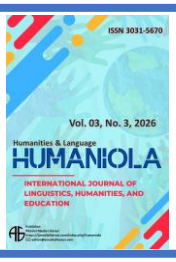
Humaniola Humanities and Language
International Journal of Linguistics, Humanities, and Education
Volume 3 Issue 3, September 2026
E-ISSN 3031-5670



The Practice of Language, Power, and Politeness: A Sociopragmatic Study of Buyer Reviews in Online Transactions

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Sociopragmatic; Buyer Reviews; Online Transactions; Politeness

Article history:
Received 1 July 2026
Revised 6 August 2026
Accepted 7 Auguts 2026
Available online
30 September 2026

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.32734/w5d3r123

ABSTRACT

This article examines the practices of language, power negotiation, and politeness strategies in buyer reviews of online buying and selling transactions from a sociopragmatic perspective. This research is a literature study, supported by several cases, that examines how reviews not only function as product evaluations but also as a form of social communication that reflects the identities, emotions, and relationships between buyers and sellers. The results show that power dynamics are manifested through linguistic choices, such as the use of certain modalities, imperatives, and language styles, which affect seller responses as well as the quality of interaction. Politeness strategies, especially *hedging* and *indirectness*, have been shown to play a role in mitigating conflict and building trust. Cultural, gender, and social norms also shape variations in communication styles and interpretations of power in digital interactions. In addition, technological limitations are driving the emergence of compensation strategies such as emoticons and narrative explanations. These findings highlight the research gap related to the simultaneous integration of power, politeness, and language practice in the context of online reviews. This research emphasizes that digital interaction is a complex and dynamic social negotiation arena, so a multidisciplinary approach and new methodologies are needed to understand communication patterns in the e-commerce ecosystem.

How to cite:
Musaffak, Laksono, K., Mulyono & Anggraini, A. (2026). The practice of language, power, and politeness: A sociopragmatic study of buyer reviews in online transactions. *Humanities & Language: International Journal of Linguistics, Humanities, and Education*, *3*(3), 193-202.

1. Introduction

In online buying and selling transactions, there are usually complaints or praise from customers for the product or service purchased. Customer satisfaction complaints and praise are emotional expressions of customers because there is something that cannot be accepted or satisfactory (Fan et al., 2013), both related to the product or service offered and the seller's services, so that it can result in subsequent sales. Among the customer complaints that are often found in online shopping platforms are caused

by several things such as (1) the service received is not as it should be; (2) left to wait without explanation; (3) a delayed response from the seller; (4) receiving goods or services not according to the specifications in the description; (5) misunderstandings in communication, and (6) delivery of old goods or services (Banju et al., 2024; Sabila & Kusumaningrum, 2020; Nasir, 2004). The customer's complaints affect the success of the purchase or not in the next purchase and sale transaction speech. Likewise, the praise conveyed by buyers in product reviews, it has an impact on: (1) the understanding of potential buyers of the product description; (2) to convince other buyers that the product is of good quality; (3) contains real photos or images of the product, so that it can be considered by the buyer; (4) increasing the sales rating, so that this also affects the increase in the number of goods sold (Masyhuri, 2022; Lee et al., 2023).

Reviews from buyers, as mentioned above, are a reflection of buyer preferences and experiences. In addition, buyer reviews are also one of the reasons to negotiate with the seller, for example, negotiating to request another model of goods. In addition, merchants usually comment with good things; for example, buyers are asked to contact the *customer service* admin or return the purchased item to be exchanged for a new item at the buyer's request. Thus, it can be said that in online buying and selling there is still a negotiation process, both negotiation of power and courtesy between sellers and buyers. Power negotiation and politeness play an important role in maintaining relationships as well as achieving transactional goals (Félix-Brasdefer, 2017; Taulia et al., 2023; 2025)

In this process, sociopragmatic theory can serve as an analytical framework that highlights the social meanings and communication strategies formed and negotiated in digital interactions. In addition, with a sociopragmatic framework, social identity and power relations are negotiated through pragmatic strategies, including mitigation and politeness (Agus & Iswandi, 2025; Khoif & Rokhman, 2025; Pujiono et al., 2026). In negotiations, politeness is not only about respecting the opponent but also an important communication strategy for reducing conflict and obtaining concessions (Lee et al., 2021).

Sociopragmatic studies are closely related to understanding the contextual meaning of conversation by paying attention to the social elements of society (Haugh et al., 2021). The contextual meaning in question includes behaviors, customs, values, beliefs, attitudes, social categories, emotions, and so on (Goddard, 2006). This shows that the language used by a person is not only conveyed implicitly but also an expression to convey the self, sociocultural, psychocultural, and the characteristics of the speaker.

Based on the above explanation, it can be said that research on the practice of language in online transactions is very important because the pattern of digital interaction has shifted the way speakers build social relationships, negotiate power, and convey politeness (Seargeant & Tagg, 2014). In the context of buyer reviews, language not only serves as a tool to evaluate products but also as a means to negotiate a position as a consumer, demand rights, and form a self-image in front of sellers and other potential buyers (Vásquez, 2014). This situation demands a more in-depth sociopragmatic analysis so that an understanding of the power dynamics, politeness strategies, and social meanings behind the review can be revealed more comprehensively. Thus, this research has academic urgency because it is able to map how language practices in the digital space continue to develop and form new communication patterns that reflect social changes in society.

Several previous studies on online buying and selling interactions have generally focused on politeness strategies in direct communication between sellers and buyers, for example, through chat features, or on the linguistic aspects of reviews as product assessments. However, the study is still limited to the analysis of buyer reviews as a sociopragmatic practice that contains power negotiations, identity representation, and implicit and explicit politeness strategies. This research offers novelty by positioning buyer reviews not only as a form of product evaluation but as a social communication practice that contains certain pragmatic goals, such as influencing seller responses, negotiating profits, and building solidarity or social pressure. The uniqueness of this research lies in the simultaneous analysis of language practice, power relations, and politeness strategies in the context of review, thus presenting a more multidimensional perspective than previous research.

2. Method

This article employs a literature review to examine online buying and selling activities from a sociopragmatic perspective, focusing on politeness, language practices, and power relations. Scopus AI was used as a discovery tool to identify potentially relevant publications by combining keywords related to online buyer reviews, sociopragmatics, language practice, politeness, and power negotiation. After screening titles and abstracts for relevance to the research focus and availability of sufficient analytical information, 42 journal articles were retained for review. The articles were read, coded, and compared thematically according to four categories: language practices, power negotiation, politeness strategies, and sociocultural or technological influences. Scopus AI supported article discovery and initial mapping, while the authors conducted interpretation and synthesis using sociopragmatic theories. To contextualize the literature findings, several publicly accessible buyer-review cases from online marketplaces were purposively selected because they contained explicit evaluations, requests, complaints, praise, mitigation, imperatives, or seller-buyer power negotiations. These cases were used only as illustrative empirical examples, not as a separate primary dataset. They were interpreted qualitatively and compared with the themes emerging from the 42 articles to clarify how the reviewed concepts operate in actual digital interactions.

3. Result and Discussion

Sociopragmatics is interesting to use in the analysis of buyer reviews, both those that contain satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the products they buy. The speech situation is determinant, namely the speaker and the speech partner, the context of speech, the context of the situation, the purpose and function of speech, and the act of speech. Sociopragmatic studies cannot separate themselves from sociolinguistic and pragmatic studies. Both focus on the use of language by their speakers as the object of their study. This approach sees the use of language in general as closely related to social, cultural, and behavioral values. In other words, the views and values of a society are a medium to convey the attitudes and behaviors of its users (Kuswarno, 2011).

A sociopragmatic approach is important for understanding the dynamics of power and politeness in online communication, as online interactions often involve negotiating complex identities, statuses, and social relationships. Sociopragmatic studies provide an in-depth analysis of environmental language strategies that lack non-verbal cues (Park, 2008; Ren, 2023).

In sociopragmatic studies, the meaning of speech is always associated with speech situations. Leech (1983) identified five aspects of the speech situation. First, the speaker and speaking partner, which includes age, socioeconomic background, gender, level of familiarity, education level, geographical origin, and social status, are reflected in the choice of words, method of expression, and choice of syntax used by the speaker and speaking partner. Second, the context of speech, which is all forms of background knowledge that the speaker has, includes both the cultural context (the text or genre used by the community to communicate) and the context of the situation (the subject matter, the relationship between the speaker and the speaking partner, and the communication channel used). Third, the purpose and function of speech, namely, speech is associated with the desired meaning or desire of the speaker in using speech. Fourth, speech (speech as a form of action/activity), which is speech related to verbal actions that occur in certain situations and times (pragmatically). Fifth, speech is a product of verbal action; that is, speech is not nonverbal but a product of verbal action.

Buying and selling transaction speech is a form of speech used in communicating (bargaining) by negotiating between each other (seller-buyer). The speech in the buying and selling transaction emerged from the context in which it took place. This context is intended to be related to the physical/verbal, behavioral, and social environment of speech, such as the shared background knowledge of the speaker and the speech partner, so as to make it easier for the speech partner to interpret the speech contextually (Efendi et al., 2017).

Previous research is the basis for this literature review. A related study has been conducted by Megawati (2016) on the act of illocutionary speech in the interaction of buying and selling at the Kramat Jati Main Market with a pragmatic study. The research takes a different mode from this study, namely buying and selling interactions, while this study talks about the practice of language, power, and politeness in buyer reviews on online buying and selling practices. Fauzan (2018) conveyed the results of his research on the speech of the opposition in the village rembuk negotiation with ethnopragmatic studies. The locus and focus of this research differ from those of previous research. Previous research focused on negotiation speech in village discussion activities at the village office, using ethnopragmatic theory. In contrast, the locus and focus of this research were buyer reviews of transactions on online buying and selling platforms, using sociopragmatic studies.

The power in the interaction of online buyers and sellers is manifested through influence over commercial details, operational issues, and attitudes. Power can be operationalized formally through quantitative models and qualitative approaches (Meehan & Wright, 2012; Meehan & Wright, 2011). Linguistic indicators such as the use of imperatives, modalities, and literal/figurative language styles are markers of power in the review.

Regarding power tactics in coercive buyer reviews, threat or pressure tactics tend to reduce the performance of relationships and trust, as well as increase *negative word-of-mouth* intentions (Victor et al., 2024; Dang-Van & Nguyen, 2025). Financial incentives increase the frequency of positive reviews, but on the other hand, it also encourages bias and dishonesty, especially in certain groups (e.g., men, young age) (Liu et al., 2024).

Sellers can use manipulative signals to increase ratings, but the effect on buyers' comment tone is more limited, and it is also influenced by the buyer's experience (Huang et al., 2023). Individual and cognitive factors in the expression of power, such as the need for status and experience, influence the expression of power and language

preferences in the review. Consumers with high levels tend to use abstract evaluations, while those with low ones are more concrete. Experience and status needs also moderate responses to messages and incentives in the review (Zhu et al., 2025; Yang & Zhang, 2018; Ren & Nickerson, 2019).

The dynamics of power in online reviews are multidimensional and are influenced by the interaction between organizational, individual, and relational factors. The power tactics used by buyers and sellers have a direct impact on the tone, content, and honesty of reviews, as well as long-term relationships (Tasyarasita et al., 2024). The types and functions of politeness strategies commonly used include *hedging*, which is to reduce the firmness of criticism or demand, and *indirectness*, i.e., avoiding confrontation (Hoppner et al., 2014; Meehan & Wright, 2012). Politeness that is positive or negative in nature shows empathy, appreciation, or social distancing. The strategy is considered effective in mitigating *face-threatening acts* and maintaining good relationships between buyers and sellers (Tseng & Zhang, 2025).

The use of courtesy, *hedging*, and *indirectness* in buyer reviews influences the seller's response, increasing the likelihood of constructive dispute resolution. A personal and empathetic response from the seller increases trust and purchase intent, while a defensive or *impolite* response decreases reputation and trust (Tasyarasita et al., 2024; Tripathi et al., 2022; Lee & Hong, 2021).

Regarding the role of disrespectful strategies in power negotiations, sellers sometimes use disrespectful strategies (e.g., aggressively retaliate or publicize buyers' manipulative behavior) as power tactics to pressure buyers or improve reputations. However, excessive use of impoliteness can damage the credibility of sellers and lower the purchase intention of third parties (Ye et al., 2014; Yang et al., 2024). Politeness and impoliteness in online reviews serve as a tool for negotiating social relations and power, with a direct impact on conflict resolution and seller reputation (Maiklad & Numtong, 2025).

Language style suitability between buyers and sellers increases trust and credibility (Zhu, 2025; Li et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2019). Cultural differences influence the choice of politeness strategies and their interpretation. Asia tends to use *indirectness* and *positive politeness*, while the West is more direct and explicit. Social norms and collectivism/individualism values shape communication patterns and perceptions of power (Maiklad & Numtong, 2025; Haugh, 2021).

The conformity of language style between buyers and sellers plays an important role in building trust and the effectiveness of reviews. Language-style appropriateness increases the perceived quality and helpfulness of reviews, especially for complex or unfamiliar products (Liu et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2021; Za'rour et al., 2025). Sociopragmatic features in online reviews reflect social norms, cultural expectations, and communication strategies that are adaptive to digital and multicultural contexts (Zhu, 2025; Liu et al., 2019; Li et al., 2019). When viewed through gender and multicultural dimensions, women's politeness strategies tend to be more expressive and detailed, employing positive politeness strategies. In contrast, men's strategies tend to be more concise, factual, and direct, employing negative politeness. These differences affect power negotiations and perceptions of social relations in the review (Za'rour et al., 2025; Nelson et al., 2015).

Cultural values, ethnicity, and intercultural sensitivity shape the strategy of politeness and the perception of power. Cross-cultural interactions often create friction in the interpretation of politeness and power, so a sociopragmatic framework that is

sensitive to local differences is needed (Shan et al., 2019; Etae et al., 2016; Voldnes et al., 2012). Gender and multicultural dimensions enrich the complexity of politeness strategies and power negotiations in online buyer reviews, demanding an interdisciplinary and contextual analytical approach (Nelson et al., 2015; Etae et al., 2016).

There is a research gap in sociopragmatic studies related to online transactions due to the lack of simultaneous integration between power, politeness, and language practice in online transactions. Among them is the lack of longitudinal research on the evolution of buyer-seller relations. The adaptation of politeness strategies in online shopping interactions and the influence of multilingual/multicultural contexts is still limited (Locher, 2004; Safont, 2024).

The limitations of technology encourage the use of compensation strategies such as emoticons, *hedging*, and *indirectness*. Digital media also affects the pattern of trust and effectiveness of communication (Tasyarasita et al., 2014; Tractinsky & Srinivasan Rao, 2001; Darics, 2010). Politeness and power relations strategies evolve, influenced by experience, repetitive interactions, and changes in platform features. Cross-cultural pragmatic challenges are increasingly relevant in the era of e-commerce globalization (Tasyarasita et al., 2014; Meehan & Wright, 2013; Moon, 2023). Further research is expected to highlight the need for studies that integrate sociopragmatic aspects, interaction evolution, and cross-cultural comparisons in *online transactions*, as well as the development of new methodologies for big data analysis and automation of communication strategy detection (Park, 2008; Locher, 2004; Safont, 2024).

From the various research results above, it can be concluded that the power, politeness, and practice of language in *online reviews* are dynamic and influenced by organizational strengths, cultural variables, and technological limitations (Tasyarasita et al., 2024; Park, 2008; Meehan & Wright, 2013; Zhu et al., 2025). Politeness strategies such as hedging and *indirectness* are effective in mitigating conflict and building trust. Cultural and gender differences enrich patterns of communication and power negotiation. The research gap demands multidisciplinary integration and the development of new methodologies to understand sociopragmatic interactions in online transactions.

The results of the research mentioned above have practical implications and recommendations for e-commerce actors, namely sociopragmatic-based communication training to improve the quality of interaction and dispute resolution. For researchers, longitudinal studies and big data analysis for modeling language and power patterns. For platform developers, design features that support polite expressions and automatic detection of review manipulation (Tseng & Zhang, 2025; Liu et al., 2019; Darics, 2010).

As a synthesis, it can be conveyed that a sociopragmatic study of the practice of language, power, and politeness in online shopper reviews reveals that digital interaction is a complex arena of social negotiation, influenced by organizational power, culture, and technology. The integration of cross-disciplinary approaches and the development of new methodologies is indispensable to enrich the understanding and practice of communication in the future e-commerce ecosystem (Hoppner et al., 2014; Tasyarasita et al., 2025; S&P 2025; Park, 2008).

4. Conclusion

The results of the literature review confirm that power in online reviews is manifested through the choice of language, such as the use of modalities, imperatives, abstract or concrete language styles, and coercive or persuasive tactics. This power strategy has a direct impact on the tone of the review, the response of the seller, and the creation of a long-term relationship between the two parties. Meanwhile, courtesy strategies, including hedging and indirectness, have proven effective in mitigating conflict, maintaining harmony in interactions, and increasing consumer trust.

The sociopragmatic features in the review are strongly influenced by cultural, gender, and social norm factors, which shape language style preferences and ways of understanding power. Cross-cultural interaction in a global platform poses its own challenges, as differences in perceptions of politeness can lead to misunderstandings. In addition, the limitations of digital communication with minimal non-verbal cues make speakers develop compensation strategies such as emoticons, narrative explanations, and adaptive language styles. This study also found a gap in studies related to the simultaneous integration of power, politeness, and language practice in the context of online reviews. The lack of longitudinal studies and big data-based analysis is a challenge for developing a deeper understanding of the evolution of digital interactions.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest. The founding sponsors had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript, and in the decision to publish the results.

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