Politeness Strategies and Gendered Language Use in Hospitality Discourse: A Case Study from an Urban Hotel in Jakarta

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Abstract. This research examines the utilization of politeness strategies and gendered language among hospitality professionals at Ibis Styles Jakarta Mangga Dua Square. The main goals are threefold: to find out what kinds of politeness strategies front office staff use, to look at how gender affects the language choices they make when talking to guests, and to look at how important these strategies are for improving customer satisfaction and professional communication. Data were gathered via direct observation of daily service interactions and semi-structured interviews with staff, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of both practice and perception. The analysis shows that people often use both positive and negative politeness strategies. However, the way they use them depends on their gender. Female staff members were more likely to use both positive strategies, like friendly greetings and building solidarity, and negative strategies, like indirect requests and polite apologies. This shows that they were relational and empathetic. On the other hand, mostly the male staff applied positive politeness strategies that focus on clarity, assertiveness, and resourcefulness, especially when they were busy assisting the customers. These gender-based distinctions show wider discourse forms, including "rapport talk" and "report talk", thus it emphasizes that communication styles are influenced by personal preferences, social beliefs, and professional ethics. These findings demonstrate that linguistic strategies are not merely a matter of language ethics. It is also a crucial instrument in improving customer satisfaction and professional trustworthiness. The study contends that neither empathetic nor efficiency-driven approaches should be favored; instead, both fulfill complementary roles in hospitality service delivery. By contextualizing this knowledge in the real hospitality practices, the research enriches the applied linguistic sphere, discourse studies, and hospitality management. It also has the real impact on professional training and staff development programs that indicate improving communication, flexibility, and service excellence in the global hospitality industry.

Keywords: Politeness strategies, Gendered language, Hospitality, Discourses, Linguistics, Quality Education

Introduction

Communication is very important in the hospitality industry, especially at the hotel front desk. This department gives the first impression that has significant influence, on the whole, towards customer satisfaction. In this context, politeness strategies and gender-specific language usage are pivotal factors influencing the quality of interaction. These linguistic characteristics not only show politeness and professionalism but also deliver complex social and cultural implications in providing service. Numerous linguistic scholars have underscored the significance of politeness in cultivating favorable service experiences. Brown and Levinson

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(1987) categorize politeness into two main strategies, namely positive politeness and negative politeness. Positive politeness stimulates connection and affability, while negative politeness avoids pressure and maintains formality. Tannen (1990) proposed the concept of "genderlects," positing that men and women, influenced by distinct socialization patterns, typically communicate in divergent manners. Men frequently employ more assertive and direct communication, whereas women typically embrace a more empathetic and nurturing style.

While numerous studies have investigated politeness and gendered language independently, there is a deficiency of comprehensive research analyzing the interaction of these two factors in practical hospitality contexts. Rababah (2021), Kusumarini, et. al. (2021), and Noorani (2021) show that the way people interact in hotels is mostly shaped by cultural and institutional factors. Rababah et al. (2021) found that hotel staff in Jordan often use direct instruction for efficiency. Meanwhile, Kusumarini et al. (2021) described that Japanese hotel staff in Bali used an equitable politeness strategy by incorporating positive and negative mechanisms. This strategy aimed to retain respect and rapport. Besides, Noorani (2021) also discussed numerous positive politeness strategies that guests prefer. It clarifies that professional and polite language is still essential in efficient service interactions.

Furthermore, recent research about politeness strategy has explored the gender impact towards communication practices in the sector of hospitality. Chalke et. al. (2025) found that women tend to use collective language in the application materials. It is in line with Beiza et. al.' (2024) study that demonstrated gender influences the way people respond to hotel marketing messages. However, only a few studies focused on gender manifestations in direct service interactions between hotel staff and guests, which is the main focus of this research.

This study aims to address the existing gap by examining the utilization of politeness strategies and gendered language by male and female front office personnel at Ibis Styles Jakarta Mangga Dua Square, as well as the impact of these factors on guest satisfaction. The study is guided by the following question: What politeness strategies are frequently employed by male and female front office staff during the interaction with guests? How do their communication style adapt to or counter conventional gender norms?

This research enriches the sociolinguistics and pragmatics disciplines through authentic interaction and interview data assessment, focusing specifically on service discourse. This research is also advanced because of the integrative approach by analyzing politeness strategies and gendered language at the same time within the real hospitalization context. The prior studies have not been extensively explored. Its significance transcends theoretical boundaries, providing practical applications for training hospitality professionals to cultivate more inclusive and effective communication strategies. Through this approach, this research not only contributes to academic discourse but also improves the service quality and guest satisfaction in the hospitality industry.

Theoretical Framework
The Theory of Politeness

This study examines the interplay between politeness strategies and gendered language in front office communication within the hospitality sector. This research uses two approaches in linguistics to strengthen the analysis, namely Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987) and Deborah Tannen's Gender and Language Theory (1990). These theories delineate the primary variables, elucidate the researcher's perspective, and provide a foundation for interpreting data gathered from actual service interactions. Brown and Levinson state that individuals put an effort to protect their public image, or "face", during social interaction. Speakers usually use two main strategies to manage their face. Positive politeness draws attention to friendliness, support, and greetings (for example, "We are glad to help you").

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Meanwhile, negative politeness reduces demand and requests indirectly by using hedging signs or making formal apologies (for example, "Is it okay if you wait for a moment?"). These strategies are crucial to create interaction in the polite, professional, and guest-oriented hospitality industry. The approach offers a model to classify the linguistic strategies applied by the hotel front office staff in managing relationships with guests.

Language and Gender Theory

Tannen discusses "genderlects" to show how men and women tend to talk to each other in different styles due to the way they were raised and society's expectations toward them. She examines two types of talk: report talk and rapport talk. Men commonly use the report talk, which focuses on delivering information, authority, and self-reliance. Meanwhile, women usually use the rapport talk, which focuses on emotional connection, empathy, and teamwork. These styles manifested in the way hotel staff handling complaints, giving information, or showing politeness. Tannen's model facilitates this research to examine whether the gender-based communication style in the hospitality industry strengthens or challenges conventional gender norms.

Research Parameters and Analytical Framework

This research focuses on two interrelated variables: (1) the politeness strategies (positive or negative) used by front office staff, and (2) gender-based communication patterns. These are examined through field observations, interviews with staff, and guests feedback at Ibis Styles Jakarta Mangga Dua Square. The analysis supposes that linguistic behavior is formed by both professional social context (for example, service expectations, cultural standards) and individual identity (for example, gender, role, and experience). This research thoroughly observes assumptions such as "women are more polite naturally" or "men communicate with greater authority." It aims to prove or challenge the claims by using empirical evidence.

Adding to the Framework with Contemporary Studies

Recent academic research has demonstrated how politeness and gender influence communication in service context. Kim and Jang (2019) reveal that using polite language strategically not only makes people consider you as more professional, but it also has a significant impact on guest satisfaction, especially when it is suitable with gender expectations. Holmes and Marra (2021) argue that language in the workplace is not merely individual characteristics, but a performance that is socially constructed. It is influenced by institutional norms, power dynamics, and intrinsic gender-based language that has contextual and flexible characteristics.

This research contributes to sociolinguistics and pragmatics by combining politeness and genderlect theory in the context of actual hospitality. It integrates linguistic strategies to show how the strategy simultaneously reflects the professional politeness, gender identity, and institutional expectation. It is significantly different from the previous research that analyzed these variables separately. The results are not only theoretically significant, as they enhance our comprehension of service discourse, but also practically important, providing insights for the formulation of inclusive and effective communication training for hospitality professionals.

Material and Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive methodology to investigate the utilization of politeness strategies and gendered language in actual guest interactions within the hospitality industry. The research, structured as a case study, was executed at Hotel Ibis

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Styles Jakarta Mangga Dua Square, concentrating on the communication behaviors of front office staff during service interactions. By applying the qualitative description approach, this research intends to reveal language patterns shaped by gender and to understand how these influence guest satisfaction. Recent studies underline that this approach offers flexibility and rich, data-driven comprehension while sustaining familiarity with participants' experiences. Scholars, however, also emphasize encounters related to methodological accuracy, credibility, and the ethical integration of the latest tools, such as large language models, in qualitative research (Hall & Liebenberg, 2024; Schroeder et al., 2025; Villamin et al., 2025).

A qualitative case study methodology was employed to facilitate a comprehensive examination of communication within its authentic context. This approach facilitated a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of linguistic practices formed by social role and professional standards. It highlights data interpretation by using established linguistic theories, including Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987) and Tannen's Gender and Language Theory (1990), rather than testing specific hypotheses.

The research was conducted at Ibis Styles Jakarta Mangga Dua Square, where front office personnel frequently engage with a varied guest. Seven staff members took part, five men and two women. The staff interaction was observed during three workdays, from Monday to Wednesday, starting at 7 a.m. until 6 p.m. This timespan was intentionally designated to match with peak season, thus ensuring higher frequency of service interaction for observation (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mohajan, 2018).

Various tools were utilized to gain a whole image of gender-based politeness and communication. These included: A) observation evaluation sheet and field transcripts, which had indicators such as 1. Use of positive politeness (greetings, pronouns that include everyone, compliments, and small talk), 2. Use of negative politeness (hedging, indirect requests, and apologies), 3. Politeness nonverbal signs (smiling, making eye contact, and standing upright), 4. Response rate and relevance during high-pressure conditions (handling complaints); B) Documentation – including staff communication manuals, guest comments, and service procedure handbooks, which displayed knowledge of institutional expectations related to politeness and professionalism; C) Semi-Structured Interviews – conducted with seven hotel staff members. The indicators are: 1. How people see gender roles in communication, 2. Procedures to handle guests' expectations, and 3. Comprehending how politeness works on guest complacency; D) Guest Satisfaction Survey Data – analyzed to note how the guests assessed staff based on politeness, professionalism, and communication clarity, particularly in gender and politeness strategy (Vogl, 2022; Guest et al., 2020).

Semantic and pragmatic methods were utilized to analyze the data based on the applied theoretical framework. The process consisted of:

1. Transcription and Coding – Wrote down what people said during interviews and interactions and put them into positive or negative politeness categories based on Brown and Levinson (1987).
2. Gendered Communication Analysis – Tannen's (1990) framework was utilized to discern rapport talk and report talk patterns within staff discourse.
3. The Classification Matrix sorts data into groups like politeness type, gender, interaction style, response speed, and problem-handling method so that male and female staff can be compared in a systematic way.
4. Cross-Validation: Comparisons were conducted among observational data, interview results, and guest survey data to validate recurring patterns and enhance reliability (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Nowell et al., 2017).

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To maintain quality and credibility, the concept of trustworthiness criteria offered by Lincoln and Guba's (1985) was implemented, among others, 1) Credibility: assured through triangulation of observations, interviews, documentations, and guest surveys, as well as finding validation by participants; 2) Transferability: gained by serving detail contextual description, which enables adaptation into similar hospitality environment; 3) Dependability: espoused by documented research process, which allows the replication or external audit; 4) Confirmability: enhanced through reflexive journal and cross-validation to decrease researcher partiality and establish objectivity (Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Amankwaa, 2016).

Results and Discussion
Results

The findings show clearly how staffs at the front desk of Hotel Ibis Styles Jakarta Mangga Dua Square use polite ways of speaking along with language shaped by gender when talking to visitors every day. The information came from watching real situations, including doing casual interviews, checking written records, and pulling feedback from guest rating forms. Mixing these sources helped confirm that things were not just random guesses. The seven staff involved held several roles up front: a male Assistant Front Office Manager (Mr. F), plus one man working as Duty Manager (Mr. Rv), a captain named Bellmen (Mr. D), one front desk worker (Mr. Ar) along with Mr. Re, plus two women at reception - Ms. S and Ms. T. For confidentiality purposes, initials are used in this section.

Table 1.
Front Office Staff Participants

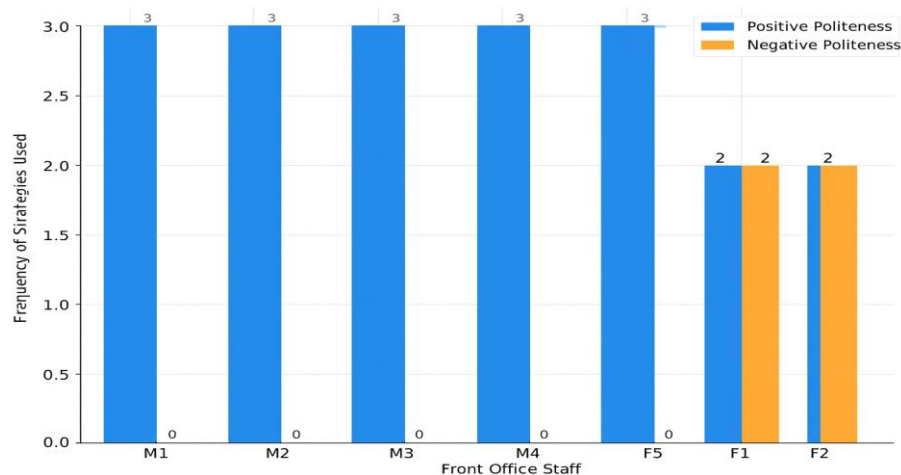| No	Initial	Position
1	Mr. F	Assistant Front Office Manager
2	Mr. Rv	Duty Manager
3	Mr. D	Captain Bellmen
4	Mr. Ar	Front Desk Agent
5	Mr. Re	Front Desk Agent
6	Ms. S	Front Desk Agent
7	Ms. T	Front Desk Agent

Diagram 1.
Politeness Strategies by Gender

The findings revealed that hotel front desk staffs used both kinds of politeness tactics, though men and women differed clearly in approach. Women tended to mix upbeat methods -

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like warm welcomes ("Good morning, we are glad to have you here") plus expressing teamwork ("Let's see what we can do together") - with more cautious ones like saying sorry ("I'm so sorry for the inconvenience") or softening asks ("Would it be possible if…"). That lines up with how they generally aim for kind, respectful, people-focused communication.

In comparison, men on staff usually leaned toward upbeat tones, which are clear, warm, and confident, especially when sorting out guest problems. Instead of softening their words, they would say things like "Let me fix this right away" or "Just leave it to me." The guests would not hear much hesitation or roundabout talk from them. When things got busy, like during check-in rushes or tough complaints, they stayed straightforward and sharp. Completing everything without delay was their approach.

The data in Table 1 demonstrates a clear pattern, that is women used two types of positive politeness and two types of negative politeness. Meanwhile, men showed three forms of positive politeness, yet none of the negative kind. Hence, female staffs seem to mix friendliness with caution, balancing tone and distance, while males lean toward directness, focusing on speed and outcomes instead. These patterns are in line with Brown and Levinson's argument of mind face during talk. It is also in accordance with recent studies that showed how gender shapes conversational habits (Al Shlool, 2020; Ogiermann & Bella, 2020).
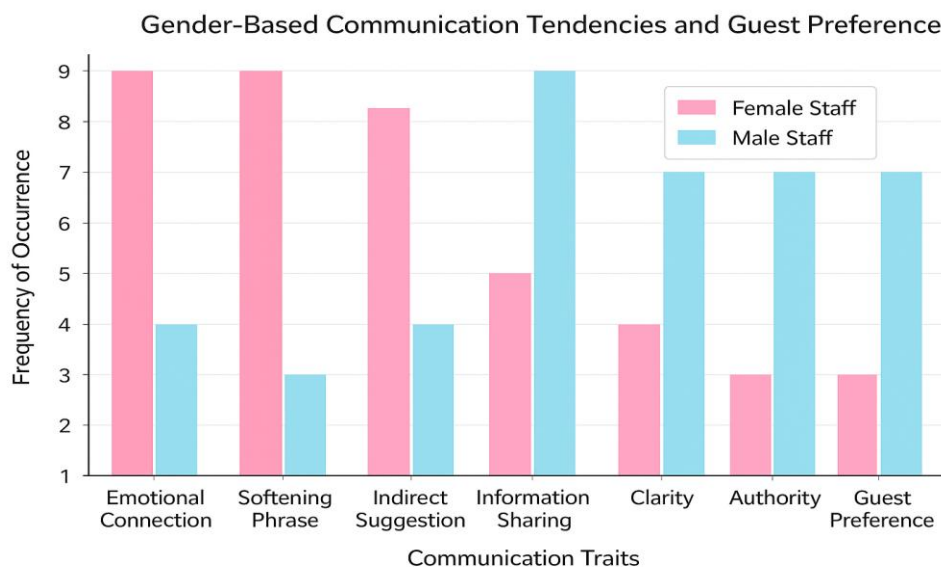

Diagram 2.
Feedback on Guest Satisfaction According to Gender Communication

This research revealed significant differences between men and women in the way they talk at the workplace. Women commonly choose friendly talk through soft words, quick apologies, or clues to develop intimacy, rather than direct instructions. In this way, they tried to make visitors feel comfortable, valued, and noticed on a personal level. Like when helping someone, they would often go with "I understand how you feel, let me see how I can help you," or "Would it be alright if we…" These ways show care and awareness of feelings. On the other hand, Males leaned more toward straight-to-the-point speech, focusing on facts, being clear, and sounding confident. Their talks usually focused on getting things done, particularly during set routines like arrivals or departures or when dealing with problems. Statements like "Your room will be ready in five minutes" or "I will resolve this issue right now" show how they prefer clear and short messages aimed at quick results.

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Guests noticed a shift. Men usually go forward when making speedy moves or hard decisions become important. It is because the moves are seen as very structured and straightforward (Mullany, 2019; Holmes & Marra, 2017). Over at Hotel Ibis Styles Jakarta Mangga Dua Square, feedback lined up with real-life views where men tended to appear bolder and more driven. Their speech played a role, crisp, and packed with facts with zero fluff that lines up with Tannen's (1990) take on report-style chat. This kind of delivery helped them shine during tight spots or urgent fixes (Holmes, 1995; Thai, 2017).

Female employees often excelled at forming personal connections by using caring, responsive speech, typical of rapport-focused interactions. Such an approach helped strengthen lasting customer commitment while promoting a friendly environment. Still, when situations demanded fast outcomes under stress, feedback showed male workers' straightforward, confident tone came across as better suited and more impactful (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Kuo, 2011). Overall, results indicate that gender-linked speaking styles mirror learned social behaviors - and directly influence client views on service performance (Webster & Sundaram, 2009). Data on guest satisfaction showed a consistent pattern in both male and female front office staff, particularly in efficiency, trustworthiness, and interpersonal friendliness. The male staff are usually considered more efficient and reliable in handling complex or demanding service conditions, such as guest complaints or crucial requests. Their ability to give instant, direct, and solution-oriented responses was appreciated by guests who demand simplicity and quick service. On the contrary, the female staff were recognized for their friendliness, concern, and relational sensitivity, which contribute to raise up a comfortable and welcoming situation. However, their approach was sometimes seen as less decisive or slower in execution, a perception that may be influenced by broader societal expectations surrounding gender and professionalism in the workplace (Mohsin & Lengler, 2017; Kim & Kang, 2019).

The guest feedback was in line with what was seen during the observation process and findings from the interview. It highlighted how gender-based talk formed service impressions. Instead of working together effortlessly, the male front officer often applied clear speech and focused on the intended task to deliver information briefly. Due to this way, they appeared confident and took control, especially when handling busy situations, such as check-in or unexpected guest needs. In contrast, the female front officer usually tends to develop connections through friendly replies, softer remarks, and thoughtful to relations (Tannen, 1990; Holmes, 1995). Meanwhile, some people perceived their manner as less firm. Hence, it eased guests feel more comfortable emotionally, which is important for guests who need warm and attentive service.

The interview answers revealed that the staff adjusted the way they talk based on the guest's type. Business guests got short, clear messages - aimed at saving time. In contrast, tourists received warmer, friendlier talk meant to build comfort. Such shifts highlight workers' ability to change tone when needed. These differences also reflect how men and women contribute in varied yet balanced ways during service interactions (Kuo, 2011; Thai, 2017).

Overall, these results reveal that instead of prioritizing one approach, both males' and females' ways of speaking give special value to guests' feelings. Men tend to offer clear, fast responses in high-pressure or routine situations, whereas women often strengthen personal bonds and emotional engagement. Because they balance each other, this mix highlights why varied communication methods matter for full-service hospitality; showing that when different gender-linked patterns work together, guest exchanges become more effective and meaningful.

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Discussion

The findings highlight patterns in how politeness, gender, and guests' views interact within hotel environments. While examining politeness tactics, the researchers found support for Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework when classifying speech behaviors during service interactions. Instead of using indirect forms, male employees often applied direct friendliness - this made them seem self-assured, proactive, yet open. Because of this manner, guests felt reassured during time-sensitive cases; for example, fixing reservation mistakes or handling delayed arrivals. The female staff applied both positive and negative politeness tactics by combining friendliness with respect. Their speech tone sensed as polite and full of caring because they spoke indirectly and asserted apologies. It was very helpful, especially when happens a tense moment such as guest complaints or misunderstandings. The application of both styles indicated adaptability and awareness of social dynamics in the hospitality environment. While the male staff tends to be friendly, the female staff combined the friendliness with formality, a pattern that is also suggested by Al Shlool's (2020) and Ogiermann and Bella (2020). Their research showed that politeness very depends on context and influenced by social positions.

Second, looking at how gender affects communication fits well with Tannen's (1990) idea of genderlects - specifically her split into "report talk" versus "rapport talk." Instead of working together equally, men in staff roles leaned toward report talk, using clear, step-by-step, and firm ways of speaking; this was frequently seen by guests as skilled or capable. Women in service roles showed more rapport talk, using understanding tones, softer phrasing, besides focusing on creating personal bonds. When it came to preference, guests responded differently: for fast decisions plus high speed, they tended to trust male workers whereas women earned recognition by nurturing lasting relationships via emotional closeness. Although earlier studies from Holmes (1995), Mullany (2019), also Holmes & Marra (2017) support these outcomes, they stress one key point that communication differences tied to gender are not natural but shaped by society.

Third, combining what guests said with direct observation highlights how communication affects service views. When business travelers or those dealing with pressing matters chose male employees, it was because they liked clear and organized responses. On the contrary, tourists on vacation, parents, or guests searching for a calming place to stay gave more positive responses to female staff who offered thoughtfulness and sympathy. These patterns show that what guests expect depends heavily on context and shifts based on the nature of each situation. These results align with Mohsin & Lengler (2017), also supported by Kim & Kang (2019), suggesting that effective service depends on speed as well as emotional awareness. In real situations, this means staff training should focus on the adaptation of the way they speak. It assembles various guest expectations rather than prioritizing one approach only.

These results complement the ongoing debates in pragmatics and sociolinguistics. According to the data, gendered speech in hospitality is not natural but precisely ingrained from social rules, workplace demands, or particular circumstances. Litosseliti (2018), Schnurr & Zayts (2017), as well as Holmes & Marra (2021) support this argument. They argue that communication at work must be studied through cultural and structural lenses. Differences between men and women staff here depended on guest types - business travelers compared to tourists - as well as situation type: standard arrivals contrasted with complaints. Such shifts align with Mills' (2003) view since service talk is shaped by gender dynamics alongside organizational control.

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In sum, results show how men's and women's ways of communicating support better guest outcomes. The male staff tend to focus on unambiguous, quick, and helpful solutions during busy periods. Women often use warmth and connection to build comfort. Neither method works best alone; combining both improves overall service quality. In real settings, hotels should offer skill-building that helps employees adjust their tone and style based on guest needs. Future work should use more diverse groups, involve staff from different hotel areas, while also looking into culture or online interactions (Park & Kim, 2020; Kim & Kang, 2021). These efforts could clarify how courtesy and gender-related speech affect service quality within today's international hospitality settings.

Conclusion

The present research sought to investigate the influence of polite expressions and gender-related expressive language on interactions of hotel workers in a hotel Ibis Styles Jakarta Mangga Dua Square. The findings revealed that both male and female employees are instrumental in the quality of service, as each conversational style has unique advantages that enhance the customer's experience. Satisfied Ibis Styles Jakarta Mangga Dua Square visitors reported that male staff are more likely to deliver clear, organized responses in high-stress situations; female team members, in turn, are credited with friendliness, attentiveness, and the creation of homely atmospheres. Rather than approach one or the other style as superior, however, this analysis indicates that these styles are most effective when they function together to facilitate some strong overall results. Linguistic awareness and tolerance are of utmost importance in the service industry. By facilitating workers' understanding of various types of communication skills, and by introducing convenient training styles for delivering training content, a spirit of customer service that increases customer satisfaction can be enhanced in the hospitality industry. Over time, this study demonstrates how accepting different languages of communication enriches employee-guest encounters and facilitates the development of services more conducive to guest preferences.

Acknowledgement

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