2.3)	1 (1.9)	1 (3.7)	1 (2.4)	1 (1.7)	1 (2.1)
Commissive	2 (1.5)	-	5 (5.6)	-	-	1 (1.9)	-	-	-	-

Expressive	13 (9.9)	10 (10.6)	6 (6.7)	7 (7.4)	8 (6.2)	4 (7.4)	6 (22.2)	5 (12.2)	3 (5.2)	5 (10.6)
Declaration	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total (%)	131 (100)	94 (100)	90 (100)	94 (100)	130 (100)	54 (100)	27 (100)	41 (100)	58 (100)	47 (100)

The predominance of representative acts among both Thai and Chinese guest speakers is clearly reflected in their responses, which often involved storytelling, personal reflection, or the expression of opinions. For instance, a Thai guest candidly shared, *"A lot of shits happen in life, and sometimes it's very hard to swallow... I would tell myself 'This too shall pass'"* (KND 1). This highly personal and emotionally laden statement exemplifies the emotive, narrative style typical of Thai discourse, where self-disclosure connects the speaker with the host and audience. Similarly, a Chinese guest reflected, *"But jazz is my biggest passion in music... I just went crazy for jazz during my university days"* (ICON 4), employing a representative act to convey personal passion with slightly more restraint—demonstrating involvement, yet delivered with the composed tone often observed in Chinese interactional norms.

Expressive acts, though less common, surfaced in both programs as moments of affective alignment or intellectual curiosity. A Thai guest remarked, *"Well, I'm so intrigued by the country (Uzbekistan) itself… it's one of the two countries in the world that's double-landlocked from the sea"* (KND 4). Here, the expressive act conveys spontaneous wonder, underscoring the playful, curious tone often found in Thai conversations. In contrast, a Chinese guest's expressive utterance, *"One project which showed… which we really feel proud about… is the parade car at both the 60th and 70th anniversary national parades"* (ICON 3), reflects collective pride in a formal context, but the effect is more subdued and ceremonial, aligning with a culturally embedded preference for modesty and formality in public expression.

Occasional directive and commissive acts also reveal differences in guest tone and agency. A Thai guest stated, *"We are always cooking something up. I just want you guys to keep following our social media accounts in PROXIE…"* (KND 2), directly engaging the audience with promotional intent, reflecting the self-promoting informality common in Thai pop culture discourse. Meanwhile, a Thai guest's remark, *"The road is going to be tough... but rest assured that I will climb it, no matter how steep"* (KND 3), represents a rare commissive—a declaration of personal resolve—delivered with motivational flair. In contrast, the Chinese guest's indirect commissive, *"I made you the coffee called 'Dirty'"* (ICON 1), is more functional and understated, suggesting a task-oriented commitment to offering a drink as a gesture of hospitality. This contrast reinforces the finding that Thai guests tended to be more spontaneous and

expressive, whereas Chinese guests appeared more measured, emotionally reserved, and formal, even when using the same speech act categories.

Directness and Politeness Strategies in Thai and Chinese Talk Shows

A comparative analysis reveals that while directness was common in both Thai and Chinese talk-show interactions, it manifested through distinct cultural styles. Thai speakers often used overtly direct, casual language, reflecting a preference for positive politeness—a strategy that fosters closeness and shared emotion. In contrast, Chinese speakers tended to soften directness through modal verbs, hedging, and indirect phrasing, aligning more with negative politeness, which emphasizes respect and social distance. These differing strategies were evident in the dominant use of directives and representatives; commissives were rare and declarations entirely absent, likely due to the genre's informal, non-institutional nature. Overall, both groups navigated interaction through culturally embedded norms of politeness, with Thai discourse favoring expressive immediacy and Chinese discourse privileging respectful restraint.

Interview Findings: Politeness, Culture, and ELT Implications

The interviews added context to the speech act data, particularly regarding perceptions of politeness. Two groups were interviewed: participants familiar with Chinese language and culture (n = 5), and those unfamiliar (n = 5). Five key themes emerged (Table 4), interpreted through metapragmatic awareness and positioning, reflecting how cultural background, social alignment, and communicative intent shape judgments of politeness (Kecskes, 2014; Davies & Harré, 1990).

Table 4

Interview Findings on Politeness Perceptions and Their Significance in ELT

Theme	Key Insights	Cultural Group Differences
Perceptions of politeness	Chinese hosts seen as more polite; Thai casual/blunt	Both agreed, reasons varied
Politeness in English communication	Linked to professionalism and appropriateness	Equally emphasized
ELT emphasis on politeness	Under-taught in most settings	No major differences
Experience with politeness instruction	Mostly indirect or limited exposure	Slightly more in international schools

Theme	Key Insights	Cultural Group Differences
Suggestions for ELT practice	Support explicit pragmatics teaching via media, role-play	Strong support across groups

Perceptions of Politeness

Both groups saw Chinese hosts as more polite due to their formal tone, slower pace, and indirectness, reflecting cultural values of hierarchy and face-saving. Thai speakers' casual, sarcastic style was viewed as less polite; one participant (P1-Fam) criticized on-air use of expressions like "shit happens." These discourse features align with cultural norms shaping politeness judgments.

Politeness in English Communication

Seven out of ten participants (three familiar with Chinese language and culture and four unfamiliar) emphasized that politeness is essential in English, associating it with professionalism, clarity, and intercultural appropriateness. Others expressly noted that politeness is context-dependent, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of pragmatic variation in global English use.

ELT Emphasis on Politeness

Most participants felt that ELT tends to underemphasize pragmatic competence, especially in relation to politeness and impoliteness. One remarked, "We should teach politeness and impoliteness separately. It's not just about accuracy but also appropriateness" (P1-Unfam). This suggests a gap in ELT curricula, where grammar often overshadows sociolinguistic sensitivity.

Experiences with Politeness Instruction

Many participants reported little to no explicit instruction on politeness during their English education. A few, particularly those from international or faith-based schools, encountered it indirectly through essay writing, literature, or moral education. As one put it, "We learned to write essays and be formal, but no one really taught us how to be polite when speaking" (P2-Unfam). Across both groups, there was agreement that pragmatic instruction was minimal, potentially leading to overly casual or

inappropriate expressions in real-world communication – such as the Thai guest's "A lot of shit happened."

Suggestions for ELT Practice

Nearly all participants supported incorporating politeness and impoliteness instruction into ELT curricula. Suggestions included role-play, media analysis, and explicit discussion of speech acts across cultures. One participant proposed, "We could use YouTube or Netflix clips to teach this. Students need to see how people actually speak—not just in textbooks" (P2-Fam). Others advocated for comparative approaches that explore politeness norms across languages, aiming not only to avoid offense but to enhance intercultural understanding.

These interview findings support the speech act analysis by showing that perceptions of politeness are shaped by culture and context. Chinese speakers were seen as more polite due to their formal, indirect style, while Thai speakers appeared more casual or blunt. Participants stressed the importance of pragmatic competence and noted gaps in current ELT practices. The results highlight the need for English teaching to move beyond grammar, incorporating explicit instruction in speech acts, politeness strategies, and impoliteness management in both classroom and digital contexts.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study explored how speech acts and politeness strategies are realized and interpreted in English-language interview programs on YouTube, focusing on two culturally distinct contexts: Thailand and China. Using a qualitative approach, it provided context-sensitive insights into how politeness is constructed and perceived in specific online intercultural settings, rather than aiming for broad generalizations.

In response to the first research question, the findings showed that hosts predominantly used directive and representative acts, while guests mostly employed representatives. Direct speech acts were common and frequently accompanied by positive politeness strategies such as humor, compliments, and informal language. This combination fostered a friendly, engaging atmosphere and supported conversational flow in time-limited interviews. Although indirectness and negative politeness were rare, the Chinese host occasionally used modals like *would* to soften assertions. These patterns suggest that directness, when paired with positive politeness, is not inherently impolite but a pragmatic strategy to convey clarity and

approachability, reflecting the dual goals of efficiency and rapport on platforms like YouTube.

In response to the second research question, interview data from ten participants revealed that most perceived Chinese speakers as more polite than their Thai counterparts, citing a more formal tone, slower pacing, and occasional indirectness in the Chinese program. Thai speakers, by contrast, were viewed as more casual, humorous, and sometimes sarcastic. While all participants recognized the importance of politeness in English-language communication, those familiar with Chinese culture were more sensitive to formal markers of respect, whereas others appreciated Thai informality as a sign of warmth. These differing perceptions reflect broader cultural values: the formality in Chinese interactions may stem from Confucian ideals of hierarchy and respect, as well as stricter media conventions. Even in casual settings, educated Chinese speakers may favor careful, bookish language. Thai communication, shaped by concepts like *sanuk* (enjoyment) and *mai pen rai* ("never mind"), tends to value relaxed, socially aware exchanges, as discussed by Bowe and Martin (2007).

These findings have implications for education, business, and intercultural communication. In language education, they highlight the need to teach pragmatics and cultural nuance, not just grammar and vocabulary. In business contexts, understanding differences in tone and communication style can support smoother negotiations and more effective relationship-building. More broadly, increased awareness of how politeness is interpreted across cultures can reduce misunderstandings and foster intercultural empathy.

The findings support Arundale's (2021) view that politeness judgments are shaped more by social context and norms than by speaker intent alone. They also reflect Vignozzi's (2022) claim that politeness strategies are culturally embedded and shaped by expectations of appropriateness. In terms of digital discourse, the study echoes Alcosero and Gomez (2022), who found that YouTube creators often use positive politeness to connect with audiences, with negative politeness appearing less frequently.

The influence of language proficiency emerged as significant, supporting Pathanasin and Eschstruth's (2022) findings that more proficient English speakers use politeness strategies more flexibly and effectively. Participants with greater fluency showed heightened pragmatic sensitivity, strategically employing indirectness and mitigation. However, these results contrast with Caldero and Sun (2021), who reported that Chinese students often made direct or face-threatening requests in English. This divergence likely reflects differences in participant profiles: Caldero and Sun studied students with limited real-world exposure, whereas the present study focused

on professional, media-savvy speakers accustomed to public communication, highlighting how experience shapes pragmatic competence.

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations. It examined only two YouTube channels and drew interview data solely from Thai universities, limiting generalizability. However, the goal was not to generalize, but to offer an in-depth exploration of politeness in specific intercultural contexts. By combining discourse analysis with participant perceptions, the study provides a nuanced foundation for further inquiry.

In sum, this study enhances understanding of how politeness is expressed and interpreted in non-native English media discourse. It shows how cultural norms, media formats, and language proficiency shape communicative choices, and how these choices are perceived by diverse audiences. Future research could expand the cultural scope, explore other digital genres, or use mixed methods to complement qualitative insights with broader patterns. As digital intercultural communication continues to grow, such work will be crucial in understanding how global English users manage politeness in an increasingly complex communicative landscape.

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