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Avoidance Language Typology: Comparing Policy-Driven and Culture-Driven *Professional* Communication for ESP Research

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ABSTRACT

In professional communication, effectiveness is determined not only by what is said but also by what is consciously avoided. While English for Specific Purposes (ESP) research has traditionally emphasised productive vocabulary, avoidance language remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by proposing a comparative typology of avoidance language across two professional domains: (1) policy-driven avoidance in English-language social media moderation and (2) culture-driven avoidance in Thai business communication contexts. Adopting a qualitative, dataset-informed design, the study analyses normative institutional artefacts, specifically, publicly available profanity blocklists and business communication substitution manuals, to map the mechanisms of avoidance. Although the datasets are purposively limited by proprietary and cultural constraints, their comparison yields noteworthy theoretical insights into high-context professional ESP communication. The researchers propose the Avoidance Language Typology Model, distinguishing between top-down, rule-based avoidance (omission) and bottom-up, relational avoidance (substitution). The analysis demonstrates that while social media moderation enforces compliance through rigid keyword blacklists, business communication in high-context settings emphasises pragmatic substitutions to maintain harmony. These findings offer direct implications for ESP pedagogy, particularly for learners navigating the intersection of algorithmic constraints and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) pragmatic norms. Specifically, the distinction between lexical compliance and pragmatic substitution provides a practically applicable pedagogical framework for teaching avoidance as a necessary communicative skill in digital and intercultural workplaces.

Keywords: Avoidance Language Typology; Intercultural Pragmatics; Social Media Content Moderation; Thai Business Communication; English for Specific Purposes Pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

In globalised workplaces, effective communication extends beyond what should be expressed; it also involves knowing what should not be said. Certain lexical choices, including profanities, insults, or culturally inappropriate terms, may lead to serious consequences. On digital platforms, violating language policies can result in account suspension or reputational harm (Roberts, 2019). In intercultural business contexts, inappropriate expressions may damage trust, undermine professional relationships, or even terminate negotiations (Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2021). This is particularly evident in Thailand, where professionals using Business English as a Lingua Franca

(BELF) in multinational environments face complex communicative demands requiring heightened pragmatic awareness to avoid relational breakdown (Rajprasit et al., 2022). Avoidance language in this study is defined not merely as the evasion of traditional taboos but as a strategic communicative practice involving the omission or pragmatic substitution of sensitive terms within institutional and algorithmic constraints, extending prior work on taboo language and euphemism (Allan & Burridge, 2006; Yang, 2023; Zhang & Su, 2023).

Research in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has long examined specialised vocabulary and communication strategies in academic and professional contexts (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Nation, 2001). However, this scholarship largely prioritises productive competencies, focusing on how learners use specialised terms effectively (Belcher, 2009). Far less attention has been paid to avoidance strategies, in which professionals must omit or replace certain terms. This imbalance suggests a gap in both theory and pedagogy.

Two domains highlight the importance of avoidance. The first is social media content moderation, where guidelines prohibit certain English words associated with profanity, hate speech, or harassment (Notar et al., 2013). Compliance is enforced algorithmically (Gorwa et al., 2020; Jhaver et al., 2018) and supported by human moderators (Ahmad & Krzywdzinski, 2022; Roberts, 2019). In this context, avoidance is policy-driven and punitive, requiring users to refrain from specific terms. The second is Thai business communication, particularly in sales interactions, where culturally sensitive expressions must be avoided to maintain politeness and relational harmony. Here, avoidance is not governed by formal rules but shaped by cultural norms such as *kreng jai* and face maintenance (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holmes, 2000; Wierzbicka, 2003). Unlike social media, which prohibits offensive language, Thai business practice encourages indirect substitutions that soften meaning while preserving communicative effectiveness (Allan & Burridge, 2006; Nordin et al., 2024; Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2021).

Despite their importance, these domains have rarely been analysed together. This absence is notable, given that they represent contrasting paradigms: rule-based avoidance and relational avoidance. Rather than treating them as equivalent, their juxtaposition reveals distinct avoidance mechanisms relevant to ESP learners. This study does not compare the domains in terms of equivalence, effectiveness, or representativeness; instead, it treats them as analytically contrasting cases to construct a theoretical typology of avoidance. Moreover, limited research has documented avoidance lexicons and substitution strategies in Thai business sales communication, leaving a gap in cross-cultural pragmatics and ESP (Belcher, 2009; Ishihara & Cohen, 2014).

SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this juxtaposition is therefore not to establish parallels between comparable systems, but to illuminate how distinct institutional and cultural conditions give rise to fundamentally different avoidance mechanisms. This study addresses these gaps by analysing two distinct datasets, which function as normative institutional artefacts rather than records of spontaneous interactional speech. These datasets comprise a curated list of profanity terms for social media moderation (Dergacheva & Katzenbach, 2023) and a lexicon of taboo words with recommended substitutions in Thai business communication.

It is important to clarify that the Thai dataset is utilised here as a paradigmatic case of high-context professional interaction, rather than as a representative model of all high-context business cultures. This study does not treat social media moderation and Thai business communication as

structurally equivalent domains. Instead, it analytically juxtaposes them to illustrate how contrasting environments shape different avoidance strategies (Recuero, 2024).

This juxtaposition further demonstrates how local pragmatic norms (such as *kreng jai*) (Wierzbicka, 2003) shape English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) usage in the ASEAN region (Nickerson, 2005; Rajprasit et al., 2022). Based on this analysis, the researchers propose the Avoidance Language Typology Model, conceptually distinguishing between policy-driven and culture-driven avoidance. The objectives of this study are therefore threefold:

1. To document restricted vocabulary and institutional substitution guidelines in social media moderation and high-context business communication.
2. To juxtapose the underlying drivers and mechanisms of avoidance to highlight how they operate differently across these contexts.
3. To propose an exploratory typology of avoidance language with practical implications for ESP pedagogy in globalised digital and intercultural settings.

Accordingly, any apparent asymmetry between the datasets is not treated as a methodological limitation but as a necessary condition for generating theoretical contrast, as typological analysis prioritises conceptual differentiation over empirical equivalence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

AVOIDANCE IN DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

The rise of social media has intensified concerns about harmful language online, including profanity, hate speech, and harassment (Notar et al., 2013). Studies report high rates of online harassment, disproportionately affecting vulnerable groups such as women, minors, and LGBTQ+ individuals (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012; Duggan, 2017). To address this, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) enforce strict moderation policies, often through automated keyword detection (Gorwa et al., 2020; Jhaver et al., 2018).

Blocklists and keyword filtering represent a rule-based model of moderation that directly governs user avoidance. While efficient, this approach has limitations, including algorithmic bias, neglect of intent, and reduced sensitivity to context (Basile et al., 2022). For example, a word such as gay may function as a slur or a neutral descriptor depending on context (Gorwa et al., 2020), yet automated systems frequently flag both, resulting in over-censorship (Milosevic, 2016; Roberts, 2019). Human moderators are therefore employed, but this work is emotionally demanding and often outsourced under precarious conditions (Ahmad & Krzywdzinski, 2022).

It is necessary to distinguish between platform policies and users' avoidance practices. Although platforms impose top-down prohibitions, such governance shapes how users construct digital discourse (Dergacheva & Katzenbach, 2023; Recuero, 2024). In response, users adapt their language to navigate restrictions, giving rise to "algospeak", where creative substitutions are used to evade automated detection, as documented in recent studies of user adaptation to platform governance (Pateda et al., 2025; Steen et al., 2023). Avoidance in digital contexts thus extends beyond passive compliance, emerging as an active strategy through which users negotiate institutional constraints and minimise the risk of punishment.

In contrast, intercultural business communication relies heavily on implicit norms of politeness and relational harmony. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory explains how speakers manage face through linguistic choices. In high-context cultures such as Thailand, inappropriate or overly direct expressions can undermine trust and damage professional relationships (Holmes, 2000; Nickerson, 2005; Rajprasit et al., 2022).

Research on Thai communication emphasises the cultural value of *kreng jai*, which discourages confrontation and promotes deference (Wierzbicka, 2003). In sales interactions, words perceived as disrespectful or insulting must be avoided. However, unlike social media moderation, the expectation is not silence but substitution: speakers replace offensive terms with neutral or positive alternatives. This practice reflects a relational model of avoidance, where the goal is not merely to comply with rules but to preserve harmony and empathy (Holmes, 2000; Nordin et al., 2024; Yang, 2023).

While studies in intercultural pragmatics have examined politeness strategies across contexts (Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2021), few have documented avoidance lexicons specific to Thai business communication. This study, therefore, aims to fill that gap by cataloguing taboo words and their recommended substitutes, and illustrating how avoidance operates as a proactive communicative strategy that juxtaposes culturally driven substitution against algorithmically enforced omission.

ESP AND THE PEDAGOGICAL GAP

ESP research has traditionally emphasised specialised vocabulary and communicative strategies for academic and occupational domains (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Nation, 2001). It has also highlighted intercultural competence (Belcher, 2009; Paltridge & Starfield, 2013), digital literacy (Hafner, 2025), and pragmatic awareness (Ishihara & Cohen, 2014). However, avoidance language remains underexplored.

Pragmatics research has indirectly addressed avoidance through studies of euphemism and taboo language (Allan & Burridge, 2006) and impoliteness (Culpeper, 2011). These strands explain how speakers mitigate offence, manage face (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and respond to norms governing what is sayable across contexts (Wierzbicka, 2003). Euphemism studies show how blunt expressions are replaced with more acceptable forms (Allan & Burridge, 2006; Yang, 2023; Zhang & Su, 2023), while taboo research highlights how restricted words are avoided to maintain social harmony (Allan & Burridge, 2006; Wierzbicka, 2003). Impoliteness research further shows that deliberate offence can occur and may lead to serious interpersonal consequences (Culpeper, 2011).

Despite their relevance, these insights have rarely been systematically integrated into ESP pedagogy, which continues to prioritise productive language skills over avoidance strategies (Belcher, 2009). ESP courses continue to prioritise vocabulary, grammar, and genre conventions, with limited attention to managing linguistic risk or avoiding unintended offence (Ahamat & Kabilan, 2022). This gap is particularly evident in contexts where communication is both task-oriented and shaped by power relations (Holmes, 2000), institutional expectations, and cultural norms (Nickerson, 2005).

The risks of inappropriate language in digital and intercultural communication are increasingly evident (Basile et al., 2022). A single email, post, or online message may damage professional relationships, harm reputations (Roberts, 2019), or even result in legal or ethical

consequences (Gorwa et al., 2020; Milosevic, 2016). Misunderstandings are more likely when interlocutors differ in linguistic and cultural expectations of appropriacy (Nordin et al., 2024; Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2021). The rise of online harassment and algorithmic moderation further highlights the need for linguistic sensitivity in digital environments (Dergacheva & Katzenbach, 2023; Duggan, 2017; Jhaver et al., 2018; Steen et al., 2023).

Therefore, integrating avoidance strategies into ESP curricula is both timely and necessary. ESP instruction can guide learners to identify sensitive topics, recognise potentially offensive expressions, a concern also noted in computational studies of hate speech (Reynolds et al., 2011; Yin et al., 2009), and select more neutral alternatives. Such training also fosters reflection on discourse community expectations and the consequences of language choice. In this sense, avoidance teaching not only promotes caution; it also develops pragmatic competence and ethical awareness (Ishihara & Cohen, 2014), preparing learners for complex professional communication.

This study contributes to ESP research by (1) documenting avoidance lexicons in underexplored contexts, (2) proposing a comparative typology of avoidance, and (3) developing a conceptual framework for teaching avoidance as a pragmatic skill.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopts a qualitative, dataset-informed design grounded in Institutional Discourse Analysis, focusing on how professional communication is normatively regulated rather than spontaneously produced in interaction. The aim is not to model frequency or variation in everyday language use, but to identify institutional mechanisms of avoidance that govern what is considered acceptable, risky, or prohibited in high-stakes professional contexts.

In domains such as social media moderation and professional business communication, linguistic behaviour is often shaped less by individual preference than by explicit rules, guidelines, and training materials that codify idealised conduct. Accordingly, the study analyses institutional artefacts, including profanity blocklists and communication manuals, as empirical data. These datasets are treated as representations of institutionalised avoidance systems, enabling a juxtaposition of contrasting regulatory logics rather than a comparison of equivalent interactional domains. The analytical focus is therefore conceptual differentiation rather than cross-domain comparability, with each dataset functioning as an extreme case that clarifies the proposed typology. These artefacts provide systematic insight into how avoidance is conceptualised, enforced, and operationalised within institutions.

Given restricted access to proprietary governance systems and internal communications, this study employs a proxy dataset approach, which has been adopted in studies examining platform governance and moderation systems where direct access is restricted (Dergacheva & Katzenbach, 2023; Gorwa et al., 2020; Roberts, 2019). Rather than treating proxy data as secondary, this study positions them as primary evidence of institutional logic, reflecting how organisations define linguistic risk and appropriateness.

This design prioritises typological saturation over statistical representativeness. In high-risk contexts such as content moderation or client-facing communication, the impact of a single prohibited term outweighs frequency of occurrence. A single lexical violation may trigger sanctions, reputational harm, or relational breakdown (Steen et al., 2023). Therefore, mapping

rules of avoidance, specifically what must be omitted or reformulated, provides a more appropriate basis for typological comparison than sampling naturally occurring discourse.

SOCIAL MEDIA MODERATION DATASET

The dataset representing Policy-Driven Avoidance was compiled from profanity and harassment terms documented in computational sociolinguistics and cyberbullying research (Dadvar et al., 2012; Reynolds et al., 2011; Yin et al., 2009). From these sources, a purposive set of 30 high-impact lexical items was selected based on their relevance to platform governance and recurrence in automated detection systems, informed by the researchers' familiarity with moderation practices. The aim was not exhaustiveness but to capture the functional logic of algorithmic moderation, in which lexical tokens serve as context-independent indicators of harm (Dergacheva & Katzenbach, 2023; Jhaver et al., 2018).

The terms represent categories of linguistic risk, including profanity, sexual references, insults, and identity-based slurs. This reflects moderation systems that operationalise harm through binary inclusion–exclusion mechanisms, where any occurrence of a prohibited term constitutes a violation regardless of intent or context (Steen et al., 2023).

Although compact, the dataset functions as a heuristic representation of blacklist logic in moderation systems. It enables analysis of how avoidance is enforced through lexical omission and how institutional authority encodes moral and legal concerns into machine-readable constraints. It is used not to generalise user behaviour, but to theorise structural features of policy-driven avoidance as institutional practice (Roberts, 2019).

THAI BUSINESS COMMUNICATION DATASET

The Thai business communication dataset represents Culture-Driven Avoidance within an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) context (Nickerson, 2005; Rajprasit et al., 2022). It was curated from professional training materials, including email templates, service protocols, and communication manuals used in Thai contexts, which guide English-mediated interactions in intercultural and client-facing settings (Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2021).

The dataset contains taboo or face-threatening expressions in Thai and English, paired with recommended substitutions. These are not lexical replacements but pragmatic reformulations intended to preserve face, maintain harmony, and reflect cultural norms such as *kreng jai* (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holmes, 2000; Wierzbicka, 2003). The inclusion of English equivalents further demonstrates how local politeness strategies are transferred into English business discourse, reinforcing the dataset's relevance to ESP and ELF research in Southeast Asia (Rajprasit et al., 2022).

By treating these materials as codified institutional norms rather than individual speech data, the study captures professional pragmatics in high-context settings (Nordin et al., 2024; Yang, 2023; Zhang & Su, 2023). The dataset shows that culture-driven avoidance operates through substitution rather than prohibition, offering a clear contrast to rule-based moderation systems.

ANALYTICAL PROCEDURES

Data were analysed using qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2014). The unit of analysis was defined as the lexical item and its institutional treatment. Items and substitution strategies were coded inductively to identify categories of avoidance, including profanity, insults, discriminatory language, and culturally sensitive expressions. Through iterative comparison, categories were refined to capture differences in mechanisms, institutional motivations, and communicative orientations (Dergacheva & Katzenbach, 2023; Roberts, 2019).

The comparative analysis examined how avoidance is operationalised across levels: lexical omission versus pragmatic substitution, top-down enforcement versus bottom-up relational management, and compliance-oriented versus harmony-oriented goals. Coding was iterative, and researcher triangulation ensured reliability. Interpretive differences were resolved through discussion, strengthening analytical coherence and reducing bias.

RESULTS

The comparative analysis of two distinct datasets (a profanity term list for content moderation and a parallel list of taboo words with cultural alternatives for business communication) suggests a clear distinction in the function and mechanism of professional avoidance language. The findings indicate that avoidance operates through two contrasting but systematically observable patterns: lexical omission in policy-driven contexts and pragmatic substitution in culture-driven contexts.

POLICY-DRIVEN AVOIDANCE IN SOCIAL MEDIA

The dataset for social media moderation exemplifies a constrained form of lexical avoidance implemented through a rigid, top-down blacklist of thirty profanity and derogatory terms. Rather than emerging from user practice, the list is centrally authored and periodically updated by platform policy teams, legal departments, and trust-and-safety units. It functions as a compliance enforcement mechanism embedded in automated or semi-automated content-detection systems that support platform governance and Terms of Service enforcement (Ahmad & Krzywdzinski, 2022; Dadvar et al., 2012; Dergacheva & Katzenbach, 2023; Gorwa et al., 2020; Reynolds et al., 2011; Roberts, 2019).

The blacklist comprises four categories of prohibited expressions: core profanity (e.g., fuck, shit, damn, hell), sexual and anatomical terms (e.g., dick, pussy, cunt), general insults (e.g., idiot, dumbass, bitch), and identity-based hate speech targeting race, gender, or sexual orientation (e.g., nigga, nigger, racist, gay, retard). This typology reflects a particular understanding of harm, consistent with prior analyses of moderation systems that prioritise detectable lexical items (Basile et al., 2022). It prioritises lexical items that are easily isolable and machine-detectable over more subtle, contextually embedded forms of harassment or discrimination (Basile et al., 2022). Such reliance on automated filtering has been associated with evasion strategies such as "algospeak", where users adapt language to bypass algorithmic surveillance (Pateda et al., 2025; Steen et al., 2023).

The inclusion of identity-based slurs, particularly those linked to historical discrimination, reflects the policy's aim to mitigate explicit harm, reduce cyberbullying, and maintain baseline civility in digital spaces (Cooper & Blumenfeld, 2012; Jhaver et al., 2018; Notar et al., 2013; Recuero, 2024; Roberts, 2019). These terms carry significant legal, reputational, and ethical risks,

particularly in jurisdictions with strict hate speech regulation. Their prohibition thus represents both a normative stance against overt bigotry and a risk management strategy to pre-empt public controversy, advertiser backlash, or state intervention. The full list is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Social Media Profanity Term List

No	Profanity Term	No	Profanity Term	No	Profanity Term
1	fuck	11	racist	21	nerd
2	shit	12	rapist	22	pussy
3	stupid	13	retard	23	cunt
4	nigga	14	idiot	24	nigger
5	ass	15	dumbass	25	mother fucker
6	bitch	16	crap	26	goddam
7	gay	17	piss	27	boob
8	damn	18	bastard	28	devil
9	hell	19	delusional	29	slut
10	dick	20	cock	30	dog

Yet this policy-driven approach has documented limitations. Because the blacklist treats targeted expressions as context-free indicators of harm, it collapses distinct pragmatic uses of the same word: a reclaimed slur in intra-group use, a critical quotation in academic discourse, and an explicit instance of hate speech may be flagged identically. Similarly, non-derogatory uses of terms such as gay or racist in descriptive or self-referential contexts may trigger moderation despite the absence of abusive intent. Consequently, users often resort to euphemisms, creative spellings, or coded language (often referred to as algospeak) to bypass detection, which may alter linguistic form without necessarily reducing underlying hostility (Pateda et al., 2025; Steen et al., 2023).

Functionally, this model imposes a simple communicative requirement: omission of specified lexical items. Any occurrence of a blacklisted term is treated as an immediate violation, consistent with the binary logic of rule-based detection architectures described in prior research (Basile et al., 2022; Reynolds et al., 2011; Yin et al., 2009). Such systems are easy to integrate into content pipelines, operate at scale in real time, and generate quantifiable indicators of platform responsiveness, such as the number of posts removed or accounts suspended. These features render blacklist-based moderation attractive to platforms under pressure to demonstrate visible action against abuse, even though the underlying mechanism remains comparatively blunt.

From an institutional perspective, the dataset encodes not only proscribed vocabulary but also organisational priorities. It privileges scalable, legible, and auditable strategies over context-sensitive and resource-intensive approaches, such as human review or advanced natural language processing models requiring continuous tuning. Efficiency, risk mitigation, and enforceability of standardised norms across heterogeneous user populations, therefore, become central principles in constructing and maintaining the blacklist.

Consequently, policy-driven avoidance on social media can be understood as a compromise formation that reconciles the competing demands of user safety, free expression, technical feasibility, and dataset accountability by reducing online harm to a discrete, manageable subset of lexical items. While this offers operational advantages, it also risks obscuring broader dynamics of power, exclusion, and harassment that are not captured by keyword lists. The dataset, in other words, renders certain forms of harm highly visible and actionable, while simultaneously making others less visible within the platform's moderation apparatus.

The Thai dataset reveals a culturally embedded, context-sensitive model of pragmatic avoidance that contrasts sharply with policy-driven approaches in social media environments. Rather than prohibiting taboo expressions, Thai business protocols employ a substitution-based strategy grounded in *kreng jai*, a norm of deference and interpersonal consideration that prioritises harmony and face maintenance. Consequently, avoidance is proactive, relationally motivated, and flexible, reflecting politeness practices that reshape rather than suppress meaning in socially appropriate ways (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Nordin et al., 2024; Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2021).

The dataset thus takes the form of a substitution strategy list rather than a blacklist of forbidden terms. Table 2 presents taboo English expressions alongside Thai equivalents and recommended euphemistic alternatives. These substitutions represent not only lexical replacement but also pragmatic reformulation in stance and interpersonal alignment, illustrating the interpretive nature of Thai professional communication. For instance, highly face-threatening terms such as bastard/asshole are replaced with the affiliative phrase "good guy" (คนดี), which does not merely soften insult but performs a reparative social act to restore affinity. Similarly, Dumbass is reframed as "don't understand" (ไม่เข้าใจ), shifting responsibility from individual incompetence to a shared communicative difficulty (Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2021; Wierzbicka, 2003).

Additional examples further illustrate this relational orientation. A gendered or aggressive term such as "bitch" is substituted with neutral relational terms like "sis, bro" (เพื่อน, คุณผู้หญิง ฯลฯ), while an exclamation such as "hell" is redirected to the non-committal query "come again" (ว่าอะไรนะ). This phrasing diffuses tension by addressing a possible communication breakdown rather than responding to the profanity itself. Such patterns confirm that Thai business avoidance is bottom-up, interpretative, and socially motivated, making active use of euphemism and circumlocution to manage social relations (Allan & Burridge, 2006; Yang, 2023; Zhang & Su, 2023).

TABLE 2. Thai Business Communication Avoidance Lexicon

No	Taboo words in English	Thai Translation	Alternative Thai	Alternative English
1	bitch	อีแพศยา, นังตัวดี	เพื่อน, คุณผู้หญิง ฯลฯ	sis, bro
2	shit/ crap	ขี้, เหี้ย (หยาบคาย)	โธ่, อ๊ะ	so...., very....
3	fuck/fucking	เย็ด (คำกริยา), เหี้ย, แม่ง (คำอุทาน)	ดีมาก, เยี่ยม	good
4	dumbass	โง่, ไอ้โง่, ปัญญาอ่อน	ไม่เข้าใจ, งง	don't understand
5	hell	นรก, เหี้ย (ในบริบทคำอุทาน)	ว่าอะไรนะ	come again
6	bastard/asshole	ไอ้เวร, ไอ้เหี้ย, ลูกหมา	คนดี	good guy
7	pussy	ช่องคลอด (แปลตรงตัว), อีหน้าหี	ไม่มีมารยาท	no manner
8	devil	ปีศาจ, มาร, ซาตาน	คนดี	good guy
9	slut/ whore	อีตัว, โสเภณี, แรด	คนไม่ดี, คนเจ้าชู้	bad guy
10	dog	หมา, ไอ้หมา	คนไม่ดี / คนเลว	scoundrel / jerk

Overall, the Thai business communication dataset demonstrates a distinctive, culturally driven model of avoidance. Rather than enforcing lexical prohibition, it uses pragmatic rephrasing to preserve face, maintain harmony, and uphold relational norms shaped by *kreng jai*. This positions Thai avoidance practices not as censorship but as a strategic, culturally informed form of politeness, which is particularly vital for Thai professionals navigating Business English as a Lingua Franca in dataset environments (Rajprasit et al., 2022).

SYNTHESIS OF AVOIDANCE TYPOLOGY

The comparison of the two datasets supports the development of a typological distinction between two functional forms of avoidance language: Policy-Driven Avoidance and Culture-Driven Avoidance. These types differ in mechanism, linguistic level, motivation, and communicative orientation. Policy-Driven Avoidance aligns with Culpeper's (2011) conceptualisation of the management of taboo expressions within impoliteness studies. It operates primarily through lexical omission, removing a specific prohibited term to comply with platform-level regulations. This type of avoidance is top-down, emerging from institutional authority, such as terms of service and algorithmic moderation systems (Dergacheva & Katzenbach, 2023; Steen et al., 2023). Its motivation is largely extrinsic, driven by concerns about legal, reputational, or punitive consequences. Accordingly, the communicative goal is compliance: users avoid linguistic violations to ensure that their messages are not flagged, restricted, or penalised.

In contrast, Culture-Driven Avoidance aligns more closely with Brown and Levinson's (1987) notion of politeness as a cultural universal. This form of avoidance operates through pragmatic substitution, replacing potentially face-threatening or socially sensitive concepts with more harmonious, indirect, or relationally appropriate expressions (Yang, 2023; Zhang & Su, 2023). Rather than being enforced by external rules, Culture-Driven Avoidance is bottom-up, shaped by community expectations and interpersonal norms, such as the Thai concept of *kreng jai*. Its motivation is intrinsic, grounded in the desire to maintain social harmony, preserve face, and uphold relational balance (Nordin et al., 2024). The communicative goal, therefore, is subtlety: speakers strategically adjust their utterances to prevent discomfort, conflict, or loss of face for either party. While the notion of mitigation is well established in pragmatics, it is treated here as an adjacent but analytically distinct concept, rather than a central category, as the present typology focuses specifically on institutionally and culturally structured forms of avoidance.

These two avoidance types illustrate a dual framework in which speakers navigate both institutional rules and cultural expectations. Policy-Driven Avoidance requires mastery of omission as a compliance-oriented strategy, whereas Culture-Driven Avoidance demands an understanding of substitution as a socially attuned communicative act. Taken together, the findings suggest that effective professional communication in intercultural digital contexts depends on the speaker's ability to deploy both strategies consciously and appropriately, responding to the distinct pressures of platform governance and interpersonal politeness norms (Rajprasit et al., 2022; Recuero, 2024).

DISCUSSION

THE AVOIDANCE LANGUAGE TYPOLOGY MODEL

The analysis of these institutional artefacts supports an exploratory typology of avoidance language, distinguishing between Policy-Driven Avoidance and Culture-Driven Avoidance. As noted, this typology is an analytical abstraction based on observed contrasts rather than assumed equivalence between domains. While derived from Thai data, the latter has broader implications for English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) interactions in Asia, where speakers often transfer local politeness strategies into English usage, shaping how avoidance is realised in professional communication (Nickerson, 2005). These models illustrate how institutional and cultural environments shape the management of potentially face-threatening or harmful expressions. They

are not mutually exclusive but represent orientations along a communicative continuum, where speakers may combine rule compliance with relational strategies to navigate overlapping constraints (Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2021).

Policy-driven avoidance, most visible in social media moderation, is a top-down system defined by formal regulation, automated detection, and punitive enforcement. It aims to prevent explicit harm by treating impoliteness as a lexical offence, a tendency observed in both computational moderation studies and impoliteness research (Basile et al., 2022; Culpeper, 2011), thereby reducing legal and reputational risk (Roberts, 2019). Operationally, it relies on blacklist logic (Dadvar et al., 2012; Recuero, 2024), where prohibited terms trigger violations regardless of context. Language is thus treated as discrete risk-bearing tokens, and avoidance is enforced through deletion, sanctions, or algorithmic demotion rather than reformulation (Gorwa et al., 2020). As a result, users often develop creative substitutions, or algospeak, to bypass these constraints (Pateda et al., 2025; Steen et al., 2023).

In contrast, culture-driven avoidance, exemplified by Thai business protocols, is a bottom-up relational system aimed at preserving face and interpersonal harmony. Its logic is grounded in shared norms that shape how criticism and disagreement are expressed (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holmes, 2000; Rajprasit et al., 2022; Wierzbicka, 2003). Avoidance here extends beyond omission to the strategic transformation of speech acts, in which substitution reframes criticism as polite queries, hedged suggestions, or neutral observations (Ishihara & Cohen, 2014). These strategies operate on stance and perspective rather than vocabulary alone and function as schematic prompts rather than fixed forms.

The contrast between blacklist logic (what must not be said) and substitution logic (what should be said instead) captures two communicative orientations. Policy-driven avoidance prioritises consistency and enforceability, while culture-driven avoidance privileges nuance and relational sensitivity. Bringing these models together suggests that avoidance is shaped by both regulatory and cultural logics (Gorwa et al., 2020; Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2021). As digital communication becomes increasingly intercultural and platform-governed, speakers must meet both algorithmic and relational demands, navigating the tension between institutional rules and interpersonal expectations.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The typology advances theories of cross-cultural pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and applied linguistics by introducing a comparative framework for analysing avoidance across domains. Prior studies on taboo language and impoliteness (Allan & Burridge, 2006; Culpeper, 2011) have primarily treated avoidance as a context-specific phenomenon, though recent scholarship increasingly views it as a strategic pragmatic function (Yang, 2023; Zhang & Su, 2023). This study expands the field by highlighting how explicit institutional rules interact with implicit cultural norms to shape different avoidance practices (Dergacheva & Katzenbach, 2023; Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2021). Social media moderation has been described as foregrounding lexical policing and the management of impoliteness (Basile et al., 2022), while cultural settings emphasise relational management and face-work (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Nordin et al., 2024; Wierzbicka, 2003).

By juxtaposing these two logics, the proposed framework contributes a new theoretical dimension: avoidance as both a regulatory construct and a culturally embedded strategy. This dual perspective suggests the value of considering how institutional constraints and cultural expectations jointly shape communicative behaviour.

In particular, the typology reframes avoidance as an organising principle in interaction rather than a mere side effect of politeness or taboo. It links macro-level regimes of control, such as platform guidelines, legal regulations, and institutional policies, to micro-level linguistic choices, illuminating how power and authority are negotiated through what is left unsaid (Dergacheva & Katzenbach, 2023; Holmes, 2000; Roberts, 2019). This connection invites a re-evaluation of existing models of impoliteness and taboo, suggesting that avoidance practices mediate between structural constraints and individual agency.

The framework also contributes to theories of indexicality and stance-taking by showing how avoidance indexes alignment with particular moral orders, ideologies, and community norms. Choices to suppress or circumvent certain expressions become stance resources that signal solidarity, resistance, deference, or moral evaluation, consistent with research on stance-taking in pragmatics (Holmes, 2000; Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2021). In digitally mediated contexts, these stances are further shaped by users' anticipations of algorithmic detection and sanction, embedding technological mediation into the pragmatics of everyday discourse (Gorwa et al., 2020; Recuero, 2024; Steen et al., 2023).

For applied linguistics, the typology provides a structured lens for analysing how language learners and multilingual speakers navigate competing avoidance regimes across languages and platforms. It highlights pragmatic competence as the ability to interpret and manage overlapping, and sometimes conflicting, expectations about what may or must not be said in different institutional and cultural settings (Ishihara & Cohen, 2014; Rajprasit et al., 2022). This perspective encourages future research that integrates cross-cultural pragmatics with studies of regulation, platform governance, and ethical communication (Belcher, 2009).

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR ESP

For English for Specific Purposes (ESP), the typology reveals that avoidance is not merely a defensive behaviour but a productive communicative competence essential for professional interaction. Traditional ESP instruction emphasises vocabulary, presentation, and negotiation (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Nation, 2001; Paltridge & Starfield, 2013). However, this study demonstrates that mastery in modern professional contexts requires two additional competencies. Lexical-Compliant Competence refers to the ability to identify and omit prohibited terms to meet policy-driven requirements in digital and global ELF environments (Pateda et al., 2025; Steen et al., 2023), where multimodal and platform-mediated communication is increasingly central (Hafner, 2025; Nickerson, 2005; Rajprasit et al., 2022).Pragmatic-Substitutive Competence involves generating culturally appropriate alternatives that preserve face and mitigate conflict, an advanced form of sociolinguistic performance (Holmes, 2000; Ishihara & Cohen, 2014; Nordin et al., 2024). The Thai business data illustrate that substitution is not simply replacing a word but re-framing the interaction towards a positive speech act, as when a hostile term (e.g., "bastard/asshole") is replaced with a neutral or positive alternative (e.g., คนดี "good guy").

These findings support the call for developing avoidance literacy in ESP: the ability to know *what not to say*, *why not to say it*, and *what to say instead*. Developing this literacy may require targeted pedagogical frameworks and material adaptation by educators (Ahamat & Kabilan, 2022). Without systematic instruction in both policy-driven and culture-driven avoidance strategies, learners remain vulnerable to digital sanctions, miscommunication, and relational breakdown in professional settings.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ESP PEDAGOGY: A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Building on the dual typology of avoidance identified in this study, the researchers propose a data-led framework that expands the scope of ESP instruction. Integrating these dual avoidance strategies into ESP curricula requires deliberate material adaptation. As Ahamat and Kabilan (2022) suggest, adapting teaching materials to reflect local contextual realities is essential for effective language instruction. While traditional ESP pedagogies have prioritised the acquisition of productive vocabulary and genre conventions (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Nation, 2001), our empirical findings suggest that modern professional competence equally requires the mastery of avoidance strategies. Learners must navigate two opposing regimes: binary lexical omission in policy-driven contexts and pragmatic substitution in culture-driven contexts. This shift requires moving beyond a focus on "*what to say*" to a clearer understanding of "*what not to say*" and "*how to reframe it*", particularly in digitally mediated and intercultural communication contexts (Hafner, 2025; Nickerson, 2005). The following framework demonstrates how the specific lexical and pragmatic data presented in Tables 1 and 2 can be translated into critical pedagogical objectives.

FOCUS AREA I: ALGORITHMIC LITERACY AND LEXICAL COMPLIANCE

The study's analysis of social media blocklists (Table 1) reveals that digital moderation operates on a context-collapsed, binary logic. As evidenced by the categorical prohibition of terms ranging from general profanity (e.g., shit, fuck) to identity markers (e.g., gay, retard) listed in Table 1, these tokens trigger automatic sanctions regardless of speaker intent (Basile et al., 2022; Dergacheva & Katzenbach, 2023; Gorwa et al., 2020). Consequently, ESP pedagogy must foster Algorithmic Literacy. Instruction should mirror the study's findings by training learners to identify these specific "high-risk" lexical items that act as machine-detectable signals (Dadvar et al., 2012; Yin et al., 2009). Furthermore, learners should be made aware of how users actively adapt their language, such as through "algospeak", to navigate these strict platform restrictions (Pateda et al., 2025; Steen et al., 2023). Unlike traditional vocabulary teaching, this focus area emphasises that in policy-driven environments, lexical omission is a non-negotiable compliance strategy enforced by technological architecture, distinct from interpersonal politeness (Roberts, 2019; Steen et al., 2023). Learners must understand the strict "if-then" causality of algorithmic governance, as exemplified in the dataset, to protect their professional digital footprint.

FOCUS AREA II: PRAGMATIC SUBSTITUTION AND RELATIONAL REPAIR

In contrast to the deletion logic of social media, the Thai business dataset demonstrates that culturally motivated avoidance relies on relational repair and reframing. This is directly supported by the data in Table 2, where face-threatening terms are not merely omitted but strategically recoded as positive affiliative markers (Nordin et al., 2024). For instance, replacing the aggressive term bastard with the moral descriptor Khon Dee ("Good Guy"), or reframing the insult dumbass into the shared problem of Mai Kao Jai ("Don't understand"). Therefore, ESP instruction must prioritise Pragmatic Substitution Competence (Ishihara & Cohen, 2014). Drawing directly from the specific 'Prohibition–Substitution' pairings in Table 2, educators should teach learners to reframe negative speech acts as positive inquiries. This aligns with the finding that culture-driven avoidance is bottom-up and harmony-oriented (*kreng jai*) (Wierzbicka, 2003), requiring learners

to actively manage 'face' through the specific reformulation strategies identified in the dataset (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Holmes, 2000; Rajprasit et al., 2022).

FOCUS AREA III: CONTEXTUAL CALIBRATION AND CODE-SWITCHING

The fundamental divergence between the two datasets highlights a critical skill for modern professionals: the ability to calibrate avoidance strategies based on the communicative channel. The study indicates that a single concept may require omission if it falls under the binary constraints of Table 1 (e.g., in a public digital post) but substitution using the relational strategies of Table 2 (e.g., in a face-to-face client meeting) (Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2021). Pedagogy should thus focus on Contextual Calibration, using the typology to help learners distinguish between "rule-compliance" (Policy-Driven) and "relational-maintenance" (Culture-Driven) modes. This approach equips learners to navigate the tension between institutional governance and cultural norms, enabling them to deploy the appropriate avoidance mechanism, deletion, or reformulation, depending on whether the governing power is an algorithm or a human interlocutor.

LIMITATIONS

While this study offers a novel typological framework, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, the use of proxy datasets (lexical lists and manuals) rather than authentic interactional data limits our ability to analyse how these avoidance strategies are negotiated in real-time discourse. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that social media moderation and Thai business communication represent structurally different domains, which limits direct comparability. Second, while the Thai business context provides a robust case study of culture-driven avoidance, future research should examine whether these findings can be generalised to other high-context cultures or to different ESP domains. Despite these constraints, the proposed typology provides a necessary theoretical foundation for understanding the divergent logics of avoidance in the digital age.

CONCLUSION

This study proposes an exploratory comparative typology of avoidance language, distinguishing Policy-Driven Lexical Avoidance in social media moderation from Culture-Driven Pragmatic Avoidance in Thai professional communication. Drawing on two datasets, the analysis shows that policy-driven avoidance arises from top-down regulatory systems that maintain public safety and order (Allan & Burridge, 2006; Roberts, 2019), whereas culture-driven avoidance involves strategic substitution shaped by relational harmony and interpersonal sensitivity, exemplified by the Thai notion of *kreng jai* (Wierzbicka, 2003). These findings indicate that professionals in globalised digital and intercultural contexts must navigate both formal rules and cultural norms. Avoidance can therefore be understood as both a communicative lack and a sophisticated pragmatic competence that bridges algorithmic regulation and intercultural politeness, thereby providing a pedagogical basis for further empirical validation. The framework remains exploratory rather than generalisable and is intended to guide future research across broader contexts.

The study contributes theoretically by positioning avoidance as a deliberate and productive pragmatic competence, consistent with work in pragmatics and linguistic politeness (Culpeper, 2011; Yang, 2023; Zhang & Su, 2023). It advances ESP scholarship by conceptualising avoidance

as a comparative construct across regulatory and relational dimensions of professional communication. Practically, it supports the integration of avoidance into ESP curriculum design, aligned with needs analysis and curriculum development traditions (Belcher, 2009; Paltridge & Starfield, 2013). Methodologically, it demonstrates the value of proxy datasets when authentic data are inaccessible, thereby supporting the qualitative approaches outlined by Mayring (2014).

Although proxy datasets enable typological abstraction, they involve trade-offs in capturing interactional frequency. This limitation is inherent where authentic data are restricted, yet it enables the construction of a theoretically robust framework. Future research should extend this work by examining interactional frequency in large-scale authentic datasets.

Further research should also broaden the typology across cultural, digital, and professional contexts; expand datasets through larger dataset-based investigations (Pateda et al., 2025); and empirically validate the ESP framework through classroom interventions (Ishihara & Cohen, 2014). Such work will support integration of avoidance, both as lexical omission and pragmatic substitution, into professional English pedagogy. In an era of algorithmic surveillance and intercultural complexity, managing what remains unsaid is essential for professional participation and credibility.

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