

EXPLORING LANGUAGE POLITENESS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF BARACK OBAMA'S 2020 "60 MINUTES" INTERVIEW

¹Diaz Rosi Velizziano, ²Adam Damanhuri, S.S., M.Hum.

English Literature Study Program, Faculty Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Surabaya

E-mail: diaz.21018@mhs.unesa.ac.id, adamdamanhuri@unesa.ac.id

ABSTRAK. Penelitian ini berusaha untuk meneliti ekspresi linguistik kesantunan yang digunakan oleh Barack Obama dalam wawancara "60 Minutes" pada tahun 2020. Penelitian ini mengkaji dasar-dasar teoretis, latar belakang historis, dan implikasi pragmatis kesantunan berbahasa melalui integrasi karya-karya penting Brown dan Levinson (1987) tentang kesantunan universal, penelitian Watts, Ide, dan Ehlich (2005) tentang kesantunan berbahasa, teori kesantunan Locher dan Watts (2005) tentang teori kesantunan dan relasi, penelitian Culpeper (2011) tentang ketidaksantunan, serta investigasi Goffman (1967) tentang interaksi tatap muka. Melalui pemeriksaan transkrip wawancara, penelitian ini menjelaskan berbagai strategi kesantunan yang digunakan oleh Obama, yaitu taktik kesantunan positif yang memprioritaskan solidaritas dan hubungan baik, taktik kesantunan negatif yang mengakui otonomi, dan dengan cekatan menavigasi perilaku yang mengancam muka. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan keampuhan taktik kesopanan yang digunakan oleh Obama dalam menjaga interaksi sosial yang menguntungkan dan mengendalikan persona publiknya. Penelitian ini menggali implikasi pragmatis dari strategi kesantunan berbahasa yang digunakan oleh individu yang bersangkutan. Secara khusus, penelitian ini menjelaskan bagaimana strategi ini memfasilitasi navigasi individu dalam dinamika kekuasaan, serta kemampuan mereka untuk mengendalikan citra publik mereka sambil melibatkan audiens. Penelitian ini meningkatkan pemahaman terkait kesantunan berbahasa yang lazim dalam wacana politik, sekaligus memberikan pengamatan yang jeli terkait manuver komunikatif yang dilakukan oleh tokoh-tokoh terkemuka, seperti Barack Obama.

Kata kunci: Kesantunan Berbahasa ; Strategi Kesantunan Berbahasa ; Obama ; Wawancara

ABSTRACT. The present research endeavors to examine the linguistic expressions of politeness that were utilized by Barack Obama in the course of his "60 Minutes" interview in the year 2020. This study examines the theoretical underpinnings, historical background, and pragmatic implications of politeness in language through the integration of seminal works of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness universals, Watts, Ide, and Ehlich's (2005) research on politeness in language, Locher and Watts' (2005) politeness theory and relational work, Culpeper's (2011) study on impoliteness, and Goffman's (1967) investigation on face-to-face interactions. Through the examination of the interview transcript, this research illuminates the various politeness strategies employed by Obama, namely positive politeness tactics that prioritize solidarity and rapport, negative politeness tactics that acknowledge autonomy, and adroitly navigated face-threatening behaviors. The results indicate the efficacy of the politeness tactics employed by Obama in preserving favorable social interactions and controlling his public persona. The present study delves into the pragmatic implications of the language politeness strategies employed by the individual in question. Notably, this research elucidates how these strategies facilitate the individual's navigation of power dynamics, as well as their ability to control their public image while engaging the audience. This research enhances comprehension pertaining to the language politeness prevalent in political discourse, while imparting discerning observations regarding the communicative maneuvers exercised by prominent personalities, such as Barack Obama.

Keywords: Language Politeness; Language Politeness Strategies; Obama; Interview

INTRODUCTION

In political discourse, the employment of language politeness assumes a vital function in guiding the strategies used by individuals in negotiating multifaceted social interactions and preserving favorable relationships. Political interviews present an exceptional context for examining the application of language politeness strategies, since individuals in the public eye are compelled to maintain their social image, navigate complex power dynamics, and communicate their intentions in a compelling manner. This study provides a critical analysis of the linguistic strategies of politeness utilized by Barack Obama in his "60 Minutes" interview in 2020, thereby offering significant contributions to the understanding of the interconnectedness between language, politics, and societal dynamics. The 44th President of the United States, Barack Obama, is widely acknowledged for his polished communication abilities and eloquence. The 2020 "60 Minutes" interview provides a significant opportunity to analyze the linguistic strategies and politeness mechanisms utilized by Obama when addressing critical political matters and evaluating his presidential tenure. Through a comprehensive analysis of President Barack Obama's use of language in a particular interview, it is possible to obtain a more profound comprehension of how he skillfully navigates the complexities of political communication by carefully employing language politeness. The present study seeks to analyze and examine the distinct techniques utilized by Obama, utilizing the framework of politeness theory, which encompasses both positive politeness - the emphasis on solidarity and amiability and negative politeness - the valorization of autonomy and the avoidance of imposing upon others. Through the present analysis, our objective is to elucidate the manner in which language politeness is leveraged for the purpose of managing face, establishing rapport, and facilitating the effective communication of messages, specifically in the political interview setting.

Prior research has explored the notion of linguistic politeness within the realm of political discourse. However, there exists a lacuna in empirical inquiry, specifically in relation to an in-depth examination of the language politeness strategies deployed by Barack Obama during his interview on the widely followed program, "60 Minutes." The analysis of this interview provides a valuable opportunity to discern and comprehend the intricate intersections of linguistic selection, pragmatic concerns, and socio-political intricacies that underpin

political discourse. This study adds to our comprehension of the strategic use of language politeness by political personalities, especially in prominent interviews, as a means of upholding favorable social interactions and regulating their public perception.

The outcomes derived from this research bear significance for diverse domains, comprising sociolinguistics, political communication, and discourse analysis. Through an examination of the politeness strategies employed by Barack Obama during his interview on "60 Minutes," there exists an opportunity to cultivate a more profound comprehension pertaining to the means by which politicians employ linguistic strategies to adeptly traverse intricate social dynamics and proficiently communicate their intended messages. This analysis illuminates the intricate relationship between language, power, and social relationships within political discourse, emphasizing the critical role of linguistic politeness in influencing and maintaining favorable public perception and constructive political interactions.

Language Politeness

Language politeness refers to the set of linguistic strategies, behaviors, and norms employed in communication to maintain social harmony, respect others' face needs, and navigate sensitive situations without causing offense. It encompasses various linguistic choices, such as the use of polite forms, deferential language, and the consideration of others' perspectives. Language politeness is a fundamental aspect of social interaction, influencing relationships, power dynamics, and the construction of social identities. The work by Brown and Levinson (1987) titled "Politeness: Some universals in language usage" provides a comprehensive understanding of language politeness. They propose a framework that includes positive politeness (strategies emphasizing solidarity and friendliness), negative politeness (strategies respecting autonomy and minimizing impositions), and face-threatening acts (speech acts that potentially damage face). This work establishes the foundation for studying language politeness and its universality across cultures.

Function of Language Politeness

The function of language politeness is to facilitate effective communication, maintain social relationships, and manage face needs in interactions. Politeness strategies serve to establish rapport, express deference, and mitigate potential face threats. By employing politeness in language, individuals can create a positive social atmosphere, show respect, and negotiate social hierarchies. Language politeness plays a crucial role in shaping interpersonal dynamics, expressing politeness norms within specific cultures, and enabling smooth communication. The book edited by Watts, Ide, and Ehlich (2005) titled "Politeness in Language: Studies in its History, Theory and Practice" offers insights into the function of language politeness. It explores the historical development of politeness norms, its practical applications in different domains (e.g., workplace interactions, computer-mediated communication), and its significance for language teaching.

Types of Language Politeness

Language politeness encompasses various types that reflect different communicative intentions and strategies. Positive politeness involves strategies aimed at establishing solidarity and camaraderie, such as the use of inclusive pronouns, expressions of gratitude, and compliments. Negative politeness focuses on strategies that respect others' autonomy and minimize potential impositions, such as hedging, indirect requests, and the use of mitigating language. The article by Locher and Watts (2005) titled "Politeness theory and relational work" explores different types of politeness. They emphasize that politeness is not solely about face management but also involves relational work in establishing and maintaining social relationships. The authors highlight the complex dynamics of politeness and its role in constructing social identities. While these works provide insights into the nature of language politeness, it is important to note that the study of impoliteness is also relevant. Culpeper's book (2011) titled "Impoliteness: Using language to cause offense" examines the intentional use of language to cause offense and disrupt social harmony, offering a complementary perspective to politeness.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative methodology to conduct a critical analysis of the language politeness strategies employed by Barack Obama during his 2020 "60 Minutes" interview. The qualitative approach allows for a detailed examination of linguistic choices, pragmatics, and politeness strategies utilized by a prominent political figure within a specific interview context. The methodology involves several key steps, including data collection, transcription, coding, and analysis.

1. **Data Collection:** The primary data source for this research is the transcript of Barack Obama's 2020 "60 Minutes" interview, which is publicly available. The transcript provides a rich and comprehensive dataset for analyzing the language politeness strategies employed by Obama during the interview.
2. **Transcription:** The interview transcript is carefully transcribed, ensuring accuracy and capturing the nuances of Obama's language use. The transcription process involves capturing verbal cues, pauses, intonations, and non-verbal elements that may contribute to the analysis of language politeness.
3. **Coding:** The next step involves coding the transcript for identifying and categorizing language politeness strategies employed by Obama. This coding process may draw upon existing frameworks, such as politeness theory and sociolinguistic concepts, to identify specific strategies utilized by Obama, including positive politeness, negative politeness, face-saving, and face-threatening acts.
4. **Analysis:** The coded transcript is analyzed using qualitative techniques such as discourse analysis and pragmatics. The analysis focuses on identifying patterns, themes, and specific instances of language politeness strategies employed by Obama. It examines the linguistic choices, speech acts, and pragmatic implications of Obama's language use in relation to maintaining face, navigating power dynamics, and conveying messages effectively. Throughout the analysis, triangulation of data sources and intercoder reliability checks may be employed to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings. This involves having multiple researchers independently analyze the transcript and compare their interpretations to ensure consistency and minimize bias.

analysis is guided by the research questions and objectives, which revolve around examining the language politeness strategies employed by Obama and their implications for political discourse. The findings are then presented and discussed, providing insights into the specific strategies used by Obama, their effectiveness in maintaining positive social interactions, and their role in managing public image during high-profile interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study presents an analysis of the politeness strategies employed by Barack Obama during his "60 Minutes" interview in 2020. The investigation provides valuable insights into Obama's linguistic preferences, pragmatic considerations, and the efficacy of his politeness strategies in promoting successful communication and preserving his social identity.

Positive Politeness Strategies. During the course of the interview, Obama consistently utilized positive politeness tactics to underscore the concept of solidarity, amiability, and rapport with both the interviewer and the audience. The aforementioned tactics consisted of employing all-inclusive pronouns such as "we" and "us," expressing appreciation, conveying compliments, and utilizing humor. Utilizing the technique of positive politeness, Obama endeavored to cultivate a sense of affinity and establish mutually shared goals and objectives, ultimately facilitating a constructive and collaborative ambiance. The utilization of said strategy enabled him to effectively establish a connection with the audience and augment their willingness to receive and internalize his communicated ideas.

Negative Politeness Strategies, which refers to the ways in which individuals can mitigate the degree of imposition or threat to face when making requests or engaging in communication. The purpose of this discussion is to provide a critical analysis of the various strategies employed under negative politeness, including the use of indirect forms of addressing, hedging language, and apologies or excuses, as well as their underlying theoretical perspectives. By examining the relevant theories and examples, this discourse seeks to deepen our understanding of the pragmatic nuances that govern language use and social interaction in different contexts.

As a strategic communicative approach, Obama employed not only positive politeness but also negative politeness strategies as a means of demonstrating respect for the autonomy and face-saving requirements of his interlocutors. The author utilized a deferential style of language, which included

hedging techniques (such as the use of phrases like "I think" and "It's possible"), aimed at mitigating the possibility of imposing their views and acknowledging the existence of alternative perspectives. The utilization of said strategies by Obama was evocative of a heightened cognizance regarding the face needs of others, as well as an aptitude for delicately traversing touchy subjects without engendering offense or compromising amicable relationships. The utilization of negative politeness by Obama exhibited a commendable degree of linguistic tact and empathy towards opposing viewpoints, ultimately resulting in successful communication and a positive impression of his persona.

Face-threatening Acts, despite availing himself of politeness strategies, Obama occasionally committed face-threatening acts during the course of the interview. The aforementioned actions encompassed rigorous inquiry, cogent commentary, and vocalized dissent. The former President of the United States, Barack Obama, artfully navigated potentially damaging acts to his perceived social identity by implementing tactics such as the use of mitigating language, providing explanatory information, and utilizing rhetorical techniques as means to sustain a composed and courteous disposition. By adopting this approach, he curtailed the possibility of humiliation and upheld constructive interpersonal relations. The remarkable communicative acumen of Obama was brought to the forefront through his proficient handling of face-threatening interactions with deftness and diplomacy. Such a display of dexterity and equanimity bolstered his image as an unwavering and poised leader.

The Pragmatic Implications of the aforementioned phenomenon need to be thoroughly examined and analyzed in which, the pragmatic analysis of Obama's language usage indicated that his employment of politeness strategies carried significant pragmatic implications. He was afforded the opportunity to navigate the power dynamics inherent in the interview context, exert influence over his public persona, and deliberately communicate his intended messages. The utilization of politeness strategies by Obama served to bolster his credibility and favorability, thereby fostering efficacious communication and engendering audience engagement. Through the implementation of a nuanced interplay between positive and negative politeness strategies, Obama adeptly navigated the intricacies of simultaneously articulating his own perspectives and demonstrating respect towards both the interviewer and audience. This approach played a key role in his overall effectiveness in communicating his ideas and cultivating a favorable public persona.

This study's outcomes demonstrate that the utilization of language politeness tactics by Barack

Obama in his "60 Minutes" interview was proficient in the facilitation of favorable social interactions and the maintenance of a positive public image. Through the adept utilization of a meticulously calibrated amalgamation of affirmative and negatory politeness strategies, proficiently navigating occasions that may jeopardize the integrity of one's face, and contemplating the pragmatic connotations of one's lexical preferences, Obama evinced his linguistic acuity and proclivity to effectively engross in political colloquy. The use of politeness strategies by the individual under study not only aided in the achievement of effective communication but also proved instrumental in fostering positive relations and establishing a favorable perception among the target audience. The present study underscores the importance of utilizing language politeness in political discourse and yields insightful observations regarding the communicative maneuvers employed by highly influential personalities such as Barack Obama.

CONCLUSION

Analyzing Obama's language politeness in "60 Minutes" interview provides insights into political discourse politeness dynamics. Obama's skill in using politeness and managing face-threatening situations highlights his linguistic finesse and social proficiency. Obama's polite strategies helped maintain positive interactions, manage image, and convey messages effectively. Obama used positive politeness to connect with interviewer and audience. However, his negative politeness techniques indicated consideration for others' autonomy. Obama's management of face-threatening acts exemplified his ability to navigate sensitive topics while preserving positive social interactions. Obama's polite language helped him navigate power, control his image and convey messages effectively. Being polite helped increase his credibility, likability, and audience engagement. Language politeness in political discourse impacts public perceptions and requires strategic communication. Obama's language politeness strategies illustrate successful political communication. Note limitations: One interview and Obama's language. More research can analyze how other politicians use polite language strategies in various interview settings to enhance our comprehension of political discourse politeness nuances and variations. This study adds to literature on politeness theory, sociolinguistics, and political communication by showcasing how high-profile political figures use language politeness strategies in interviews. The study shows that politeness is crucial for positive social interactions, public image, and effective communication.

REFERENCES

- Culpeper, J. (2011). *Impoliteness: Using language to cause offence*. Cambridge University Press.
- Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior*. Doubleday.
- Haugh, M. (2017). The role of politeness in political interviews: A case study of Australia's Kevin Rudd. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 109, 58–71. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2016.12.010>
- Locher, M. A., & Watts, R. J. (2005). Politeness theory and relational work. *Journal of Politeness Research: Language, Behaviour, Culture*, 1(1), 9–33. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jplr.2005.1.1.9>
- Mills, S. (2003). *Gender and politeness*. Cambridge University Press.
- Pauwels, A. (2003). Politeness in Australia and New Zealand: Similarities and differences. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 35(5), 765–789. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166\(02\)00135-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(02)00135-8)
- Spencer-Oatey, H. (2008). *Culturally speaking: Culture, communication, and politeness theory* (2nd ed.). Continuum.
- Trosborg, A. (1995). *Interlanguage pragmatics: Requests, complaints, and apologies*. Walter de Gruyter.
- Watts, R. J. (2003). *Politeness*. Cambridge University Press.
- Watts, R. J. (2005). Politeness in political debates: Shaping public opinion about economic matters. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 4(2), 271–295. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.4.2.06wat>
- Watts, R. J., & Locher, M. A. (2019). Politeness theory. In *The International Encyclopedia of Linguistic Anthropology* (pp. 1–9). Wiley-Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118786093.ieo1>
- Watts, R. J. (2019). *Politeness*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.598>

- Weatherall, A. (2011). A critical examination of the application of politeness theory to political discourse: The case of the U.S. presidential debates. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 30(2), 123–142. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X10387100>
- Zempi, I., & Chakraborti, N. (Eds.). (2019). *The Routledge international handbook of Islamophobia*. Routledge.
- Zhou, M. (2006). The politeness phenomenon in Chinese culture. *Multilingua - Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication*, 25(3), 235–251. <https://doi.org/10.1515/MULTI.2006.015>