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Politeness Strategies in a Speech by Jordan B. Peterson about "How to be Articulate"

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Abstract

Politeness is a concept in the area of pragmatics and conversational analysis in which the speaker considers several factors to be polite, including their relationship with the hearer, their age, the power they have over the hearer, the importance of their utterances, etc. Speeches from prominent figures provide rich sources of analysis on politeness, a vital concept in everyday communication. This study examines different realizations of politeness strategies. The researcher used Brown and Levinson's model (1987), categorizing the strategies into four main realizations (Bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record). The data source has been a 15-minute video clip from Jordan B. Peterson – a prominent Canadian psychologist and author – about being articulate, for which a qualitative method was used. During the data analysis, first, the author watched the video clip to get the gist, then wrote its transcription to look for the types of strategies used by the speaker. The transcription was then re-evaluated by two teachers in the field of English as a foreign language (EFL)to assure its inter-rater reliability. The results showed that the speaker employed the four types of politeness strategies during the speech, among which negative and positive politeness, together with their realizations – 'do not presume/assume' and 'raise/assert common ground were the most dominant. Further research on known figures, in different contexts and with larger data is imperative to ameliorate the pragmatics knowledge of both teachers and students and enhance their interactions.

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Introduction

One of the most commonplace definitions of language is that it is a means of communicating and exchanging ideas. It is a medium using which people conduct social interactions – the reciprocal impact which is possibly between individuals, or individuals and their audience (Biddle, 1967) – to which certain strategies must be applied (Haryanto et al., 2018). There is a link between linguistic form and its role in communication, which is highly important to the field of pragmatics, where the function of a communicative

utterance or what it seeks to accomplish in a certain context is aimed for investigation (Paltridge, 2021, p. 38).

Even proficient speakers of a language may not be able to produce socially and culturally appropriate utterances because of their limited pragmatic competence (Karimnia & Afghari, 2010). The significance of making an appropriate decision about what to utter to a particular person while being in a particular situation is undeniable for communication and negotiation; the reason for this is that there are some culturally-varied 'norms' – interaction and interpretation constraints based on mutual knowledge (Hymes, 1972) – embodying expectations about who is allowed to say what, to whom, and also when (Fasold & Connor-Linton, 2014). Hence, second language (L2) learners who are deprived from explicit instruction of pragmatics, and therefore unaware of the norms increasingly face pragmatic failures which lead to hampered intercultural communication (Mohammadi & Tamimi Sa'd, 2014). This highlights the value of treating other people with tactfulness, humility, and integrity, which can be precisely interpreted as 'politeness' in linguistics (Yule, 2022).

Brown and Levinson (1987) believed that politeness is not defined the same in different groups, situations, and even between different individuals. For example, some regard politeness as "etiquette" (Geertz, 1960). Also, it is, say, the control that people have over their emotions to avert disagreement (Sifianou, 1992, p. 82) or a formal behavior that does not aim to dictate (Holmes, 1995). Linguistic politeness in language use is accomplished via speakers' strategies to be received favorably by the listener and by the speaker's selection of contextually acceptable linguistic forms in a specific speech community (Ide, 1989). In other words, politeness is the 'strategic conflict avoidance' possible to be quantified by the amount of time and effort invested into averting confrontation and maintaining good relations with others (Leech, 1993). When a speaker of comparatively lower power makes a greater request in a more distant relationship, the methods are used more than when a speaker of comparatively higher power makes a smaller request in a closer relationship (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Overall, being thoughtful and aware of someone else's face is the definition of politeness.

As per a sociological perspective, the concept of 'face work' is considered to be the cornerstone of politeness (Brown, 2015). According to Goffman (1967, p.5), In every form of our encounters with other people, we express our feelings or perspectives using verbal or nonverbal acts called 'line' – even if we do not intend to – bringing us what is known as 'face'. The term 'face' is a positive worth in a society that one has a claim on due to the 'line' people surmise from them during an encounter. Moreover, face is interpreted as one's self-image' for the depiction of which favored social facets form its basis.

Face, then, is something similar to an emotional asset because it can be lost, preserved, or reinforced; for everyone's face to be preserved, people often make an effort to cooperate because they can be expected to guard their vulnerable face against possible threats (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In every conversation and encounter, two types of acts either preserve or damage the interlocuters' faces based on which no free-of-face communication exists (Scollon et al., 2012). Every time people utter something to decrease the probability of threatening someone's face, a face-saving act occurs as face-saving means to protect one's *self-esteem* and face wants (Hinck & Hinck, 2017). On the other hand, a face-threatening act happens when someone utters something by which the other side of the conversation's self-image is damaged. However, it is worth remembering that 'politeness strategies' cannot be regarded as universal, and also, the concept of 'face' is different from one culture to another; thus, if an act is considered a face-threatening one in a culture, it might be totally different in another (Matsumoto, 1989; Gu, 1990; Paltridge, 2012, p. 57).

According to Brown and Levinson's model (1987, p. 69-71), politeness strategies are of 4 types, the first of which is called "on record, baldly, without redressive action" in which one of the interlocutors would do an act briefly and directly as there is no fear of possible

confrontation because of a variety of reasons such as 'urgency or efficiency' or when the damage to the hearer's face is not considerable when it comes to requests, offers, or suggestions that are in the hearer's best interest (e.g., sit down), and also when the speaker's power status is in a much higher level than the hearer's. 'Positive politeness' is the second strategy using which the hearer feels valued and respected, so the possible threat to the face is to some extent reduced, such as when the hearer is regarded as an important figure in the speaker's eyes, or the hearer is liked by the speaker; thus, the edge of the face-threatening act (FTA) is taken. The third strategy in this model is negative politeness which ascertains that the hearer's freedom and independence are not hampered using apologies, hedges, passive structures, etc. "Off-record" is the fourth strategy and occurs when the speaker uses an utterance indirectly or covertly to test the speaker's emotions and consideration toward him or her. The speaker makes use of a face-threatening act by an indirect utterance (Mahmud, 2019). This model has been used by many researchers to analyze innumerable conversations, speeches, lectures, etc.

Many articles have investigated the notion of politeness in interviews or speeches of well-known figures in different countries. For example, Li (2008) analyzed an interview of China's Foreign Ministry spokesman based on 'cooperative principles' (CP) by Grice (1989) and 'politeness strategies' by Brown and Levinson (1987). The results showed that the spokesman flouted and violated certain maxims (e.g., quantity) and used politeness strategies (e.g., bald-on record) to achieve certain goals during the interview. Also, in a descriptive qualitative study, Aulia (2013) examined Barack Obama's speech and interview in order to identify different types of politeness strategies. It was found that while the most frequent strategy used by Barack Obama was negative politeness, the bald-on record was never employed during the speech and interview in question. In another study, an interview between Desi Anwar and Mark Rutte was examined by Kurniawan (2015). The results indicated that the participants preferred positive politeness, but compared to Mark Rutte, Desi Anwar used negative politeness strategies relatively more.

Donald Trump's speeches have been analyzed numerous times by different researchers. For example, Tisia (2016) analyzed Donald Trump's presidential campaign announcement and figured out that since he always showed confidence and tried to see the audience as members of the campaign, *positive politeness strategies* were used significantly more than *negative politeness strategies*. Similarly, Balogun and Murana (2018) analyzed Donald Trump's inaugural speech focusing on 'face-saving' and 'face-threatening' acts. Results revealed that intense criticisms and denunciations led to excessive use of 'face-threatening acts', which could be refrained from. Abudayeh and Dubbati (2020) conducted a different study and investigated six Arabic translations of Trump's *offensive* language in different channels according to the modified version of Brown and Levinson's model called *neo-Brown and Levinson approach.* They argued that trumps improper speech was mitigated in some channels which may change his public image in the eyes of Arabs, preserve his face-threatening character and bald communication. Ammaida (2020) analyzed the use of politeness strategies by the users who wrote comments under Donlad Trump's Instagram post for international women's day and found positive politeness as the most frequent strategy since the users wanted to seek unity by treating each other's as members within a group. Another study by Batubara et al. (2022) examined Trump and Clinton's 2016 presidential debate in which *negative politeness* for expressing pessimism and minimizing imposition was the dominant one.

Nixon and Bush's victory speech was also examined by Sameer (2021) using Leech's maxims of politeness and found that maxims of approbation and agreement were repeated the most. Another study carried out by Alamsyah (2022) aimed to investigate Vladimir Putin's speech. The findings indicated that 'positive politeness' strategies were frequent because he sought to reduce the social barrier between audiences and develop positive relationships with them. Purba et al. (2023) conducted an article on Joe Biden's victory speech. They

found he used 'positive politeness' strategies more in order to facilitate effective communication and establish a relaxed, delightful situation. In a recent study, Kosman (2023) investigated Krzysztof Bosak's, a polish politician, tweets through a corpus analysis. The result suggested that although (de)legitimating strategies were obvious in his tweets, his interactions with Twitter users and other politicians were polite and respectful.

Additionally, popular TV shows, plays, and movies were subjects of investigation on how strategies related to politeness are used. For example, Dharmayanti et al. (2018) analyzed two episodes of Ellen DeGeneres's talk show in which Barack Obama appeared as the guest to determine the reasons behind selecting strategies. They found positive and negative politeness as the dominant strategies for two reasons – sociological circumstances and intrinsic payoffs. Similarly, Ruansyah & Rukmini (2018) examined an episode of the same talk show in which the host (Ellen DeGeneres) uses all four strategies during the interview for different reasons, including avoiding misinterpretation, displaying appreciation, etc. In another study, Lady Macbeth's dialogues in 'Macbeth' were the subject of analysis by Eshreteh & Draweesh (2018). Results show that Lady Macbeth used different strategies on different occasions due to factors such as power, position, and 'distance'. Yuniarti et al. (2020) investigated the positive politeness strategy utilized by a character named Patience Phillips in the movie Catwoman. They identified fifteen types of politeness strategies with the most frequent ones being optimism, inclusive language, giving or asking for reasons, and others. In addition, Permadi et al. (2022) descriptively analyzed the politeness strategies used in the movie Aladdin, where the main characters employed all four strategies. Among them, bald on-record was the most frequent strategy used due to the need for urgency, efficiency, and other reasons. Positive politeness was the second most frequent strategy employed since the hearer's good was taken into account, in-group identity markers were used, and other factors.

Overall, being polite, or to put it in another way, using politeness strategies not only would depict us well and leave a good impression in people's minds but also may increase the level of intimacy with others, help us build robust relationships, and stay away from conflict of any kind. Perhaps, one way to learn and consequently use these strategies is to analyze well-known and popular figures' conversations or speeches in different fields.

Hence, this study aims to, first, identify the politeness strategies applied by Jordan B. Peterson in a speech where he answers a question on how to be articulate. Second, it describes the realizations related to each strategy, and then finds the most dominant realization and strategy in the speech in question. Finally, it analyses the reasons why each strategy was used in specific occasions.

Methodology

The data used in this study is a Youtube video clip named "*This is How You Become More Articulate*", and it is available at https://youtu.be/2FTx7DV7sv8, published on March 31st, 2022. The video is about 15 minutes (14:24), in which Jordan B. Peterson, a prominent psychologist, talks about the importance of being articulate and how advantageous it would be. The researcher attempted to choose this video because politeness strategies are easily detectable in the speaker's utterances, and he is known as an articulate figure who always suggests people choose their words wisely. A qualitative method is used for the purpose of this study because, according to Creswell (2014), this method focuses on answering questions like what and why related to a single phenomenon, and also it is suitable for gathering, examining, and more in-depth explanation of the data.

Before analyzing the data, the researcher downloaded the video clip and its transcription from Youtube and watched it several times to fully understand the topic.The transcription had some inaccuracies due to being generated by a machine. As a result, certain sections of the transcription were not entirely precise. Thus, the researcher edited the transcription so that the utterances would be analyzed accurately. It was then re-examined by two teachers in the field of English as a Foreign language (EFL) with more than twenty years of experience to ensure its

inter-rater reliability. For the purpose of the analysis, Brown and Levinson's model (1987) was used, which consisted of four types of strategies each of which has its own realizations. Strategic and linguistic usages related to message construction are fundamental to Brown and Levinson's model (1987, pp. 56-58). For instance, bald on-record occurs when the speaker uses imperative forms as orders or attention-getters, or positive politeness takes place when the speaker utilizes repetitions, conclusive markers (e.g., then), inclusive language (e.g., we), and so on. Furthermore, negative politeness happens when indirect speech acts, auxiliary or tense marker deletion, hedges, questions, performatives, impersonal verbs, passive voice, etc. are employed, and off-record occurs where tautologies, contradictions, irony, metaphors, etc. are used by the speaker (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 69).

The types of politeness strategies and the number of realizations regarding each strategy were then tabulated to provide a general overview of the dominant strategies and realizations, followed by a descriptive analysis regarding the reasons behind using them by the speaker.

Results and Discussion

This study aimed to identify the types of politeness strategies, their realizations used by Jordan B. Peterson, and analyze the reasons behind the application of each according to Brown and Levinson's model (1987). Table 1. shows 97 instances of politeness strategies used by Jordan B. Peterson during the speech. Negative politeness is the most frequent strategy of the four, which occurred 44 times. Other strategies, such as positive politeness and off-record, occurred 31 and 17, respectively. In addition, it is illustrated that the 'bald on-record strategy is the least frequent one, having occurred only 12 times out of 97 instances. Moreover, not only is negative politeness the most dominant strategy, but also one of its sub-strategies, 'don't presume/assume', was the most common one with 40 occurrences. The second most dominant realization is one of the realizations of 'positive politeness, 'raise/assert common that occurred 13 times out of 97. Furthermore, 'give or ask for reasons', a positive politeness sub-strategy, holds the third position with 10 occurrences. It is followed by a realization related to the 'off-record' strategy, 'rhetorical questions', having occurred 8 and 8 times.

Table 1. The Types, frequency, and Percentage of politeness Strategies and Their Realizations by Jordan B. Peterson

No.	Strategy	Realization	Freq.	%
1.	Bald on-record	Imperative Form	5	5.1
Sub-total			5	5.1
2.	Positive Politeness	Raise/Assert Common Ground	13	13.4
		Give or Ask for Reason	10	10.3
		Include Both S and H in the Act	3	3
		Seek Agreement	3	3
		Avoid Disagreement	2	2
Sub-total			31	31.9
3.	Negative Politeness	Don't Presume/Assume	40	41.2
		Communicate S's Wants to not Impinge on H	4	4.1
Sub-total			44	45.3
4.	Off-record	Rhetorical Questions	8	8.2
		Give Associational Clues	5	5.1
		Give Hints	4	4.1
Sub-total			17	17.4
Total			97	100

Other realizations came about at most 5 times. Imperative form, a sub-strategy of bald on-record and 'give associational clue' related to the 'off-record' strategy, both took place 5 times. 'Communicate S's wants not to impinge on H', a 'negative politeness' sub-strategy together with 'give hints – an 'off-record' sub-strategy – are in the next position with 4 occurrences. Also, 'Including both S and H in the act' and 'seek agreement', the sub-strategies of 'positive politeness', occurred only 3 times. The last position belongs to 'seek agreement', a realization of 'positive politeness' that occurred only 2 times, taking up just 2 percent of the total.

Bald on-record

The following sentences in excerpt 1 are part of the speech in which Jordan B. Peterson provides the audience with some advice on how to be articulate. He makes use of an analogous example to convince the audience. According to Jordan B. Peterson, in order to be articulated, people must pay careful attention to what they utter and compare it to when one wants to cross a swamp. This is where examples of bald on-record strategies, such as the use of 'safe topic' and 'imperative form', take place. Since the audience cannot reject the conclusion, he tries to make, it can be regarded as a safe topic. Also, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), imperative forms are sometimes used for cases where the focus of interaction is 'task-oriented'. Here Jordan B. Peterson recommends the audience use an imperative form and subsequently asks them to think of the analogous situation.

Excerpt 1

> *So, how do you become articulated? That's a good start, and what do I mean by that, I mean, [pause] pay attention to what you say. Imagine that you're trying to walk across a swamp and the swamp is murky but you know there's a path; you know there's a path of stone under the water, but it twists and moves, and if you stay on the path, …*

In fact, the speaker attempts to make an example and wants the hearers to think about an imaginary scene so that they would perceive what he actually means. Also, the speaker believes the first step to being articulate is to pay attention to what one says. Hence, in order to be maximumly efficient, he makes use of imperative form.

Positive Politeness

According to Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 103), 'claiming common ground' suggests the speaker and the hearer are both part of a group of people with similar aims, values, and desires. There are three approaches to support this assertion: the speaker may say that a certain want of the hearer is admirable or intriguing to S as well; alternatively, he could emphasize shared membership in a group or category, emphasizing that both the speaker and hearer are part of a group of people who have the same desires. In Excerpt 2, it can be seen that Jordan B. Peterson believes that being articulate is a *"great thing"* because, in the culture that he himself and the audience are living, utterances are highly important.

Excerpt 2

> *in our whole cultures based on the idea of the supremacy of the word; our whole culture is based on the idea that it is the word itself that extracts habitable order from chaos and possibility and, and the reason our culture is predicated on that is because it's a deep truth and to the degree that our culture actually embodies that it works, so it's a great thing to be articulate and it would be so lovely if our educators were wise enough to communicate this appropriately to young men.*

As illustrated, the speaker repeatedly used 'our' as the possessive pronoun for the words 'culture' and 'educators', emphasizing that whatever he says makes sense for both sides of the speech, and that they belong to the same culture and have the same or at least similar educators.

Moreover, in another part of the speech, Jordan B. Peterson tries to provide the audience with reasons why being articulate benefits them.

Excerpt 3

> *If you're a plumber, I have great respect for plumbers by the way, and you're articulate you can negotiate with your clients, you can introduce your co-workers, you can, you*

can make a case for your employees, you can, you can advertise your services, you can think through your problems

By the use of rational reasoning, Jordan B. Peterson attempts to convince the audience that being articulate is a need. In fact, the hearer would be made to understand the reasonableness of the speaker's remarks by including the hearer in his practical reasoning and assumption of reflexivity (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 128).

Negative Politeness

One way through which negative politeness can be applied while talking to others is 'not to presume/assume', which can be done by using 'hedges'. During the speech, the speaker exploits 'hedging opinions' repeatedly. According to Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 145-7), 'conversational principles' are a significant source of background presumptions regarding cooperation, understanding, relevance, and clearness, which frequently need to be eased for face-saving and commitment avoidance purposes; thus, hedges are the best instrument for the task in these situations. In the following excerpt, Jordan B. Peterson tries to use hedges so that he would commit himself to probability rather than certainty.

Excerpt 4

I know a former special services; Special Operations Soldier Jaco Willink, some of you might know about Jaco. He's got a pretty decent online following.

Excerpt 5

One of the things that your clients would be evaluating you for was that capability, and you might say that someone with that capability manifests themselves as genuine and trustworthy.

Excerpt 6

Sometimes some of the things I said didn't have that effect; they weren't accompanied by a sense of shame let's say they weren't accompanied with a sense of vulnerability they were solid and at the beginning that was probably only about five percent of what I said.

The preceding excerpts indicate that the speaker employs hedging strategy to avoid commitment to certainty and saying something that might not be true for the audience.

Off-Record

A rhetorical question is a type of conversational implicatures that is a sub-strategy for the fourth politeness strategy, off-record. It is used when one employs a question to provide the hearer with 'indicated information'. In the following excerpt, Jordan B. Peterson asks several questions he does not seek an answer for. However, he wants the audience to figure out why being articulate matters.

Excerpt 7

why be literate? Well, do you, do you want to be, do you want to be competent and dangerous or do you want to be vague and useless?!

Excerpt 8

What's the alternative? (do) you want to be inarticulate? (do) you want to say ah and like and um and pause and stumble and, and, and (do you want to) be unable to formulate a strategy, (do you want to) be unable to elucidate a vision be unable to compel and convince other people to entice them with your articulated vision.

The speaker asks several questions he does not want the audience to answer. In fact, he wants to convey that to be competent, proficient, qualified, and positively dangerous, you need to be articulate. Otherwise, you would be unproductive, have an ambiguous personality, and unable to communicate convincingly.

Results indicate that negative politeness was the most frequently used strategy by Jordan B. Peterson. This is in line with Aulia's (2013) findings, where the strategy was predominant in Barack Obama's speech, allowing the audience to form their own interpretations. Additionally, hedging devices were persistent in Donald Trump's presidential campaign and inaugural speech

(Tisia, 2016; Balogun & Murana, 2018). Therefore, hedging is a widely utilized strategy by public figures to show that they abstain from potential bias in their beliefs and opinions.

Moreover, the speaker tended to use positive politeness as the second most common strategy through raising or asserting common ground with hearers, including both speaker and hearer in the activity, seeking agreement, and giving or asking for reasons. This aligns with the study conducted by Batubara et al. (2020), which shows that raising or asserting common ground is a commonly employed sub-strategy of positive politeness. Vladimir Putin's speech also encompassed the same strategy, together with including S and H in the activity to state that he and the audience share common objectives (Alamsyah, 2022). Strategies for seeking agreement and avoiding disagreement were identified in Donald Trump's presidential campaign speech (Tisia, 2016) and Obama's utterances on the Ellen DeGeneres TV show. Furthermore, in the context of televised shows, Dharmayanti et al. (2018) and Ruansyah and Rukmini (2018) found the same strategy in former US president Obama and talk show host Ellen DeGeneres with the same purpose.

The analysis of Jordan B. Peterson's utterances revealed the use of off-record strategies, including giving hints and associational clues. A similar result was found in Batubara et al. (2022), where the same strategies were utilized in the Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton presidential debate, albeit to a lesser extent.

Conclusion

According to the data presented in the data analysis and discussion, the result of this research indicates that all four politeness strategies (i.e., bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record) were employed by the speaker during his interview about how to become more articulate.

Results obtained from this study shows that *negative politeness* strategy was more dominant during the speech due to the speaker's intentions not to 'presume/assume' by utilizing a great number of hedges so that he avoids certainty during his speech, be cautious with his opinions, and in some cases, avoid misunderstandings which makes his utterances slightly ambiguous. Additionally, by using presuppose/raise/assert common ground' with the audience, the speaker aims to show that their concerns or interests are similar about a specific topic or event, or that they share the same society with the same culture. Also, the results indicate that the speaker made use of 'give or ask for reasons' and 'rhetorical questions – positive politeness and off-record sub-strategies, respectively – so that he presents the hearers with reasons why being articulate is a privilege and helps them on a regular basis.

Pragmatics and conversational analysis are not being excogitated in classrooms, mostly in countries where English is being taught as a foreign language. Investigating politeness strategies using conversations or speeches by well-known figures would help students improve their communicative competence. They learn what utterances can be a threat to someone's face, how they can be mitigated using politeness strategies, and, more importantly, where their own face is being threatened. Moreover, each type of politeness strategy is suitable for a particular situation and in an encounter with a specific person, so they find out what to say to whom and where. Being aware of politeness strategies would also benefit teachers to build a friendly relationship with their students.

Although this study provides valuable insights into of how a prominent figure makes use of politeness strategies before a large audience, it is important to consider some limitations. Firstly, this study investigated a short segment of a speech in which the speaker almost had a monologue during the video. The application of politeness strategies may differ in diverse cultures and when conversations are subjects of examinations. Therefore, future studies should investigate politeness strategies used by notable individuals in various countries and in conversational contexts.

Second, the data chosen for this study was

limited in length. Future research could analyze longer speeches or conversations to provide a more comprehensive investigation of the frequency of these strategies as well as a deeper understanding of reasons behind their utilization that play a significant role in our interactions.

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