

Pragmatic Failures and Implications of the Florasis Eyebrow Pencil Incident from the Perspective of the Politeness Principle

Qiong Zhang

College of Foreign Languages, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai 200093, China

Email: 2187550954@qq.com

How to cite this paper: Zhang, Q. (2026). Pragmatic failures and implications of the Florasis eyebrow pencil incident from the perspective of the politeness principle. *Literature, Language and Cultural Studies*, 4(2), 21 - 27. ISSN Print: 3079-5095; ISSN Online: 3079-5109.

<https://doi.org/10.63313/LLCS.9134>

Published: 2026-02-24

Copyright © 2026 by author(s) and

Erytis Publishing Limited.

This work is licensed under the Creative

Commons Attribution International

License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Abstract

Guided by Leech's Politeness Principle, this study analyzes the pragmatic failures in the Florasis eyebrow pencil incident. The findings reveal that as a lead anchor, Li Jiaqi's sales discourse during the livestream violated the Politeness Principle, which includes tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy maxims. Multiple violations of the Politeness Principle negatively impacted both his personal image and the reputation of the livestreaming industry. Therefore, the paper proposes some pragmatic suggestions for streamers based on the Politeness Principles, aiming to raise awareness of harmonious marketing communication between viewers and streamers and provide insights for improving livestreaming sales discourse.

Keywords

Eyebrow pencil incident; Politeness Principle; Livestream; Streamer

1. Introduction

With the advancement of information technology, people's lifestyles have changed deeply. As for shopping, more people choose to buy things online, rather than go shopping in person. Although more choices are available in online shopping, the quality of products is difficult to ensure. However, the emerging livestreaming e-commerce alleviates this market pain point to a certain degree. The livestreaming as a direct selling channel allows consumers to make purchase decisions after developing a thorough knowledge of commodities. During livestreaming, viewers can put up any questions about the goods, and streamers will provide targeted answers to specific inquiries, which constructs effective communication between the two parties (Wang et al., 2022). Consequently, the language of streamers has a significant influence on viewers' purchase behavior (Korshuk & Meng, 2025). Appropriate linguistic tactics may arouse viewers' desire to purchase and speed up the ordering process, while inappropriate or violent livestreaming discourse is

likely to cause a negative side effect. In September 2023, Li Jiaqi, a high-profile streamer, became the focal point of public debate because of his assertion that an eyebrow priced at 79 yuan is not considered expensive. Taking Leech's Politeness Principle as an analytical framework, this article explores the pragmatic failures underlying the Florasis eyebrow pencil incident, aimed at raising awareness of sales discourse in livestreaming e-commerce. It also provides advice for improving pragmatics in livestreaming, which helps establish a good relationship between viewers and streamers and promotes sustainable development in the industry.

2. Theoretical Foundation

2.1. The Politeness Principle

As an indispensable tool in communication, language can strengthen interpersonal bonds yet simultaneously precipitate conflicts. Linguistic politeness is an important element in facilitating harmonious social interactions. Leech (1983) proposed six maxims of the Politeness Principle to promote polite communication. They are the maxims of tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. The statement of these maxims involves two primary participants, namely "self" and "other". The maxim of tact recommends that the speaker should minimize cost to other. In other words, the speaker has to maximize benefit to other. The generosity maxim means minimizing benefit to self. The approbation maxim encourages the speaker to minimize dispraise of other. The maxim of modesty advocates minimizing praise of self. The agreement maxim requires the speaker to minimize disagreement between self and other. According to the sympathy maxim, the speaker is expected to minimize antipathy or maximize sympathy between self and other. Politeness Principle not only plays a crucial role in refining communication strategies but also contributes significantly to intercultural communication (Huang, 2008) and language education (Dewi, Amin, & Qalbi, 2023).

2.2. Applicability of the Politeness Principle to Livestreaming E-commerce

Livestreaming e-commerce integrates real-time interaction with digital marketing (Wongkitrungrueng & Assarut, 2020). Almost everyone has the right to enter the livestreaming room and make comments on the products. In essence, livestreaming e-commerce is still a kind of commercial activity in which buyers and sellers engage in an exchange of equivalents for goods. When products are largely homogeneous in terms of features and pricing, how to win consumers' favor becomes a critical issue, making sales discourse particularly vital. To maximize the effectiveness of livestreaming in e-commerce, the role of live streamers should be paid attention to (Chen, Dou, & Xiao, 2023). Streamers' use of the Politeness Principle can, to a certain extent, influence consumers' purchase behavior. For example, streamers can take advantage of the tact and generosity maxim to create a strong sense of the seller's

generosity by emphasizing significant price benefits. Besides, by employing the approbation and modesty maxim, streamers can praise the viewers' discernment and present products to viewers in a humble manner. More importantly, livestreaming has become an integral sales channel, which requires a stable long-term relationship with consumers. When preparing livestreaming discourse, streamers have to align with consumers' expectations and try to foster an emotional bond with them through adherence to the agreement and sympathy maxim. Conversely, violation of the Politeness Principle may lead to misunderstandings and conflicts (Felemban, 2012).

3. Pragmatic Failures in the Florasis Eyebrow Pencil Incident

The discourse fragments analyzed in this study are sourced from a livestream clip uploaded by Xigua Caomei Xiongmei (2023) on the social media platform Xiaohongshu. For the sake of conciseness, subsequent citations of this specific source will be omitted unless otherwise noted.

3.1. Violation of the Tact and Generosity Maxim

Faced with widespread skepticism from the viewers regarding the 79-yuan price tag for a Florasis eyebrow pencil, Li Jiaqi did not patiently explain the pricing rationale. Instead, he responded sharply with angry rhetorical questions: "Too expensive? How is it expensive?" He further emphasized that "the price has remained the same for so many years". Li supplemented his defense by stating that domestic brands struggle significantly and that Florasis maintains high standards in production. He continued with a defensive posture: "I'm not trying to attract hate for the brand, but Florasis isn't mandatory for everyone. We offer budget options like three eyebrow pencils for 50 yuan, okay?" The series of rhetorical questions and defenses above clearly reflect that Li Jiaqi's personal stance at that moment was primarily aligned with the product manufacturer rather than with consumers. He did not make consumers feel that their interests were being maximized; instead, he gave the impression that he was making excuses to justify the manufacturer's unreasonable pricing. Such behavior reinforces the consumers' perception that streamers and manufacturers share an aligned interest to extract maximum profit from the buyers. Brand loyalty is strongly associated with brand trust (Lau & Lee, 1999). This perceived collusion inevitably causes consumers to develop a mental barrier against the products of Florasis. Although Li Jiaqi later emphasized that the livestream offered alternative budget options, a palpable rift had already formed between him and the viewers. As a result, his remarks were more likely to be interpreted as a subtle mockery of consumers' purchasing power.

3.2. Violation of the Approbation and Modesty Maxim

When the price of the eyebrow pencil was questioned by the public, Li Jiaqi's anger

triggered a series of verbal depreciations toward consumers. His discourse was riddled with derogatory remarks, such as “Don’t just talk nonsense with your eyes wide open.” He shifted the blame onto the viewers, stating, “Reflect on yourself: has your salary increased all these years? Have you been working hard enough? It’s been this price for years.” These instances of belittling language appeared with striking frequency. Li Jiaqi’s success was jointly forged by the consumers in his livestreaming room. However, his remarks constituted a dual negation of the viewers’ judgment capacity and professional diligence, creating the impression that he has forgotten the very people who contributed to his success, and provoked strong dissatisfaction among viewers and triggered a boycott of the Florasis eyebrow pencil. In contrast, Li Jiaqi engaged in self-praise, stating, “I’ve been with Florasis for so many years. I’m the one who knows best how they rose to success.” Through such utterance, he attempted to convert his personal endorsement into consumer brand acceptance. Nevertheless, Li’s tone was marked by a superior’s arrogance toward ordinary workers, failing to align with empathy for the working class. From the consumers’ perspective, given the current challenging employment climate, it is understandable that those with lower incomes are price-sensitive. In spite of this, Li Jiaqi compulsively insisted that consumers should attribute the cause to themselves.

3.3. Violation of the Agreement and Sympathy Maxim

In terms of the agreement maxim, Li did not prioritize conflict resolution by employing a mild approach to justify the pricing. Rather than mitigating the dispute, he ignored the friction and even allowed it to intensify, further alienating his viewers. Statements such as “That is all for the introduction of the Florasis eyebrow pencil. We offer cheaper alternatives for those who need them, so please buy according to your own needs, alright?” and “My apologies, it’s fine; just buy whatever you want, okay?” reflect Li’s attempt to introduce the concept of “individual needs”. This stance leaves the divergence unaddressed and embodies that he is indifferent to the varying financial capacities of his followers. Such a method of managing conflict evidently reflects a deficiency in the streamer’s professional competence. In terms of the sympathy maxim, followers of Li Jiaqi once subconsciously regarded him as a confidant, as he was able to provide emotional value to consumers while promoting products. However, in this incident, the potential consumers did not receive any emotional reassurance. They were met only with mockery targeting their status as low-income earners.

4. Negative Effects Triggered by the Pragmatic Failures

4.1. Negative Effects on the Streamer’s Personal Reputation

After the abrupt livestreaming incident, Li Jiaqi’s approachable public image

suffered substantial damage. The citizens found that the eyebrow pencils in this incident reached nearly 1000 yuan per gram. The price is nearly double that of gold, thereby attracting extensive criticism. In response to the criticism, Li Jiaqi only spoke on behalf of the sellers, without alleviating the consumers' concerns. His actions were disheartening and made people doubt his initial motivation that he would serve as a shopping assistant for "all girls". Most viewers who resist the proposed price assume Li Jiaqi is solely driven by financial gains rather than customer satisfaction. Following the incident, as the once-dominant streamer, he faced a massive public backlash and experienced a decline in followers, which reduced his conversion capacity. Merchants who once scrambled to collaborate with him have become more cautious, fearing that any further similar remarks during his livestreaming might damage their brands' positive image. Ultimately, it is evident that the incident has posed a considerable challenge to the streamer's personal reputation and commercial value.

4.2. Negative Effects on the Reputation of the Livestreaming Industry

Livestreaming shopping as a new trend notably improves consumers' shopping experience, because it not only eliminates the inefficiencies of offline shopping, but also retains the advantage of intuitive product perception. However, the incident makes viewers question whether they are only viewed as sheep waiting to be shorn. It also leads the viewers to call into question the professionalism of streamers, raising concerns about whether most streamers prioritize aggressive selling over the actual feelings and needs of consumers. While reflecting consumers' general anxieties about current livestreaming trends, these negative sentiments erode the industry's overall credibility. Li Jiaqi was once considered a perfect shopping aide, but his condescending tone makes the public aware that sellers and consumers are always positioned on opposing sides. Accordingly, consumers' faith in streamers has been shaken, which has a negative impact on the livestreaming industry.

5. Implementing the Politeness Principle in Livestreaming

5.1. Practice the Tact and Generosity Maxim

After outlining the fundamental product details, streamers are advised to underscore the exclusive privileges or promotional advantages provided to viewers. Streamers should position themselves as allies of the consumers. The language employed in livestreaming should ensure that consumers perceive themselves as the primary beneficiaries, thereby stimulating their desire to purchase. In other words, streamers need to make consumers feel that they are standing on the consumers' side. Nevertheless, in this process, business integrity should be upheld. Streamers should refrain from using overly absolute or exclusive expressions to exaggerate the advantages of their products.

5.2. Practice the Approbation and Modesty Maxim

In livestreaming, streamers also should provide heartfelt encouragement and appreciation to the audience. For instance, when viewers express negative perceptions of their own age, streamers may utilize appropriate language strategies to encourage self-acceptance, emphasizing that beauty manifests differently across various stages of life. Through diversified interactive forms, such as bullet-screen comments and real-time connections, streamers can strengthen engagement with viewers. In line with this, streamers must exercise humility and avoid flaunting their socioeconomic status or accomplishments. Instead of responding with arrogant defense, they should embrace criticism with an open mind. Even in a virtual setting, mutual respect is the cornerstone of effective communication between people.

5.3. Practice the Agreement and Sympathy Maxim

Given the diversity of viewer preferences, it is inevitable that differing opinions or demands may arise during livestreaming. In such situations, streamers should accurately identify points of disagreement and strive to minimize or resolve these divergences. For example, when confronted with viewers' inquiries regarding the excessively slim tailoring of women's apparel, streamers can reframe the question to subtly mitigate potential tension. Primarily, streamers should express empathy toward the body anxiety caused by restrictive clothing sizes, prioritizing the audience's emotions to make them feel heard and valued. Subsequently, streamers could explain that slim-fit designs are often perceived to align with a healthier lifestyle, as obesity is associated with a range of health problems. In this way, viewers are less likely to develop negative feelings due to differences in opinion.

6. Conclusion

The study provides a detailed analysis of the Florasis eyebrow pencil incident through the lens of Leech's Politeness Principle. When the legitimacy of the price was challenged, the streamer's emotional state became increasingly unstable, eventually leading to a loss of self-regulation. He retorted sharply to the viewers and asked them to reflect on their own perceived financial inadequacy, which undermines viewers' self-esteem. Such crisis handling reflects an insufficient grasp of the Politeness Principle. The research offers practical implications for livestreaming practitioners in establishing a positive rapport with viewers by integrating the maxims of the Politeness Principle into livestreaming discourse, which helps to construct a favorable image and promote the high-quality development of livestreaming e-commerce. A growing number of online virtual scenarios are expected to emerge in the future. Therefore, further research is needed to examine the application of the Politeness Principle in these new contexts.

References

-
- [1] Chen, H., Dou, Y., & Xiao, Y. (2023). Understanding the role of live streamers in live-streaming e-commerce. *Electronic commerce research and applications*, 59, 101266.
 - [2] Dewi, R., Amin, B., & Qalbi, N. (2023). Politeness principles used by EFL teachers in classroom interaction during teaching-learning process. *Journal of Development Research*, 7(1), 47-58.
 - [3] Felemban, F. H. (2012). Building up learners' communicative competence: the politeness principle. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 46, 70-76.
 - [4] Huang, Y. (2008). Politeness principle in cross-culture communication. *English Language Teaching*, 1(1), 96-101.
 - [5] Korshuk, E. V., & Meng, Y. Y. (2025). The role of language in e-commerce live streaming. *Вестник РГГУ. Серия: Литературоведение. Языкознание. Культурология*, (3), 111-117.
 - [6] Lau, G. T., & Lee, S. H. (1999). Consumers' trust in a brand and the link to brand loyalty. *Journal of market-focused management*, 4(4), 341-370.
 - [7] Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics*. Longman.
 - [8] Wang, Y., Lu, Z., Cao, P., Chu, J., Wang, H., & Wattenhofer, R. (2022). How live streaming changes shopping decisions in E-commerce: A study of live streaming commerce. *Computer Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW)*, 31(4), 701-729.
 - [9] Wongkitrungrueng, A., & Assarut, N. (2020). The role of live streaming in building consumer trust and engagement with social commerce sellers. *Journal of business research*, 117, 543-556.
 - [10] Xigua Caomei Xiongmei. (2023, September 15). Florasis eyebrow pencil livestream clip [Video]. Xiaohongshu. <http://xhslink.com/o/6hYszkDrdvT>