



Politeness Strategies in Multicultural Interaction: A Pragmatic Study of Urban Communities

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Abstract

This study investigates politeness strategies in multicultural urban communities through an empirical qualitative pragmatic design based on naturally occurring conversational data and ethnographic observation. The analysis demonstrates that urban speakers employ indirect requests, mitigated refusals, layered apologies, humor, and collective framing as adaptive facework resources in contexts marked by cultural heterogeneity and interactional uncertainty. Findings indicate that indirectness functions as pragmatic caution, enabling relational alignment without presuming shared normative expectations, while humor operates as an affiliative tool that simultaneously carries intercultural risk. Institutional environments such as workplaces, service encounters, faith-based spaces, and digital platforms further shape politeness realization by imposing hierarchical constraints and medium-specific pressures. Quantitative distributions of coded strategies confirm the centrality of mitigation and preparatory moves in high-imposition speech acts. The study advances politeness theory by emphasizing the emergence of hybrid urban norms generated through contact, mediation, and symbolic sensitivity. Methodologically, it contributes a discourse-pragmatic framework that captures politeness as a negotiated civic practice sustaining multicultural coexistence.

Keywords: Politeness strategies, Multicultural interaction, Urban pragmatics, Facework, Discourse analysis.



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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary pragmatic inquiry has increasingly positioned politeness not as a peripheral etiquette phenomenon but as a core mechanism through which social actors negotiate face, power, and relational legitimacy within the intensified mobility of global urban life, where multicultural contact is no longer episodic but structurally embedded in everyday interaction (Handriani et al., 2025). Recent developments in politeness theory have moved beyond static universals toward context-sensitive models that foreground the socio-indexical work of linguistic choices, revealing how speakers calibrate indirectness, mitigation, and affiliative cues in response to shifting communal norms and intercultural expectations (Alaoui, 2025). Within this landscape, urban communities emerge as particularly complex pragmatic ecologies, since linguistic diversity, socio-economic stratification, and transnational cultural repertoires converge to produce interactional conditions in which politeness becomes a contested and dynamically reconfigured resource rather than a stable code.

Empirical scholarship has generated important insights into the variability of politeness strategies across cultural domains, demonstrating that pragmatic competence is inseparable from the sociocultural logics that authorize particular forms of deference, solidarity, or strategic ambiguity. Studies on cross-cultural communication have shown that politeness is frequently realized through indirect speech acts and relational negotiation, rather than explicit markers of respect, complicating earlier assumptions of transparent pragmatic equivalence across languages (Handriani et al., 2025). Research on off-record strategies, for instance, illustrates how honor and social legitimacy may be negotiated through ritualized indirectness in culturally saturated practices, indicating that politeness operates as a moral economy of interaction rather than a mere linguistic ornament (Yaqin, 2025). Comparative analyses of invitations across communicative cultures further confirm that speech acts function as sites of sociocultural

encoding, where pragmatic meaning is contingent upon historically sedimented expectations about obligation, intimacy, and autonomy (Shorokhova & Peña-Jiménez, 2025).

Despite these advances, the literature continues to exhibit conceptual and empirical asymmetries that limit its explanatory reach, particularly when politeness is examined in multicultural urban settings characterized by rapid contextual shifts. Much existing work remains anchored either in relatively bounded rural or community-specific environments, where normative frames are more stable, leaving unresolved how facework is recalibrated in heterogeneous metropolitan interactions marked by anonymity and fluid affiliation (ElKamel et al., 2025). Even when institutional settings are addressed, such as hospitality discourse, analyses often isolate gendered or occupational dimensions without fully theorizing how multicultural urban contact reshapes pragmatic expectations at the intersection of service, migration, and globalized communicative styles (Dari et al., 2025). Similarly, educational borderland studies illuminate politeness socialization across cultural landscapes but do not sufficiently capture the adult urban interactional marketplace where multiple politeness regimes compete simultaneously (Andini et al., 2025).

The unresolved problem becomes more urgent when considering that multicultural interaction is increasingly mediated through institutional, diplomatic, and digital arenas where pragmatic misalignment carries tangible consequences for social cohesion and communicative effectiveness. Interpreting practices in high-stakes diplomatic negotiation, for example, reveal that politeness is inseparable from role balance and pragmatic strategy, suggesting that miscalibration may distort not only interpersonal rapport but also political meaning (Bai & Tang, 2025). Online multicultural interaction further complicates this terrain, as humour and pragmatic play function simultaneously as affiliative bridges and as potential sites of exclusion, underscoring the fragile boundaries of politeness in digitally accelerated urban publics (Jegede, 2025). Traditional greeting practices likewise demonstrate that even seemingly routine politeness rituals encode deep cultural variation, indicating that everyday interaction in multicultural cities is saturated with latent pragmatic negotiations that remain insufficiently theorized (Adebayo et al., 2025).

Current scholarship also points to underexplored speech-act domains and awareness dimensions that are crucial for a fuller account of politeness in multicultural urban communities. Socio-pragmatic studies of ostensible commissives in Saudi Arabic, for instance, show how commitment can be interactionally performed without literal obligation, highlighting the strategic elasticity of politeness in culturally specific communicative economies (Al-Zubeiry & Alzahrani, 2025). Work on politeness awareness among university students suggests that pragmatic knowledge is unevenly distributed and socially conditioned, raising questions about how urban multicultural actors acquire, contest, or hybridize politeness norms across linguistic boundaries (Haddaoui, 2025). Even research focused on English conversational politeness tends to abstract interaction from the dense sociocultural layering of multilingual cities, where English often functions as a contact code embedded in unequal symbolic economies (Salim et al., 2025). Taken together, these trajectories indicate that politeness research has not yet fully articulated how multicultural urban communities generate emergent pragmatic norms through everyday relational negotiation.

This study addresses these gaps by investigating politeness strategies as interactional resources through which speakers in multicultural urban communities manage face, construct social belonging, and navigate the pragmatics of diversity under conditions of intensified contact and normative plurality. It aims to contribute theoretically by refining context-sensitive accounts of politeness that foreground urban heterogeneity as a generative site of pragmatic innovation, while also contributing methodologically through an analytic framework capable of capturing the fluid interplay between cultural repertoires, situational demands, and strategic communicative choices in naturally occurring interaction. By positioning multicultural urban discourse as a critical testing ground for contemporary pragmatics, the research seeks to advance a more robust understanding of how politeness operates not as a static cultural script but as an adaptive, negotiated practice central to social life in global cities.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs an empirical qualitative pragmatic design, given that the investigation of politeness strategies in multicultural urban interaction requires naturally occurring communicative data rather than purely theoretical argumentation. The research was conducted in diverse urban communities characterized by multilingual and multicultural contact, where everyday interpersonal exchanges

provide a rich site for observing facework and politeness negotiation. Participants were adult residents from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds who regularly engage in intercultural communication within public, occupational, and community settings. A purposive sampling strategy was applied to ensure representation of interactional diversity, complemented by snowball sampling to access participants embedded in multicultural social networks. Data were collected through audio-recorded naturally occurring conversations in community spaces, supplemented by semi-structured ethnographic observations to contextualize interactional norms and situational constraints. This approach enabled the documentation of politeness strategies as they emerge dynamically in authentic urban discourse rather than in elicited or experimental conditions.

The primary research instrument consisted of an interactional pragmatic coding framework grounded in established politeness theory, which guided the systematic identification of strategies such as indirectness, mitigation, honorific usage, and relational alignment. To ensure analytic rigor, inter-coder reliability procedures were implemented through independent coding of selected data segments, followed by consensus-building discussions to refine category boundaries and enhance consistency. Data analysis was conducted using discourse-pragmatic methods, integrating speech act analysis, facework interpretation, and contextual sociocultural reading to capture how politeness operates as a negotiated resource in multicultural encounters. Ethical considerations were addressed through informed consent, anonymization of participant identities, and secure data handling protocols, particularly given the sensitivity of recording interpersonal communication in public urban environments. Overall, the methodological design aligns with the study's objective of advancing a context-sensitive understanding of politeness strategies as adaptive practices shaped by multicultural urban interaction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Interactional Facework and Indirectness in Urban Multicultural Encounters

Urban conversational data revealed that indirectness operated as a dominant politeness resource through which speakers managed face sensitivities in culturally heterogeneous encounters, particularly when interlocutors lacked shared assumptions about normative entitlement. Participants frequently selected mitigated request forms, conditional phrasing, and implicit stance markers as interactional safeguards, indicating that pragmatic caution functioned as a socially adaptive response to diversity. Such patterns resonate with cross-cultural pragmatic observations that politeness emerges through relational negotiation rather than fixed linguistic formulas (Handriani et al., 2025). The qualitative coding further demonstrated that indirectness was not merely avoidance but an active strategy for maintaining affiliative openness across cultural boundaries. These findings align with off-record orientations toward honor and social legitimacy documented in ritualized indirect practices, suggesting that urban discourse reproduces comparable moral economies under modern conditions (Yaqin, 2025).

A closer examination of naturally occurring exchanges indicated that speakers often balanced clarity with face-preserving ambiguity, especially in first-contact interactions within public and occupational spaces. This balance reflected an interactional logic where pragmatic meaning depended less on propositional content and more on the socio-indexical implications of speaking too directly. Similar dynamics have been identified in pragmatic analyses of pre-request speech acts, where preparatory moves serve as culturally inflected politeness calibrations (Revita et al., 2025). In multicultural urban contexts, these preparatory strategies became intensified because interlocutors anticipated divergent thresholds of imposition. The data suggested that indirectness served as a pragmatic buffer enabling communicative alignment without presuming intimacy. This observation parallels broader arguments that politeness frameworks must bridge contextual gaps rather than rely on universalized assumptions (Alaoui, 2025).

Empirical segments also revealed that commissive-like expressions were frequently deployed ostensibly, allowing speakers to display goodwill without binding commitment, particularly in interactions among acquaintances from different cultural groups. Such pragmatic maneuvering illustrates how urban politeness often involves strategic performativity rather than literal obligation. Comparable socio-pragmatic functions of ostensible commissives have been documented in Arabic interaction, where promises may operate as relational signals rather than contractual commitments (Al-Zubeiry & Alzahrani, 2025). In the present dataset, similar patterns occurred in service encounters and neighborhood conversations, where affiliative intent was foregrounded over enforceable responsibility.

These practices demonstrate that multicultural politeness is deeply tied to managing expectations under uncertainty. The findings contribute to pragmatic theory by emphasizing how urban diversity amplifies the need for flexible facework resources.

Quantitative tendencies extracted from coded qualitative data further clarified the distribution of major strategies, with indirect requests and mitigated refusals appearing as the most recurrent forms across interactional settings. The table below summarizes the frequency of key politeness strategies identified in the corpus, providing an empirical anchor for the interpretive claims discussed in surrounding analysis.

Table 1. Frequency of Politeness Strategy Categories across Urban Interactional Contexts

Politeness Strategy Category	Frequency (n)	Interactional Contexts Dominant
Indirect Requests and Pre-Requests	46	Public service, workplaces
Mitigated Refusals and Softened Disagree	38	Community meetings, peers
Honorifics and Formal Address	29	Intercultural first encounters
Humor as Affiliation	21	Informal multicultural groups

Source: Author's fieldwork data (2026)

The distribution indicates that indirectness and mitigation were structurally central, reflecting pragmatic pressures of multicultural coexistence. These patterns correspond with research on request and refusal strategies in ELF academic communication, where politeness emerges through rhetorical sequencing rather than isolated markers (Liu et al., 2025). The frequency of softened disagreement further suggests that urban speakers prioritize relational continuity even in moments of pragmatic friction. Such findings reinforce the claim that multicultural politeness is best understood as adaptive interactional labor rather than static etiquette.

Refusal practices within the dataset displayed nuanced variation, with speakers often embedding refusals inside explanations, apologies, or alternative offers to reduce potential face-threat. This aligns with pragmatic comparisons showing that refusal strategies are culturally patterned yet highly sensitive to bilingual and multilingual negotiation contexts (Fardi Shekarab, 2025). In multicultural urban exchanges, refusal mitigation became a crucial competence because direct negation risked being interpreted through incompatible cultural frames. Speakers frequently relied on deferential tone and temporizing expressions, producing refusals that remained interactionally cooperative. Such patterns echo findings on apology strategies among tourists, where politeness depends on managing intercultural expectations of accountability (Al Fraidan & Alhulaybi, 2025). The present results highlight refusal as a key site where multicultural pragmatics becomes socially consequential.

Humor emerged as another significant strategy, functioning as an affiliative bridge that reduced interpersonal distance in multicultural peer interactions. Participants employed light teasing, shared laughter, and playful exaggeration to signal solidarity without overstepping cultural boundaries. This pragmatic role of humor is consistent with arguments that online multicultural interactions rely on humor as both relational lubricant and potential site of exclusion (Jegade, 2025). In face-to-face urban discourse, humor similarly operated as a low-cost strategy for easing tension and creating temporary common ground. The data suggested that humor was most effective when speakers oriented to inclusivity rather than sarcasm. Such findings contribute to understanding politeness as multimodal affective alignment in diverse communities.

Gendered dimensions were also visible, particularly in hospitality and workplace settings where service roles shaped expectations of deference and warmth. Female speakers in customer-facing interactions displayed higher rates of mitigated directives and supportive backchanneling, reflecting institutionalized politeness labor. Comparable patterns have been documented in Jakarta hotel discourse, where gender intersects with professional norms to structure pragmatic performance (Dari et al., 2025). In the present urban corpus, gendered politeness was not deterministic but emerged through role-based interactional pressures. These findings suggest that multicultural politeness cannot be

separated from socio-economic positioning within urban service economies. Pragmatic theory benefits from integrating gender, labor, and intercultural contact as co-constitutive forces.

Educational and socialization trajectories also influenced politeness awareness, with participants who had formal intercultural training demonstrating more explicit meta-pragmatic monitoring. This observation corresponds with studies of politeness strategy awareness among university learners, where pragmatic competence is unevenly distributed and shaped by institutional exposure (Haddaoui, 2025). In multicultural urban communities, such awareness translated into cautious speech-act design and greater use of hedging. Speakers often articulated sensitivity to “different cultures” as a rationale for indirectness, revealing reflexive politeness ideologies. These ideologies indicate that multicultural interaction fosters pragmatic self-consciousness as part of communicative survival. The findings reinforce the importance of examining politeness not only as practice but also as socially circulating knowledge.

Cross-cultural variation in greeting rituals appeared prominently in initial encounters, where speakers navigated uncertainty through formal address terms, respectful gestures, or minimalistic salutations. Such variation echoes comparative research on traditional greetings in Nigerian communities, demonstrating that greetings encode deep cultural expectations about respect and belonging (Adebayo et al., 2025). In the urban dataset, participants often opted for neutralized greeting forms to avoid misrecognition of hierarchy. This neutralization reflects an emergent urban politeness norm oriented toward safe inclusivity rather than culturally specific elaboration. The results suggest that multicultural cities generate hybrid greeting practices that balance difference with interactional efficiency. These dynamics underscore the pragmatic creativity of urban communities under conditions of diversity.

The findings connect with broader evidence that multicultural politeness functions as a cohesion-maintaining resource within plural societies. Studies in Manokwari have emphasized politeness understanding as a means of sustaining unity across ethnicities, highlighting its social integrative role (Febriansyah et al., 2025). The present urban data similarly illustrate that indirectness, mitigation, and affiliative humor are not merely linguistic preferences but pragmatic infrastructures of coexistence. This section demonstrates that facework in multicultural interaction is shaped by contextual uncertainty, institutional pressures, and culturally diverse expectations. The empirical contribution lies in showing how politeness strategies operate as adaptive relational technologies within everyday urban discourse.

Speech-Act Variation and Institutional Constraints in Multicultural Urban Politeness

Urban multicultural interactions revealed that speech acts such as invitations, apologies, and directives were systematically reshaped by institutional norms and intercultural asymmetries, producing pragmatic outcomes that differed from culturally homogeneous settings. Participants frequently adjusted the form and sequencing of invitations to minimize potential imposition, indicating that speech-act realization was inseparable from perceived relational distance. Comparative work on invitations in Spanish and Russian communicative cultures similarly demonstrates that invitation strategies encode sociocultural expectations about obligation and intimacy, making them highly sensitive to contextual negotiation (Shorokhova & Peña-Jiménez, 2025). In the present dataset, invitations in public and workplace environments tended to rely on tentative framing rather than explicit propositional force. These findings suggest that multicultural urban politeness requires speech-act flexibility as an interactional competence rather than adherence to singular cultural scripts.

Apology strategies emerged as particularly salient in intercultural service encounters, where misunderstandings were often managed through layered expressions of regret, explanation, and relational reassurance. Participants rarely produced bare apologies, instead embedding them within accounts that framed responsibility in culturally neutral terms. Such patterns resonate with research on tourists’ apology strategies in Saudi Arabia, where apologies function as pragmatic tools for repairing intercultural rapport under conditions of unfamiliar norms (Al Fraidan & Alhulaybi, 2025). In multicultural urban discourse, apologies similarly served as face-restorative practices that protected both speaker and hearer from negative evaluation. The data indicated that apology forms were shaped not only by cultural background but also by institutional expectations of professionalism. This highlights how urban politeness is mediated through organizational role structures as much as through cultural variation.

Request speech acts displayed strong evidence of pragmatic accommodation, particularly among non-native speakers who oriented to local politeness expectations while drawing on their own linguistic repertoires. Participants often employed indirect interrogatives, modal verbs, and honorific address to signal deference in unfamiliar interactional spaces. Comparable findings appear in studies of Arabic request strategies by non-native speakers, where pragmatic adaptation becomes a key marker of communicative legitimacy (Al Izzah et al., 2026). In the present corpus, requests were frequently preceded by small talk or contextual justification, indicating heightened sensitivity to face-threat in multicultural contact zones. These practices demonstrate that speech acts in urban environments are rarely straightforward transactions, instead operating as negotiated social performances. The findings contribute to pragmatic scholarship by foregrounding multilingual adaptation as central to politeness realization.

Institutional discourse contexts further revealed that politeness strategies were constrained by hierarchical role relations, particularly in settings such as diplomatic interpretation, religious preaching, and formal service encounters. Speakers occupying intermediary roles often balanced competing politeness obligations, maintaining neutrality while facilitating relational alignment between parties. Research on interpreters in Sino-US diplomatic negotiations similarly emphasizes role balance as a pragmatic achievement shaped by politeness principles (Bai & Tang, 2025). In the urban data, analogous pressures emerged in multicultural mediation contexts such as community leadership meetings and intercultural workplace supervision. Such environments required speakers to manage face not only interpersonally but also institutionally, where pragmatic missteps could carry professional consequences. These findings underscore that multicultural politeness cannot be fully understood without accounting for institutional pragmatics.

Religious and moral discourse provided another domain where politeness strategies intersected with authority, spirituality, and communal identity. In recorded segments of public sermons and faith-based community interactions, speakers frequently combined directive illocutionary force with affiliative mitigation to sustain respect while maintaining moral positioning. Similar dynamics have been documented in Islamic preaching discourse in Medan, where illocutionary acts are strategically shaped by politeness concerns within religious authority structures (Rangkuti et al., 2025). In multicultural urban contexts, such discourse often addressed heterogeneous audiences, intensifying the need for inclusive politeness framing. Speakers employed generalized honorifics and collective pronouns to avoid excluding minority cultural groups. These findings highlight the intersection of pragmatics, spirituality, and multicultural urban coexistence.

Politeness strategies were also evident in literary and narrative representations, where fictional discourse mirrored culturally recognizable facework practices. Analysis of conversational excerpts discussed by participants revealed that narrative politeness served as a resource for reflecting on social norms and intercultural tension. Studies of politeness strategies in selected short stories similarly show that literary pragmatics can illuminate how politeness ideologies circulate beyond everyday interaction (Abba, 2025). In the present research, references to fictional scenarios often surfaced during interviews as interpretive frames for evaluating real politeness behavior. This suggests that multicultural politeness is shaped not only through direct interaction but also through culturally mediated narrative repertoires. Such insights extend pragmatic inquiry into the broader semiotic ecology of urban communities.

Quantitative tendencies within coded speech-act categories further clarified how institutional constraints shaped strategy distribution across contexts. The table below summarizes the frequency of key speech-act types and their dominant politeness realizations, providing empirical grounding for the interpretive discussion presented in this section.

Table 2. Distribution of Speech-Act Types and Politeness Realizations in Multicultural Urban Data

Speech-Act Type	Frequency (n)	Dominant Politeness Realization
Requests	41	Indirect interrogatives, honorific address
Refusals	33	Accounts, mitigated disagreement

Apologies	27	Regret + explanation + reassurance
Invitations	22	Tentative framing, reduced imposition
Institutional Directives	19	Authority softened through affiliative cues

Source: Fieldwork corpus of naturally occurring conversations and ethnographic observations in multicultural urban communities (2025)

The distribution indicates that requests and refusals dominated interactional risk zones, requiring the most intensive facework. These findings correspond with pragmatic studies of English conversation, where mitigation and indirectness structure everyday politeness even within shared linguistic codes (Salim et al., 2025). In multicultural settings, the pragmatic load of such acts increases because speakers anticipate divergent interpretations of imposition. The table demonstrates how institutional directives remain comparatively less frequent yet highly consequential, requiring careful balancing of authority and solidarity. These patterns reinforce the claim that speech acts are central sites of multicultural politeness negotiation.

Educational contexts further showed variation in politeness implementation, as students navigated differences between social and academic interactional norms. Participants with university experience often demonstrated sharper distinctions between informal solidarity strategies and formal academic deference. Similar contrasts have been documented in research on students' social and academic politeness implementation, highlighting how institutional environments shape pragmatic expectations (Razak et al., 2025). In multicultural urban communities, such distinctions became more complex because academic and social spheres were often multilingual and interculturally mixed. Speakers frequently shifted politeness styles depending on whether interaction was framed as peer-based or institutionally hierarchical. These findings suggest that pragmatic competence involves dynamic register management across overlapping social domains.

Cross-cultural comparative perspectives also emerged strongly, as speakers drew on culturally specific politeness norms while adapting to urban hybridity. Participants from Indonesian and Uzbek backgrounds, for instance, displayed differing preferences for directness and honorific marking, yet converged toward mitigated forms in intercultural contact. Research on Indonesian and Uzbek communication similarly highlights that politeness is shaped by linguo-pragmatic variation rather than universalized principles (Komilovna et al., 2025). In the present corpus, convergence patterns suggest that multicultural urban environments generate emergent pragmatic middle grounds. These middle grounds are not neutral but reflect power relations, dominant language ideologies, and institutional expectations. Such findings position urban multicultural politeness as an evolving pragmatic field shaped by both diversity and structural constraint.

Institutional speech-act constraints interact with multicultural variability to produce pragmatic innovations that cannot be reduced to single-cultural norms. Requests, refusals, apologies, and invitations become sites where speakers enact relational caution, professional legitimacy, and intercultural accommodation simultaneously. The findings extend cross-cultural politeness research by demonstrating that urban communities constitute pragmatic laboratories where speech acts are continuously recalibrated through contact and constraint. This section contributes to theoretical debates on politeness by emphasizing institutional embeddedness and speech-act adaptation as central explanatory dimensions.

Digital, Symbolic, and Community-Based Extensions of Multicultural Politeness

Multicultural urban politeness was not confined to face-to-face interaction, as participants frequently extended pragmatic strategies into digitally mediated spaces where relational work unfolded under conditions of reduced contextual cues. Online exchanges among community members demonstrated intensified reliance on lexical mitigation, emoji-like affective markers, and humor to compensate for the absence of embodied signals. Such findings align with research on online healthcare support communities, where politeness strategies become essential for sustaining trust and emotional safety in sensitive discourse environments (Federici, 2025). In the present dataset, speakers displayed heightened awareness of potential intercultural misinterpretation in digital settings, leading to cautious

pragmatic framing. These patterns suggest that multicultural politeness in urban life increasingly operates across hybrid communicative ecologies rather than bounded conversational events. The results contribute to pragmatic scholarship by emphasizing the continuity between offline and online facework practices.

Humor remained a particularly salient strategy in digital multicultural interaction, functioning as both an affiliative resource and a pragmatic risk. Participants employed playful language to create solidarity, yet also monitored humor carefully to avoid culturally specific references that might exclude interlocutors. This dual function resonates with findings that humor operates as a pragmatic tool in multicultural online interactions, simultaneously enabling bonding and producing vulnerability to misunderstanding (Jegade, 2025). In urban digital discourse, humor often served as a low-imposition strategy for initiating contact across cultural boundaries. The data indicated that successful humorous politeness depended on shared urban experiences rather than shared ethnic traditions. Such findings underscore that multicultural pragmatics is increasingly shaped by digital communicative norms alongside local cultural repertoires.

Symbolic spaces of multicultural faith and heritage also structured politeness practices, as speakers oriented to religious and cultural symbolism when negotiating respect across diverse communities. Ethnographic observations in culturally significant urban sites revealed that participants frequently employed deferential address forms and softened directives when interacting in spiritually charged environments. This aligns with linguistic-religious analyses of multicultural faith spaces, where symbols mediate interpersonal relations and pragmatic meaning (Nasution et al., 2025). In the present corpus, politeness strategies in such contexts were not merely interpersonal but also indexical of communal belonging and interfaith sensitivity. Speakers often avoided direct confrontation, preferring indirect counsel or collective framing to maintain harmony. These findings demonstrate that multicultural urban politeness is deeply embedded in symbolic landscapes as well as conversational routines.

Community cohesion narratives further shaped politeness orientations, as participants explicitly framed politeness as a moral obligation sustaining unity across ethnic difference. Interview reflections revealed that speakers perceived politeness strategies as instruments of social integration rather than optional communicative embellishments. Such perceptions resonate with research emphasizing multicultural politeness understanding as a means of maintaining national and communal unity across ethnicities (Febriansyah et al., 2025). In everyday urban encounters, this ideological framing encouraged indirectness, tolerance of pragmatic ambiguity, and avoidance of overt face-threat. The data suggest that politeness becomes a civic practice in multicultural cities, intertwined with broader discourses of coexistence. This positions pragmatic strategies as socially consequential resources for managing diversity.

Digital request and refusal practices among international and multilingual speakers also displayed patterned rhetorical structuring, particularly in semi-formal messaging contexts such as student communication and workplace coordination. Participants often adopted elaborate opening moves, gratitude expressions, and mitigated closings to reduce imposition in intercultural exchanges. Comparable patterns appear in studies of international students' request and refusal emails in ELF contexts, where rhetorical move structures function as politeness scaffolding (Liu et al., 2025). In the present urban corpus, similar scaffolding emerged in messaging applications, suggesting that digital politeness draws on institutionalized genres even in informal environments. These practices highlight how multicultural pragmatics is shaped by genre hybridity and transnational communicative norms. The findings extend speech-act theory into digitally mediated urban life.

Quantitative tendencies across digital and symbolic interactional contexts further clarified the distribution of key strategies beyond face-to-face encounters. The table below summarizes the frequency of major politeness resources identified in online and community-symbolic settings, providing empirical grounding for this section's interpretive claims.

Table 3. Politeness Strategies in Digital and Symbolic Urban Interaction

Strategy Category	Frequency (n)	Dominant Contexts
Humor and Playful Mitigation	26	Online peer interaction, group chats

Indirect Requests with Gratitude	24	Digital coordination, semi- formal messaging
Deferential Address in Faith Spaces	18	Religious heritage sites, interfaith events
Collective Framing for Harmony	21	Community discussions, multicultural forums

Source: Coded pragmatic data from digitally mediated interactions and ethnographic observations in multicultural urban communities (2025)

The distribution indicates that humor and indirect gratitude-based requests were central to digital politeness, reflecting heightened sensitivity to misinterpretation. These findings correspond with broader pragmatic work showing that politeness strategies adapt to medium-specific constraints while maintaining facework continuity (Federici, 2025). Deferential address in symbolic spaces further demonstrates that urban politeness is shaped by cultural semiotics as much as by linguistic form. Collective framing emerges as a community-level strategy, linking politeness to civic cohesion rather than individual tact. The table reinforces the argument that multicultural politeness extends across multiple communicative domains.

Cross-cultural variation remained visible in digital contexts, as participants carried culturally specific politeness preferences into online interaction while adapting to emergent urban norms. Speakers from different linguistic backgrounds displayed differing degrees of directness, yet convergence toward mitigated strategies was evident in intercultural group communication. Such convergence reflects broader cross-cultural politeness dynamics documented in comparative pragmatic research, where adaptation occurs through contact and negotiation rather than uniform assimilation (Handriani et al., 2025). In the present dataset, digital spaces accelerated this negotiation by exposing speakers to diverse pragmatic styles in rapid succession. These findings suggest that multicultural urban politeness is increasingly shaped by contact intensity and communicative speed. Pragmatic theory must account for these accelerated conditions of norm emergence.

Apology and repair practices also took distinctive forms in online multicultural interaction, where misunderstandings were often addressed through brief acknowledgments, emoji-like affective softeners, and quick topic shifts. Participants avoided extended confrontation, preferring minimal repair that preserved group harmony. Such strategies echo intercultural apology findings, where speakers prioritize relational restoration over explicit fault attribution (Al Fraidan & Alhulaybi, 2025). In multicultural urban digital communities, repair practices were shaped by the publicness of group chats and the desire to avoid escalating face-threat. The data indicate that online politeness involves compressed yet highly strategic facework. These patterns highlight the pragmatic complexity of digital multicultural coexistence.

Institutional and community leadership communication further demonstrated that politeness strategies were deployed as governance tools in multicultural urban life. Leaders frequently used inclusive pronouns, softened directives, and culturally neutral honorifics to maintain legitimacy across diverse constituencies. Such patterns connect with institutional politeness research emphasizing the balance between authority and solidarity in mediated interaction (Bai & Tang, 2025). In the present corpus, leadership politeness functioned as pragmatic diplomacy at the community level, reflecting urban micro-politics of coexistence. These findings underscore that multicultural politeness operates not only interpersonally but also as a structuring principle of communal organization. Pragmatic inquiry benefits from recognizing politeness as both interactional practice and civic infrastructure.

Multicultural politeness strategies in urban communities are increasingly distributed across digital platforms, symbolic spaces, and community governance practices, producing an expanded pragmatic field beyond traditional face-to-face encounters. Humor, indirect gratitude-based requests, deferential address, and collective framing emerge as central resources through which speakers negotiate belonging and manage diversity. The empirical contribution of this section lies in showing how politeness adapts to medium-specific constraints while remaining anchored in facework imperatives. These findings advance politeness theory by integrating digital pragmatics, symbolic semiotics, and community cohesion into a unified account of urban multicultural interaction. The study overall positions multicultural cities as dynamic laboratories where politeness strategies evolve through contact, mediation, and the continuous negotiation of social life.

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that politeness strategies in multicultural urban communities function as adaptive pragmatic resources through which speakers manage face, negotiate relational legitimacy, and sustain social cohesion across culturally diverse interactional environments. Empirical findings reveal that indirectness, mitigation, humor, and collective framing operate not as superficial etiquette but as structurally significant mechanisms for navigating uncertainty, institutional constraints, and symbolic sensitivities in both offline and digitally mediated discourse. The analysis confirms that multicultural cities generate emergent hybrid politeness norms shaped by contact intensity, role asymmetries, and medium-specific communicative pressures. By integrating interactional pragmatics with sociocultural and institutional perspectives, the research advances a context-sensitive understanding of politeness as civic infrastructure within heterogeneous urban life. The study contributes theoretically by refining models of facework under diversity and contributes methodologically through systematic coding of naturally occurring conversations supported by ethnographic contextualization.

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