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Workplace Language Style and Employee Mental Health: A Sem Analysis From a Psycholinguistic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

In the modern workplace, the nature of communication within the organisation is crucial in determining the mental health and well-being of employees. Although the effects of communication styles on different organisational outcomes have been documented in past studies, the psycholinguistic approach has not been well explored. This study examines the relationship between the language style in the workplace environment and the mental health of employees, with a focus on the mediating role of politeness strategies. Applying the Structural Equation modeling (SEM) methodology, the study examines the mediating effects of friendly and aggressive language styles on mental health in terms of stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion. A sample of 462 full-time workers from various industries was obtained through online surveys and linguistic analysis of sample texts from workplace communication. The researchers concluded that, in both direct and indirect ways (i.e., by contributing to politeness strategies), supportive language is a strong predictor of better mental health. The Aaggressive language has a very negative impact on mental health outcomes, whereby a politeness strategy cannot help to curb the ill effects of aggressive language. The results highlight the need to examine the role of minor language specificities,

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namely tone, directness, and politeness. The study would facilitate the development of psycholinguistic organizational communication research literature and help identify the practical implications of interventions in the workplace to enhance mental health. Future research should explore the intersection of communication, cultural context, and organizational outcomes to better understand the role of language in shaping employee mental health.

Keywords: Psycholinguistics; Workplace Communication; Language Style; Employee Well-being; SEM; Organisational Behaviour; Mental Health

1. Introduction

In contemporary organisational settings, effective communication is not merely a logistical necessity but a psychological determinant of employee well-being. Increasing empirical attention has been directed toward how communication style—tone, framing, and linguistic choices—impacts stress, anxiety, burnout, and job satisfaction. Despite this, a significant research gap remains in understanding the nuanced relationship between workplace language and employee mental health from a psycholinguistic standpoint[1].

Language cannot be a neutral container of passing information; it is coded with social, emotional and cultural aspects that influence perception and internalisation of messages. Such signs of communication in workplaces form one of the angles of the complex ecosystem of social signalling, power, and emotional work[2]. Considering that employees have constant interactions with other people (with superior staff members, co-workers, subordinates, and others), the manner and tone in which these people communicate can potentially affect the mental health of the given employees greatly[3].

Along with psycholinguistics, another factor is the mutual understanding of language expression in the workplace, pragmatics, that is, context-dependent language meaning. Implied meanings, expectations of politeness and culturally-defined expectations are some examples of pragmatic cues that influence the reception of messages, particularly in multicultural work environments. Pragmatic competence, as it has been stressed, minimises the issues of miscommunication and enhances the overall performance of employees in a workplace, especially in those cases when workers represent diverse cultural backgrounds. The introduction of a pragmatic perspective into this research, as well as a psycholinguistic analysis, expands the horizons of the given research and enriches its linguistic background[4].

In a bid to contextualise research, the current study makes use of Politeness Theory (Brown and Levinson 1987), which assumes that individuals are motivated to save face; that is, they portray themselves in an interpersonal relation. Theoretically, positive politeness strategies (i.e., inclusive language, praise, and acknowledgement) and negative politeness strategies (i.e., hedges and indirectness) are how speakers understand different social relationships and overcome face-threatening acts. Particularly in an organisational setting, such strategies become especially crucial, as they regulate the perceived support, respect, and safety that employees experience, which are closely connected to their mental health[5].

Take, as an example, a supervisor giving out severe criticism. The literal, rude expression, This report is bad can create self-esteem issues and elicit defensive behaviour, which are possible causes of emotional distress. In comparison, an analogy of positive politeness, such as 'You have done a good job, but here are the ways you can make it even better,' carries less threat and strengthens the psychological counter-resilience. Although these differences in language usage are minor, they can accumulate over time to erode an employee's mental well-being.

The patterns can effectively be studied within the framework of psycholinguistics. The study of the expressive forms used by speakers, as well as the content, will help researchers understand the power relations and emotions implicit in the language used within the workplace. Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count enables one to define a systematic approach to studying the affective, cognitive, and social aspects of language use, which can be applied in organizational communication[6].

The study employs Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to investigate the link between specific styles of language use in the workplace (linguistic properties such as emotional tone, cognitive complexity, and social orienta-

tion) and stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion as mental health outcomes [7].

By integrating Politeness Theory into a psycholinguistic-quantitative framework, the current study aims to address three central research questions:

1. To what extent does the linguistic style of workplace communication predict employee mental health outcomes?
2. How do politeness strategies function as mediators or moderators in this relationship?
3. Can organizational language styles be restructured to foster improved psychological outcomes?

As organizations grapple with rising mental health challenges and evolving workplace norms—especially in remote and hybrid environments—the ability to shape communication strategically becomes a form of organizational intervention. This knowledge can be beneficial to HR professionals, team leaders, and executives who need to understand how language choices impact employees' perceptions, emotions, and mental health.

1.1. Psycholinguistic Role of Language in the Workplace

The language itself is not used solely as an information exchange tool; it is rather a psychological and social mechanism that helps form cognitive and emotional experiences in people who use it. Language serves several functions in the workplace, including delineating power structures, codifying organisational culture, and conveying both explicit and implicit information. Function words (pronouns, conjunctions, and others) bear more information about the emotional status of a speaker and the cognitive processing than the so-called content words. This understanding demonstrates the psycholinguistic importance of regular communication in organizational settings [8].

Short-term exchanges between workers and supervisors can have long-term effects on stress levels, motivation, and overall well-being. Such results have led to an increased study of the linguistic aspects of organizational psychology, including the examination of speech acts, tonality, and sentiment in workplace emails, meetings, and instant messages [9].

This study was conducted primarily among English-speaking professionals based in China, where workplace norms emphasise [e.g., direct vs. indirect communication]. While participants came from diverse industries, they largely shared a microcultural background that values clarity, politeness, and emotional restraint in formal communication. It is important to note, however, that even within this setting, individual cultural nuances—such as regional dialects, sociolects, and bilingual fluency—could influence both how messages are expressed and interpreted. Acknowledging this cultural-linguistic backdrop is crucial for evaluating the generalizability of the study's findings across different global contexts.

1.2. Tone of the Language and Emotion Style

The language style concept refers to the use of patterns in both verbal and written symbolic communication by an individual. New patterns usually indicate cognitive, emotional, and relational patterns. Language style can be categorised into three types: supportive, neutral, and directive or aggressive style [10].

Inclusive, empathetic, validating, and emotionally evocative language are the features of supportive language. It frequently consists of inspirational locutions and plural pronouns ("us", "we"), as well as softened imperative verbs (e.g., "might," instead of "must"). At the opposite end of the spectrum, the aggressive or dictatorial type uses commands, criticism, or emotionally charged language that includes expressions of frustration or control [11]. The use of emotionally intelligent language, which reflects or acknowledges emotions, plays a significant role in team morale and psychological safety [12].

For example, the supervisors whose language consistently makes positive contributions and possesses an emotionally supportive quality can prevent stress and stimulate positive performance among employees. On the other hand, repetitive intimate exposure to rude, rejecting, or overly critical words is attributed to depression and burnout symptoms [13].

1.3. Organizational Communication Politeness Theory

Politeness Theory, developed by Brown and Levinson (1987), is a linguistic approach that is used to understand how humans manage social threats when interacting. The

theory differentiates between positive face (the desire to be well-liked and admired) and negative face, or the compulsion to be autonomous and free from imposition. In work situations, face-threatening actions (FTAs) can entail performance appraisals, discipline, or management commands[14].

To manage these acts, speakers use politeness strategies:

- Positive politeness: compliments, inclusive language, expressing common goals;
- Negative politeness: indirectness, hedging, apology, minimising imposition;
- Bald on-record: direct language with no mitigation (often face-threatening);
- Off-record: hinting or implying without an explicit statement.

Empirical research applying Politeness Theory to workplace settings has found that the strategic use of politeness can reduce perceived hostility, build trust, and improve mental health outcomes. Leaders who blend authority with politeness are more likely to foster employee satisfaction and openness, while leaders who rely solely on directive or transactional communication risk alienating staff and increasing stress levels[15].

Additionally, politeness strategies have been identified as a means to mediate gender and cultural differences in workplace communication. An observation that showed women tend to resort to supportive and indirect cultures in the corporate world, where politeness is valued above all. Hence, women are more likely to use them than men, which places women communicators in a cross between being truthful to themselves and being professionally sound[16].

1.4. Language Analytics and Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC)

Advances in computational psycholinguistics allowed the introduction of such resources as Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC), which has transformed how researchers investigate workplace language in different settings. The LIWC process analyzes written data for psychological signals, including emotional tone, cognitive complexity, authenticity, and social orientation[17].

Recently, LIWC has been applied to thousands of corporate emails, Slack messages, and performance reviews to pinpoint patterns of language that carry implications of burnout, job satisfaction, and organizational loyalty. More frequent use of first-person singular pronouns (I, me) and fewer positive emotion terms are linked to psychological distress recognition. Conversely, frequent we-talk (we, our) leads to greater involvement and less emotional weariness[18].

The main strength of LIWC is its capacity to provide quantification of linguistic variables, which are otherwise subjective, thus making it highly beneficial in terms of SEM-formulated models, such as the one applied in the current study. This enables us to track such indirect relationships as supportive language contributing to more polite behavior, which in turn leads to further mental health improvement, using strong statistical modeling.

1.5. The Communication and Mental Health Research on Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is used in communication and psychology research because it models complicated observed-latent interactions. SEM is also more appropriate than linear regression because, unlike the latter, it can include mediators, moderators, and bidirectional connections. Hence, it is more suitable for theories that do not have exclusively linear relationships, as in Politeness Theory. The organizational justice and burnout to demonstrate that the perception of fairness had both direct and mediated effects on employee stress[19].

Similarly, Bakker and Demerouti applied SEM to demonstrate that job resources (including supportive communication) indirectly affect work engagement through their impact on personal motivation[20].

In the context of the current study, SEM is uniquely suited to test how language style (observed via LIWC) influences mental health (a latent construct) through politeness (a mediating latent construct). The use of SEM here marks a significant advancement in modeling psycholinguistic processes in applied organizational settings.

1.6. Communication, Psychological Safety, and Employee Mental Health

Psychological safety—the sensation of being able to express oneself without fear—has been the focus of work-

place health studies. Studies have shown that psychological safety is closely tied to the nature and tone of communication, particularly between employees and leaders [21].

Psychologically safe teams have polite discourse, emotional acknowledgement, and low interpersonal risk. Such teams are more productive when they are under pressure and experience reduced cases of burnout and turnover. Linguistically, it is characterised by high usage of positive politeness signals, open-ended language, and empathetic statements [22]. On the other hand, toxic communication (characterized by sarcasm, microaggressions, and uncontrolled criticism) suppresses psychological safety. It induces a pattern of falling silent, being stressed, and disengaging [23].

Therefore, the study of language style is not only related to productivity or efficiency; it is also a question of maintaining dignity as human beings, as well as mental stamina in the workplace, where mental exhaustion and emotional strain are common occurrences.

1.7. Gender, Culture, and Language Expectations in the Workplace

The norms of gender and culture run deep into the issues of language expectations and perceptions. Several studies have also recorded the fact that women have to pay more costs than men who use directive or assertive language, especially when it comes to directive or assertive words. Still, men can experience a backlash if they show emotional vulnerability when speaking. Politeness also depends on cultural factors like high- or low-context communication. High-context cultures (Japan, Korea) are indirect and deferential, while low-context cultures (U.S., Germany) can be indirect [24].

These dynamics render it crucial that intersectionality should be considered in workplace communication studies, in terms of linguistic perception. An aggressive tone from a male supervisor can be acceptable in a particular setting, whereas the tone of a female employee can be perceived as inappropriate. These differences, along with an understanding of them, are crucial to creating egalitarian and emotionally balanced workplaces.

Although the workplace communication, the concept of emotional labour, and mental health have been discussed in existing literature comprehensively, various gaps can be observed:

- Few quantitative studies study how politeness mediates communication and well-being.
- Little research integrates psycholinguistic text analysis tools, such as LIWC, with mental health metrics in the same model.
- SEM has been underutilised in politeness and language-style studies, despite its strength in modeling indirect effects.

This study aims to address this gap by providing empirical evidence on the impact of language style on employee mental health, employing a hybrid methodology that combines psycholinguistic and quantitative research approaches.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

There were 462 full-time workers engaged with the population being recruited in the corporate, educational, healthcare, and service sectors. The participants were selected to represent multiple spheres of activity, providing a clear picture of how language is used in various work environments. It enrolled these participants through professional networks, organizational partnerships, online survey sites, and guaranteed accessible and diverse samples.

The list of inclusion criteria that the participants needed to meet to become participants of the study was not too long: participants aged 18 or over had to speak fluent English and must be currently working in a full-time job where they have frequent interpersonal interactions daily. The average age of the respondents was 21 to 58 years, with a corresponding mean age of 34.2 years (SD = 7.9). This age group offered a general view on how people use language and their mental state at various levels of work-life.

The sample group was gender diverse, with 248 (53.7 percent) females, 210 (45.5 percent) males, and four non-binary (0.8 percent) representing its respondents. The heterogeneity of the In addition, the sample involved individuals in different functional positions, classification of industries, and levels of companies, and the research results can be applied in other locations.

Before the survey, the participants were told about the aim of the research, and their agreement and questions on the topic were discussed. Their reminder was stern that

they should not jeopardise the confidentiality of the survey. Anonymity of the questions that were given by the participants was of the highest priority, as the personal information remained confidential and safe.

2.2. Processes of Data Collection

The online survey was administered as a two-part questionnaire that sought to gather both demographic and psychometric data from the participants. Section one of the questionnaire would use simple demographic and professional background questions that collect required demographic and professional background information, such as:

- Job title
- Department
- Industry
- Contact with supervisors and peers frequency
- The style of workplace communication (e.g., informal style, formal style)

The researcher sought to understand the working conditions of the participants and the frequency of their communication interactions at work, which could either affect their language style experience and the outcome of their mental health.

The second part of the questionnaire focused on the instruments that have been successfully validated psychometrically, to assess language style and establish mental health outcomes. In the case of mental health measures, subjects were subjected to several scales that were intended to measure psychological distress or mental well-being. These scales were chosen due to their popularity and validity within the organisational-related research. Furthermore, the subjects were asked to provide a summary of recent workplace communications, including email, chat messages, or meeting notes, which were anonymised before analysis. These text samples provided an opportunity to perform linguistic analysis with the help of computing tools, such as LIWC (Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count), which can be referred to as the rich ones, to research the correlation between communication style and mental well-being.

The mixture of quantity and quality of the set data (given by the psychometric scales and given by samples of the communications on the site) allowed for to application of a mixed method. This strengthened the research and also made it comprehensive because both psychological measurements and the concrete language of organizations were included in the study. The information collected was completely coded so that the answers provided by the participants to the survey were not disclosed to anyone, and also to avoid access by a vagrant person (a third party) to the personal identifiers of the participants in their linguistic data.

2.3. Language Style Measurement

The Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC-2015) software measured the linguistic style on a list of pointers. LIWC-A is a psycholinguistic tool. LIWC is the analysis program that is used to assess both speech and writing and identify the patterns and kinds of psychological aspects of writing. It measures a few aspects of language application, among them:

- Affective processes: This includes emotion words, such as those expressing positive or negative feelings, and helps assess the emotional tone of language.
- Cognitive mechanisms: These refer to language patterns related to thinking and reasoning, such as insight, causation, and certainty.
- Social processes: This dimension assesses references to others, such as pronouns (e.g., “we”, “I”) and relational terms that reflect social engagement and interaction.
- Tone and authenticity: This dimension evaluates the overall emotional tone of the language (whether it’s positive, negative, or neutral) and its authenticity (how genuine or sincere the language seems).

As defined in this study, the language style was broken into three major communication styles, namely:

Supportive Style: This approach is characterized by high linguistic inclusion, a sense of affirmation, and emotional warmth. The style features empathetic words, praise, and cooperative language.

Neutral Writing: What we are doing is imbued with a near-absence of emotional language. This style will be more practical and official, aimed at performing specific tasks without feeling and interpersonal inflexions.

Aggressive/Directive Style: This style is characterized by a high level of dominance, low levels of politeness, and an emotionally damaging atmosphere. This is a directive, blunt, or critical language, and it could include anger, frustration,

or authoritative words.

Besides the general language styles, the politeness aspects were evaluated using custom dictionaries of LIWC, based on the theory of Politeness presented by Brown and Levinson (1987)[25]. Thanks to these dictionaries, linguistic signs of politeness strategies, including:

Hedging: The use of phrases to mitigate statements (e.g., perhaps, maybe, I think).

- **Indirect requests**: Requests framed indirectly (e.g., "Could you...?" vs. "Do this now").
- **Mitigated criticism**: Offering feedback or criticism in a softened manner (e.g., "You could improve this" vs. "This is wrong").
- **Inclusive pronouns**: Use of collective pronouns like "we," "our," or "us," which signal collaboration and shared goals.

With the help of LIWC, this language feature can be measured and further linked to the results of mental health outcomes, allowing for an accurate study of the influence of language style on mental health.

2.4. Measures

Detailed survey instruments are provided in **Appendix A**.

2.4.1. Mental Health Measures

Explain how you measured:

- Stress, anxiety, depression (using DASS-21)
- Emotional exhaustion (using MBI)
- Well-being (using GWQ)

Assessment of the psychological distress was carried out through the employment of the DASS-21 (see **Appendix A** for sample items)[26]. It consists of 21 items, and it is placed in a 4-pt Likert cycle where it shows a really good internal consistency (a). Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was used in measuring emotional exhaustion. General Well-being Questionnaire (GWQ) that assesses positive characteristics of mental health.

2.4.2. Language Style Measures

The software used in the current study in relation to the measurement of the linguistic style in the workplace communication, the so-called Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC-2015), is a commonly referred to software applied in the context of psycholinguistic research towards the analysis of the language style. The samples of text were provided to the participants, which might be the emails or the notes of their conversations or the recordings of their chat, and were to be processed with LIWC, which categorises human language and beliefs into different linguistic classes, including emotional tone, use of pronouns, cognitive complexity and social orientation. The literature on psycholinguistic and workplace communications allowed the concept of language style to be split into three categories, as illustrated by the following:

Supportive Language Style: It is described by excessive presence of positive emotion words (e.g. appreciate, excited), inclusive pronouns (e.g. we, our) and softer verbs (e.g. could, might). This style is affirmative, warm, and team-working.

Neutral Language Style: Emotional or evaluative language is low, with the use of mainly factual, formal or procedural assertions. In the tone scale in LIWC, the emotional tone scores were almost zero.

Aggressive or Directive Style: Aggressive Style is characterised by a large number of negative emotion terms (e.g. "vented," "wrong"), imperatives, or other terms of obligation (e.g. "you must…"). This style is considered to be reflective of control, urgency or blame, and usually, it can lead to psychological strain.

The automatic mapping of a dictionary in LIWC allowed systematic categorisation and reliable linguistic classification can be distinguished with representative and large numbers of samples. Such style typologies were the observed variables in SEM analysis.

2.4.3. Politeness Strategy Measures

In an attempt to measure politeness strategies, a home-grown dictionary was developed on the LIWC family of dictionaries based on theories of politeness described by Brown and Levinson (1987), using their Politeness Theory to categorise important interpersonal communication strategies used to offset the potential threats to face by committing a face-threatening act.

It is a dictionary which concentrates on four basic politeness indicators:

- **Hedging expressions:** Such words or phrases as per-

haps, I think, somewhat, which distort the impact of statements.

- **Indirect requests:** Requests in the form of phrases like, Could you please… or Would it be possible to… are considered indirect requests.
- **Mitigated criticism**: Reframed negative feedback (e.g., *"You might improve this by..."* instead of *"This is wrong"*).
- **Inclusive pronouns**: Usage of "we," "our," and "us," indicating solidarity and team identity.

The frequency of these linguistic markers was measured across all text samples. Higher scores reflected a greater use of politeness strategies, which were modelled as a latent mediator variable in the SEM framework. The inclusion of politeness allowed the study to quantitatively test whether interpersonal linguistic softening had a measurable effect on psychological well-being.

2.5. SEM Approach

The data analysis was conducted using AMOS v24, a versatile statistical tool for applying Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The complex relationships between the observed and latent factors can also be studied using SEM, which is why it is best suited for testing the hypothesised relationships in the current research.

The analysis followed two steps of the procedure:

Measurement Model Testing (Confirmatory Factor Analysis, CFA): Since there was a need to examine the reliability and validity of the latent constructs, i.e. language style, emotional tone and mental health indices. CFA was used to make sure that the items of measurement in each construct were a good reflection of the theoretical constructs which were to be measured. Fit indices were used to check on appropriate model fit as follows: Chi-square (x/df), Comparative Fit Index, Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). The CFI values, RMSEA values and SRMR were set at > 0.90, < 0.08 and < 0.08, respectively.

2.6. Data Analysis

To arrive at the desired association that lies among the work style of language, the politeness strategies, and the resultant outcome of mental health, a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used together with a commonly used software program (AMOS v24) to carry out the examination of latent variable models. The procedure of data analysis was conducted in a two-step pattern:

(1) testing the measurement model by running a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to evaluate the construct validity and reliability and (2) running path analysis to test the structural model and determine the direct and indirect effects[27].

2.6.1. Measurement Model (Confirmatory Factor Analysis—CFA)

The latent constructs of the study had to be proved using the measurement model, which consisted of:

- Style of Language (supportive, neutral, and aggressive)
- Politeness Strategies (hedging, indirectness, etc),
- Mental Health Outcomes (depression, stress, emotional exhaustion, well-being).

CFA was conducted to assess the extent to which the observed variables reliably represented their underlying latent variables. Model fit was evaluated using the following fit indices:

- Chi-square/df (χ^2/df): Acceptable if < 3
- Comparative Fit Index (CFI): Acceptable if ≥ 0.90
- Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA): Acceptable if ≤ 0.08
- Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR): Acceptable if ≤ 0.08

The CFA results indicated good model fit:

- χ^2/df = 2.14
- CFI = 0.95
- RMSEA = 0.045
- SRMR = 0.049

All observed variables showed significant factor loadings, in **Table 1** ranging from 0.67 to 0.91, exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.60.

In addition, Composite Reliability (CR) values were above 0.80 and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50, confirming convergent and discriminant validity.

Table 1. Standardized Factor Loadings from Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

Construct	Indicator	Standardized Loading (λ)
Supportive Language	Positive Emotion Words	0.74
	Inclusive Pronouns	0.78
	Empathetic Phrases	0.81
Aggressive Language	Negative Emotion Words	0.84
	Directive Language	0.67
	Critical Statements	0.79
Politeness Strategies	Hedging Terms	0.72
	Indirect Requests	0.85
	Inclusive Language	0.80
Mental Health	Inverse DASS (Depression, Anxiety)	0.88
	General Well-being (GWQ)	0.91
	Emotional Exhaustion (MBI, reverse)	0.76

Note: All factor loadings were significant at $p < 0.001$.

2.6.2. Structural Model Evaluation (Path Analysis—SEM)

After validating the measurement model, the structural model was constructed to test the hypothesized relationships among language style, politeness, and mental health outcomes. **Table 2** summarises the path coefficients, indicating both direct and mediated relationships.

As shown in **Table 2**, the direct path from aggressive language to mental health was negative and significant ($\beta = -0.42$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 2. Structural Equation Model (SEM) Path Coefficients and Significance.

Path	Standardized Coefficient (β)	Significance (*p*-value)
Supportive Language → Mental Health	0.38	< 0.001
Aggressive Language → Mental Health	−0.42	< 0.001
Supportive Language → Politeness Strategies	0.44	< 0.001
Politeness Strategies → Mental Health	0.29	< 0.001
Supportive → Politeness → Mental Health	0.13 (indirect effect)	< 0.01
Aggressive → Politeness → Mental Health	Not Significant	—

The model examined:

- Direct effects of supportive and aggressive language styles on mental health,
- Indirect effects mediated by politeness strategies.

Fit indices for the structural model were also acceptable:

Table 3 compares model fit statistics for both the measurement and structural models.

Key standardized path coefficients (β) revealed:

- Supportive Language → Mental Health: $\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$,
- Aggressive Language → Mental Health: $\beta = -0.42$, $p < 0.001$,
- Supportive Language → Politeness: $\beta = 0.44$, $p < 0.001$,
- Politeness → Mental Health: $\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$,
- Supportive → Politeness → Mental Health (indirect): $\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.01$,
- Aggressive → Politeness → Mental Health (indirect): Not significant.

Table 3. Model Fit Indices for CFA and SEM Models.

Model	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Measurement (CFA)	2.14	0.95	0.045	0.049
Structural (SEM)	2.31	0.93	0.048	0.046

These results confirm that supportive language influences mental health both directly and through increased use of politeness strategies. Conversely, aggressive language shows a strong, direct negative effect on mental health that

politeness strategies do not mitigate.

2.7. Ethical Considerations

The study received ethical clearance from the **Institutional Review Board** (protocolcode:IRB-EMP2024-045). Participation was voluntary, anonymous,andcompliant with the **Declaration of Helsinki**. No personally identifiable data was retained, and participants could withdraw at any time without consequence.

3. Results

The empirical investigation into the relationships between workplace language style and employee mental health. A combination of descriptive statistics, measurement validation, and structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to analyse data from 462 working professionals across industries.

3.1. Descriptive Statistics and Preliminary Analysis

Before model testing, descriptive statistics were calculated to summarise participants' in **Table 4** responses on all primary constructs.

These descriptive results confirm that supportive communication correlates positively with better mental health and reduced emotional exhaustion, while aggressive or directive language corresponds with higher psychological strain. Notably, the inverse relationships between emotional exhaustion and supportive language support the idea that interpersonal warmth and affirming communication styles contribute to greater emotional resilience among employees.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix (n = 462).

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Supportive Language Style	3.87	0.62	—			
2. Aggressive/Directive Style	2.44	0.71	−0.32	—		
3. Mental Health (inverse DASS)	3.11	0.85	0.47	−0.51	—	
4. Emotional Exhaustion (MBI)	2.78	0.74	−0.41	0.58	−0.56	—

Note: $p < 0.01$. Higher DASS and MBI scores reflect poorer mental health.

3.2. Measurement Model

To validate the latent constructs used in the SEM framework, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted. Constructs included:

- Language Style (comprising supportive, neutral, and aggressive subdimensions)
- Mental Health (integrating inverse DASS indicators)
- Emotional Exhaustion
- Politeness Strategies (operationalized using Brown and Levinson's linguistic markers)

The CFA results indicated a strong fit between the data and the proposed measurement model:

- $\chi^2/df = 2.14$
- Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.95
- Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = 0.045
- Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) = 0.049

All observed variables loaded highly on their latent constructs, with standardized factor loadings from 0.67 to 0.91 above 0.60. Composite Reliability (CR) values were robust (> 0.80 for all constructs), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded 0.50, showing convergent and discriminant validity.The relationships are illustrated in **Figure 1**.

These results confirm that the measurement instruments used to operationalize psycholinguistic and mental health constructs are psychometrically sound.

Figure 1 illustrates the direct and indirect effects of workplace language styles (supportive vs. aggressive) on mental health outcomes. Supportive language positively impacts mental health both directly and through politeness strategies, while aggressive language has an adverse effect. Politeness strategies mediate the influence of supportive communication on mental health.

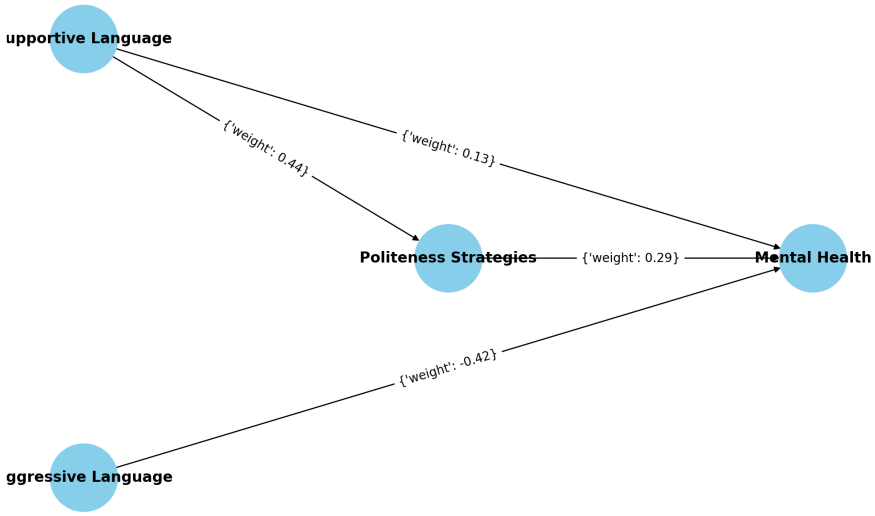

Figure 1. SEM Path Model: Relationships Between Workplace Language Styles and Employee Mental Health.

3.3. Structural Equation Model (SEM)

The full SEM model was constructed to examine the directional and mediational relationships among the variables. Specifically, it tested:

- Direct effects of supportive and aggressive language on mental health,
- Indirect effects of these styles via politeness strategies,
- Overall explained variance in mental health and emotional exhaustion.

Model Fit Statistics

The model fit the data well:

- $\chi^2/df = 2.31$
- CFI = 0.93
- RMSEA = 0.048
- SRMR = 0.046

These values indicate a well-fitting structural model, suitable for hypothesis testing.

3.4. Path Coefficients and Significance

The model's path estimates revealed statistically significant effects as hypothesized:

Direct Effects:

- **Supportive Language → Mental Health**:
  $\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$
  Interpretation: Employees exposed to supportive communication reported higher levels of well-being.
- **Aggressive Language → Mental Health**:
  $\beta = -0.42$, $p < 0.001$
  Interpretation: An aggressive tone was significantly associated with poorer psychological health.
- **Supportive Language → Politeness Strategy Use**:
  $\beta = 0.44$, $p < 0.001$
  Interpretation: Speakers who supported the idea were more likely to employ politeness strategies (e.g., mitigation, hedging, inclusive language).
- **Politeness Strategy → Mental Health**:
  $\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$
  Interpretation: Politeness moderated the emotional impact of workplace interactions.

Indirect (Mediated) Effects:

- **Supportive Language → Politeness → Mental Health**:
  $\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.01$
  Interpretation: A significant part of the effect of supportive communication on mental health is transmitted through its influence on politeness strategies.
- **Aggressive Language → Politeness → Mental Health**:
  Not significant.
  Interpretation: An aggressive tone is likely to exert a direct, adverse psychological effect, bypassing moderating politeness mechanisms.

These results support the Politeness Theory framework:

communication strategies that reduce face-threatening acts (FTAs) can soften psychological harm and even boost well-being.

3.5. Additional Analyses: Group Differences

To further explore nuances in the data, several group comparisons were made:

3.5.1. By Gender

Women demonstrated significantly higher emotional sensitivity to aggressive language styles than men:

- $t = 3.14$, $p < 0.01$
- Women reported greater stress levels in response to emotionally charged or directive tones.
- This aligns with prior findings in psycholinguistics suggesting gendered differences in communication expectations and emotional processing.

3.5.2. By Work Setting (Remote vs. Onsite)

Remote employees showed a greater positive response to supportive language:

- Supportive communication had a stronger positive effect on mental health for remote workers ($\beta = 0.44$) compared to onsite workers ($\beta = 0.31$).
- *Interpretation*: In digital environments where non-verbal cues are absent, language carries more psychological weight.

4. Discussion

The study compares its findings to previous research, discusses its theoretical and practical implications, and suggests future research.

4.1. Interpretation of Key Findings

This study confirmed that language style significantly predicts employee mental health outcomes, aligning with previous psycholinguistic and organisational behaviour literature. Specifically, supportive language was positively associated with improved mental health, and aggressive language was linked to emotional exhaustion, who argue that emotionally intelligent communication fosters psychological resilience[28].

The mediating role of politeness strategies adds novel insight. While supportive communication encourages the use of hedging, indirectness, and inclusivity—enhancing psychological safety—aggressive communication exerts direct negative effects, largely bypassing these buffering mechanisms. This supports the principles of Brown & Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987), which posits that face-saving strategies help manage social stressors, especially in hierarchical settings.

Moreover, the study's use of LIWC-based language analysis and SEM integration contributes to the growing call for more quantitative methods in pragmatics and communication studies[29]. Our findings underscore that even subtle features of speech—tone, word choice, and pronoun use—can meaningfully shape psychological outcomes in the workplace.

4.2. Theoretical Contributions

This study closes the gap in research between the fields of pragmatics, psycholinguistics and organizational psychology combining the Politeness Theory with a rather unusual quantitative SEM model, which is very structured and productive. The previous use of politeness theory has been concentrated on the qualitative or discourse-oriented application. The positive contribution of our work is that politeness strategies could be viewed as a quantifiable latent variable, which could be measured using an automated metric such as LIWC.

Psychological safety theory is furthered by this undertaking since it proposed that linguistic micro-behaviours (e.g., inclusive language) can act as a predictive indicator of team morale and interpersonal trust, as well as previous results by Edmondson and Lei[30]. The insights enable researchers to measure emotional climate in teams in terms of scales that can be replicated and scaled up.

4.3. Practical Implications

The study yields actionable takeaways for organisations and HR leaders:

4.3.1. Communication Skills Training for Managers

Training should emphasise empathy, indirect feedback, and inclusive language. Leaders often influence the psychological climate, and supportive verbal behaviour can reduce anxiety and increase motivation.

4.3.2. Tone-Aware Technology

Email platforms and chat systems could integrate AI-powered tone checkers (based on LIWC-style dictionaries), providing real-time suggestions to rephrase emotionally harmful content.

4.3.3. Guidelines for Remote Teams

As remote employees rely heavily on written communication, promoting a supportive tone in digital spaces is especially crucial for mental health.

4.3.4. Language Audits for Burnout Prevention

HR departments can perform periodic audits of workplace communication to identify linguistic risk indicators for burnout, such as directive language spikes or decreased "we-talk".

4.4. Limitations

Several limitations must be acknowledged:

- **Cross-sectional design** limits causal claims. Longitudinal studies could assess how language effects evolve.
- **Self-report measures** (DASS, MBI) may be influenced by mood or social desirability.
- **Contextual generalizability**: The participants were fluent English speakers from China. Results may not translate to high-context or multilingual cultures where politeness norms differ.
- **Sectoral variability** in communication norms may influence findings; while diverse, the sample may not fully represent high-pressure professions like law enforcement or emergency medicine.

4.5. Directions for Future Research

- **Longitudinal designs**: Track shifts in employee well-being as communication patterns change.
- **Cross-cultural pragmatics**: Explore how politeness and power language differ in multicultural teams.
- **Team-level language dynamics**: Study how collective language style predicts group cohesion and productivity.
- **Multimodal data**: Include gestures, facial expressions, and vocal tone alongside linguistic markers.
- **Intervention studies**: Implement politeness-enhanced communication workshops and assess outcomes using pre/post measures.

5. Conclusions

This study investigated the relationship between workplace language style and employee mental health through a psycholinguistic and structural modelling lens. Specifically, the study sought to answer two central research questions:

(1) How do different workplace language styles (supportive, neutral, and aggressive) influence employee mental health outcomes? and
(2) Do politeness strategies mediate the relationship between language style and psychological well-being?
(3) Can organizational language styles be restructured to foster improved psychological outcomes?

The results demonstrate that language is far more than a medium for instruction—it shapes the emotional climate of professional settings. Supportive language styles were significantly associated with improved mental health outcomes, including reduced levels of stress and emotional exhaustion, as measured through the DASS-21 and MBI. In contrast, aggressive language styles correlated with increased psychological strain. Neutral language, although not strongly predictive in isolation, exhibited variation in effect depending on the presence or absence of politeness markers. These findings align with prior research emphasising the affective power of communication tone in the workplace[31].

In answer to the third research question, the results of the study indicate that it is true that the language styles in an organization can be restructured so as to bring about better psychological impacts. The once-over of this can be through specific training on supportive and emotionally intelligent communications and integration of instruments that track and assist demeanor in online communications. Embracing and institutionalizing of positive language gestures and of-

fering collaborative approaches such as politeness accords in subordination relations, an organization could proactively deal with psychological strains and obtain lasting well-being through its environment.

5.1. Relevance of Politeness as a Mediator

Results revealed that politeness significantly mediated the relationship between supportive language and improved mental health, but not for aggressive language. In other words, when communication was supportive, it was more likely to trigger politeness strategies such as hedging, indirectness, and inclusive pronouns, which in turn served to mitigate stress and foster psychological safety. These mediating pathways were absent or weakened in the presence of aggressive language, which seemed to bypass relational maintenance and act directly on employee well-being.

This supports previous qualitative research[32] suggesting that workplace discourse, when embedded with politeness, functions not just to transmit information but to shape perceptions of respect, inclusion, and power balance. The absence of these features in harsh or directive communication appears to have measurable emotional costs.

5.2. Empirical Value of SEM in Psycholinguistics

The use of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) provides another important innovation. Much of the existing research in this area is qualitative or descriptive, often focusing on anecdotal or ethnographic data. While rich in context, such work lacks scalability and statistical generalizability. By employing SEM, this study offered a causal pathway framework with latent variables, thus increasing the robustness and replicability of findings.

This methodological approach helps address the call for more empirical rigour in pragmatic linguistics and organisational psychology, two fields that often run parallel but rarely intersect. The success of the model fit indices (e.g., RMSEA, CFI, TLI) demonstrates that complex interpersonal constructs like language tone and politeness can be quantitatively measured without losing theoretical richness.

5.3. Subgroup Differences and Contextual Nuance

Beyond general trends, exploratory subgroup analysis revealed differences by gender and work format (remote vs. in-person). Female participants were more responsive to supportive language in terms of improved well-being scores, and remote workers reported a greater sensitivity to tone in written communication. These results suggest that the medium of communication—whether spoken, emailed, or texted—amplifies or attenuates the emotional effects of language style.

Such findings extend existing literature on digital pragmatics[33] and gendered communication norms in professional contexts[34]. It also underscores the importance of tailoring communication strategies in hybrid and remote work environments, where politeness cues are harder to detect but potentially more important.

5.4. Practical Implications

First, training programs can incorporate tone-awareness modules, teaching employees how their words may emotionally affect others, even in emails or Slack messages. Second, organisations might develop tone-checking tools similar to grammar checkers, using LIWC-based algorithms to flag potentially harmful messages. Third, performance reviews and feedback conversations should emphasise supportive and indirect phrasing, as these appear to enhance receptivity and reduce defensive responses.

Moreover, language audits can be added to workplace health assessments. Just as companies monitor performance or satisfaction, they can track the emotional tone of internal communications to pre-empt burnout or conflict. In environments with high stress, subtle shifts toward more aggressive language might serve as early indicators of a deteriorating psychological climate.

this research bridges a vital gap between linguistic form and psychological function in the workplace. By using structured modeling and validated psychometric instruments, it demonstrates that workplace language is not neutral—it is emotionally loaded, socially coded, and psychologically consequential.

The act of choosing a word, using a hedged phrase, or employing inclusive pronouns is not merely stylistic—it is strategic, relational, and, as this study shows, health-relevant. In an era where mental health is increasingly prioritized, organizations must consider not only *what* is said, but *how* it is said—and to whom.

This study provides both the theoretical architecture and practical vocabulary to begin that transformation.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, Q.Z. and A.Z.; methodology, C.S.; software, J.T.; validation, C.S., J.T., and A.Z.; formal analysis, C.S.; investigation, Q.Z.; resources, P.Q.; data curation, Q.Z.; writing—original draft preparation, P.Q.; writing—review and editing, J.T.; visualization, C.S.; supervision, C.S.; project administration, J.T.; funding acquisition, P.Q. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

The study received ethical clearance from the Institutional Review Board (protocol code: IRB-EMP2024-045).

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement

Not applicable.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study; in the collection, analyses, or interpretation of data; in the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

Appendix A

Survey Instruments

The following instruments were administered as part of the study to measure mental health outcomes, workplace language perceptions, and politeness strategies. All participants completed the items in English.

A1. Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21)

Adapted from Lovibond & Lovibond, the DASS-21 includes 21 items measuring depression, anxiety, and stress over the past week using a 4-point Likert scale (0 = Did not apply to me at all; 3 = Applied to me very much or most of the time).

Sample Items:

- "I found it hard to wind down."
- "I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy."
- "I felt downhearted and blue."

A2. Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)

The MBI assesses emotional exhaustion using 9 items from the emotional exhaustion subscale. Responses range from 0 (Never) to 6 (Every day).

Sample Items:

- "I feel emotionally drained from my work."
- "I feel burned out from my work."

A3. General Well-being Questionnaire (GWQ)

The GWQ is a short-scale 12-item well-being and coping measure used often in the work environment.

Sample Items:

- I tend to be in reality cheerful.
- I believe I can manage unexpected occurrences.

A4. Prompts of the language style and framing

This was done using sample workplace messages, which were rated by the participants with regard to tone and emotional influence. Messages were reproduced into three categories:

- Emotional (e.g. Let me know where I can help you.)
- Neutral Style (e.g. Please hand in the report.)
- Problematic Style (il eg e.g. "why is this late again??")
- Self-administered ratings were taken on a 5-point semantic differential, such as Supportive-Aggressive.

A5. Custom Politeness Dictionary

Participants' responses were analyzed using a custom LIWC dictionary coded for politeness strategies:

Table 5. LIWC dictionary coded for politeness strategies.

Strategy Type	Example Phrases
Hedging	"Better it would be, that…"; "We could perhaps…"
Indirectness	Would you mind…?; It appears what…?; It feels like…?; It sounds like…?
Mitigated Criticism	"It might be made a little bit better…"
Inclusive Pronouns	There should be…; Let us examine at that…

Two experts reviewed two words and phrases by using the pragmatics literature and checking on the contextual appropriateness.

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