



Generational Differences in Politeness Strategies in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Workplace Communication: A Narrative Review of Theories, Practices, and Emerging Trends

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ABSTRACT

Politeness in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and workplace communication is a vital pragmatic resource for maintaining professionalism, managing relationships, and negotiating intercultural interactions. This narrative review synthesises major theoretical perspectives, Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, Leech's Politeness Principle, Spencer-Oatey's Rapport Management, and Culpeper's (Im)politeness Framework, to trace how politeness strategies evolve across generations and digital contexts. The review highlights distinctive communicative preferences between Generation Y (Gen Y) and Generation Z (Gen Z), particularly in their approaches to formality, directness, and digital etiquette in professional English use. Drawing from Southeast Asian studies, it identifies a persistent gap in ESP-oriented research that integrates generational and regional perspectives. The paper proposes a multi-framework approach to understanding generational politeness in digital workplaces and outlines implications for ESP pedagogy and workplace communication training. Findings underscore the need for culturally grounded and generation-responsive ESP curricula that foster pragmatic competence, digital awareness, and intergenerational communication effectiveness.

Keywords: politeness; ESP communication; generational differences; digital pragmatics

INTRODUCTION

Politeness, within the field of pragmatics, refers to the strategic use of language to manage interpersonal relationships and maintain social harmony. It enables speakers to convey respect, mitigate potential conflicts, and preserve each other's social "face." While the underlying goal of politeness is universal, its expression is culturally and contextually bound (Arnawa et al., 2022; Daar et al., 2023; Sembiring et al., 2023). Individuals employ various linguistic strategies, such as indirect speech acts, hedging, or honorifics, to navigate hierarchies, avoid imposition, and foster cooperation in communication.

In workplace communication, particularly within ESP, politeness assumes a professional dimension. It functions not merely as a social courtesy but as a strategic competence that sustains collaboration, trust, and mutual respect in specialised environments such as engineering, healthcare, and business. In multilingual and multicultural workplaces, pragmatic awareness enables employees to communicate effectively across linguistic and cultural boundaries, reducing misunderstanding and maintaining professionalism (Hartini et al., 2023; Nursanti et al., 2023; Nurjaleka et al., 2021). Demonstrating politeness also enhances professional image, fosters teamwork, and promotes client satisfaction (Mulyadi et al., 2023).

Recent shifts toward digitalised workplace interactions have redefined how politeness is enacted. Digital platforms such as email, messaging apps, and social media introduce multimodal cues, emojis, punctuation, tone markers, and response timing that convey empathy and respect in virtual communication (Revita et al., 2023).

However, these evolving norms also blur traditional markers of formality, creating generational differences in how appropriateness is perceived. Studies in Southeast Asia suggest that cultural

Background continues to influence how politeness is expressed and interpreted in digital contexts, underscoring the need for context-sensitive digital etiquette (Hartini et al., 2023; Arafah & Hasyim, 2023).

Generational variation further complicates these dynamics. Gen Y (Millennials), often described as digital pioneers, value flexibility and relational harmony, frequently preferring communication that balances professionalism with interpersonal warmth (Adiwijaya & Nurmala, 2023; Putra et al., 2023). Conversely, Gen Z, known as digital natives, favour brevity, directness, and visual expressiveness in their communication, reflecting their immersion in fast-paced, multimedia environments (Tarihoran et al., 2022; Febriana & Mujib, 2024). These contrasting styles highlight the importance of understanding politeness as a dynamic, generationally adaptive phenomenon shaped by technological affordances and socio-cultural expectations (Andriani et al., 2022).

Despite increasing research on workplace communication, studies that situate politeness within ESP and Southeast Asian contexts remain limited. Existing scholarship often draws heavily on Western-centric models, leaving gaps in how politeness is negotiated in culturally diverse, multilingual, and digital professional settings (Nurjaleka et al., 2021; Hartini et al., 2023). Addressing this gap is vital for both pragmatic research and ESP pedagogy, as effective workplace communication increasingly requires cultural intelligence and intergenerational awareness.

To address this, the present paper employs a narrative review approach to synthesise and interpret existing scholarship on politeness in ESP and workplace communication, focusing on intergenerational (Gen Y and Gen Z) and digitally mediated discourse. Sources were purposely selected from recent academic and indexed journal publications released between 2021 and 2025 in linguistics, pragmatics, ESP, communication, education, sociolinguistics, digital media, and workplace studies, particularly within Southeast Asian contexts. Foundational theories proposed by key figures in linguistic pragmatics and politeness theory informed the theoretical framing, while contemporary empirical studies were reviewed to trace theoretical evolution and identify contextual gaps.

Research Aim and Objectives

This paper aims to construct an integrative understanding of how politeness evolves across generations and digital platforms in ESP workplace communication. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Compare key theoretical frameworks of politeness and their relevance to ESP contexts.
2. Examine how Gen Y and Gen Z differ in applying politeness strategies in professional and digital communication.
3. Identify research gaps within Southeast Asian contexts and propose implications for ESP pedagogy and workplace training.

Theoretical Background on Politeness

Brown & Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory

Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory is a seminal framework in pragmatics that defines how individuals mitigate threats to face using specific strategies. The theory outlines four main strategies: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record. Bald on record involves direct communication without any minimisation of imposition, used when clarity is prioritised over face-saving. Positive politeness emphasises closeness and seeks to build camaraderie by recognising the hearer's desires. Negative politeness aims to recognise the hearer's desire not to be imposed upon, often employing indirectness and deference. Finally, off-record strategies involve indirect language that allows multiple interpretations, thus minimising the imposition by allowing the hearer to interpret the intention as desired (Rahman & Kurniati, 2021).

Despite its widespread usage and influence on pragmatic research, the theory has faced several critiques. One of the primary criticisms is the claim of universality, as politeness strategies can vary significantly across different cultures. Researchers have pointed out that what Brown and Levinson propose might not be applicable to all



linguistic and cultural contexts, highlighting the theory's Western-centric bias (Nurjaleka et al., 2021). Additionally, the theory's applicability to digital communication has been questioned, as digital interactions often lack the situational and non-verbal cues that are available in face-to-face communication, challenging how politeness is understood and expressed in technologically mediated environments (Yaqin et al., 2022).

In contemporary workplace and ESP studies, Brown & Levinson's model provides applicable baseline concepts such as face-threatening acts, but often requires supplementation with culturally and digitally grounded frameworks.

Alternative and Complementary Models

Leech's Politeness Principle, developed in 1983 and expanded in 2014, offers a set of maxims aimed at maintaining social harmony and minimising face-threatening acts in communication. The principle is structured around six key maxims: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. Each maxim serves a specific role in facilitating polite interactions. The tact maxim focuses on reducing imposition, while the generosity maxim addresses selflessness. Approbation emphasises praise, modesty promotes humility, agreement encourages consensus, and sympathy ensures emotional support (Rasna et al., 2024). Leech's expansion in 2014 included a greater emphasis on pragmatic contexts and introduced nuances considering cultural variations and the dynamic nature of politeness. The principles serve as a foundational guideline in pragmatic linguistics and emphasise the critical role of linguistic choices in maintaining social cohesion (Nurjaleka et al., 2021).

Spencer-Oatey's Rapport Management framework, introduced in 2000 and expanded in 2008, provides a comprehensive approach to understanding interpersonal interactions, with an emphasis on maintaining and negotiating rapport within communication contexts (Sutikno et al., 2023). Initially, in 2000, Spencer-Oatey defined rapport management as an integral component of interpersonal communication, influenced by social goals, relational history, and cultural contexts (Sutikno et al., 2023). Her work highlighted the variability of rapport strategies based on individual and cultural expectations, underscoring the importance of context in communication. By 2008, Spencer-Oatey had refined her framework to integrate emotional, personal, and professional dimensions of rapport, advocating for heightened cultural sensitivity. She emphasised that effective communication, particularly in multicultural and professional settings, requires an awareness of diverse communicative expectations and styles (Francis et al., 2023). This expanded model, supported by empirical research, underscores the critical role of managing rapport to enhance collaboration and minimise misunderstandings in diverse environments (Agustin et al., 2024).

Culpeper's (Im)politeness Framework provides a comprehensive analysis of how both politeness and impoliteness are manifested in communication, extending traditional theories by emphasising intentionality and the influence of social context. It differentiates between positive politeness, which enhances relationships through compliments or empathy, and negative politeness, which respects an individual's desire for autonomy through indirectness or hedging (Nursanti et al., 2023). The framework also details impoliteness strategies, such as bald-on-record communication where direct speech disregards face-threatening implications, and tactics that deliberately harm the addressee's face, like insults or coercion (Ramli et al., 2023). Culpeper highlights the significance of social context in interpreting these communicative acts, stressing that factors like cultural norms, relationships, and situational dynamics crucially impact the effectiveness and interpretation of politeness strategies (Rasna et al., 2024). The framework is unique in focusing on the speaker's intention, recognising that impoliteness may be employed to assert dominance or express dissatisfaction, thereby enriching our understanding of the communicative process (Nurjaleka et al., 2021).

Together, these models reveal that politeness is not a fixed construct but a continuum of relational strategies shaped by intent, context, and culture. For intergenerational ESP communication, combining these frameworks enables a more holistic lens. There is potential to apply a multi-framework approach

combining politeness theories and rapport management to generational analysis, aiming to better understand communication dynamics across different age cohorts. The integration of frameworks like Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, Leech's Politeness Principle, Spencer-Oatey's Rapport Management, and Culpeper's

(Im)politeness Framework could offer a comprehensive lens to analyse how different generations perceive and employ politeness strategies. For instance, Brown and Levinson's emphasis on face-saving acts can be juxtaposed with Spencer-Oatey's focus on rapport management to assess how different age groups prioritise relational goals in communication (Nurjaleka et al., 2021; Nursanti et al., 2023). Additionally, Leech's maxims, with their nuances in politeness strategies, can be compared with Culpeper's impoliteness strategies to explore generational preferences and tendencies toward politeness or assertiveness in various contexts (Daulay et al., 2022).

Such a comprehensive approach would allow for a nuanced exploration of how communication strategies evolve across generations, influenced by cultural, social, and technological changes. To illustrate the theoretical distinctions and interconnections discussed, Table 1 summarises their key concepts and relevance to ESP and intergenerational communication.

Table 1. Summary of Key Politeness Frameworks and Their Relevance to ESP and Intergenerational Communication

Framework	Core Focus	Key Concepts / Features	Relevance
Brown & Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987)	Managing "face" through politeness strategies.	Positive and negative politeness; mitigation of face-threatening acts.	Forms the foundation for analysing deference, indirectness, and relational strategies across generations.
Leech's Politeness Principle (1983, 2014)	Maintaining social harmony via pragmatic maxims.	Six maxims: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy; later expanded to include contextual and cultural sensitivity.	Explains how speakers maintain cooperation and reduce imposition in professional ESP settings.
Spencer-Oatey's Rapport Management (2000, 2008)	Negotiating and sustaining interpersonal rapport.	Emphasises face, sociality rights, and interactional goals; integrates emotional, professional, and cultural dimensions.	Illuminates how rapport is built and maintained across generational and cultural boundaries in workplace communication.
Culpeper's (Im)politeness Framework (2011)	Analysing both politeness and impoliteness as strategic acts.	Differentiates between positive/negative politeness, as well as impoliteness, focusing on intention, power, and context.	Helpful in examining assertiveness, conflict, and digital discourse styles among younger professionals.

Building on the frameworks summarised in Table 1, this synthesis enhances understanding of generational communication styles, thereby facilitating more effective intergenerational interactions and collaborations.

Politeness in Esp and Workplace Communication

Politeness in ESP and workplace communication is integral to effective interaction within professional environments. In ESP, which focuses on specialised language for academic and workplace contexts, politeness transcends mere grammar and vocabulary, encompassing pragmatic competence essential for respectful and effective interpersonal exchanges. This is particularly critical because ESP learners must navigate varied professional settings where cultural norms around politeness can differ significantly, affecting communication styles and expectations (H. H. Dewi et al., 2023). The emphasis on politeness in workplace communication involves employing respectful language, maintaining appropriate tones, and utilising strategic linguistic elements to minimise impositions, such as hedging and indirect requests. These strategies help foster positive professional relationships and ensure smooth, respectful interactions among colleagues and clients (Suhardiman et al., 2024). The

inclusion of politeness training in ESP programs, therefore, enhances learners' communicative competence,



preparing them for the nuances of real-world professional engagements where effective communication is key. This preparation is vital as it allows ESP learners to not only acquire language proficiency but also align their communication practices with professional standards and expectations (Nursanti et al., 2023).

Politeness in Workplace Contexts

Politeness in workplace communication, including emails, meetings, and intercultural contexts, functions as a tool for negotiating hierarchy and mitigating conflicts. In emails, politeness strategies involve linguistic choices that respect hierarchy and facilitate clear, respectful exchanges, as seen in studies emphasising how user motives like personal integrative needs can enhance email communication satisfaction (Anumudu et al., 2021). Meetings, particularly virtual ones, have highlighted the role of organisational commitment and the perception of shared goals in fostering effective collaboration, which politeness can enhance by ensuring respectful dialogue and equitable participation (Prasetyo et al., 2022). Intercultural communication requires sensitivity to different politeness norms, as cultural variations can affect the perceived appropriateness and effectiveness of politeness strategies. Understanding these differences through frameworks like Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is crucial for minimising misunderstandings and facilitating smooth interactions (Nurjaleka et al., 2021). Collectively, politeness in these contexts not only facilitates smooth communication but also supports a respectful negotiation of social hierarchies and contributes to conflict avoidance and resolution in diverse workplace settings (Nursanti et al., 2023).

Politeness in Digital Communication

In the landscape of digital communication platforms such as WhatsApp, Slack, and LinkedIn, politeness manifests in diverse ways tailored to each platform's context and audience. On WhatsApp, a lean towards informal communication is prevalent, with users frequently deploying emojis, abbreviations, and shortened texts to convey friendliness and emotional expressiveness. However, the absence of non-verbal cues often leads to misunderstandings, necessitating the use of emojis as a compensatory tool for emotional clarity (Revita et al., 2023). Slack, while primarily used for professional interactions, offers flexibility in tone, allowing for a blend of professionalism and casualness, maintained through strict adherence to channel etiquette and context-sensitive communication (Nursanti et al., 2023). LinkedIn, in contrast, demands a more formal tone, emphasising the importance of professional language and politeness, particularly in connection requests and engagements, which require personalised and respectful communication (Arafah & Hasyim, 2023). Across all platforms, the shift towards informal communication styles, compounded by the lack of non-verbal cues, highlights the evolving nature of politeness as digital etiquette continues to adapt to new forms of interaction.

Generational Perspective on Politeness

Generational Cohorts and Communication Styles

Generational cohorts exhibit distinct communication styles shaped by their unique sociocultural backgrounds and technological fluency. Gen Y, often referred to as Millennials, typically value courtesy, professionalism, and formality in their communication. This cohort has grown up in environments where structured and polite language is emphasised, particularly within professional settings, aligning with traditional norms of respect and formal engagement (Helmi et al., 2021). Conversely, Gen Z is characterised by a preference for directness and brevity, heavily influenced by the rise of digital communication, which prioritises efficiency and informal exchanges. This generation is adept at navigating digital platforms, often using casual language, emojis, and abbreviated text forms, reflecting their comfort with technology and a more relaxed approach to communication (Hidayat & Hidayat, 2020). The divergence between these cohorts highlights the evolving nature of communication practices, driven largely by technological advancements and shifting cultural attitudes (Andriani et al., 2022).

Studies Comparing Generational Differences

Studies on generational differences in workplace contexts reveal distinct approaches to hierarchy, teamwork, and professional tone between cohorts. For instance, research shows Baby Boomers and Gen X typically value



hierarchy and professionalism, often preferring structured environments with clear chains of command. These generations are also recognised for their emphasis on workplace formality and adherence to traditional ethos in team-based settings (Andriani et al., 2022). On the contrary, Millennials and Gen Z, often referred to as digital natives, tend to favour flatter organisational structures and collaborative teamwork, alongside informal communication styles that accommodate their comfort with digital interactions (Almadana et al., 2021). The contrast between digital natives and digital migrants, those who adapt to technology later in life, further underscores these generational divides. Digital natives, being inherently familiar with technology, exhibit distinct communication styles characterised by agility and informality, differing markedly from digital migrants who typically maintain traditional communication approaches and may face challenges in adapting to rapidly evolving digital tools and platforms. Understanding these generational nuances is crucial for fostering intergenerational harmony and interaction within modern workplace environments.

Implications for ESP

The implications of intergenerational workplace expectations for the ESP curriculum and employability training are significant, particularly when considering the mismatch of expectations among different age groups. In workplaces where multiple generations coexist, varying values and expectations can create challenges, especially in terms of communication and teamwork. This generational divide necessitates an ESP curriculum that is responsive to these differences, integrating skills such as effective communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, which are universally valued across age groups (Widarto et al., 2023). The need for an adaptable curriculum is further emphasised by the demand for digital literacy and technology skills, which are particularly essential for younger workers (Suhardiman et al., 2024). Employability training must focus on bridging these gaps by preparing students to work harmoniously in diverse teams while equipping them with the skills to succeed in a technologically advanced workplace. Innovative teaching strategies, such as project-based learning, have been shown to effectively improve learning outcomes in ESP classes, thereby enhancing the overall employability of students (Hidayati et al., 2023). By addressing these intergenerational expectations, ESP programs can better prepare students for the contemporary workforce.

Gaps in Literature

A review of the existing literature on politeness in ESP and workplace communication reveals several interrelated gaps concerning theoretical focus, methodological scope, and contextual relevance. Although politeness has been widely studied in pragmatic and sociolinguistic research, its application within ESP and Southeast Asian workplace settings remains underdeveloped.

First, the majority of studies on workplace politeness rely heavily on Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, treating it as a universal framework (Nurjaleka et al., 2021). While this model provides a foundational understanding of facework, its Western-centric orientation often overlooks the collectivist and hierarchical cultures prevalent in Southeast Asia. As a result, region-specific norms, such as deference to authority, indirectness, and relational harmony, remain insufficiently theorised within ESP discourse. This theoretical gap underscores the need for integrated models that combine face-saving, rapport management, and context sensitivity to explain politeness across cultural and generational boundaries.

Second, there is an imbalance between theoretical discussion and empirical validation. Many works remain descriptive or conceptual, offering limited data-driven insights into how politeness strategies actually operate in Southeast Asian workplaces (Sembiring et al., 2023). The scarcity of ESP-specific studies restricts our understanding of how pragmatic norms manifest in discipline-based English communication, particularly in fields such as engineering, business, or healthcare, where clarity and hierarchy coexist with interpersonal diplomacy (H. H. Dewi et al., 2023; Nursanti et al., 2023).

Third, the generational dimension of politeness has been largely overlooked in ESP scholarship. Although generational diversity has been explored in organisational studies, few linguistic investigations compare how Gen Y and Gen Z professionals differ in their politeness strategies within workplace English. This absence limits our understanding of how digital fluency, communication preferences, and pragmatic expectations evolve across cohorts (Ihsaniyati et al., 2023; Andriani et al., 2022). Given the increasing presence of Gen Z in the workforce,

understanding these differences is critical for designing intergenerationally responsive ESP curricula.

Fourth, the literature inadequately addresses digital workplace communication, despite the fact that most professional interactions today occur through mediated platforms such as email, chat, and social media (Ihsaniyati et al., 2023; Revita et al., 2023). While some studies have explored digital etiquette, they seldom connect these findings to politeness frameworks or pragmatic teaching in ESP. This omission limits the relevance of current models, which were primarily designed for face-to-face communication.

Finally, there is a notable regional research gap. Despite the growing number of Southeast Asian publications on politeness, most focus on general pragmatics rather than ESP or professional discourse (Jauhari, 2024). Malaysia, Indonesia, and neighbouring nations offer linguistically diverse and multicultural workplaces that are ideal for examining how politeness is negotiated across language varieties and professional domains. However, this potential remains underexplored, resulting in limited pedagogical and practical insights applicable to local or regional training programs.

By bridging theoretical, contextual, and generational gaps, this review advances a more comprehensive understanding of politeness as a dynamic, adaptive, and culturally grounded phenomenon in professional English communication.

DISCUSSION

Politeness is a dynamic and context-sensitive construct that evolves across cultures, generations, and communicative modes. In the ESP workplace, it serves as both a linguistic and social strategy, striking a balance between clarity, respect, and relational harmony in professional exchanges. The synthesis of theoretical and empirical insights in this review demonstrates that politeness cannot be adequately explained through a single framework; instead, it requires an integrative, context-responsive model that accounts for cultural diversity, technological mediation, and generational change.

From a theoretical standpoint, Brown and Levinson's (1987) notion of face remains useful for understanding hierarchical and deferential communication, especially in Southeast Asian workplaces where professional interactions often prioritise social hierarchy and respect (Nurjaleka et al., 2021). However, its limitations become apparent in multicultural and digital settings, where politeness extends beyond speech acts to include multimodal cues such as emojis, punctuation, and digital tone management (Yaqin et al., 2022). Leech's (1983, 2014) Politeness Principle adds a layer of cooperative intent, explaining how speakers maintain interpersonal harmony through tact and agreement, which is essential for teamwork in multilingual environments (Rasna et al., 2024). Meanwhile, Spencer-Oatey's (2008) Rapport Management shifts attention toward relational negotiation, clarifying how communication success depends on managing expectations and rights within interactional goals (Sutikno et al., 2023; Francis et al., 2023). Finally, Culpeper's (2011) (Im)politeness Framework introduces the crucial dimension of intentionality, offering insight into how perceived rudeness or directness may emerge from pragmatic misalignment rather than communicative failure (Ramli et al., 2023).

Together, these frameworks underscore that politeness is not a fixed code but a relational competence, one that is culturally grounded yet adaptable to evolving contexts. In Southeast Asia, this competence intertwines with collectivist values such as deference, empathy, and respect for authority (Hartini et al., 2023). However, as digitalisation reshapes communication norms, these cultural expectations now coexist with the generational pragmatics of younger professionals, creating both harmony and tension in the workplace.

Generational analysis reveals that Gen Y and Gen Z differ not merely in language use but in their underlying pragmatic orientation. Gen Y tends to align with negative politeness strategies, formal, respectful, and indirect, reflecting their transitional experience between analogue and digital communication. Gen Z, by contrast, exhibits positive politeness or on-record directness, valuing clarity, authenticity, and immediacy (Adiwijaya & Nurmala, 2023; Febriana & Mujib, 2024). Applying Spencer-Oatey's framework, these distinctions can be seen as differing approaches to rapport management: Gen Y sustains harmony through hierarchy and formality, while Gen Z builds rapport through informality and technological connectedness.



Importantly, these generational variations do not imply a breakdown in politeness norms but a reconfiguration of pragmatic expectations. For instance, a concise or emoji-accompanied message from a Gen Z employee may be intended as friendly engagement but perceived by Gen Y as overly casual or abrupt. Conversely, a formally worded email from a Gen Y superior may appear distant to Gen Z subordinates. Such scenarios exemplify Culpeper's notion of perceived impoliteness, which arises not from intention but from differing social interpretations.

From an ESP perspective, this evolving landscape calls for a shift from teaching politeness as fixed formulae toward developing adaptive pragmatic competence. ESP learners must be trained to interpret contextual cues, understand generational preferences, and select politeness strategies that are appropriate to both the audience and the medium. Integrating digital pragmatics, such as email etiquette, emoji interpretation, and multimodal discourse analysis, into ESP curricula can help bridge generational divides and improve intercultural communication effectiveness (Hidayati et al., 2023).

Furthermore, workplace and HR training should incorporate awareness of intergenerational communication, enabling employees to navigate differences in tone, formality, and response norms. In collectivist Southeast Asian contexts, where harmony and face are central, such awareness ensures that digital efficiency does not compromise relational respect. This aligns with Leech's tact and sympathy maxims and Spencer-Oatey's sociality rights, promoting professional collaboration that is both efficient and culturally sensitive (Sutikno et al., 2023; Nursanti et al., 2023).

Conceptually, this synthesis suggests that politeness in ESP workplace communication can be understood through three intersecting dimensions:

1. Relational Dimension: drawing from Brown & Levinson and Spencer-Oatey, focusing on managing face and rapport.
2. Contextual Dimension: drawing from Leech, highlighting cultural and situational appropriateness.
3. Generational-Digital Dimension: extending Culpeper's perspective to mediated, intergenerational communication in Southeast Asian settings.

These dimensions collectively form what may be described as a Generational Politeness in ESP Model: a conceptual lens through which professional English users negotiate relational goals, cultural expectations, and digital practices across age groups.

Implications for ESP Teaching and Training

The synthesis of theories and findings in this review offers several pedagogical and professional implications for ESP instruction and workplace communication training, particularly within multicultural and intergenerational Southeast Asian contexts. Politeness should not be treated merely as a set of linguistic conventions but as a transferable pragmatic competence that integrates cultural awareness, digital literacy, and generational sensitivity.

First, ESP curricula should explicitly incorporate modules on pragmatic and intercultural communication. Learners need to understand how politeness operates across hierarchical and cultural boundaries, using frameworks such as Brown and Levinson's (1987) face theory and Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport management to analyse real workplace interactions. Teaching materials can include authentic tasks such as email exchanges, meeting dialogues, and intercultural negotiation simulations. For example, case-based discussions can help students identify appropriate degrees of formality or indirectness when communicating with colleagues of different ages or ranks (H. H. Dewi et al., 2023; Nursanti et al., 2023).

Second, given the influence of digitalisation on workplace discourse, digital pragmatics training should be integrated into ESP courses. Activities such as rewriting impolite email threads, comparing text-based vs. face-to-face tones, or analysing emoji use across professional contexts can promote awareness of how politeness functions online. These tasks encourage reflection on Leech's (2014) tact and agreement maxims and Culpeper's



(2011) intentionality perspective, fostering adaptive communication in hybrid or remote settings (Hidayati et al., 2023; Revita et al., 2023)..

Third, ESP educators should design intergenerational communication awareness modules that enable learners to examine the differences in language preferences, feedback styles, and response patterns between Gen Y and Gen Z. Group tasks can require mixed-age participants to collaborate on mock projects, discuss misunderstandings, and identify strategies that preserve rapport. Such pedagogy aligns with Spencer-Oatey's (2008) emphasis on sociality rights, ensuring mutual respect and role recognition in interaction. The goal is to cultivate learners' ability to shift their communicative register depending on interlocutor expectations and generational background.

Fourth, workplace and HR training programs can apply similar principles by integrating politeness- focused communication workshops into professional development. These may involve email and message tone analysis to highlight cross-generational differences in digital communication, role- playing exercises that foster empathy and pragmatic flexibility among intergenerational teams, and reflective feedback activities that encourage participants to recognise their own communicative biases and view perceived "impoliteness" as a possible generational difference rather than a sign of disrespect.

Such initiatives not only improve professional collaboration but also align with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on Quality Education, promoting lifelong learning and intercultural competence in the workforce (Lubis et al., 2024).

Ultimately, integrating politeness into ESP teaching enhances employability skills, particularly in communication, teamwork, and intercultural intelligence (Widarto et al., 2023). By emphasising relational and digital competence alongside language accuracy, educators and trainers can prepare learners for real-world communication demands that span generations, technologies, and cultures.

Overall, incorporating impoliteness awareness into ESP curricula and workplace training equips learners to navigate evolving communication norms effectively, thereby strengthening employability and promoting productive collaboration within linguistically and culturally diverse professional environments.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Politeness remains a cornerstone of effective communication in ESP, particularly within diverse and intergenerational workplaces. As this review demonstrates, politeness extends beyond linguistic courtesy; it represents a strategic and adaptive competence that enables professionals to maintain relationships, manage hierarchies, and express empathy across cultural and digital boundaries.

By synthesising major frameworks, Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, Leech's (1983, 2014) Politeness Principle, Spencer-Oatey's (2008) Rapport Management, and Culpeper's (2011) (Im)politeness Framework, this study proposes a multi-framework understanding of politeness suited to Southeast Asian and digital ESP contexts. Collectively, these theories reveal that politeness is best viewed as a relational and generationally adaptive phenomenon, shaped by intent, context, and medium.

The comparison between Gen Y and Gen Z underscores how generational experience and digital fluency influence pragmatic choices. Gen Y professionals generally display a preference for negative politeness strategies that reflect formality and respect, while Gen Z professionals favour positive politeness and directness, prioritising clarity, efficiency, and peer connection (Andriani et al., 2022; Adiwijaya & Nurmala, 2023; Febriana & Mujib, 2024). Recognising these generational distinctions enables educators and employers to foster communication that is inclusive, efficient, and respectful.

In pedagogical terms, the findings highlight the need to integrate digital and intercultural pragmatics into ESP teaching, moving beyond fixed politeness formulae toward situational awareness and adaptability. In professional terms, this review supports the design of workplace training programs that promote intergenerational understanding and digital etiquette as part of communicative competence. Such initiatives strengthen employability and workplace harmony, key outcomes aligned with both linguistic education and

sustainable workforce development (Suhardiman et al., 2024; Widarto et al., 2023).

Future Research Directions

While this narrative review offers valuable theoretical and pedagogical insights, several research avenues remain open for further exploration. Future studies could include empirical validation through mixed-method or corpus-based analyses to examine how Gen Y and Gen Z professionals actually enact politeness strategies in ESP or workplace settings. Comparative regional research across Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and the Philippines is also needed to understand how cultural norms shape generational pragmatics. Additionally, digital discourse analysis could explore politeness markers in new communication modes, such as virtual meetings, workplace messaging platforms, and AI-assisted interactions. Finally, pedagogical experimentation should evaluate the impact of explicit pragmatic instruction in ESP programs on learners' intergenerational and intercultural awareness.

In conclusion, understanding politeness as a generationally and digitally mediated pragmatic competence enhances both linguistic theory and applied ESP practice. It encourages a view of communication not as static politeness rules but as negotiated interaction, dynamic, contextually aware, and responsive to the evolving realities of globalised and intergenerational workplaces.

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