

NEGOTIATING POLITENESS IN ENGLISH-MEDIATED HERITAGE TOUR GUIDING AT MANGKUNEGARAN PALACE

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Abstract

Politeness plays a central role in English-mediated heritage tour guiding, particularly in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) setting where guides and tourists often come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In such intercultural encounters, guides must balance cultural explanation, visitor engagement, rapport management, and mutual understanding. This study investigates how politeness is negotiated in guiding interactions at Surakarta Mangkunegaran Palace from a socio-pragmatic perspective. Data were collected through on-site audio recordings, field observations, and follow-up interviews with three professional guides. The findings reveal that guides employ a dynamic combination of politeness strategies, including hedging, softening, indirectness, humour, quiz-based engagement, and culturally grounded forms of Javanese politeness. These strategies enable guides to perform multiple roles as educators, entertainers, cultural mediators, and tour-flow managers while accommodating the needs of international visitors. The analysis further shows that politeness is interactionally co-constructed rather than realized through fixed linguistic formulas. The study contributes to politeness and intercultural pragmatics research by demonstrating how local Javanese values are recontextualized within ELF communication, producing hybrid forms of hospitality discourse. Practically, the findings highlight the importance of pragmatics-informed training for heritage tour guides working in intercultural environments.

Keywords: *English as a Lingua Franca (ELF); heritage tour guiding; intercultural pragmatics; politeness; relational work*

INTRODUCTION

Tour guiding is a communicative profession in which interactional competence, cultural mediation, and language pragmatics intersect to shape tourists' experiences. In heritage sites, guides are expected not only to transfer information but also to manage interpersonal relationships, negotiate cultural meanings, and build rapport with visitors from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, 2020).

Contemporary tour guides are further required to perform multiple communicative functions throughout the tour experience, including welcoming guests, facilitating intercultural interaction, managing visitor engagement, and ensuring smooth tour flow (Purnomo, 2026). Politeness, as a central dimension of pragmatic competence, has therefore become a crucial part of tour guiding performance, particularly when English is used as a lingua franca (ELF) in multicultural tourism settings.

Research on ELF has emphasized the flexibility, accommodation, and intercultural sensitivity required when English is used among speakers with diverse linguistic backgrounds (Jenkins & Mauranten, 2017; Björkman, 2022). ELF users tend to prioritize clarity, rapport-building, and cooperative interaction rather than native-like accuracy—features that are highly relevant for tour guides managing multicultural audiences. In ELF-based tourism encounters, pragmatic strategies such as mitigation, collaborative repair, and explicitness are especially important for preventing miscommunication and maintaining positive relational dynamics. Despite the growing literature on ELF pragmatics, however, little attention has been directed toward how these strategies operate when embedded within strong local cultural frames, such as Javanese politeness norms. This gap becomes increasingly relevant as heritage tourism continues to expand and guides navigate the intersection between local communicative traditions and global expectations.

A review of previous studies on politeness and tourism highlights several important trends. Scholars have examined politeness, rapport management, humour, stance-taking, and empathy as important components of service encounters, hospitality communication, and intercultural interaction (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 2014; Spencer-Oatey, 2008, 2020; Haugh & Kádár, 2023). Yet research focusing specifically on heritage-based guiding using English as a lingua franca remains scarce, particularly in settings shaped by local courtly traditions. Likewise, the integration of Javanese politeness norms with contemporary politeness theories has not been sufficiently explored, even though these norms strongly influence guiding interactions in royal palaces. Empirical analyses of real guiding practices in Surakarta Mangkunegaran Palace are also limited, despite the site's unique blend of royal etiquette, tourism storytelling, and intercultural communication. These gaps underscore the need for a more nuanced investigation into how politeness is co-constructed in multilingual and multicultural heritage tourism contexts.

Javanese communicative norms offer a rich framework for examining politeness in such settings. Values like *andhap-asor* (lowering oneself, showing humility), *tepa slira* (empathy and sensitivity), and *aji-ajining dhiri* (maintaining dignity and social harmony) shape expectations about how individuals speak, behave, and position themselves in social encounters. Within palace environments, politeness becomes not only a linguistic tool but also an index of respect for hierarchy, age, and social roles (Errington, 1998; Sukarno, 2012; Nursanti et al., 2024). When these values converge with intercultural tourism communication, guides must negotiate between local hierarchical politeness norms, diverse expectations from Western and non-Western tourists, and ELF-based

pragmatics that emphasize clarity, collaboration, and rapport. This negotiation surfaces in guides' choices of address terms, mitigation strategies, humour, stance markers, and narrative framing. Heritage tourism thus demands a communicative approach that is not only accurate and engaging but also culturally sensitive, as guides serve simultaneously as storytellers and cultural ambassadors.

Surakarta Mangkunegaran Palace provides an especially compelling context for analysing these dynamics. As a living heritage destination, the palace embodies a convergence of royal protocol, historical narration, and public engagement that requires guides to manage politeness carefully. Interactions in this setting must maintain cultural authenticity while remaining accessible to visitors from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Guides therefore perform a delicate balancing act, navigating between deference and approachability, authority and friendliness, sacredness and entertainment—each dimension closely tied to their politeness practices. These diverse responsibilities reflect the multifunctional nature of contemporary tour guiding, where guides simultaneously act as information providers, cultural mediators, facilitators of visitor engagement, and managers of interactional flow throughout the tour experience (Purnomo, 2026). Understanding how guides negotiate these communicative demands offers valuable insights into how politeness functions in heritage tourism and how it is shaped by both global and local communicative norms.

Positioned within the field of intercultural pragmatics, this study examines how politeness is negotiated in English-mediated heritage tour guiding encounters involving participants from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Rather than treating politeness as a fixed set of linguistic strategies, the study adopts a relational and interactional perspective that views politeness as an emergent process co-constructed by participants in situated intercultural encounters. In the context of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) communication, where interlocutors do not necessarily share the same linguistic and cultural norms, politeness involves ongoing negotiation of rapport, face concerns, and sociocultural expectations. By investigating naturally occurring guide–tourist interactions at Surakarta Mangkunegaran Palace, this study explores how local Javanese politeness values are adapted, recontextualized, and integrated into globally intelligible communicative practices. In doing so, it contributes to intercultural pragmatics by demonstrating how relational work is accomplished at the intersection of local cultural traditions and global tourism communication.

Against this background, the present study investigates how politeness is negotiated in English-mediated heritage tour guiding encounters at Surakarta Mangkunegaran Palace. Its central contribution is to show how Javanese relational values are not merely preserved in English-language guiding but are selectively reworked into globally intelligible strategies such as quiz-based engagement, softened directives, accessible humour, and multimodal facework. Drawing on perspectives from intercultural pragmatics, relational work, and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) communication, the study examines the forms of facework, interactional strategies, and relational practices

employed by guides when interacting with visitors from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. By focusing on naturally occurring guide-tourist discourse in a royal heritage setting, the study offers a context-specific account of how local courtly politeness and global tourism communication are jointly negotiated in practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Politeness has been extensively theorized in pragmatics, beginning with Brown and Levinson's (1987) universalist model of face-threatening acts and politeness strategies. Their framework—built around the concepts of positive and negative face—has provided an enduring foundation for analysing interpersonal communication across cultures. Yet scholars have increasingly questioned its universalist orientation, arguing that politeness is not reducible to a fixed set of strategies but is instead shaped by cultural expectations, relational positioning, and interactional contingencies. Locher and Watts (2005) reconceptualize politeness as an evaluative judgment that participants negotiate moment by moment during interaction. Rather than being predetermined by speaker intention, politeness emerges discursively through participants' interpretations, alignments, and contestations. This approach emphasizes the variability of politeness norms and highlights that what counts as polite or impolite depends on participants' shared histories, local norms, and contextual expectations.

Building on this discursive orientation, relational approaches to pragmatics have further reshaped the understanding of politeness. Spencer-Oatey's (2008, 2020) Relational Work framework argues that interactions involve constant negotiation of sociality rights, face sensitivities, and behavioural expectations. In this view, politeness is a subset of relational management, where speakers calibrate their linguistic and non-linguistic choices to maintain harmonious relationships and fulfil both individual and group-based expectations. Relational Work thus enables a more nuanced analysis of how politeness operates in multicultural or asymmetrical contexts—such as guide–tourist interactions—where participants bring different cultural assumptions to the communicative encounter. Contemporary interactional pragmatics perspectives (Haugh et al., 2024) extend this shift by examining politeness not merely as a product of linguistic forms but as a co-constructed process grounded in participants' interpretations, relational histories, and moment-to-moment adjustments. These perspectives foreground the intersubjective nature of communication and offer analytical tools for examining how politeness is enacted through turn-taking, stance markers, repair sequences, and metapragmatic comments.

Within the field of intercultural pragmatics, politeness is increasingly viewed as a dynamic and negotiable phenomenon that emerges when interlocutors from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds interact through a shared communicative medium. Rather than relying on mutually shared sociocultural norms, participants in intercultural encounters often engage in ongoing processes of accommodation, interpretation, and relational adjustment to achieve mutual understanding (Kádár & Haugh, 2013; Haugh & Kádár, 2023). This perspective is particularly relevant to English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)

communication, where speakers frequently prioritize intelligibility, rapport-building, and interactional cooperation over adherence to native-speaker norms (Jenkins & Mauranen, 2017; Björkman, 2022). Research on ELF pragmatics has shown that politeness in such contexts is commonly achieved through flexible use of mitigation, explicitness, collaborative meaning-making, and culturally adaptive interactional strategies that help participants negotiate face concerns and interpersonal relationships across cultural boundaries. Consequently, politeness in ELF interactions is increasingly understood not as the application of predetermined cultural rules but as a form of intercultural relational work that is jointly constructed through interaction.

Tourism discourse research has increasingly drawn on contemporary pragmatics theories to better understand the complex communicative demands faced by tour guides. Tour guides employ diverse interactional resources—including humour, storytelling, gesture, gaze, and spatial positioning—to build engagement, manage rapport, and maintain authority. Research on humour and politeness shows that well-timed jokes, playful teasing, and light self-mockery can reduce social distance, create shared enjoyment, and ease potential face threats (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 2014). Humour also functions as an intercultural resource that helps guides navigate delicate topics or bridge cultural differences.

Multimodal guiding has similarly emerged as an important concern in tourism communication. Guides draw on embodied cues—such as pointing, walking trajectories, gaze, smiling, and the orchestration of group movement—to manage attention and convey meanings that complement verbal explanations. The combination of verbal, visual, and embodied modes enhances the clarity of information delivery and strengthens rapport, particularly in multilingual ELF settings where linguistic comprehension may vary among visitors. These practices underscore that hospitality is a pragmatic act involving complex relational and cultural work that extends beyond mere service provision.

Heritage interpretation research adds another important dimension, demonstrating that guiding in heritage sites involves not only informational transmission but also identity positioning, cultural framing, and the performance of authenticity. Heritage guides are expected to preserve cultural meanings while making them accessible to diverse audiences, requiring them to balance accuracy, sensitivity, and engagement. This discursive balancing is closely tied to politeness, as guides must align with both institutional expectations and tourists' interactional preferences.

Within Indonesian and specifically Javanese contexts, linguistic politeness has long been associated with the hierarchical speech level system known as *undha-usuk basa*. Studies of Javanese politeness emphasize the importance of harmony, deference, indirectness, and sensitivity to social relations (Errington, 1998; Sukarno, 2012; Sumekto et al., 2022; Nursanti et al., 2024). In professional settings such as tourism, these norms become more flexible. When interacting with foreign tourists, guides often blend Javanese politeness norms—such as *andhap-asor* (humility), *tepa slira* (empathy and restraint), and *alus* speech style—with global hospitality expectations that value friendliness, clarity, and

approachability. This blending results in hybrid politeness styles where guides maintain respectful demeanour through tone, gesture, and nonverbal cues, even if linguistic indicators of hierarchy are not explicitly encoded.

Research on Javanese politeness in cross-cultural contexts shows that speakers may downscale hierarchical markers when communicating with non-Javanese interlocutors to avoid misunderstanding, while still maintaining the values of harmony and respectfulness through indirectness, softening devices, and careful stance-taking (Sukarno, 2012; Sumekto et al., 2022; Nursanti et al., 2024). These hybridized practices illustrate how local politeness systems adapt to global communicative demands, especially in multilingual professional domains. In heritage tourism settings, the presence of sacred objects, ritual spaces, and courtly etiquette adds another layer of complexity: guides must simultaneously adhere to cultural authenticity and accommodate visitors' linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This is particularly relevant at Javanese royal sites such as the Mangkunegaran Palace, where the palace's cultural authority shapes expectations for deferent comportment while the tourism context demands accessibility and engagement.

Despite the growing richness of these studies, there remains a scarcity of research that integrates Discursive Politeness Theory, Relational Work, and interactional pragmatics to examine how politeness is enacted in English-mediated guiding at Javanese heritage sites. Existing works tend to treat Javanese politeness and tourism discourse separately, leaving unexplored how guides dynamically negotiate global and local expectations during real guiding encounters. Moreover, empirical studies focusing on naturally occurring tour guiding interactions at the Mangkunegaran Palace are limited, which restricts our understanding of how contemporary politeness frameworks operate within culturally layered, ELF-dominant tourism environments. By engaging with these theoretical and empirical developments, the present study aims to fill this gap by analysing how guides navigate face concerns, relational expectations, and intercultural sensitivities through their linguistic and multimodal practices when addressing international visitors.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach situated within the field of pragmatics and tourism discourse analysis. This approach was selected because the study seeks to examine how politeness is negotiated in naturally occurring English-mediated heritage tour-guiding encounters, where English functions as a *Lingua Franca* (ELF) among participants from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Particular attention is given to the linguistic, interactional, and contextual resources through which guides manage rapport, address face concerns, and facilitate intercultural communication during the tour.

The research setting consisted of regular English-mediated guided tours conducted in the palace's main heritage zones. Data were collected from 12 recorded tour sessions led by three professional tour guides who regularly conducted tours for domestic and

international visitors. Prior permission was obtained from the relevant site authority and the guides were informed about the academic purpose of the recordings; tourist identities were not reported and all excerpts were anonymized in the analysis. Across the recorded sessions, tourist groups ranged from two to twelve participants and included visitors from Southeast Asia, Europe, and Australia. Each tour lasted between 35 and 55 minutes, depending on group size and the guide's interactional style. The average length of each recorded interaction was approximately 3,000–4,500 words after transcription, resulting in a substantial corpus of naturally occurring discourse for pragmatic analysis. The number of recorded sessions was considered sufficient because recurring patterns of facework, relational practices, mitigation, humour, and rapport-management strategies became evident across the dataset. Following qualitative discourse-analytic traditions, adequacy was determined by the recurrence and interpretive richness of interactional patterns rather than numerical representativeness (Patton, 2003).

Researcher positionality was acknowledged throughout the study. The researcher acted as a non-participant observer who blended into the tour groups without interacting directly with the guides or visitors to minimize observer effects and preserve the naturalness of the discourse. Reflexive memos were maintained to document interpretive decisions, and analytical bias was mitigated by triangulating interpretations with field notes, guide explanations, and theory-driven coding.

Data analysis proceeded in several structured phases. First, recordings were transcribed verbatim with attention to pauses, humour, directives, clarification exchanges, and salient nonverbal cues noted during field observation. Second, utterances were coded deductively using classic politeness strategies and contemporary relational frameworks, while allowing inductive categories such as quiz-based engagement, globalized humour, and multimodal politeness to emerge from the data. Third, 20% of the data was re-coded after a two-week interval to check intra-coder consistency, with discrepancies reviewed against field notes and theoretical definitions before final coding decisions were made. Theoretical triangulation was performed by interpreting the same utterances through Brown & Levinson's (1987) model, Spencer-Oatey and Ruhi's (2007) and Spencer-Oatey's (2008) Relational Work framework, and discursive politeness perspectives. The unit of analysis consisted of pragmatically meaningful interactional segments—such as a narrative turn, a joking sequence, a clarification exchange, or a directive related to movement—which allowed the analysis to capture the multimodal and relational dimensions of guiding. This integrated analytic process enabled the identification of how guides negotiate rapport, manage face wants, calibrate degrees of deference, and maintain tourist engagement through context-sensitive politeness practices.

Given the qualitative design, the findings should be interpreted as an in-depth account of politeness practices in one culturally specific heritage site rather than as a statistically generalizable representation of all Indonesian or Javanese tour guiding. The value of the study lies in its contextual richness and its ability to illuminate how politeness is interactionally negotiated in a royal palace tourism setting.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the major findings of the study supported by data excerpts (referred to as Datum 1, Datum 2, etc.). Each datum represents naturally occurring tour-guiding utterances produced by English-speaking guides at Surakarta Mangkunegaran Palace. The findings are organized thematically to show how guides deploy politeness strategies to build rapport, manage face wants, educate visitors, resolve misunderstandings, and perform emotional labor during the tour.

Overall, the analysis identified four interrelated patterns of politeness in English-mediated heritage tour guiding at Mangkunegaran Palace. Guides used positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies to build engagement, regulate visitor behaviour, and protect face in culturally sensitive moments. These strategies were extended through humour, multimodal cues, and emotion work, showing that politeness was not limited to verbal formulae but distributed across language, gesture, tone, and tour management. The most distinctive finding is that Javanese values such as *andhap-asor*, *tepa slira*, and *alus* conduct were adapted into ELF-compatible practices that visitors could recognize and respond to. Politeness therefore functioned as the core mechanism through which guides performed their roles as educators, entertainers, cultural mediators, and tour-flow managers.

Positive Politeness for Engagement and Hospitality

Positive politeness emerged as the most frequently used strategy. Guides employed inclusive pronouns, jokes, personal compliments, and small talk to foster closeness and enhance visitor enjoyment.

Datum 1

“Okay everyone, before we enter the royal hall, let’s take a fun guess—how many years do you think this palace has stood? Just try! No wrong answers today.”
(Guide A, field recording, 00:15:27)

The datum illustrates the guide’s attempt to reduce social distance by creating an engaging atmosphere. The use of *“everyone”*, *“fun guess”*, and *“no wrong answers”* reflects positive politeness that emphasizes encouragement and group inclusion (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The guide’s quiz functions both as an entertainment tool and a face-supportive act, making tourists feel competent regardless of their answer. This supports Spencer-Oatey’s (2008) concept of rapport enhancement, where interactional moves aim to strengthen social bonds. From an ELF perspective, the use of inclusive expressions such as *“everyone”* and *“let’s”* also serves as a pragmatic accommodation strategy. Rather than relying on culturally specific interactional conventions, the guide adopts globally intelligible forms that facilitate participation among tourists from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Consistent with intercultural pragmatics research, rapport in ELF

interactions is often achieved through cooperation, inclusiveness, and mutual orientation rather than strict adherence to native-speaker norms as summarized by Table 1 below.

Table 1. Positive Politeness Strategies Used by Guides at Surakarta Mangkunegaran Palace

Strategy Type	Linguistic Features	Communicative Purpose	Example (from Data)
Inclusive Language	<i>we, everyone, let's</i>	Creating shared identity	"Let's take a fun guess..."
Encouragement	<i>no wrong answers, feel free</i>	Reducing anxiety & distance	"No wrong answers today."
Personalization	Addressing participants warmly	Increasing involvement	"Okay friends, this part is very special."
Quiz-based Engagement	Interactive questioning	Maintain attention	"Guess how old this palace is?"

Strategic Use of Humor as Politeness Work

Humour serves as an effective tool to reduce formality and maintain visitor interest. Humour was commonly used when explaining historical artifacts, correcting tourist misunderstandings, or transitioning between tour points.

Datum 2

"This crown looks heavy, right? Our prince didn't go to the gym, but trust me – he carried it like a real superhero." (Guide C, field recording, 00:16:29)

The humorous analogy ("superhero") softens the presentation of dense historical information and creates a memorable moment. Humour in this context functions as a form of positive politeness and off-record strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987), because the guide performs an entertaining role while avoiding direct imposition. The use of a globally recognizable metaphor also suggests pragmatic accommodation: rather than drawing on highly culture-specific references, the guide selects a familiar image that can support comprehension among international visitors.

From an ELF perspective, the guide's use of a globally recognizable metaphor such as "superhero" demonstrates a form of pragmatic accommodation aimed at maximizing accessibility across diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Rather than drawing on culture-specific references that may be unfamiliar to international visitors, the guide selects a widely shared cultural symbol that facilitates comprehension and engagement. In this sense, humour functions not only as an interpersonal resource but also as a strategy for intercultural meaning-making as summarized by Table 2 below.

Table 2. Humour Functions and Forms in English Tour Guiding

Humour Function	Type of Humour	Linguistic Marker	Pragmatic Impact
Engagement	Light joke	"Superhero," "gym"	Builds rapport
Softening Correction	Humour replacing direct criticism	Playful metaphors	Reduces face threat

Humour Function	Type of Humour	Linguistic Marker	Pragmatic Impact
Cultural Bridging	Humour referencing global icons	Cartoon/comic analogies	Enhances accessibility
Memory Reinforcement	Humour tied to artifacts	Exaggeration	Improves recall of information

Negative Politeness for Respect and Cultural Sensitivity

Negative politeness appeared when guides explained sensitive cultural norms, restricted areas, or corrected unwanted behaviour.

Datum 3

“If you don’t mind, please step a little to the left. This part is reserved for royal family ceremonies.” (Guide B, field recording, 00:09:54)

The phrase *“If you don’t mind”* reflects a mitigated request designed to respect tourist autonomy. The use of lexical mitigators echoes Leech’s (2014) Politeness Principle, particularly the Tact Maxim. The guide balances authority (protecting palace rules) with deference (acknowledging visitor freedom), which is consistent with Javanese politeness values that prioritize restraint, harmony, and gentle directives (Sukarno, 2012; Sumekto et al., 2022; Nursanti et al., 2024).

Viewed through an ELF lens, the mitigated request *“If you don’t mind”* serves as an effective intercultural strategy because it balances institutional authority with respect for individual autonomy. In multilingual tourism encounters, participants may hold different expectations regarding directness and politeness. By employing conventionalized mitigation devices that are widely recognizable in international English communication, the guide minimizes potential face threats while maintaining communicative clarity. The guide’s linguistic choices thus reflect both local Javanese values and broader intercultural expectations of respectful communication as summarized by Table 3 below.

Table 3. Negative Politeness and Mitigation Devices Used by Guides

Mitigation Device	Linguistic Realization	Context of Use	Politeness Function
Softened Requests	<i>If you don’t mind..., Could you please...</i>	Moving visitors, restrictions	Minimizing imposition
Apologetic Markers	<i>Sorry, but..., I’m afraid...</i>	Preventing rule violation	Showing respect
Indirect Justification	<i>This area is usually reserved...</i>	Cultural authority	Enhancing legitimacy
Hedging	<i>a little, maybe, perhaps</i>	Correcting behaviour	Increasing optionality

Off-Record Strategies to Maintain Harmony

Guides often relied on indirect hints to avoid face-threatening acts, especially when addressing mistakes or misunderstandings.

Datum 4

"Sometimes cameras don't like too much light... maybe this one prefers a softer angle." (Guide A, field recording, 00:21:07)

Here, the guide avoids directly saying that flash photography is prohibited. Instead, the restriction is implied metaphorically. This aligns with Brown & Levinson (1987) off-record strategy where the speaker provides clues instead of direct instructions. The approach resonates with Javanese indirectness (*alus*) that prioritizes harmony. Unlike Western-museum guides who tend to use explicit rules (Haugh et al., 2024), Mangkunegaran guides avoid confrontation by embedding criticism in metaphorical phrasing.

From the perspective of intercultural pragmatics, this indirect strategy illustrates how meaning in ELF interactions is frequently negotiated through inference and contextual interpretation. Rather than issuing a direct prohibition, the guide provides a hint that allows tourists to infer the intended message while preserving their positive face. Such indirectness can be particularly effective in multicultural settings because it reduces the likelihood of embarrassment and supports cooperative interaction. As noted by Haugh & Kádár (2023), politeness in intercultural encounters often emerges through participants' joint interpretation of contextual cues rather than through fixed linguistic forms alone. The guide's off-record strategy therefore represents a form of relational work that promotes harmony while accommodating diverse communicative expectations as summarized by Table 4 below.

Table 4. Off-Record Strategies and Indirectness Patterns

Off-Record Strategy	Linguistic Realization	Hidden Directive	Interactional Function
Hinting	"Sometimes cameras don't like too much light..."	Stop using flash	Avoid confrontation
Metaphorizing Rule	"This one prefers a softer angle."	Change camera position	Maintain harmony
Implicit Warning	"Usually the palace doesn't like loud footsteps here."	Walk quietly	Soften authority
Suggestive Offer	"Maybe standing here gives a better view."	Move to preferred spot	Preserve visitor autonomy

Politeness for Educational Functions

Guides also used politeness to scaffold explanations for visitors unfamiliar with Javanese culture.

Datum 5

"Maybe some of you are wondering why the royal dancers move so slowly. It's actually a symbol of inner calm and spiritual balance." (Guide C, field recording, 00:32:17)

The guide anticipates potential confusion and provides a respectful, face-supportive explanation. This reflects the Approbation Maxim (Leech, 2014), focusing on a positive interpretation of visitor curiosity. The wording reduces the possibility that tourists will feel uninformed or embarrassed and instead frames cultural unfamiliarity as a legitimate point of inquiry.

From an ELF and intercultural pragmatics perspective, the guide's formulation "Maybe some of you are wondering" demonstrates sensitivity to the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the audience. Rather than assuming shared knowledge, the guide anticipates possible gaps in understanding and creates an interactional space in which curiosity is legitimized and encouraged. The finding suggests that educational explanation in heritage tourism is not merely the transmission of information but also an interpersonal process through which guides manage face concerns and facilitate intercultural learning as summarized by Table 5 below.

Table 5. Educational Politeness in Cultural Explanation

Politeness Strategy	Linguistic Marker	Pedagogic Function	Cultural Value Reflected
Anticipating Confusion	<i>Maybe some of you are wondering...</i>	Pre-empting misinterpretation	Javanese <i>tepa slira</i> (empathy)
Positive Framing	<i>It symbolizes calm...</i>	Guiding interpretation	<i>Andhap-asor</i> (modesty)
Cultural Clarification	<i>Actually, this movement means...</i>	Enhancing cultural literacy	Harmony & spirituality
Encouraging Curiosity	<i>Feel free to ask anything...</i>	Interactive learning	Hospitality (<i>ramah tamah</i>)

Politeness in Managing Intercultural Misunderstandings

Intercultural misunderstandings occasionally occurred when tourists interpreted Javanese cultural practices through their own cultural frames. Guides responded using face-saving strategies—primarily positive politeness and mitigated explanations—to prevent embarrassment and maintain group harmony.

Datum 6

A tourist asked, "Why do the guards look unhappy?" The guide smiled and replied:

"Ah, good question. Their faces look serious because it is part of the royal discipline, not because they are upset with anyone." (Guide B, 00:27:44)

This response avoids attributing negative meaning to the tourist's interpretation and reframes it positively. The guide uses "good question" to reassure the tourist while providing cultural clarification. Rather than treating the tourist's interpretation as wrong, the guide protects visitor face and redirects attention to the palace's cultural logic. This pattern illustrates how guides manage intercultural misunderstanding through explanation, affirmation, and relational sensitivity as summarized by Table 6 below.

Table 6. Intercultural Misunderstanding Management Strategies

Strategy	Example	Function	ELF Relevance
Positive Reframing	“Good question”	Protect tourist face	Encourages participation
Cultural Explanation	Clarifying royal discipline	Prevent misunderstanding	Facilitates intercultural understanding
Mitigation	Avoiding direct correction	Reduce embarrassment	Maintains relational harmony
Appreciation Tokens	“Interesting question”	Validate contribution	Supports collaborative meaning-making

Multimodal Politeness: Voice, Gesture, and Smiling

Apart from verbal strategies, guides also relied on multimodal cues—smiling, gentle gestures, soft intonation—to modulate the politeness of their utterances. These nonverbal behaviours functioned as “politeness boosters” that reinforced hospitality and reduced the perception of imposition.

Datum 7

During a crowded moment, the guide said in a soft tone while smiling and using an open-hand gesture: “*If we could move just a little this way, you’ll get a better view.*” (Guide A, 00:13:08)

Although linguistically a mitigated directive, the accompanying smile and gesture transformed the instruction into a collaborative invitation. The example shows that politeness in guiding is not carried by words alone; it is also shaped by voice quality, facial expression, gesture, and the spatial management of the group. Mangkunegaran guides employ these devices with distinctive Javanese softness and rhythmic pacing shaped by court etiquette as summarized by Table 7 below.

Table 7. Multimodal Politeness Resources

Resource	Realization	Function
Smile	Friendly facial expression	Rapport enhancement
Open-hand gesture	Inclusive movement	Reduced imposition
Soft intonation	Lower vocal intensity	Face support
Eye contact	Controlled visual engagement	Relational alignment

Emotion Work and Hospitality Performance

Tour guides continuously engage in “emotion work”—managing their own emotions to curate a pleasant visitor experience. This includes expressing enthusiasm, amplifying friendliness, and masking fatigue or irritation.

Datum 8

“*Take your time, no rush. This place has many stories, and we can explore them slowly.*” (Guide C, field recording, 00:37:42)

The utterance illustrates the guide's engagement in emotion work by responding sensitively to visitors who appeared fatigued after an extended explanation. The expressions "take your time" and "no rush" function as affective politeness markers that reduce interactional pressure and reassure tourists that participation can proceed at a comfortable pace. Such linguistic choices project empathy, patience, and attentiveness, thereby contributing to a positive visitor experience. Consistent with Spencer-Oatey's (2020) Rapport Management framework, the guide attends not only to informational needs but also to the emotional and relational dimensions of the encounter.

The datum also reflects the influence of Javanese interpersonal values, particularly *andhap-asor* and *tepa slira*, which emphasize humility, sensitivity to others' feelings, and the maintenance of social harmony. Rather than urging visitors to continue according to a predetermined schedule, the guide prioritizes their comfort and emotional well-being. In the present dataset, these practices are frequently accompanied by calm delivery, indirect encouragement, and relational sensitivity, suggesting the integration of local cultural values into hospitality performance as summarized by Table 8 below.

Table 8. Emotion Work and Hospitality Performance

Emotion Work Strategy	Linguistic Realization	Interactional Outcome
Empathy	"Take your time"	Reduced visitor anxiety
Reassurance	"No rush"	Comfort and inclusion
Positive Framing	"Many stories to explore"	Sustained engagement
Enthusiasm Display	Expressive narration	Visitor enjoyment

Positioning Mangkunegaran Politeness Practices within Heritage Tourism Research

The findings of this study contribute to a growing body of research that views heritage tour guiding as a complex form of intercultural and relational communication rather than a purely informational activity. The present findings demonstrate that politeness functions as a central interactional resource through which guides accomplish multiple communicative responsibilities, including explanation, engagement, cultural mediation, and tour-flow management.

Several patterns identified in the dataset align with interactional and relational approaches to pragmatics. The frequent use of inclusive language, humour, mitigated requests, indirectness, and multimodal cues illustrates that politeness is not confined to isolated linguistic forms but emerges through ongoing negotiation between participants. This observation is consistent with Discursive Politeness Theory (Locher & Watts, 2005), Relational Work (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, 2020), and intercultural pragmatics approaches (Kádár & Haugh, 2013; Haugh & Kádár, 2023), which conceptualize politeness as a dynamic process of managing relationships, expectations, and face concerns in situated interaction.

The findings also resonate strongly with research on English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) communication. Because the guides interacted with tourists from diverse linguistic and

cultural backgrounds, successful communication depended less on conformity to native-speaker norms and more on pragmatic adaptability, mutual accommodation, and collaborative meaning-making. As illustrated in Datum 1, Datum 2, Datum 3, and Datum 7, guides frequently employed globally intelligible interactional resources—including inclusive expressions (“everyone,” “let’s”), accessible humour, soft directives, and supportive explanations—to facilitate understanding and participation among international visitors. Such practices reflect ELF communication as a flexible and participant-oriented process (Jenkins & Mauranen, 2017; Björkman, 2022).

At the same time, the data demonstrate that these globally accessible communicative strategies remain deeply informed by local cultural values. The indirectness observed in Datum 4, the empathic explanations in Datum 5, and the face-sensitive management of misunderstandings in Datum 6 reflect enduring Javanese principles such as *andhap-asor* (humility), *tepa slira* (consideration for others), and *alus* interactional conduct (Errington, 1998; Sukarno, 2012; Sumekto et al., 2022; Nursanti et al., 2024). Rather than replacing local politeness norms, English-mediated tour guiding at Mangkunegaran Palace appears to adapt and recontextualize them within intercultural encounters. This finding supports the view that politeness in tourism settings should be understood as a hybrid and locally situated practice that emerges through the interaction of global communicative demands and culturally specific value systems.

Taken together, the findings suggest that politeness in heritage tourism functions not merely as interpersonal courtesy but as a multidimensional communicative mechanism that supports cultural interpretation, visitor engagement, hospitality performance, and intercultural relationship management. The Mangkunegaran case therefore contributes to contemporary research in intercultural pragmatics by illustrating how local politeness traditions are actively negotiated, adapted, and reproduced within English-mediated tourism interactions. In this respect, the study extends existing scholarship by demonstrating how relational work, ELF communication, and Javanese cultural values intersect in naturally occurring heritage tour discourse as summarized by Table 9 below.

Table 9. Theoretical Positioning of Mangkunegaran Politeness Practices

Research Perspective	Key Insights from Previous Studies	Evidence from the Present Study
Discursive Politeness	Politeness is negotiated and context-dependent	Guides dynamically adjusted interactional strategies according to visitor responses and situational needs
Relational Work	Communication involves ongoing management of rapport, face, and sociality rights	Inclusive language, humor, mitigation, and supportive explanations fostered positive guide–tourist relationships
Interactional Pragmatics	Meaning and politeness are co-constructed through interaction	Politeness emerged through turn-taking, clarification, repair, and multimodal resources
ELF Communication	Successful communication relies on accommodation and mutual understanding rather than native-speaker norms	Guides used globally intelligible expressions, accessible humor, and collaborative meaning-making strategies

Research Perspective	Key Insights from Previous Studies	Evidence from the Present Study
Intercultural Pragmatics	Communication reflects negotiation between different cultural expectations	Guides balanced international tourist expectations with local cultural norms and heritage values
Javanese Politeness	Harmony, humility, and consideration for others are central values	<i>Andhap-asor</i> , <i>tepa slira</i> , and indirectness informed many politeness practices observed in the data

Integration of Politeness, Tourism Roles, and Cultural Identity

Table 10 summarizes how the major politeness strategies identified throughout the dataset align with different guiding roles and interactional outcomes.

Table 10. Integrated Politeness Functions Across Guide Roles

Tour Guide Role	Politeness Strategy Cluster	Key Linguistic Features	Interactional Outcome
Educator	Explanation, hedging, softening	“Actually...”, “maybe...”, “in Javanese culture...”	Cultural understanding
Entertainer	Humour, quiz, personalization	Jokes, inclusive pronouns	Visitor enjoyment
Cultural Mediator	Indirectness, contextualization	Metaphors, analogies, explanatory framing	Cross-cultural rapport
Tour Flow Manager	Mitigated directives, hints	“If you don’t mind...”, “maybe stand here...”	Smooth movement and order

Across the entire dataset, politeness emerged as the central interactional resource through which guides enacted multiple professional roles and navigated the communicative demands of heritage tourism. The data reveal that guides continuously shifted between the roles of educator, entertainer, cultural mediator, and tour-flow manager while maintaining positive relationships with visitors.

In their educational role, guides frequently employed explanation, hedging, and softening devices to introduce culturally unfamiliar information in a face-sensitive manner. This pattern is evident in Datum 5, where the guide stated, “Maybe some of you are wondering why the royal dancers move so slowly,” before providing a cultural explanation, and in Datum 6, where a potentially problematic interpretation was reformulated through the supportive response, “Ah, good question. Their faces look serious because it is part of the royal discipline.” Rather than presenting information through direct correction, the guides used mitigated explanations that simultaneously promoted learning and preserved visitor face. Such findings support relational approaches to pragmatics, which emphasize the importance of balancing informational goals with rapport management (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, 2020).

The role of entertainer was particularly visible in Datum 1 and Datum 2. The quiz invitation, “Let’s take a fun guess,” and the humorous comparison of a prince to a “superhero” illustrate how guides used humour, playful engagement, and personalization to maintain visitor interest and reduce the cognitive burden often

associated with historical interpretation. From an intercultural perspective, such humour was generally based on globally recognizable references rather than culturally specific jokes, making it accessible to tourists from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

The guides' role as cultural mediators became evident in their efforts to connect local cultural meanings with visitors' interpretive frameworks. Datum 5 demonstrates how cultural practices were contextualized through explanatory framing, while Datum 6 illustrates how guides reformulated tourists' assumptions to facilitate intercultural understanding. Likewise, the "superhero" analogy in Datum 2 functioned as a bridge between Javanese royal heritage and globally familiar popular culture references. These findings align with research on intercultural pragmatics and English as a Lingua Franca communication, which emphasizes accommodation, contextualization, and collaborative meaning-making in multilingual encounters (Kádár & Haugh, 2013; Jenkins & Mauranen, 2017; Björkman, 2022).

Finally, the role of tour-flow manager was reflected in the use of mitigated directives and indirect guidance strategies. As shown in Datum 3 ("If you don't mind, please step a little to the left") and Datum 7 ("If we could move just a little this way, you'll get a better view"), guides organized visitor movement while minimizing imposition. Similarly, the indirect hint observed in Datum 4 ("Sometimes cameras don't like too much light") demonstrates how behavioural regulation was achieved through relationally sensitive communication rather than overt authority. These strategies are consistent with Brown and Levinson's (1987) notion of negative politeness and with interactional approaches that view politeness as a collaborative process of maintaining social harmony.

These professional roles were not performed independently but were closely intertwined with the guides' construction of cultural identity. Throughout the dataset, Javanese values such as *andhap-asor* (humility), *tepa slira* (consideration for others), and *alus* interactional conduct informed the tone and interpersonal orientation of the discourse. At the same time, the use of English as a Lingua Franca encouraged the adoption of globally intelligible communicative practices, including inclusive language, accessible humour, explanatory framing, and participant-oriented interaction. The resulting discourse reflects a hybrid form of intercultural politeness in which local cultural values and global communicative expectations are continuously negotiated.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that politeness is not merely an ancillary feature of heritage tour discourse but the primary mechanism through which guides manage education, entertainment, cultural mediation, and visitor coordination simultaneously. By integrating relational work, intercultural pragmatics, and ELF communication perspectives, this study shows how politeness enables guides to maintain cultural authenticity while fostering accessibility, hospitality, and cross-cultural understanding in naturally occurring heritage tourism interactions.

General Synthesis

Taken together, the findings confirm the central argument of this study: English-speaking tour guides at Surakarta Mangkunegaran Palace systematically mobilize politeness strategies—drawing from classic, discursive, relational, and intercultural frameworks—to manage the multifaceted demands of heritage guiding. The analysis demonstrates that their politeness practices extend beyond interpersonal courtesy and function as a flexible communicative system that supports explanation, entertainment, cultural mediation, conflict avoidance, and flow management. Compared with more general accounts of politeness and intercultural communication, Mangkunegaran guides exhibit a particularly strong integration of Javanese socio-cultural values, resulting in a nuanced hybrid style that is simultaneously relational, indirect, globally intelligible, and culturally grounded. Importantly, the findings indicate that politeness in this setting is negotiated within an ELF environment where participants do not necessarily share the same linguistic or cultural norms. Rather than following native-speaker models of English politeness, guides and tourists collaboratively construct understanding through accommodation, contextualization, and relational work (Jenkins & Mauranen, 2017; Kádár & Haugh, 2013). Notably, this study identifies quiz-based engagement, multimodal politeness, and globalized humour as strategies that extend existing discussions of tourism pragmatics.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how politeness is negotiated in English-mediated tour guiding at Surakarta Mangkunegaran Palace through the lens of contemporary pragmatics and heritage tourism communication. The findings demonstrate that politeness functions as a dynamic interactional resource through which guides manage rapport, facilitate cultural understanding, and maintain harmonious relationships with visitors from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Three major findings emerged from the analysis. First, guides strategically combined positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record indirectness as complementary resources adapted to the unfolding demands of interaction. Second, humour, quizzes, and other engagement-oriented practices served not only entertainment purposes but also facilitated rapport-building and visitor participation. Third, the guides' politeness practices reflected the influence of Javanese cultural values, particularly *andhap-asor*, *tepa slira*, and the preference for maintaining interpersonal harmony, while simultaneously accommodating the communicative needs of international visitors through English-mediated interaction.

Overall, the study shows that politeness in heritage tour guiding extends beyond conventional notions of courtesy and operates as a central mechanism for managing intercultural encounters, mediating cultural meanings, and supporting visitor engagement. The findings contribute to a growing body of research that views politeness

as an interactionally negotiated and culturally situated practice within multilingual tourism settings.

The findings carry several theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to ongoing debates in politeness research by showing how contemporary frameworks—such as Relational Work and discursive pragmatics—can be applied to heritage tourism contexts where cultural identity, hospitality norms, and globalized expectations intersect. Practically, the results highlight the need for guide-training programs that emphasize pragmatic awareness, face-management skills, and intercultural communication strategies, particularly for heritage sites with significant international traffic. Future research could broaden the comparative dimension by examining politeness practices across multiple palaces or heritage locations in Central Java, or by incorporating larger datasets that allow for quantitative coding of politeness frequency and distribution. Longitudinal studies would also be beneficial in tracing how guides adapt their politeness strategies as tourism demographics and cultural expectations continue to shift. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that politeness in heritage tour guiding is best understood as a form of intercultural relational work through which local cultural values and global communicative expectations are continuously negotiated.

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