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# Riding with respect: politeness in conversation between bodaboda riders and their clients in Mbooni Sub-County, Makueni, Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the use of politeness strategies in the interactions between bodaboda riders and their clients in Mbooni Sub-County, Makueni, Kenya. A qualitative research approach, utilizing purposive sampling, was employed. Observations and interviews were used to collect the data. Data obtained from the interviews were first transcribed from Kikamba to English before being coded for analysis. This analysis was guided by Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. Critical analysis of the utterances was done with the aim of identifying the politeness strategies utilized within these interactions. The findings revealed that both bodaboda riders and clients consistently used politeness strategies to maintain each other's face. The predominant strategy was positive politeness, followed by on-record and off-record strategies. Negative politeness and silence strategies were infrequently utilized. Anticipated payoffs and the relational dynamics between the interlocutors influenced the choice of the politeness strategies. These findings highlight the significant role of politeness strategies in improving communication in the bodaboda industry. Pragmatically, the results offer valuable insights for enhancing communication between bodaboda riders and clients, thus contributing to communication studies. The study provides crucial information for transport sector policymakers, supporting the creation of regulations that promote politeness to enhance service experience and customer satisfaction.

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Applied Linguistics; Pragmatics; Sociolinguistics; Cognitive Science; Sign Language, Braille and Other Linguistic Communication; English Language; Morphology; Phonetics and Phonology; Psycholinguistics

## 1. Introduction

Language is crucial aspect of communication that can reveal an individual's identity and cultural background (Potongwane, 2022). In various cultures, people employ diverse linguistic styles to facilitate communication. Politeness, as one of the styles, plays a vital role in enhancing interpersonal exchange. Politeness is a universal feature across cultures (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Politeness is how people soften potentially offensive or intrusive statements during conversation in order to protect both their own and others' social image (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Therefore, it is an individual's disposition to engage in interactions with composure and methodical considerations in their conduct. In a communication context, politeness is the capacity to consider and respect the emotional well-being of others by avoiding language that may undermine or threaten the listener's face. This serves as a crucial mechanism for fostering effective and respectful interactions. Offensive statements that emerge in communication are commonly referred to as Face Threatening Acts (FTAs). According to Brown and Levinson, FTAs are speech acts that risk damaging the interlocutor's social image or self-esteem. When communication is ineffective, individuals may be hindered in the execution of their responsibilities, much like the confusion experienced during the construction of the Tower of Babel (M'Ngaruthi, 2021). Therefore, politeness strategies are instrumental in mitigating face threatening acts and enhancing effective communication.

Communication is an inevitable phenomenon, especially in the transportation sector, where humans interact as they move from one place to another. Motorcycles are among the common means of transport that most people use, particularly when maneuvering over short distances. Owing to the necessary

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interaction among users the name motorcycle has evolved into 'bodaboda'. The term 'bodaboda' originated from the English phrase 'border-border', referring to the transportation of goods across the Kenya-Uganda border (Okebiro, 2022). The use of such transport means has proliferated worldwide and is more prominent in countries such as Rwanda, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya (Amone, 2021; Arosanyin, 2011; Luvunga, 2021; Olingo, 2022). It is also preferred because of its capacity to meet clients' transportation needs promptly and its ability to navigate through remote areas with relative ease. To reach an agreement, bodaboda riders rely on communication to persuade their potential customers. The nature of the language used by both the speaker and listener plays a crucial role in determining the success of these interactions (Daulay et al., 2022). For bodaboda riders to avoid communication breakdown, they employ an appropriate style of communication to avoid inflicting pain on others and to ensure that they maintain their public image. These styles are popularly known as politeness strategies.

In Kenya, communication challenges arising from bodaboda riders and other members of the public in the transportation sector have become a great concern. For example, in the event of an accident involving a motorcycle (bodaboda) and a vehicle, instead of addressing the situation calmly and resolving the issue amicably, bodaboda riders often escalate the conflict, creating further problems and causing suffering, as was seen in the accident that occurred in Kitengela (Mwadosho, 2024). Furthermore, the Daily Nation Newspaper reported that bodaboda riders in Homabay and Mombasa were involved in setting vehicles on fire after accidents with bodaboda riders (Kurzweil, 2018). Some of the bodaboda riders use statements that disrupt conversations and sometimes spark wars that hurt people surrounding the scene. This shows that some are unaware of the proper use of politeness strategies, as it is an alternative to solving communication hurdles in a peaceful way. Extant studies have concentrated on politeness, but very little attention has been paid to conversations between bodaboda riders and their clients. This study aims to address this gap by assessing politeness strategies arising from the interactions between bodaboda riders and their clients.

## 2. Literature review

Many studies have been conducted on politeness in novels, plays and media, but only a few have dealt with one-on-one communication, particularly in areas such as the transport sector.

Olorunsogo (2020) conducted an experimental study to explore how politeness strategies are used in private hospitals in Nigeria. The study revealed the use of on-record strategies and positive politeness strategies in conversations between doctors and patients. The results further indicate that the doctors used an on-record strategy when conversing with adults and a positive strategy when interacting with children. These findings were crucial to the current study, as they assisted in identifying some of the pertinent politeness strategies employed during communication. However, the study was experimental research conducted in private hospitals setting, contrary to the current study, which focused on politeness in conversations between bodaboda riders and their clients. Although the study explored asymmetry in doctor-patient interactions, it's limited because doctors often hold strong institutional authority reinforcing a more rigid power hierarchy contrary to transport context, where power relations are more variable and context-dependent.

In addition, an investigation was conducted on the use of politeness strategies in communication between lecturers and students in a biology class (Nugrahanto & Hartono, 2020). The results show that politeness strategies were used during the interaction. Notably, the politeness strategies used were positive, negative, on-record and off-record. This study contributes to the literature by classifying politeness strategies based on Brown and Levison (1987). While this study is novel to the knowledge domain, it is still limited because it fails to provide existing strategies in other sectors, such as transport, which has been addressed by the current study. The preceding study exhibits methodological limitations, as it relied exclusively on observation as the primary data collection method. In contrast, the present study employs two approaches, integrating both observation and interviews to yield more comprehensive and nuanced insights into participants' experiences regarding politeness.

Njuki and Ileri (2021) examined how members of a national assembly use negative and positive strategies during communication. It was observed that, positive and negative strategies were prominent in their communication. Although the study focused on parliamentary negotiations, it contributed to the

identification of some politeness strategies discussed in this study. The previous study is constrained in scope, concentrating on politeness strategies within political discourse. In contrast, the present study explores politeness within a transport context, engaging a distinct set of participants, thereby offering a broader perspective on the phenomenon.

Similarly, Surjowati (2021) studied the politeness strategies used by students with different origins and diverse cultural backgrounds. The study findings showed that the interaction exhibited positive and negative politeness strategies. On one hand, positive strategies revealed the use of techniques such as avoiding disagreement, promising, exaggerations, and seeking to agree. On the other hand, negative politeness strategies involved apologizing and optimism. This study sheds light on the classification of positive and negative politeness using their respective techniques, even though it focused on student interaction only. Surjowati's study presents certain limitations, primarily due to its reliance on documentation and transcription of student interactions, which may not fully capture the dynamics of real communicative behavior. In contrast, the present study adopts a more immersive methodological approach, utilizing direct observation and interviews to obtain a richer, more nuanced understanding of actual interactions. Furthermore, while Surjowati's research focuses on politeness strategies within peer-based student exchanges characterized by relatively equal power relations, the current study examines interactional context marked by more complex and explicit power relations, thereby offering deeper insights into the interplay between politeness and power.

A study proximal to the current research examined how politeness strategies are used by matatu operators as they interact with passengers in Matuu Town (Kioko, 2021). The results show that the involved made great use of positive and negative politeness strategies in their communication. The findings were crucial as the study focused on politeness strategies in the transport industry, which is the backbone of this study. In addition, this study focused on direct conversations to obtain data similar to those in this study. The main difference is that the former focused on matatus that carry many passengers at the same time, unlike bodabodas, which carry only one client at a time. Unlike motorists, who sometimes use posters to communicate with passengers, bodaboda riders must communicate with their clients. Thus, there is a great opportunity to fully explore their conversations. Additionally, the previous study is limited in scope as it focuses on politeness using different participants and different social context. In contrast, the current study specifically examines the interactional dynamics between bodaboda riders and their clients, offering a more contextually grounded analysis of politeness strategies in service-oriented, asymmetrical power relations.

## **2.1. The study theory**

According to Daramola (2003), theory is defined as a set of ideas used to explain communication phenomena. This conversation study was guided by the politeness theory. This theory was coined by American scholars Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson in 20th century. This theory explains how people use politeness strategies to maintain social relationships and meet the face needs of other people. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), choice of politeness strategies is shaped by several contextual factors, including anticipated benefits, relative power dynamics, social distance between interlocutors, and the perceived level of imposition associated with the communicative act. In the field of pragmatics, face denotes an individual's socially constructed self-image, encompassing the emotional and interpersonal identity that one seeks to uphold during communicative exchanges (Tiryakian & Goffman, 1968). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), there are two types of face: positive and negative. The concept of face was first introduced by Goffman (Tiryakian & Goffman, 1968) and later expounded by Brown and Levinson. Every face has needs that must be met. A positive face has the desire to be recognized, respected, accepted, and valued. In contrast, a negative face needs not to be imposed upon, and wishes for the autonomy of doing things without obstacles. When someone does anything against these wants, he or she commits a face-threatening act. Any utterance from the speaker has the ability of threatening the listener's face. To deal with face-threatening acts, politeness strategies are used to soften the edges of utterances. For interlocutors to relate well during conversations, there must be cooperation between them (Grice, 1975). Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory and Grice's Cooperative Principle offer complementary insights into the pragmatics of interpersonal communication.

While Grice's framework foregrounds the rational underpinnings of discourse through the maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner, Brown and Levinson extend this model by incorporating the sociocultural dimensions of face management. In this sense, politeness can be understood as a nuanced form of cooperative behavior, aligning with and enriching Grice's original postulates through the lens of social interaction. The politeness theory has five tenets.

### ***2.1.1. Positive politeness strategy***

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), this strategy meets the positive face need to avoid threats to the positive face. It aims to make someone feel respected, recognized, accepted, and valued. This strategy involves various techniques, such as praising and complimenting the listener, employing humor, predicting positive outcomes (optimism), identifying with the listener, making promises, and intensifying agreement.

### ***2.1.2. Negative politeness strategy***

This strategy aims at the negative face of the listener. This prevents the listener from feeling coerced or imposed upon. If the speaker wishes to make a request to the listener, this strategy is utilized most of the time to hedge the utterance. This tenet was useful in identifying the statements or utterances used to avoid imposition on the listener.

### ***2.1.3. On-record strategy***

This strategy is widely used by people who are close to each other as far as social distance is concerned (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The message is presented plainly, without minding the feelings of those involved in the conversations. Most of the time, it is used by family members and friends. This strategy corresponds closely with Grice's Maxim of Manner, which calls for clarity, conciseness, and the avoidance of ambiguity (Grice, 1975). Additionally, the strategy agrees with Lakoff's emphasis on the value of clarity as one of the core components of politeness. Although on-record strategies might appear blunt, Lakoff contends that being clear can itself be a form of politeness, especially in contexts where ambiguity might lead to greater discomfort or misinterpretation (Lakoff, 1973). The three scholars converge on the principle that information or messages should be presented clearly. This tenet aided in identifying the utterances that were presented directly in the conversations between bodaboda riders and their clients without caring about the feelings of those involved.

### ***2.1.4. Off-record strategy***

This strategy involves indirect presentation of messages to listeners. Hints are used to leave the listener with the freedom to interpret what the speaker means. By using this strategy, speakers evade the face-threatening act of imposing on the listener. Brown and Levinson (1987) posited that the speaker intentionally does this to protect the listener's face. This strategy was crucial for identifying statements that relied on pragmatics to convey meaning.

### ***2.1.5. Silence strategy***

In conversation, this strategy involves silence. The speakers refrains from uttering anything to avoid threatening the hearer's face. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), this is the best strategy for saving a listener's face. This strategy was helpful in identifying situations where silence was used to maintain the public image of the listener in conversations between bodaboda riders and their clients.

## **3. Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative approach to explain and uncover the underlying issues within the study through the analysis of the collected data, with the goal of providing a clear and comprehensive understanding of the problem (Wanyama et al., 2018).

The field research was specifically conducted in Mbooni Sub-County, Makueni County, which is located in Lower-Eastern Kenya. The study location was selected based on the prominence of bodaboda, which is the most prevalent mode of transport in the region, surpassing other forms of transportation used in the area. Furthermore, bodaboda transport has proven to be a significant source of employment, particularly for the youth in this area.

Observation and interview methods were used to obtain data from purposively selected research participants. These two techniques were applied to ensure the reliability and credibility of the obtained data, as each method served to complement the shortcomings of the other. A total of twenty-six (26) observations of bodaboda riders and their clients were made, and fifty-eight (58) research participants were interviewed. Majority of the respondents were aged 18–35 years (71%), with 29% aged 36 years and above. Males comprised 69% of the sample, while females accounted for 31%. Educational attainment varied, with most participants having completed secondary (33%) or primary education (31%), and smaller proportions holding diplomas (22%), certificates (9%), and degrees (5%). This reflects a predominantly young, male demographic with diverse educational backgrounds, hence dynamic power relation between the interlocutors. Conversations were recorded using an audio recorder. Observations of bodaboda riders and their clients were guided by an observation schedule to examine their communication behaviors and to maintain the authenticity of the data.

The data recorded from the five stations were listened to, written, and transcribed from Kikamba to English. Free translation was used because it accurately conveys the true meaning of the original text without creating room for ambiguity. The gathered data were coded according to bodaboda stations, and the bodaboda riders' and their clients' utterances that indicated the use of politeness strategies were categorized for analysis. Utterances that utilized politeness strategies were analyzed based on the theoretical principles outlined by Brown and Levison (1987), which considers the influence of power dynamics in interpersonal communication. The SPSS software played a key role in analyzing the demographic data of the 58 participants while ATLAS.ti.24 aided in coding and categorizing the utterances for analysis. The research outcomes were presented through interpretation, and a summary presented in a table and a pie chart.

This study ensured that ethical considerations were upheld. Following the acquisition of a research permit from National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) (Ref No. 577814, license number: NACOSTI/P/24/38653) and ethical approval from Pwani University Institutional Scientific and Ethics Review Committee (Ref No. ISERC/MA/010/2024). Authorization letters to engage with the public were obtained from the County Commissioner (Ref No. MKN/CC/ADM.6/1 VOL.VI/24) and County Director of Education of Makueni (Ref No. MKN/C/ED/5/33/VOL.11/214) In the process of conducting the study, all participants willingly volunteered to participate by giving verbal consent without any external pressure. Verbal consent was utilized to enhance inclusivity, ensuring the participation of both literate and illiterate bodaboda riders and clients. In light of the dynamic and time-sensitive nature of the bodaboda work environment, verbal consent emerged as a more pragmatic approach, minimizing delays that would have otherwise resulted from the need to read and comprehend lengthy written consent documents. Consequently, participants appeared more comfortable providing verbal consent rather than written consent.

The following figure shows how the analysis was performed systematically (Figure 1).

#### 4. Research finding and discussions

The research findings revealed that all politeness strategies were utilized in conversations between bodaboda riders and their clients. These strategies include positive, negative, on-record, off-record, and silence politeness strategies. In the presentation of the results, data were coded as **AA1**, **BA2**, **CM1**, **DA3**, and **EM2** where the first letter represents the Bodaboda station. The second letter represents either a bodaboda rider (**M**) or client (**A**). The second letter was followed by a numeric letter that represented the position of the bodaboda rider or client in the observation or interview list. Distinct politeness strategies are discussed as follows.

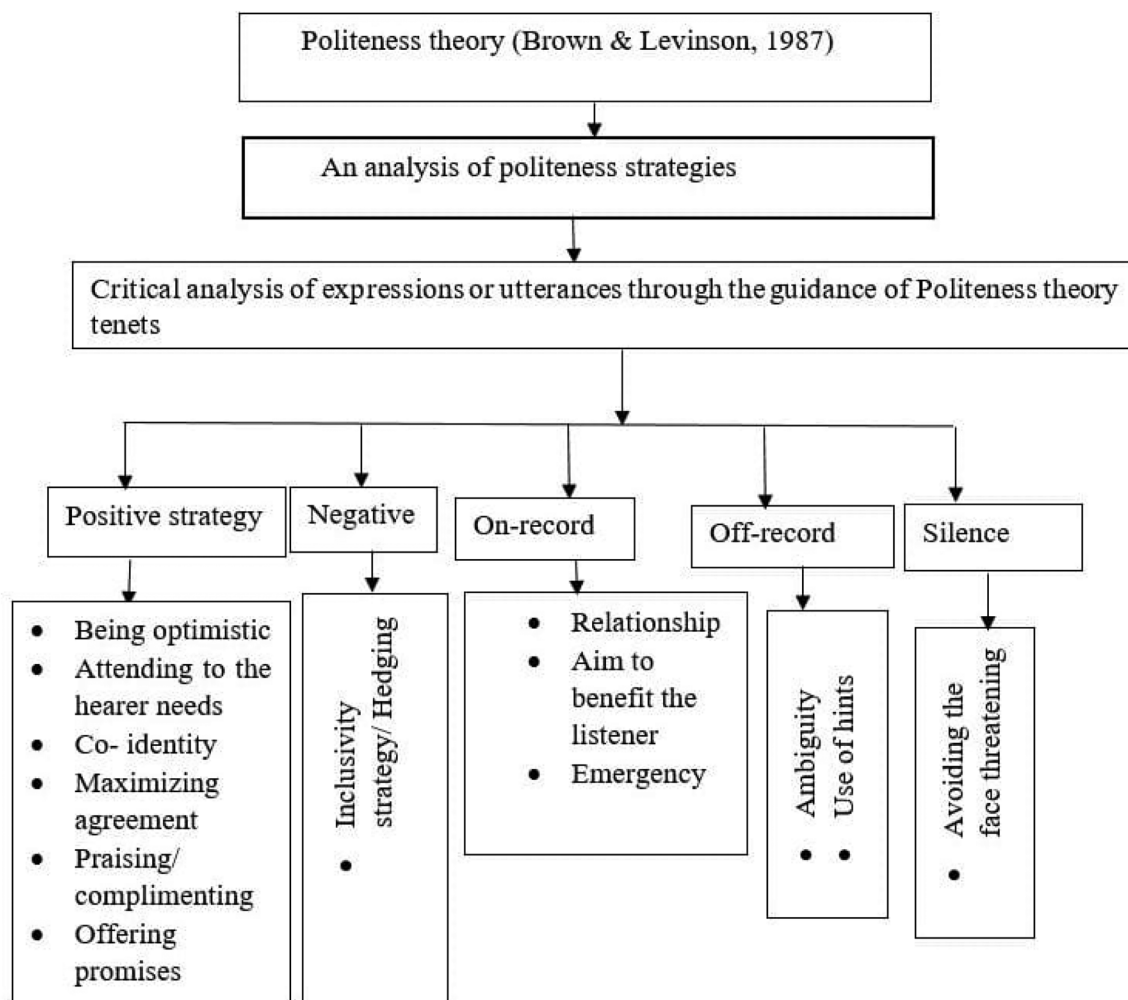


Figure 1. The data analysis structure (Source: Researcher's creation).

#### 4.1. Positive politeness strategies

This study revealed that this politeness strategy was widely used in conversations between bodaboda riders and their clients. This strategy involved the use of various techniques, such as giving hints about positive outcomes (being optimistic), attending to the hearer's needs, co-identity, maximizing agreements, praising the listener, and offering promises to the listener. All these strategies were used to maintain the positive face of the listener (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This strategy is primarily used in situations in which the speaker and listener barely know each other.

##### a) hinting a positive outcome

This strategy indicates the state of optimism. This causes the speakers to expect the hearer to do something. The speaker hopes that the listener will do something beneficial to him or her. The following example illustrates this.

**Example 1** AA1: *Ai nyie ndiendete oyu; nienda uthumuanga vaa.* (Eng. Am not leaving right now, I want to have some rest here.)

The first client in Stage A (AA1) responded to a bodaboda rider inquiring whether she wanted to travel at that specific moment. In her response, the client used the strategy of hinting at a positive outcome in her statement. In her response, she intentionally used the phrase *oyu* (right now) to hint a positive outcome to her listeners. Practically, the bodaboda rider expected the client to respond by agreeing to his request. To avoid the act of threatening the positive face of the bodaboda rider, she purposely used the term *oyu* (right now) to show that even though she was not travelling at that particular time there was

hope of her to travel later on that day. Therefore, giving a hint of a positive outcome to the bodaboda rider for having a client later. The speaker doesn't say 'No, I won't leave', instead she gives a mitigated refusal which suggests awareness of the interlocutor's feelings and expectation. The statement illustrates a nuanced negotiation of power, in which the speaker resists an implicit directive in a non-confrontational manner. By employing a hint, the speaker utilizes a positive politeness strategy to maintain interpersonal harmony while simultaneously affirming her autonomy. This suggests a balanced power dynamic, where the speaker feels comfortable asserting autonomy within a respectful social context.

### **b) attending to the hearer's needs**

The results revealed that during conversations, the bodaboda riders and their clients were concerned about each other's faces. This is achieved by attending to the needs of the listener to make him feel like he is cared for. When someone is concerned about attending to the listener, he/she participates in maintaining his positive face (Brown & Levison, 1987).

**Example 2** AM1: *Notuthi ngakwonia vandu ukathumuanga?* (Eng. Can we go, I show you a place to rest?)

Bodaboda rider 1 noticed a client standing and, feeling compassionate, invited him to follow in order to guide him to a place where he could rest. The statement by the first bodaboda rider at station A (AM1) showed that he cared about the client's needs and was determined to attend to them. According to the bodaboda rider's evaluation, he felt that the place where the client stood was unsatisfactory. This showed that the speaker had a higher power than the listener. The bodaboda rider presents himself as someone capable and responsible, positioning himself as a figure of authority who is both willing and able to attend to the hearer's needs. To attend to the client, he requested that the client follow him to show him a better place where he could take rest. This indicates that he cared for the needs and well-being of his listener. He desired to make the listener feel good, happy, and satisfied by finding a comfortable place to rest.

In another context, a bodaboda rider sees a standing client and addresses her as follows:

**Example 3** CM2: *Wienda ukuwa ta indii?* (Eng. At what time would you like to be picked?)

CA2: *Onekalanga.* (Eng. After staying here for a while)

CM2: *Na nengi kavila tikaaya.* (Eng. Then have a sit there)

At station C, bodaboda rider 2 showed care to his client by asking her about the time she wanted to be picked. He had already recognized the clients' need for a means of transport and wanted to address it. When the client informed him that she would stay for a while before travelling, the bodaboda rider showed him more concern by showing her a place to rest while waiting. This showed that the client had a higher status than the bodaboda rider. By saying 'Then have a sit here' showed he agreed and respected the listener's choice of time. Through this, the bodaboda rider made the client feel valued and contributed to saving the client's positive face. The findings agreed with the study by Ann (2014), who discovered that politeness strategies were intentionally used to make listeners feel better about themselves.

### **c) Co-identification with the listener**

This strategy refers to recognizing and reinforcing shared identities or social groups between the speaker and listener. Positive politeness strategies linked to co-identity involve showing solidarity, acknowledging shared interests, or expressing common membership within a group, thereby making the listener feel part of something familiar and respected. It involves the use of address terms, languages or dialects, slang, and jargon (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This strategy enhances social rapport and minimizes social distance between people in a group. The findings revealed the use of kinship identifiers, such as my child, sister, aunt, and grandmother. The kinship identifiers that appeared most frequently in the data were those referring to females, as opposed to those referring to males. This can be attributed to the fact that the majority of bodaboda operators in the research area were male, and thus predominantly used these terms when addressing female clients. According to Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, such use of kinship terms functions as a positive politeness strategy aimed at reducing social distance

and fostering a sense of solidarity. The research findings further suggest that these forms of address were more common in cross-gender interactions, indicating that speakers employed kinship terms not only to attend to the hearer's positive face needs but also to navigate gender dynamics in socially appropriate ways. The following statements highlight this point.

**Example 4** AA3: *Mwana uyu wakwa nde thina (anampa pesa;) vatiala kakumi.* (**Eng.** My child has no issues (giving him money;) There is a deficit of ten shillings)

**Example 5** BM3: *Sister, koenda tithi vandu?* (**Eng.** My sister, do you wish we go somewhere?)

BA4: *Ngitite kuthumuanga o vaa.* (**Eng.** I am just resting here.)

BM3: *Ni sawa.* (**Eng.** It's okay.)

**Example 6** BM4: *Aunt wina wia? wienda uvika va?* (**Eng.** Aunt, do you have work to offer? Where do you want to go?)

BA5: *Aiee, ona ndiendete oyu.* (**Eng.** No, I am not going right now.)

**Example 7** EM5: *Mwaitu tithi.* (**Eng.** Grandmother, let's go)

EA6: *(Mhudumu akifungua kamba ya kufunga mizigo) Untheetye na mbesa syiana utanathasya?* (**Eng.** Untying the language) How much money will you drop me with?)

EM5: *One fifty* (**Eng.** One fifty shillings)

In Kikamba, when someone refers to another person as 'mwana uyu wakwa' (my child), as shown in Example 4, indicates that the speaker is older than the person being addressed. It showed that the speaker had more power than the listener and the use of the address term served to minimize social distance between them. Client 3 used this term to make the bodaboda rider feel accepted and valued. By addressing him as 'Mwana uyu wakwa' (my child), the speaker placed him in the same group as his own children. Furthermore, bodaboda rider 3 used the term 'Dada' (sister) to refer to his client. This word is used to refer to a close female relative of the same age group as the speaker's sister. By using this term, he made his client feel accepted, valued, and recognized as blood sister. Additionally, bodaboda rider 4 used the term 'Aunt' to seek the client's permission to transport her. He aimed to show respect and appreciation, making it easier to deliver his message in a nonintrusive way.

On the other hand, the bodaboda rider 5 started a conversation with an elderly woman by calling her 'Mwaitu' (grandmother). The term 'Mwaitu' (grandmother) is a respectful title in the Kamba community and is used to refer to someone of the same age as the parents of one's father or mother. In line with politeness theory, this suggests that the client held greater power than the bodaboda rider and was thus addressed with deference to mitigate social distance and maintain face. This influenced bodaboda rider 5 to use the term 'Mwaitu' (grandmother) to preserve the positive image of the speaker by making her feel recognized and respected. His aim was to maintain a good relationship with the client, to make it easier to deliver his request to transport her, and to obtain a favorable response to acceptance. This explanation is supported by the twenty-first interviewee (MM21) of this study, who explained how he communicates with his client:

*Sister, Aunt, nau kana mwaitu nitiendete? ...timetaa uu mewe muyo nundu meona twamane ndaia.* (**Eng.** Sister, aunt, grandfather, or grandmother are we going? The reason for calling them this way is so that they feel happy and make them know that we respect them. MM21.

The interviewee explained that he used address terms such as *Sister* (dada), *Aunt* (shangazi), *Nau* (grandfather), and *Mwaitu* (grandmother) to show respect and make the client feel happy. These views align with the explanations in Brown and Levison (1987) politeness theory, which states that positive politeness strategies are used to make listeners feel good. In addition, it makes the listener feel recognized and valued by the speaker.

#### d) maximizing agreement

Disagreement is often seen as a source of conflict, and politeness is used to avoid misunderstanding (Lakoff (1973). Seeking an agreement facilitates understanding between the speaker and listener, thereby maintaining and preserving a positive face. This is easily achieved if the speaker and listener share similar beliefs, opinions, and desires (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The following example illustrates the situation of an enhancing agreement.

**Example 8** AM6: *Aiii nimuitha mwambumisya mwa na mwieli nenyu* (**Eng.** You will have underpaid me because you are two.)

AA7: *Aiiee ninguunena.* (**Eng.** No, I will give you)

In the example outlined above, bodaboda rider 6 (AM6) expressed his complaints to the client, showing disagreement. To seek agreement, client 7 assured him that she would address his complaints by giving him the money he requested. Client 7 says this to bodaboda rider 6 to ensure that she maintains her listener's positive face by avoiding disagreement.

In another example, a bodaboda rider attempts to negotiate with clients about the fare they will pay. Each seems to suggest a different fare. For both to be satisfied, a bargaining strategy is used to reach an agreement and bring a common understanding. The following communication illustrates this:

**Example 9** AM7: *Ninamuola mbau lisai. Vaa vakuanawa na yiana lakini ninamuola mbau lisai.* (**Eng.** I have reduced 20 shillings for you on the fare. People are usually charged a hundred here, but I have reduced twenty shillings for you.)

AA8: *Ndwosa 70?* (**Eng.** You can't pick seventy?)

AM7: *Naku seventy ni munini.* (**Eng.** Seventy is little)

AA8: *Aiie naku kuma vaa?* (**Eng.** No, from here?)

AM7: *Ni sawa lisai.* (**Eng.** It's okay let us go.)

In Example 9, the bodaboda rider persuades the client by informing her that he has reduced the fare by twenty shillings in order to make her feel good. To make her feel more valued than others, the bodaboda rider explains that under normal circumstances, people pay a hundred shillings. Therefore, by asking her to pay 80 shillings, the rider shows that he has done her great favor. However, the client has a lower amount than that suggested by the bodaboda rider. The request 'You can't pick seventy?' had a sense of imposition to the bodaboda rider. The bodaboda rider seems to complain about the shortage of 70 shillings, but later agrees and navigates through the imposition by saying it is okay. The word 'okay' is used to indicate agreement, which helps to maintain the positive face of the listener. Thus, he intentionally agreed to avoid disagreement, maximize agreement, and preserve the listener's positive face of the listener (Brown & Levinson, 1987). These results contradict Schiffrin's Schiffrin (1984) view, which holds that disagreement should not be seen as a source of negative outcomes, but can be a sign of building strong relationships without affecting communication.

#### e) praising the listener

People are praised based on their appearance, dressing, ability to perform tasks, and ownership of property. Compliments aim to make people feel good and to build friendships. This positive evaluation makes the listener feel good about themselves (Brown & Levinson, 1987). By complimenting the listener, the speaker expresses a positive view. Such compliments are only appropriate if the listener has qualities worth praising, the speaker believes that he/she is impressed by those qualities, and would like to inform the listener that his/her qualities are impressive. The results of this study demonstrate this strategy, as indicated in the following example:

**Example 10** *AM8: Wamina soko nduumbita ngwinukye, wi sonko na smart. (Eng. When you finish shopping, you will call me to take you home, you are rich and beautiful.)*

Motorcycle rider 8 (bodaboda rider) sees a client shopping and tells the client that he should call him to take him home once he finishes shopping. The motorcycle rider deliberately uses the words 'Sonko' (rich) and 'Smart' (beautiful) to compliment his listener. In addition to delivering his message about wanting to give the client a ride, he used the complimentary word 'smart' to express his feelings about the client's appearance. The aim was to make the client feel good and minimize the social distance between them.

#### **f) offering a promise**

The results of the study showed that some bodaboda riders and clients made promises during their conversations to ensure that each participant's face was protected. A promise to fulfill a certain task is made to make the listener happy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Promises, as commissive speech acts, are significantly influenced by social hierarchy and power relations. The use of promises is demonstrated as follows:

**Example 11** *BM9: Wakwata uthi niovaa. (Eng. When you decide to leave, am here.)*

*BA9: Withaa vaa? (Eng. Do you stay here?)*

*BM9: Aiee nikweteela mbaka ila ukoka. (Eng. No, I will wait for you until you come.)*

The bodaboda rider informs the client about where to meet him. The client mimics the rider's words by asking, 'Withaa vaa?' (Do you usually stay here?). The mimicking was made to obtain reassurance. The bodaboda rider avoids the act of damaging the client's face (or reputation), because he knows that he does not stay there all the time. He maintained the positive face of the client by promising to wait until he returned. By promising to wait, he showed the listener that he cared deeply and would not go anywhere until the client returned. This utterance meets the needs of a listener's positive face. In another context, when the client requested for a fare reduction, the bodaboda rider promised to do the reduction some other time in the future.

**Example 12** *EA10: Utukuaa muno waile utuola. (Eng. You often carry us, you should reduce it the fare.)*

*EM10: Ngamuola yiingi. (Eng. I will reduce it next time.)*

Client 10 believed that since the bodaboda rider had often carried them, he should reciprocate the kind gesture by reducing the travelling cost as a reward. To ensure that he maintained the listener's positive face, the bodaboda rider promised to offer the reward some other day instead of refuting it plainly by saying that he would not reduce the fare that day. The reason for failing to refuse directly was that he did not want to threaten the listener's positive face. This showed that he had more power than the listener especially in determining the transport cost and this influenced his choice of politeness strategy.

## **4.2. Negative politeness strategy**

This strategy is employed by the speaker to present his needs to the listener in a manner that does not impose. The speaker uses this strategy to soften the impact of a statement, especially when it concerns a request, and allows the listener to have the freedom to choose whether to comply or decline. The speaker employs this polite strategy because they understand that the listener has the ability to accept or reject a request. Some of the negative politeness strategies include the speaker using indirect expressions, the speaker demeaning himself and exalting the listener, making requests, strategies of speaker and listener inclusivity (hedging), and even pessimism (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In this study, a specific strategy was frequently used. Communication between the bodaboda riders and clients revealed that the strategy of inclusivity was used to avoid the act of directly targeting a particular listener.

**a) inclusivity strategy/hedging**

Using this strategy, the speaker avoids focusing on the individual listener; instead, they present what they are saying to the entire audience. The speaker is confident that by doing so, he will not threaten the listener's face and will be able to convey his message effectively.

**Example 13** AM11: *Notinuke...?* (Eng. Can we go home...?)

AA11: *Aiee, ti oyu.* (Eng. No, not now)

In the example above, the bodaboda rider asks the client whether they can go home by saying 'Notinuke?' (Can we go home?). To ensure that he does not threaten the speaker's face, he uses hedging to avoid threatening the listener's face. The morpheme 'ti' (we) in the word 'Notinuke?' (Can we go home?) was deliberately used to show the plural. It includes both the speaker and listener in a common activity. The speaker does not directly tell the listener to go home. Instead, he softens the impact of the statement by involving himself in the act of going home. The choice of this strategy was influenced by the rank of imposition of his request to the listener. In so doing, he mitigated the imposition and harshness of the statement. Consequently, he conveys his request to offer the bodaboda transport service in a manner that does not offend the listener.

In another context, the speaker uses the hedging technique, as illustrated in the following example.

**Example 14**

DM12: *Tiendei nenyu* (Eng. Let us go)

DA12: *Katundu kana?* (Eng. To Katundu or)

DM12: *Yii* (Eng. Yes)

DA12: *Aiie, umunthi eka tukanyange.* (Eng. No, let us walk today).

The bodaboda rider at station D (DM12) used an inclusive strategy to request to take the client to a place known as Katundu. He succeeded in conveying this message by talking as if he was going to travel with them to Katundu. By saying this, he ensured that the message was not direct or commanding, thus avoiding imposition on listeners. Instead, he softens his speech by positioning himself as one of the intended recipients of the message, saying 'Nenyu tiendei' (meaning 'we should go' or 'let us go'), which helps to mitigate the potential threat of his request.

**4.3. On-record strategy**

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the speaker aims to deliver a message directly to the listener without considering their facial needs. This strategy supports Grice's Grice (1975) view that a message should be conveyed to a listener in a clear and unambiguous manner. Therefore, the emphasis is not on the face, but on the message being communicated. The research findings revealed that this strategy was used because of the relational differences that depict varying levels of authority (power dynamics). This strategy is commonly used by individuals in close relationships such as friends and family members. The use of this politeness strategy was also facilitated by an emergency situation and speech/action that aimed to benefit the listener. The on-record strategies identified in conversations between bodaboda riders and clients are as follows:

**a) relationship between the interlocutors**

When the speaker has a very close relationship with the listener, they tend to speak without considering their face needs (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This is evident when speakers are of the same age, hold equal power or positions at work, are friends, or are family members. The following statement demonstrates this.

**Example 15** AM13: (Kwa mhudumu mwenzake) *Mbona Kahindi withaa wi bado, enda wose wia nuya vaya itina. Ivetange kethaa niwiie kila kyaku nakwa ngaya kyakwa.* (**Eng.** (To his fellow colleague) Why is it that Kahindi you never mature? Go find a job; there is one behind. Leave here if you have enjoyed yours and let me eat mine.)

Bodaboda rider 13 at station A (AM13) talks to his colleague without paying attention to his face needs. He speaks directly, mentioning his listeners' real names and says, 'Kahindi withaa wi bado' (Kahindi, you are immature). These words have the potential to threaten Kahindi's face, but because they were uttered by his close friend, he ignores them and receives the message as it is. The social distance between the speaker and the listener is short hence influencing his choice of politeness strategy. Moreover, Bodaboda rider 13 continues to say to his listener, '*Ivetange kethaa niwiie kila kyaku nakwa ngaya kyakwa.*' (Leave here if you have enjoyed yours and let me eat mine.) With this statement, he communicates the message directly to the listener. He instructed him to leave so that he could communicate with the client. He reminds him that, even though he might have offered a transport service to the client previously, he had no right to demand to offer the service again by default. In this way, the speaker ensures that his message clearly reaches his colleague. In another context, this strategy is evident as follows:

**Example 16** BM14: *Nii ngambe ukua maeema.* (**Eng.** First, I will go to carry the tents.)

BA13: *Nuu usu ukwie?* (**Eng.** Who died?)

After bodaboda rider 14 said that he would transport the tents first, the client quickly jumps into the conclusion that the tents are taken to places where there is a funeral. Consequently he directly asks a question without considering the listener's face, 'Nuu usu ukwie?' (Who died?). The topic of death is sensitive in many societies, including the Kamba community, and has not been casually discussed. Euphemistic words are often used to soften the harshness of the word 'death.' For example, in the Kamba community, many say 'Niwiwiwe', which in English translates to 'He was called.' The expression of someone being called by God is a way to explain that someone has passed away. The reason for not directly mentioning death is that it is a sensitive issue in society, that often causes fear and threatens people's faces (Muia, 2003). Client 13 violated this norm by directly addressing bodaboda rider 14 without considering his face. This is because of their close relationship which minimizes the social distance and power between the interlocutors. Therefore, his goal was not to address the listener's face needs but to get an answer to the real situation.

### **b) intention of benefiting the listener**

The study findings revealed that, during an interaction, if a speaker believes that what they intend to say would benefit the listener, they often use this strategy to convey their message. They are usually unconcerned with the listener's face; in their view, the listener is a benefactor (Brown & Levinson, 1987). This strategy is evident in the following statement.

**Example 17** AM15: *Wienda utwawa va?* (**Eng.** Where do you want to be taken to?)

AA14: *Katundu.* (**Eng.** Katundu.)

In Example 17, bodaboda rider 15 directly asks client 14, 'Wienda utwawa va?' (Where do you want to be taken to?). This statement identifies the client as needy, and has the potential to threaten the hearer's face. The speaker shows that he has more power than the listener. In this context, the speaker believes that because the client would benefit, there is no need to use words meant to preserve the listener's face. Therefore, the speaker directly conveys the message.

In another context, a bodaboda rider expressed his demand to carry a client without minding about the client's negative face needs, as the following example illustrates:

### **Example 18**

CM16: *Nienda ukukua.* (**Eng.** I want to carry you)

CA15: *Wianda unguwa undwae va?* (**Eng.** Where do you intend to carry and take me to?)

CM16: Nthungoni. (**Eng.** Nthungoni)

CA15: Nthungoni, *aiie, ndiendete Nthungoni.* (**Eng.** Nthungoni, no, I am not heading to Nthungoni.)

The 16th Bodaboda rider at station C (CM16) delivers his message in a way that threatens the listener's negative face, which does not like to be interfered with. The rider told his listener, 'I want to carry you'. The speaker used these words because the listener would directly benefit from his act of kindness in wanting to carry him. He did not see the need to use words to preserve the listener's face but instead thought it was better to deliver a good message directly, as suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Grice (1975). By stating 'I want to carry you', the speaker establishes an asymmetrical power dynamic, imposing on the listener's negative face—desire for autonomy and freedom from intrusion. This direct face threatening act (FTA) disregards the listener's need for distance. This asymmetrical power dynamic influenced his decision to employ an on-record strategy, opting for directness despite the potential threat to the client's face needs.

### c) emergency situation

The on-record strategy is used when something needs to be urgently addressed. In such situations, time is not usually available to selectively use words to preserve the listener's face, as the intention is to deliver the intended message quickly. The results of this study demonstrated emergency situations that made both bodaboda riders and clients use the on-record strategy in their conversations.

**Example 19** BM17: *Kindu wa Musembi.* (**Eng.** Musembi's wife.)

BA16: *Ni wa Nzioka musenzi uu.* (**Eng.** Barbaric, I am Nzioka's wife.)

In example 19, client 16 walked with her husband towards bodaboda rider 18. The Bodaboda rider 17 at station B (BM17), upon seeing her, called out, 'Kindu wa Musembi (Musembi's wife)'. According to passenger 16, this statement is incorrect. To correct this statement and avoid any misunderstandings with her husband, she used an on-record strategy to rectify the reference. She understood that the emergency of matter needed to be addressed immediately, as there was no other appropriate time. To correct the mistake, she used the an abusive term 'barbaric' to emphasize on the weight of her message to her listener by saying, 'Barbaric, I am Nzioka's', The client aimed to make her message clear to the listener by informing him that she was not Musembi's wife, but Nzioka's. This strategy helped her convey the importance of her message appropriately and in a timely manner. The speaker's choice of an on-record strategy was informed by the high degree of face threat posed by the preceding inaccurate statement. In accordance with Politeness Theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), such a strategy serves to directly redress the communicative imbalance, prioritizing clarity and accountability over the mitigation of face threatening acts. This situation is also experienced in the following context:

**Example 20** EM18: *Kwamba unenga musaala mbee wa mandu ala angi onthe.* (**Eng.** Before anything else, let me have the compensation first.)

EA17: (*Itina wa kuma, mukuwa ambiisya kumantha mbesa muvukoni na amunenga.*) (**Eng.** After alighting, the client searches her pockets and hands money to the rider.)

In Example 20, the bodaboda rider 18 takes his client to her destination and then alights. Since the bodaboda rider knows he could get another client at any moment, this urgency pushes him to directly request for his compensation by saying, 'Before everything else, let me have the compensation first'. He aimed to convey his message of wanting immediate payment without considering the client's face needs. Therefore, he used the on-record strategy because of the urgent situation enhanced by the nature of his work environment.

## 4.4. Off-record strategy

As outlined by Brown and Levinson (1987), off-record strategies involve indirect and ambiguous communication that enables the speaker to avoid explicit responsibility for face-threatening acts. By relying

on implicature, such strategies minimize imposition and attend to the listener's negative face in contexts requiring heightened politeness. This strategy goes against the views of Grice (1975), who suggests that messages should be conveyed directly. According to Lakoff (1973), there are two principles that guide communication. One of the principles he identifies is the principle of clarity, which aligns with Grice's explanation. The second principle emphasized by Lakoff is the principle of politeness. The politeness principle encourages the speaker to organize his words in a way that does not offend the listener or threaten his face. Instead, the message is delivered in a manner that aims to preserve the listener's face (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The pragmatic perspective is widely used in interpreting meaning because speakers often imply more than what they say or imply what they do not say (Searle, 1969). The results of this study demonstrate the use of ambiguous statements and clues as off-record techniques.

#### a) use of ambiguous statements

Ambiguity arises when words or statements with more than one meaning are used in the communication. This also becomes apparent when a statement lacks a clear meaning. The speaker presents a statement and leaves the listener with the freedom to interpret the meaning. In this manner, the speaker preserves the listener's face. Some ambiguous statements identified in the communication between bodaboda riders and their clients are as follows.

**Example 21** *BM19: Sister, koenda tithi vandu? (Eng. Sister, where would you like us to go.)*

*BA18: Ngitite kuthumuanga o vaa. (Eng. I'm just resting here.)*

*BM19: Ni sawa. (Eng. Okay)*

Referring to Example 21, bodaboda rider 19 at station B (BM19) asks the client whether she would like to be taken somewhere. Instead of responding directly with yes or no, the client uses an ambiguous statement to ensure that they do not offend the listener's face. When she said, 'I'm just resting here', she left the listener with the freedom to interpret what she meant, as the statement could be understood in different ways. For example, by using this statement, the speaker may have wanted to inform the listener about what he intended to do at that moment or may have wanted to tell him that he did not want to go anywhere. Rather than saying directly that she was not travelling at the moment, she used an alternative reason for not going. She intended to convey her message unclearly so as to protect the face of rider 19. By replying 'okay', the rider showed that he understood what the client meant. Another example demonstrating ambiguity is as follows.

**Example 22** *CM20: Nounenga wia usu ngakwambatya? (Eng. Why don't you give me the job of giving you a ride?)*

*CA19: Woonu nauma niitha namukosea. Ve syindu naile umunenga. (Eng. If I leave, I will have wronged him. There are things I should give him.)*

Bodaboda rider 20 at station C (CM20) asked the client to offer him the job of transporting her. Passenger 19, in response, uses an off-record strategy to convey his message to the bodaboda rider. The statement 'If I leave, I will have wronged him. There are things I should give him', causes the rider to come up with multiple possible meanings. The rider may understand that the client is indirectly saying that she will not give him the job. Alternatively, the client may be willing to give him the job, but is concerned about wronging someone else. Furthermore, another reason that the client may not go with him is that there were things he needed to hand over to the person she was waiting for. Thus, instead of directly refusing the rider's request, the client gives reasons to leave the rider with room to figure out what he meant. This construction portrays the client as maintaining a socially distant relationship with the rider and occupying a position of lesser power, as indicated by her use of ambiguity to attenuate the risk associated with potential refusal. By doing so, the client ensured that she preserved the face of the bodaboda rider 20.

### b) giving hints

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the speaker uses clues/hints to guide the listener to understand the meaning of what is being said. Clues help with comprehension, especially when they are linked to a specific context. According to Grice (1975), on how messages should be conveyed, he opposed the use of clues as they could cause misinterpretation, thus distorting the intended meaning. Some bodaboda riders used hints to convey their messages to clients as follows:

**Example 23** CM21: *Ngali ya kwinuka nino naku.* (**Eng.** this is the car with which to go home by).

CA20: *Ndyinukite oyu.* (**Eng.** I am not going home right now)

**Example 24** EM22: *Ngali tino.* (**Eng.** this is a car.)

EA21: *Aiee, nyie ndiendete oyu.* (**Eng.** No, I am going nowhere.)

In examples 23 and 24, bodaboda riders 21 and 22 use the phrases 'This is the car to go home' and 'This is a car' respectively to hint the message they wished to convey. The word 'car' is used intentionally, as it represents a vehicle used for transporting passengers and typically has four wheels. Although a bodaboda has two wheels, it performs the same functions as a car. Therefore, bodaboda riders 21 and 22 used the word 'car' to hint at a solution to meet passenger transportation needs. Thus, the message was conveyed indirectly in a manner that did not offend the client's face. Another example of the use of hints in a different context is as follows.

A bodaboda rider sees a client approaching him and then says, 'The night is beginning to draw nigh,' as follows:

#### Example 25

DM23: *Naikwatukai* (**Eng.** The night is beginning to draw nigh)

DA22: *Aiee, ndiendee naumina tyotindete.* (**Eng.** No, am finishing up so that we can leave).

Bodaboda rider 23 hints at the purpose of his communication by reminding the client that night has fallen. Therefore, he implied that the client would need a means of transport even though he did not directly convey the message. The speaker used this strategy to avoid appearing as though he was imposing the listener. Client 26 showed that he understood the message hinted at by bodaboda rider 23 as he informed him that he was almost done with shopping for them to travel. By adopting this strategy, they maintained mutual face and mitigated the degree of imposition inherent in the intended request.

### 4.5. Silence strategy

In this strategy, the speaker avoids any action that poses a potential threat to the listener's face by remaining silent. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), this strategy is polite because it avoids threatening the listener's face. This is because any utterance has the potential to threaten a listener's face. Some bodaboda riders demonstrated the use of this strategy as follows.

**Example 26** AM24: *Na nduete o yiana.* (**Eng.** Bring one hundred only)

AA23: *Twii eli?* (**Eng.** The two of us?)

AM24: *(Amba uvindya) Ete tiliile vaa.* (**Eng.** (After short silence) Bring, we keep them here.)

Bodaboda rider 24 at station A (AM24) encountered two passengers who wished to be transported. He informs one of them about the fare they need to pay to be taken to their desired destination. To confirm this, one of the clients asks the rider if that is the fare they need to pay for both. When faced with this question, rider 24 was concerned about the listener's face and decided not to take any action

that could harm the client's face. Instead of saying that the amount was insufficient for two people, he remained silent. With respect to power dynamics, the speaker's silence reflected a lower level of power relative to the addressee, thereby informing the choice of politeness strategy. He requested that they hand over their luggage to him as a sign that he agreed to carry them for that amount. In another context, this strategy is demonstrated as follows.

**Example 27** AM25: *Wiisa uthi saa syiana?* (Eng. at what time will you go home?)

AA24: (*Avindya.*)(Eng. Silence)

Rider 25 wanted to know the specific time that the passenger wanted to travel. The passenger refrains from saying anything to the rider to preserve his face. The passenger had already noticed that this rider wanted to transport him, but he did not want to threaten the rider's face by mentioning a time that he was unsure of or even by saying that he did not need bodaboda transport. Instead, he remained silent and allowed the rider to interpret the silence. A summary of these study results is shown in the table and pie chart below (Table 1 and Figure 2).

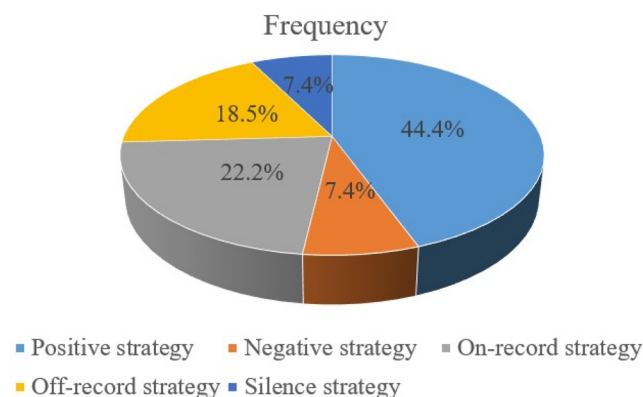
## 5. Conclusion and suggestions

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate the utilization of various politeness strategies in communication between bodaboda riders and their clients. Specifically, the study identified five distinct politeness strategies: positive politeness, negative politeness, on-record strategies, off-record strategies, and silence strategy (i.e. saying nothing). Of these, positive politeness emerged as the most frequently employed strategy, primarily aimed at preserving the hearer's positive face. On-record and off-record strategies followed in frequency, while negative politeness and silence strategies were used less frequently. The choice of these politeness strategies was influenced relational dynamics between the interlocutors and the anticipated payoffs of their use. These strategies were all geared towards addressing the needs of positive and negative faces, with the intention of mitigating face-threatening acts and preserving the public image of both the bodaboda riders and their clients. The contributions of this research are significant, particularly within the communication discipline, as they enhance the understanding of communication dynamics in the bodaboda sector.

**Table 1.** Results summary on the use of politeness strategies.

Politeness strategies	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Conclusion
Positive strategy	12	44.4	Most frequently
Negative strategy	2	7.4	Less frequently
On-record strategy	6	22.2	Frequently
Off-record strategy	5	18.5	Frequently
Silence strategy	2	7.4	Less frequently
ALL	27	100.0	

Source: Data obtained from field, 2024.



**Figure 2.** Frequency of politeness strategies used in conversation.

The insights derived from this study offer valuable implications for stakeholders and policymakers, particularly in terms of refining service delivery in the bodaboda industry. Effective communication plays a central role in the success of transportation activities within this sector, and the use of politeness strategies is critical in fostering positive interaction and ensuring that both parties (bodaboda riders and their clients) are satisfied and comfortable. Based on these findings, this study advocates the development of policies that promote the use of polite language in public transportation settings with the aim of addressing communication challenges. Furthermore, future research could explore deeply the influence of gender on the use of politeness strategies in conversations between bodaboda riders and their clients. Additionally, maritime transport communication can be examined through alternative theoretical frameworks, such as Speech Act Theory, to deepen the understanding of communication practices in this field.

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## Ethical approval statement

This study was approved by Pwani University Institutional Scientific and Ethics Research Committee (Ref No. ISERC/MA/010/2024) on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

## Author contributions

CRedit: **Faith Mbithe Kathukya**: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Writing – original draft; **John Khaisie Wanyama**: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Supervision, Validation, Writing – review & editing; **Timothy Kinoti M'Ngaruthi**: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Supervision, Writing – review & editing.

## Author contributions statement

\*Faith Mbithe Kathukya: Conceptualization, study design, acquisition of data, analysis and interpretation, and drafted the original manuscript. John Khaisie Wanyama: Conception, study design, analysis and interpretation, reviewed the article and approved the final version of the article before submission. Timothy Kinoti M'Ngaruthi: Conception, study design, analysis and interpretation, reviewed the article and approved the final version of the article before submission.

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## Declaration of Helsinki statement

This study was conducted in accordance with the principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical approval was obtained from Pwani University Institutional Scientific and Ethics Review committee (Ref No. ISERC/MA/010/2024), and all participants provided informed consent prior to their involvement in the study.

## Informed consent statement

Informed consent was obtained verbally before participation in the study. The reason for choosing verbal consent over written consent was to enhance inclusivity of participants (bodaboda riders and clients). In light of the dynamic and time-sensitive nature of the bodaboda work environment, verbal consent emerged as a more pragmatic approach, minimizing delays that would have otherwise resulted from the need to read and comprehend lengthy written consent documents. Consequently, participants appeared more comfortable providing verbal consent rather than written consent.

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## Data availability statement

Data will be made available upon reasonable request.

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