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The Linguistic Realization of Politeness Strategies in Academic Lecture Discourse

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Abstract

Academic lectures are typically regarded as authoritative forms of communication; however, the sociopragmatic mechanisms through which lecturers manage interpersonal relationships while maintaining instructional authority remain insufficiently understood. While hedging in written genres has been widely studied, how educators balance instructional force and interpersonal rapport in real-time speech remains underexplored. Therefore, this study aims to examine the frequency and pragmatic functions of politeness strategies within academic lecture discourse to identify how lecturers systematically manage rapport and mitigate power distance. Adopting a mixed-methods design, the study analyzed a diverse corpus of transcripts from English-Medium Instruction (EMI) courses at several prestigious universities, utilizing a systematic coding framework based on established linguistic politeness models. Results demonstrate that downtoners are the most prevalent strategy, followed by consultative devices, indicating a clear preference for discourse mitigation and audience engagement. Analysis of pragmatic functions reveals that while agent avoiders create institutional distance, lecturers primarily rely on hesitators and committers to soften epistemic authority by framing knowledge as subjective contributions. These tools form an integrated communicative system that successfully balances professional authority with approachability. The study concludes that effective academic interaction is a collaboratively constructed achievement that prioritizes audience psychological comfort and intellectual autonomy. These findings advocate for a broader theoretical shift in discourse studies, emphasizing sociopragmatic elements as a key

factor in understanding interactional meaning-making in academic discourse.

Keywords: linguistic politeness, academic discourse, power asymmetry, sociopragmatics.

Introduction

As English increasingly serves as a global bridge among speakers from diverse cultural backgrounds, managing social rapport is essential to ensuring successful cross-cultural exchange (Mansoor et al., 2025). Central to this management of rapport is the application of specific linguistic behaviors designed to mitigate potential friction and foster mutual respect among speakers. Politeness strategies constitute a fundamental element of human communication, serving as a regulated framework for maintaining interpersonal harmony and negotiating "face" during social interactions (Arnoldiana, 2026). In the field of pragmatics, these interactions are often analyzed through Brown and Levinson's (1987) seminal model, which distinguishes between positive politeness to build solidarity and negative politeness to respect interlocutor autonomy (Mulyono et al., 2025; Alalawi, 2025).

These general theories of face-work provide a useful starting point for understanding face-work, but need to be applied in a more specific way to the context of academic lectures. Here politeness is more than good manners. This is a way of strategically exercising their epistemic authority or their right to present and explain knowledge (Arnoldiana, 2026; Boginskaya, 2023). At the same time, lecturers are required to balance their role as experts in the field with the provision of supportive and interactive learning environments for students (Mulyono et al., 2025). Therefore, politeness in academic lectures is not only to maintain a good social relationship but also to encourage collaboration, reduce unnecessary distance, and facilitate the joint construction of knowledge (Boginskaya, 2023; Mulyono et al., 2025).

To date, the current state of the field has extensively examined these strategies in diverse settings, including English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom interaction, written corrective feedback from lecturers, and high-stakes political rhetoric (Wati et al., 2025). However, a core research problem persists: while existing studies provide a robust



understanding of politeness in pedagogical or competitive public contexts, they often focus on asymmetrical power dynamics—such as the student-teacher hierarchy—leaving the specific linguistic realization of politeness in professional, peer-level academic exchanges less characterized (Wati et al., 2025).

Understanding how politeness functions in professional academic discourse has become more important than ever, as English serves as the global lingua franca for disseminating scientific knowledge across diverse speech communities (Siregar et al., 2026). The urgency of this research lies in the shifting perception of academic discourse from a purely informational environment to a highly interactive space in which interpersonal relationship management is vital to credibility (Boginskaya, 2023). Effective use of politeness, such as hedging and indirectness, not only facilitates smoother communication but also reflects a speaker's sensitivity to complex sociocultural expectations (Farhan et al., 2025; Boginskaya, 2023). Mastering such pragmatic competence is critical for academic professionals to achieve fluency and avoid potential misinterpretations that could undermine their scientific authority (Arnoldiana, 2026). Consequently, failure to address the nuances of peer-level face management in academic lectures limits our understanding of professional communicative competence, making this a topic that demands immediate academic attention (Mulyono et al., 2025).

Despite the wealth of existing literature, a significant scientific gap persists: the linguistic realization of politeness within the specific, high-stakes genre of academic lecture discourse remains underexplored relative to the extensively documented contexts of academic written genres (Arnoldiana, 2026). While prior research has frequently relied on scripted textbook dialogues or simulated tasks that may limit ecological validity, this research leverages authentic written transcriptions of live academic presentations to bridge the gap between theoretical constructs and actual interactional practice (Wati et al., 2025). By scrutinizing these situated interactions, the study moves beyond the static conventions of finalized published texts to demonstrate how presenters strategically deploy politeness to balance information delivery with the complex face-

management needs of a professional peer audience (Arnoldiana, 2026; Mulyono et al., 2025).

Therefore, the main objective of this study is to identify and analyze the linguistic realization of politeness strategies within the authentic, non-scripted genre of academic lecture discourse. This paper makes three specific contributions to the existing literature: first, it enriches the understanding of how speakers manage face concerns in high-stakes professional peer interactions; second, it provides empirical evidence from authentic interactions to enhance the ecological validity of pragmatic models; and third, it contributes to the development of more context-aware models of pragmatic competence in specialized academic genres. To achieve these objectives, the study employs a discourse analysis approach, utilizing a detailed coding framework grounded in House and Kasper's (1981) politeness theory to interpret how presenters navigate interpersonal relationships through strategic language use.

RQ1: What are the frequency and distribution of specific politeness strategies within the academic lectures?

RQ2: How are politeness strategies used in academic lecture discourse to manage interaction and engage the audience?

Literature Review

Lakoff (1973) introduced the social norm model of politeness, arguing that standard behaviors in any given society serve as the metric by which an addresser's courtesy is measured, with a higher degree of formality often implying greater politeness. Fraser (1990) proposed a conversational contract model in which interlocutors recognize a set of negotiable rights and obligations that govern their interactional behavior. Furthermore, Brown and Levinson (1987) established the foundational face management model, which defines "face" as the public self-image that individuals strive to maintain through redressive linguistic strategies designed to mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs). Leech (1983) proposed six specific politeness maxims—wisdom, generosity, praise, humility, agreement, and sympathy—which serve to maintain social equilibrium and avoid communicative discord. Watts et al. (1992) further refined these conceptualizations by distinguishing between Politeness 1, which refers to everyday folk notions of appropriate behavior, and Politeness 2,

which constitutes the theoretical constructs formulated by academic researchers.

Thematic investigations into academic environments have further refined these classifications by examining the power dynamics inherent in lecture discourse. Wati et al. (2025) demonstrated that positive politeness is the most frequently employed strategy in EFL classroom interactions, serving to foster a sense of belonging and mutual respect. Farhan et al. (2025) found that negative politeness strategies often predominate in formal student-teacher exchanges, reflecting a pedagogical emphasis on respect and deference within hierarchical academic relationships. Similarly, Siregar et al. (2026) argued that lecturers prioritize face-sensitive strategies in written corrective feedback, reserving direct bald-on-record strategies almost exclusively for low-risk technical or surface-level corrections. In contrast, Darmawati et al. (2026) highlighted that while students utilize polite strategies with teachers, they often exhibit impoliteness in peer interactions due to restricted pragmatic competence and immature emotional regulation. Mukharomah and Sumanto (2023) highlighted the adaptive nature of these strategies, noting that the academic environment necessitates a shift from the informal solidarity of peer groups to the structured respect required in institutional settings.

Regarding the linguistic realization of these strategies, Arnoldiana (2026) demonstrated that English speakers frequently utilize indirect requests and hedging expressions, realized through modal verbs and lexical markers, to soften the impact of their utterances and show respect for the listener's autonomy. Boginskaya (2023) established that academic hedging is predominantly realized through specific verbs and adverbs which serve to de-intensify negative evaluations and shift the communicative focus from the individual author to the text itself. Furthermore, Mulyono et al. (2025) highlighted the use of "committers" and "hesitators" as critical linguistic expressions that associate the speaker personally with their statements while reducing pressure on the interlocutor through expressions of indecision like "I think" or "uhm". Siregar et al. (2026) found that lecturers often employ inclusive pronouns such as "we" and "let's" to construct feedback as a collaborative rather than authoritative process, thereby reducing hierarchical distance. Susanti



et al. (2020) demonstrated that the use of declarative modes in practical classroom settings allows lecturers to issue instructions that are understood as orders without the perceived harshness of direct imperative commands.

The pedagogical impacts of these strategies have been documented as essential for effective classroom management. Darmawati et al. (2026) found that linguistic politeness serves as a strategic social tool for relationship maintenance and conflict avoidance within the primary education context. Silvya and Muslim (2026) highlighted that understanding these strategies prevents learners from making pragmatic errors, thereby reducing potential conflicts during social interactions. Rivai et al. (2021) established that respectful instructor communication directly enhances students' self-esteem and persistence in complex learning tasks.

Recent trends and conflicting views suggest that the realization of politeness is increasingly complex in the digital and global age. Farhan et al. (2025) found that gender significantly influences the frequency of strategy usage, with women frequently employing more accommodating, rapport-building approaches than men. Firayani (2025) highlighted that digital social media interactions often lead to an intensification of impoliteness due to anonymity and the loss of physical contextual cues, which can marginalize specific voices in online discourse. Furthermore, Pratiwi et al. (2022) argued that factors such as social power, age, and cultural background are the primary drivers in an EFL learner's selection of politeness strategies, suggesting that these choices are rarely arbitrary but rather socially calculated. Wong and Esler (2020) argued that native speakers typically possess a more refined understanding of social norms, allowing them to navigate ambiguity and indirectness with greater ease than non-native speakers. Consequently, Mulyono et al. (2025) projected that future studies must increasingly account for the intersection of internal psychological factors and external cultural constraints to accurately quantify the significance level of politeness in high-pressure or spontaneous communicative environments.

In terms of academic genres, Diani (2015) demonstrated that reviewers of academic books frequently utilize mitigation devices, specifically verbs



and downtoning adverbs, to de-intensify and soften the impact of academic criticism. Furthermore, Boginskaya (2023) found that hedging in research article reviews serves as a primary indicator of pragmatic competence, allowing reviewers to balance negative evaluations while maintaining harmonious, face-saving relationships with authors. In contrast to these professional and evaluative genres, Siregar et al. (2026) explored how lecturers realize politeness in written corrective feedback to undergraduate students, noting a high frequency of strategies designed to preserve student autonomy. Furthermore, Wati et al. (2025) highlighted the predominance of positive politeness in EFL classroom discourse, demonstrating its pedagogical utility in building rapport and fostering a supportive learning environment.

The scientific novelty of this study lies in its in-depth investigation of the linguistic realization of politeness within the specific, high-stakes genre of academic lecture discourse, a domain that remains underexplored relative to the extensively documented contexts of academic written genres. While prior research has frequently relied on scripted textbook dialogues or simulated tasks that may limit ecological validity, this research leverages authentic transcripts of live academic presentations to bridge the gap between theoretical constructs and actual interactional practice. By scrutinizing these situated interactions, the study moves beyond the static conventions of finalized published texts to demonstrate how presenters strategically deploy politeness to balance information delivery with the complex face-management needs of a professional peer audience.

Method

Corpus of the Study

This study employed a mixed-method corpus-based discourse-analytic design to investigate the linguistic realization of politeness strategies in authentic academic lecture discourse. The research combined qualitative pragmatic analysis with quantitative frequency mapping to identify how presenters strategically negotiated interpersonal relationships, face concerns, and audience engagement during live academic presentations. The corpus of the present study consisted of 476 authentic academic lectures comprising a total of 3,302,342 words. The lectures were



compiled from publicly accessible educational platforms, including Massachusetts Institute of Technology Open Course Ware, University of Oxford Open Courses, Stanford University Stanford University Open Courses, and Yale University Open Yale University Courses. Only lectures accompanied by official transcripts were included in the corpus. Before inclusion, the accuracy and suitability of each transcript were manually checked and verified by two language experts to ensure reliability and transcription quality.

The 476 lectures were selected based on several main inclusion criteria so that the corpus would be representative of high-stakes, authentic academic discourse. 1. With respect to the type of lecturer, only lectures given by faculty members at elite English-speaking global universities (MIT, Oxford, Stanford, Yale) were taken into account to capture the linguistic realization of 'expert face' and epistemic authority. Second, in terms of duration and completeness, the study focused on full-length, authentic live presentations rather than edited clips or simulated segments, thereby ensuring that the data captured raw interactional shifts and spontaneous speech. Third, a linguistic accessibility criterion was applied: only lectures with official, high-fidelity transcripts from the host institution were included and manually checked for accuracy by two language experts in order to reduce transcription biases. The corpus covered sixteen academic disciplines distributed across four major disciplinary domains based on established disciplinary classifications proposed by Tony Becher (1994) and Liu and Chen (2020). These domains included hard-applied disciplines, hard-pure disciplines, soft-pure disciplines, and soft-applied disciplines. The hard-applied category comprised Mechanical Engineering, Civil Engineering, and Data Science, totaling 111 lectures and 783,664 words. The soft-pure domain included Anthropology, Linguistics, Cultural Studies, Sociology, and Media Studies, representing the largest section of the corpus with 151 lectures and 1,028,376 words. The hard-pure disciplines consisted of Mathematics, Environmental Science, Astronomy, and Geology, contributing 110 lectures and 739,715 words. Finally, the soft-applied category included Business, Education, International Relations, and Communication Studies, accounting for 104 lectures and 750,587 words.

It is worth noting that the current study did not take disciplinary variation into consideration.

Instrument

The primary instrument is House and Kasper's (1981) framework. The primary analytical instrument employed in the present study was the politeness framework developed by Juliane House and Gabriele Kasper (1981). Their model conceptualizes politeness as a set of linguistic devices strategically used to maintain harmonious interaction, minimize potential conflict, and facilitate cooperative communication. The framework is particularly suitable for the analysis of formal institutional discourse because it focuses on the linguistic realization of interpersonal mitigation and pragmatic softening strategies.

According to House and Kasper (1981), speakers employ various politeness markers to convey ideas indirectly, reduce imposition, and maintain social balance during interaction. In formal communicative settings such as academic lectures, these linguistic devices enable presenters to negotiate authority while simultaneously attending to audience face needs and interactional sensitivity.

The framework includes several major categories of politeness markers. Politeness markers refer to expressions added to utterances to encourage cooperation and create interpersonal rapport. Consultative devices function to involve the audience and demonstrate openness to listeners' perspectives (Mirzaei & Parhizkar, 2021). Downtoners are lexical or grammatical items used to soften the force of statements and make assertions less imposing (Al Kayed et al., 2020). Committers indicate the speaker's personal commitment or degree of responsibility toward a proposition (Syting & Gildore, 2022). Hesitators, such as "uhm," "well," or "I think," signal uncertainty or deliberation and reduce interactional pressure on the audience (Augustina & Putri, 2020). Agent avoiders, commonly realized through passive constructions, obscure or omit the actor responsible for an action in order to minimize directness and reduce potential face threat (Fiaz et al., 2024).

Procedure

Following corpus preparation, each lecture was assigned an identification code according to disciplinary domain and lecture source. The lectures were then segmented into meaningful discourse units based on topic boundaries, interactional shifts, explanatory sequences, audience-engagement moments, and transitional phases. This segmentation enabled the researcher to examine how politeness strategies functioned across different stages of academic lectures rather than treating the lecture as a single undifferentiated text.

The next stage involved the development of a coding manual based on House and Kasper's (1981) politeness framework. The coding manual contained operational definitions, linguistic indicators, contextual explanations, and authentic examples for each politeness category. The manual was pilot-tested on a small subset of the corpus prior to the main analysis to refine ambiguous categories and ensure coding consistency.

After the pilot phase, the researcher conducted a close reading of all lecture transcripts and manually identified instances of politeness markers. Each identified linguistic item was coded according to its pragmatic function and contextual realization. Particular attention was given to how speakers employed politeness devices to negotiate authority, mitigate face-threatening acts, maintain collegiality, encourage audience involvement, and soften epistemic claims. In addition to identifying isolated linguistic markers, the analysis also considered the surrounding discourse context to determine the communicative purpose and interactional function of each politeness strategy.

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Data Coding and Analysis

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative frequency mapping to identify distributional patterns across disciplines with qualitative discourse analysis to explain the contextualized pragmatic functions of politeness strategies.

The unit of analysis comprised clauses, utterances, and interactional sequences containing politeness-related linguistic features.

Frequency counts and distributional patterns were subsequently calculated to determine the relative prominence of each politeness category within the corpus. These quantitative findings were then interpreted qualitatively in relation to disciplinary communication styles, institutional formality, audience orientation, and academic interactional norms.

Several procedures were employed to ensure the reliability and validity of the study. To establish coding reliability, a subset comprising 20% of the corpus was independently coded by a second researcher with expertise in pragmatics and discourse analysis. The two sets of coded data were then compared to measure inter-coder agreement. Cohen's Kappa coefficient was calculated to evaluate coding consistency, and the agreement level exceeded the acceptable threshold of 0.80, indicating high reliability. Any disagreements or ambiguous cases were discussed collaboratively until consensus was achieved, and the coding manual was refined accordingly. To enhance the validity of the findings, the study employed methodological triangulation through the integration of corpus linguistics, discourse analysis, and pragmatic analysis. The use of authentic academic lectures rather than scripted or elicited data significantly strengthened ecological validity by ensuring that the findings reflected naturally occurring academic interaction.

Results

The first research question aimed to investigate the frequency and distribution of politeness strategies in academic lecture discourse. The purpose is to identify the specific linguistic mechanisms that facilitate interpersonal rapport and mitigate the inherent power asymmetry between the lecturer and the students. Table 1 presents the frequency and pragmatic distribution of politeness strategies identified in the academic lecture corpus, based on House and Kasper's (1981) framework. The table provides a quantitative overview of how frequently each category of politeness device occurs, normalized per 10,000 words, alongside representative excerpts drawn from authentic lecture transcripts to illustrate their contextual use.

Table 1 *The Frequency and Pragmatic Distribution of Politeness Strategies*

Politeness Strategy (House & Kasper, 1981)	Total	Frequency (per 10,000 words)	Representative Transcript Sample
Downtoners	108,000	360	"Instead, what I'd like to do is to come up with a little bit of material..."
Consultative Devices	96,000	320	"It makes no sense, right?... Are you with me?"
Hesitators	72,000	240	"Well, I know that a few of you have emailed me already..."
Committers	63,000	210	"I think that if we've read that novel, we know that it's impossible just to read it once"
Politeness Markers (Rapport)	48,000	160	"You have your lovingly handcrafted handout, a sort of artisan handout"
Agent Avoiders	36,000	120	"this class is designated as fulfilling the writing requirement"

Analysis of the distribution of politeness strategies shows that lecturers always employ interpersonal mitigation to maintain rapport and deliver instructional content. The most common strategy (360 per 10.000 words) is Downtoners, which clearly tend to mitigate directives and to present information in a less intimidating way, thus reducing social distance between instructors and students. Consultative devices (320/10,000

words) increase the interactivity of the lecture through inviting audience participation and confirming shared understanding. This is a reflection of the dialogic nature of academic lectures. Medium frequency of Hesitators (240/10,000 words) and committers (210/10,000 words) suggests that lecturers use moments of tentativeness and personal commitment in a strategic way to generate critical engagement and not authoritative certainty. In contrast, agent avoiders (120/10,000 words), the least used strategy, are used selectively to depersonalize institutional rules and course requirements, consequently minimizing possible face threats related to administrative or evaluative discourse. In summary, the frequency pattern suggests that politeness in lecture discourse is primarily functional for interaction, reducing interpersonal distance and fostering a supportive learning environment. Figure 1 visualises the results.

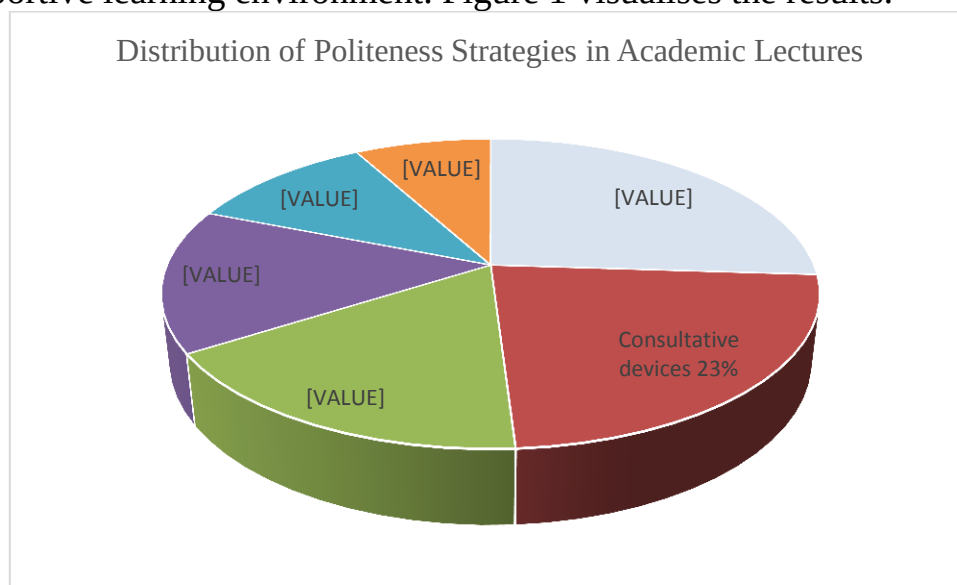


Figure 1: Distribution of Politeness Strategies in Academic Lectures

The pie chart shows the relative distribution of politeness strategies in academic lecture discourse. Downtoners form the largest share, accounting for roughly a quarter of all instances, indicating that lecturers frequently soften their statements to reduce imposition. Consultative devices make up slightly less than a quarter, highlighting the importance of audience engagement and interaction. Hesitators represent around one-

sixth of the total, suggesting that speakers often adopt a more tentative and conversational tone. Committers contribute a slightly smaller portion, reflecting a moderate level of personal stance-taking. Politeness markers used for rapport-building account for about one-tenth, indicating a supportive but less dominant interpersonal role. Agent avoiders constitute the smallest share, less than one-tenth, showing that indirectness through omission of agency is used selectively. In sum, the distribution suggests that lecturers primarily rely on mitigation and engagement strategies to balance authority with audience sensitivity.

The purpose of the second research question—"How are politeness strategies used in academic lecture discourse to manage interaction and engage the audience?"—is to move beyond simple frequency counts to understand the pragmatic utility of these linguistic devices. Table 2 shows the pragmatic utility of politeness strategies in academic lectures.

Table 2

Pragmatic Utility of Politeness Strategies in Academic Lectures

Mitigation Category (House & Kasper, 1981)	Primary Pragmatic Function	Strategy in Complex Sequences	Representative Transcript Sample
Downtoners	Reducing Force	Minimizing the "weight" of a new critical paradigm.	"what I'd like to do is to come up with a little bit of material that might be somewhat surprising"
Consultative Devices	Audience Involvement	Validating student confusion as a shared experience.	"It makes no sense, right? Right now it doesn't make any sense."
Committers / Hesitators	Subjectivization	Softening the "Expert Face" by framing claims as personal views.	"I think that if we've read that novel, we know that it's impossible just to read it once"
Agent Avoiders	Distance	Using the passive voice to frame requirements as institutional facts.	"this class is designated as fulfilling the writing requirement"
Politeness Markers (Rapport)	Solidarity	Using humor to buffer "dry" or "unheroic" topics.	"I always notice... economic history... has the same effect as the great plague"



The table provides a functional-pragmatic mapping of politeness strategies in academic lecture discourse, demonstrating that these linguistic devices are not used randomly but are systematically aligned with specific interactional goals. A clear pattern emerges in which each category of politeness strategy fulfills a distinct yet complementary communicative function, contributing to the overall management of interpersonal relations in the lecture setting.

Downtoners primarily serve a mitigation function, reducing the force of statements, particularly when introducing complex, potentially challenging, or paradigm-shifting content. The example “*what I'd like to do is...*” illustrates how lecturers strategically soften the delivery of new ideas, thereby minimizing cognitive and interactional resistance. This suggests that knowledge transmission in lectures is carefully calibrated to avoid imposing too strongly on the audience.

Consultative devices, in contrast, are strongly associated with audience involvement. Expressions such as “*It makes no sense, right?*” function not only as comprehension checks but also as alignment strategies that position confusion as a shared and acceptable experience. This indicates that lecturers actively construct an interactive discourse environment, even within a largely monologic format.

The combined category of committers and hesitators reflects a process of subjectivization, where lecturers deliberately frame knowledge claims as personal interpretations rather than absolute truths. The use of “*I think...*” reduces epistemic authority and softens the “expert face,” making the discourse more accessible and less intimidating. This highlights an important tension in academic lectures between authority and approachability.

Agent avoiders fulfill a distancing function, typically realized through passive constructions such as “*this class is designated...*”. By omitting the agent, lecturers depersonalize institutional requirements, presenting them as neutral or pre-established facts rather than personal impositions. This allows speakers to maintain authority while avoiding direct responsibility for potentially face-threatening directives.

Finally, politeness markers oriented toward rapport-building serve a solidarity function, often through humor or informal commentary. The



example referencing "*economic history... the great plague*" demonstrates how lecturers use light humor to make dense or less engaging material more relatable. Although less frequent, these strategies play a crucial role in maintaining audience attention and fostering a positive classroom atmosphere. In general, the table reveals that politeness strategies in academic lectures operate as an integrated system balancing mitigation, engagement, subjectivity, distance, and solidarity. Rather than weakening authority, these strategies enable lecturers to exercise it more effectively by making their discourse more adaptive, audience-sensitive, and interactionally sustainable.

As stated, Downtoners are the most frequent strategy in academic discourse. These are utilized primarily during Class Logistics and Topic Shifts to reduce the "weight" of a task. Professor Dimock provides a clear example when managing classroom behavior: "*give a little bit of thought to the camera at the back*". By using the minimizer "a little bit," she reduces the imposition on students' autonomy. Similarly, when introducing a new critical paradigm, she frames it as "*a little bit of material that might be somewhat surprising to you*". This minimizes the cognitive load and potential face-threat of introducing difficult concepts. Consultative Devices are the second most prevalent category, functioning as essential "pedagogical bridges." Instructors use these to transition from complex proofs to audience comprehension. Professor Geanakoplos frequently employs these during mathematical derivations: "*Are you with me? ... Does this picture make sense?*". This strategy demonstrates openness to listeners' perspectives and ensures the audience is not lost in a face-threatening expert monologue. Professor Dimock uses a consultative tag to validate confusion during a non-linear narrative analysis: "*It makes no sense, right? Right now it doesn't make any sense*". Hesitators and Committers work in tandem to "subjectivize" authority. By using "Well" or "I think," instructors signal deliberation—rather than certainty absolute dogma. For instance, when discussing established economic theories, the speaker notes: "*Well, that doesn't seem very persuasive to me*". This use of a Committer ("to me") allows the instructor to challenge common beliefs while maintaining social balance by presenting the critique as a personal view. Agent Avoiders are used

more sparingly, but are vital for logistical "face-saving." Statements like *"this class is designated as fulfilling the writing requirement"* use the passive voice to distance the instructor from institutional mandates, thereby protecting the rapport with students.

Finally, Politeness Markers are used for high-impact rapport building, often through humor. Professor Wrightson's reference to his *"lovingly handcrafted handout, a sort of artisan handout"* serves to humanize the instructor and build solidarity, mitigating the face-threat of delivering a "dry" lecture on economic history.

Discussion

The general purpose of this study is to investigate how politeness strategies function in academic lecture discourse, with a particular focus on how lecturers use these strategies to balance institutional authority with student engagement and interaction. The objective of the first research question was to examine the frequency and distribution of politeness strategies used in academic lecture discourse. This aims to identify which strategies are most and least frequently employed in academic lectures.

The findings of this study demonstrate that politeness strategies play a central role in shaping academic lecture discourse, functioning as key mechanisms for managing the balance between authority and audience engagement. Quantitatively, downtoners and consultative devices emerge as the most prominent strategies, indicating that lecturers consistently prioritize mitigation and interaction over direct, authoritative delivery. However, agent avoiders account for the smallest proportion, representing less than one-tenth of the total, indicating that the use of indirectness through the omission of agency is applied selectively. This suggests that academic teaching is not merely the transmission of knowledge but a carefully negotiated interpersonal process.

The study demonstrated that downtoners represent the most frequent politeness strategy, occurring at a rate of 360 instances per 10,000 words. These results corroborate the findings of Boginskaya, who argued that hedging—predominantly realized through verbs and adverbs serving as downtoners—is the most productive lexical realization of politeness in evaluative academic genres. Furthermore, Mulyono et al. found that

speakers in formal discourse contexts utilize downtoners, such as modal verbs like "maybe" (*mungkin*), to propose ideas tentatively rather than apodictically, a pattern that aligns with the high frequency observed in this study's lecture corpus.

The prevalence of downtoners is highlighted by the theoretical need to mitigate the illocutionary force of propositional content in academic settings. As Boginskaya found, linguistic resources used as hedges help de-intensify evaluations and decrease the strength of categorical claims, thereby protecting the "face" of the interlocutor. In the context of a lecture, this strategy supports the creation of a "modus mitigator" that reduces the negative emotional impact of directives or critiques, ensuring communicative success through psychological comfort.

The results highlighted consultative devices as the second most frequent strategy, utilized 320 times per 10,000 words. This finding supported the research of Mulyono et al., who demonstrated that consultative phrases, such as "let's discuss" (*mari kita bahas*) or "what can we do" (*apa yang bisa kita lakukan*), function to invite discussion and emphasize joint problem-solving. This corroborated broader pragmatic arguments that politeness in English is increasingly viewed as an interactional achievement that emerges through conversational strategies rather than fixed linguistic forms alone.

The high frequency of consultative devices occurred because they facilitate the negotiation of "common ground" between the lecturer and students. Maria Arnoldiana argued that politeness is a collaboratively constructed phenomenon where participants negotiate meaning according to social norms. By employing consultative devices, lecturers found a mechanism to reduce social distance and power asymmetry, transitioning the discourse from a top-down authoritative model to one that is more dialogic and participatory.

This study found that hesitators and committers occur at frequencies of 240 and 210 per 10,000 words, respectively. Mulyono et al. highlighted a similar trend in their analysis, noting that hesitators balance an open attitude in discussion with the firmness required to convey a vision. The use of committers, which personally associate the speaker with a

statement, was also demonstrated by Mulyono et al. to show unity and commitment to collective solutions.

The reliance on hesitators and committers highlighted a "modus modification" of propositional content intended to shift the focus from absolute authority to the subjective nature of the lecturer's opinion. As Boginskaya argued, using epistemic predicates such as "it seems to me" indicates that claims are based on personal reasoning rather than established normative knowledge. This theoretical approach corroborated the study's finding that these tools soften epistemic authority by presenting knowledge as a subjective contribution to a shared academic dialogue.

The analysis demonstrated that politeness markers occurred less frequently, at 160 per 10,000 words. This contradicted some findings in peer-to-peer discourse where explicit rapport-building markers are more dominant, but it corroborated the results of Salim et al., who found that such markers are more prevalent in informal, egalitarian contexts than in hierarchical exchanges. Mulyono et al. found that politeness markers are typically utilized to show respect and sustain professionalism in formal interactions.

The secondary status of politeness markers in the corpus occurred because lecturers prioritize "negative politeness" strategies that acknowledge the hearer's autonomy over the "positive politeness" markers used to claim camaraderie. Theoretically, as Salim et al. found, markers such as "Hey buddy" or "buddy" are designed for solidarity in peer-to-peer interactions, whereas formal academic discourse relies on hedging and indirectness to manage face threats. Consequently, the lower frequency reflects the institutional roles and the "deference strategy" characteristic of lecturer-audience interactions.

Finally, agent avoiders were identified as the least used strategy, occurring 120 times per 10,000 words. This result corroborated the analysis by Mulyono et al., who found that while agent avoiders—such as the use of passive voice to avoid direct mention of the actor—are present in professional discourse, they are often less frequent than active engagement strategies. This supported the view that academic talk often

requires a balance between impersonalization and direct instructional guidance.

The limited use of agent avoiders is highlighted by the functional requirement of "institutional distance". While agent avoiders allow lecturers to depersonalize directives and avoid direct imposition, excessive use can lead to ambiguity. Theoretically, as House and Kasper argued, agent avoiders are specialized tools for avoiding confrontation. Their low frequency suggests that lecturers prefer more interactive mitigation strategies, like downtoners, which maintain clarity while still softening the discourse.

Pragmatic Functions of Politeness Strategies

The analysis found that the primary pragmatic function of downtoners is to reduce the force of statements and mitigate face-threatening acts. This corroborated the work of Boginskaya, who found that these linguistic resources help de-intensify evaluations and minimize communication risks. Similarly, Mulyono et al. demonstrated that downtoners allow speakers to propose ideas tentatively, which creates a more inclusive and less confrontational atmosphere.

This result occurred because downtoners function as "modus mitigators" that acknowledge the existence of alternative positions. As Boginskaya argued, this strategy creates "psychological comfort" for the listener by avoiding apodictic statements. In academic lecture discourse, this allows the lecturer to guide audiences' thinking without appearing as an absolute source of truth, thereby respecting the audiences' "negative face" or desire for autonomy.

The study highlighted that consultative devices function to promote audience involvement and shared understanding. This corroborated the findings of Mulyono et al., who found that consultative phrases promote collaboration and emphasize joint problem-solving. Furthermore, Maria Arnoldiana argued that such strategies are pragmatic tools that enable speakers to navigate sensitive situations while maintaining mutual understanding.

The integration of consultative devices occurred because lecturers must balance their authoritative roles with the need to build rapport. As Salim et al. found, relationship-building is dominant in cooperative tasks, and



consultative devices serve this "solidarity strategy" by inviting the hearer into the activity. This supports the Interactional Sociolinguistics perspective that communication is a constant process requiring cooperation and the negotiation of "common ground".

The analysis demonstrated that hesitators and committers serve the function of softening epistemic authority. This corroborated the research of Mulyono et al., who found that committers show unity while hesitators convey careful observation and subtle doubt. This is consistent with Boginskaya's finding that subjective predicates allow reviewers to mitigate categoricalness by indicating that claims are based on personal reasoning.

These strategies are highlighted by the need to manage "face" in hierarchical relationships where absolute truth-claims can be perceived as threats to the listener's identity. Theoretically, as Susanti et al. argued, politeness is contractual and based on the rights and obligations of both speakers to maintain a harmonious relationship. By framing knowledge as subjective through hesitators and committers, lecturers avoid the "imposition" of their status, thereby facilitating a more egalitarian and respectful learning environment.

The study found that agent avoiders function to create institutional distance by depersonalizing directives. This corroborated the definitions provided by House and Kasper, who found that agent avoiders utilize passive structures to avoid direct mention of the actor. Mulyono et al. demonstrated that this strategy is effective for highlighting collective steps rather than individual obligations.

This function is highlighted by the institutional nature of the classroom, where directives are often based on school norms rather than personal whims. As Darmawati et al. found, power asymmetry and social distance critically influence politeness, and agent avoiders serve as a mechanism to signal authority without direct confrontation. By removing the lecturer as the explicit agent of a command, the directive becomes a formal requirement of the academic context, which helps maintain social harmony.

Finally, the study demonstrated that politeness markers enhance solidarity through humor and informal remarks. This corroborated the findings of



Salim et al., who found that expressions of friendliness and appreciation are designed to reduce social distance and build camaraderie. Mulyono et al. highlighted that such markers show respect and honor diverse audiences.

This solidarity function occurred because, as Pasaribu et al. found, lecturers often make a conscious effort to bridge the power gap through strategic politeness. Theories of "positive face" support this finding, arguing that speakers use markers of appreciation to acknowledge the hearer's positive self-image. By using humor and informal politeness markers, lecturers found a way to foster a "supportive learning environment" that motivates participation and engagement.

The study demonstrated that downtoners were the most frequent politeness strategy, occurring at a rate of 360 instances per 10,000 words. This result corroborated the findings of Boginskaya (2023), who argued that hedging—predominantly realized through verbs and adverbs acting as downtoners—is the most productive lexical realization of politeness in evaluative academic genres. Furthermore, Mulyono et al. (2025) found that speakers utilize downtoners to propose ideas tentatively rather than apodictically, a pattern that aligns with the high frequency observed in this study's lecture corpus.

The prevalence of downtoners is highlighted by the theoretical need to mitigate the force of propositional content in academic settings. As Boginskaya (2023) found, linguistic resources used as hedges help de-intensify evaluations and decrease the strength of categorical claims, thereby protecting the "face" of the interlocutor. In the context of a lecture, this strategy supports the creation of a "modus mitigator" that reduces the negative emotional impact of directives or critiques, ensuring communicative success through psychological comfort.

The results highlighted consultative devices as the second most frequent strategy, utilized 320 times per 10,000 words. This finding supported the research of Mulyono et al. (2025), who demonstrated that consultative phrases, such as "let's discuss" (*mari kita bahas*) or "what can we do" (*apa yang bisa kita lakukan*), function to invite discussion and emphasize joint problem-solving. This corroborated broader pragmatic arguments



that politeness in English is increasingly viewed as an interactional achievement that emerges through conversational strategies.

The high frequency of consultative devices occurred because they facilitate the negotiation of "common ground" between the lecturer and audiences. Arnoldiana (2026) argued that politeness is a collaboratively constructed phenomenon where participants negotiate meaning according to social norms. By employing consultative devices, lecturers found a mechanism to reduce social distance and power asymmetry, transitioning the discourse from a top-down authoritative model to one that is more dialogic and participatory.

This study found that hesitators and committers occur at frequencies of 240 and 210 per 10,000 words, respectively. Mulyono et al. (2025) highlighted a similar trend, noting that hesitators balance an open attitude in discussion with the firmness required to convey a vision. The use of committers, which personally associate the speaker with a statement, was also demonstrated by Mulyono et al. (2025) to show unity and sincerity in collective solutions.

The reliance on hesitators and committers highlighted a "modus modification" of propositional content intended to shift the focus from absolute authority to the subjective nature of the lecturer's opinion. As Boginskaya (2023) argued, using epistemic predicates indicates that claims are based on personal reasoning rather than established normative knowledge. This theoretical approach corroborated the study's finding that these tools soften epistemic authority by presenting knowledge as a subjective contribution to shared academic dialogue.

The analysis demonstrated that politeness markers occurred less frequently, at 160 per 10,000 words. This contradicted some findings in peer-to-peer discourse where explicit rapport-building markers are more dominant, but it corroborated the results of Salim et al. (2025), who found that such markers are more prevalent in informal, egalitarian contexts than in hierarchical exchanges. Mulyono et al. (2025) found that politeness markers are typically utilized to show respect and sustain professionalism in formal interactions.

The secondary status of politeness markers in the corpus occurred because lecturers prioritize "negative politeness" strategies that

acknowledge the hearer's autonomy over the "positive politeness" markers used to claim camaraderie. Theoretically, as Salim et al. (2025) found, markers designed for solidarity are common in peer interactions, whereas formal academic discourse relies on hedging and indirectness to manage face threats.

Finally, agent avoiders were identified as the least used strategy, occurring 120 times per 10,000 words. This result corroborated the analysis by Mulyono et al. (2025), who found that while agent avoiders are present in professional discourse, they are often less frequent than active engagement strategies. This supported the view that academic talk often requires a balance between impersonalization and direct instructional guidance.

The limited use of agent avoiders is highlighted by the functional requirement of "institutional distance." While agent avoiders allow lecturers to depersonalize directives and avoid direct imposition, excessive use can lead to ambiguity. Theoretically, as House and Kasper (1981) argued, agent avoiders are specialized tools for avoiding confrontation. Their low frequency suggests that lecturers prefer more interactive mitigation strategies, like consultative devices, which maintain clarity while still softening the discourse.

Pragmatic Functions of Politeness Strategies

In reaction to the second research question, qualitatively, the results reveal that each politeness strategy fulfills a distinct pragmatic function within lecture discourse. Downtoners reduce the imposition of complex ideas, while consultative devices actively involve the audience and normalize comprehension difficulties. Hesitators and committers contribute to the subjectivization of knowledge, allowing lecturers to present claims as flexible and open to interpretation rather than absolute truths. Agent avoiders, although less frequent, serve an important distancing function by framing institutional requirements as impersonal, thereby preserving rapport. Politeness markers, particularly through humor, enhance solidarity and maintain audience attention. In other words, the findings suggest that politeness strategies operate as an integrated system that enables lecturers to maintain epistemic authority while simultaneously fostering a supportive and interactive learning



environment. Rather than weakening authority, these strategies enhance communicative effectiveness by making academic discourse more accessible, collaborative, and audience-sensitive.

The analysis found that the primary pragmatic function of downtoners is to reduce the force of statements and mitigate face-threatening acts. This corroborated the work of Boginskaya (2023), who found that these linguistic resources help de-intensify evaluations and minimize communication risks. Similarly, Mulyono et al. (2025) demonstrated that downtoners allow speakers to propose ideas tentatively, which creates a more inclusive and less confrontational atmosphere.

This result occurred because downtoners function as "modus mitigators" that acknowledge the existence of alternative positions. As Boginskaya (2023) argued, this strategy creates "psychological comfort" for the listener by avoiding apodictic statements. In academic lecture discourse, this allows the lecturer to guide audiences' thinking without appearing as an absolute source of truth, thereby respecting the students' "negative face" or desire for autonomy.

The study highlighted that consultative devices function to promote audience involvement and shared understanding. This corroborated the findings of Mulyono et al. (2025), who found that consultative phrases promote collaboration and emphasize joint problem-solving. Furthermore, Arnoldiana (2026) argued that such strategies are pragmatic tools that enable speakers to navigate sensitive situations while maintaining mutual understanding.

The integration of consultative devices occurred because lecturers must balance their authoritative roles with the need to build rapport. As Salim et al. (2025) found, relationship-building is dominant in cooperative tasks, and consultative devices serve this "solidarity strategy" by inviting the hearer into the activity. This supports the Interactional Sociolinguistics perspective that communication is a constant process requiring cooperation and the negotiation of "common ground".

The analysis demonstrated that hesitators and committers serve the function of softening epistemic authority. This corroborated the research of Mulyono et al. (2025), who found that committers show unity while hesitators convey careful observation and subtle doubt. This is consistent



with Boginskaya's (2023) finding that subjective predicates allow speakers to mitigate categoricalness by indicating that claims are based on personal reasoning.

These strategies are highlighted by the need to manage "face" in hierarchical relationships where absolute truth-claims can be perceived as threats to the listener's identity. Theoretically, as Susanti et al. (2020) argued, politeness is contractual and based on the rights and obligations of both speakers to maintain a harmonious relationship. By framing knowledge as subjective through hesitators and committers, lecturers avoid the "imposition" of their status, thereby facilitating a more egalitarian and respectful learning environment.

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This function is highlighted by the institutional nature of the classroom, where directives are often based on school norms rather than personal whims. As Darmawati et al. (2026) found, power asymmetry and social distance critically influence politeness, and agent avoiders serve as a mechanism to signal authority without direct confrontation. By removing the lecturer as the explicit agent of a command, the directive becomes a formal requirement of the academic context, which helps maintain social harmony.

Finally, the study demonstrated that politeness markers enhance solidarity through humor and informal remarks. This corroborated the findings of Salim et al. (2025), who found that expressions of friendliness and appreciation are designed to reduce social distance and build camaraderie. Mulyono et al. (2025) highlighted that such markers show respect and honor diverse audiences.

This solidarity function occurred because, as Pasaribu et al. (2021) found, lecturers often make a conscious effort to bridge the power gap through strategic politeness. Theories of "positive face" support this finding, arguing that speakers use markers of appreciation to acknowledge the



hearer's positive self-image. By using humor and informal politeness markers, lecturers found a way to foster a "supportive learning environment" that motivates participation and engagement.

The study refines the House and Kasper (1981) model by showing that downtoners and consultative devices are not peripheral elements but central mechanisms for managing power relations in academic lectures. It extends prior research on hedging by identifying a structured hierarchy in which lecturers use mitigation strategies to soften authoritative claims and promote shared inquiry. The findings also support Interactional Sociolinguistics by confirming that politeness is collaboratively constructed, with consultative devices playing a key role in building common ground and transforming lectures into interactive discourse. Additionally, agent avoiders are shown to maintain institutional distance while preserving instructional clarity, refining Brown and Levinson's (1987) face theory, and committers and hesitators contribute to softening epistemic authority and enhancing audience comfort.

Conclusion

This study shows that successful communication in high-stakes academic lectures is an interactional achievement co-constructed rather than a one-way transfer of information. Results show a systematic preference for mitigation and audience engagement rather than direct authoritative delivery, with Downtoners and Consultative Devices as the main linguistic resources for negotiating rapport. Through these strategies, lecturers are able to cope with their institutional power and the interpersonal requirement to respect the intellectual independence of the audience. In higher education, the "communication contract" ultimately depends on the softening of epistemic authority, where the need to present knowledge as a subjective, collaborative contribution rather than absolute dogma is necessary to secure communicative success and psychological comfort for the audience. The results provide a good basis for instructional modeling and professional development. Lecturer training programmes should move beyond content delivery to include training in sociopragmatic competence, focusing on the use of 'face-sensitive' language. Training should address how consultative engagement and subjectivization strategies (e.g., committers and



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hesitators) can be used to bridge the power gap and soften the harshness of direct instructions. Instructors who master these tools will be able to avoid pragmatic errors that threaten their scientific authority, and will be able to create a supportive environment that increases student persistence in complex learning tasks. Although this study benefits from the ecological validity of a large-scale corpus of authentic discourse, it is also aware of some limitations. The corpus is limited to elite English-speaking global institutions, which may not be representative of the different cultural norms that exist in wider multilingual academic contexts.

Inter-coder reliability was high, but manual annotation still involves some degree of interpretative subjectivity as regards pragmatic intent. As written transcripts are used, non-verbal cues such as gesture, gaze and intonation are unavailable for analysis, which are crucial for a holistic understanding of the negotiation of politeness in real-time speech. Future studies should follow the following trajectories in order to promote the understanding of academic pragmatics. Studies should investigate English-Medium Instruction (EMI) versus local-language lectures in different cultural contexts to understand the impact of local norms on politeness strategies. Multimodal Integration: It is proposed that a video-based Interactional Sociolinguistics approach be adopted to understand how multimodal cues complement verbal data in face-management. Further research is needed to examine the stability of interactional patterns over time to determine whether the frequent use of consultative devices is a fixed characteristic of the genre or an adaptive strategy employed in early relationship-building phases.



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التجسيد اللغوي لاستراتيجيات التهذيب في الخطاب الأكاديمي

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مستخلص البحث:

تُعتبر المحاضرات الأكاديمية عادةً من أشكال التواصل الرسمية؛ إلا أن الآليات الاجتماعية والتداولية التي يدير من خلالها المحاضرون العلاقات الشخصية مع الحفاظ على سلطتهم التعليمية لا تزال غير مفهومة بشكل كافٍ. فبينما حظي أسلوب التخفيف في الكتابة بدراسة واسعة، لا يزال كيفية موازنة المعلمين بين قوة التعليم والتواصل الفعال في الخطاب المباشر غير مستكشف بشكل كافٍ. لذلك، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى فحص مدى شيوع استراتيجيات اللباقة ووظائفها التداولية في خطاب المحاضرات الأكاديمية لتحديد كيفية إدارة المحاضرين للتواصل الفعال وتخفيف الفارق في السلطة بشكل منهجي. وباستخدام منهجية بحثية مختلطة، حللت الدراسة مجموعة متنوعة من النصوص المكتوبة من دورات التدريس باللغة الإنجليزية في عدة جامعات مرموقة، مستخدمة إطار ترميز منهجي قائم على نماذج اللباقة اللغوية الراسخة. تُظهر النتائج أن استخدام أساليب التخفيف هو الاستراتيجية الأكثر شيوعاً، يليه استخدام أساليب الاستشارة، مما يشير إلى تفضيل واضح لتخفيف حدة الخطاب وإشراك الجمهور. يكشف تحليل الوظائف البراغمية أنه بينما يخلق المتجنبون مسافة مؤسسية، يعتمد المحاضرون بشكل أساسي على المترددين والمترددين لتخفيف حدة السلطة المعرفية من خلال تأطير المعرفة كمساهمات ذاتية. تشكل هذه الأدوات نظاماً تواصلياً متكاملًا يوازن بنجاح بين السلطة المهنية وسهولة التواصل. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن التفاعل الأكاديمي الفعال هو إنجاز يُبنى بشكل تعاوني، ويُعطي الأولوية للراحة النفسية للجمهور والاستقلالية الفكرية. تدعو هذه النتائج إلى تحول نظري أوسع في دراسات الخطاب، مع التركيز على العناصر الاجتماعية البراغمية كعامل رئيسي في فهم بناء المعنى التفاعلي في الخطاب الأكاديمي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأدب اللغوي، الخطاب الأكاديمي، عدم تماثل القوة، البراغمية الاجتماعية.