

POLITENESS STRATEGIES USED BY MICHELLE OBAMA AND OPRAH WINFREY AT THE UNITED STATE OF WOMEN SUMMIT IN 2016

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Abstract

This research investigates the use of politeness strategies performed by Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey in their conversation at the United State of Women Summit in 2016. It is aimed at identifying the types of politeness strategies and describing the realizations of politeness strategies deployed by Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey in the conversation.

The researcher applied a qualitative method. The data of the research were obtained from the video and the transcript of the conversation between Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey at the United State of Women Summit in 2016 which was taken from the White House official website. The form of the data was utterances, while the context of the data was the dialogues uttered by Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey at the summit. Finally, triangulation was applied in order to verify the trustworthiness of the data.

The results of this research are stated as follows. (1) All types of politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson are found in the conversation between Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey at the United State of Women Summit. They are bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record strategy. Bald on record and off record strategy are only performed by Michelle Obama. (2) In terms of the realizations of each type of politeness strategies, there are 48 sub-strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson, but there were 22 sub-strategies employed in the conversation. Positive politeness strategy has the highest variation of realizations of politeness strategy as many as 11 sub-strategies performed in the conversation. Meanwhile, bald on record has the fewest variations of the realizations that are 2 variations of the sub-strategies. Hence, there are some sub-strategies that do not occur in the conversation due to its formal context and limited time.

Keywords: *pragmatic analysis, politeness strategies, Michelle Obama, Oprah Winfrey, the United State of Women Summit in 2016*

INTRODUCTION

Communication as a means of human survival in a society is divided into two types; they are verbal communication and non-verbal communication. Verbal communication is a human interaction delivered using words. For example, when a woman shopping at a traditional market wants to know the price of the clothes, she has to ask the seller by saying, "How much is it?" On the other hand, a communication without using words is known as non-verbal communication. Facial expressions, body movements, and eye contact can help people to communicate without words. For example, when a teenage girl goes to a department store with her mother and she wants to buy a mini dress, her mother does not permit her to buy it. Her mother, then, only shakes her head without saying any word. Traditionally, the use of non-verbal communication cannot be separated

with the social context where the speaker and the addressee understand.

Generally, people tend to use verbal communication to achieve the purpose of communication. There are several external factors outside the words influencing the way of communication such as knowledge, experiences, and contexts. However, the main aspect to convey or to share ideas in communication is the language use itself. Expressing feeling, reporting an event, or exchanging ideas are easier to be done via language. Since language is a vital element in life, it is scientifically studied in linguistics.

Language in the real usage is very contextual. As an illustration, the word "here" can refer to "place A" or "place B" which heavily depends on the context. Context, a special element in observing language, is not embedded in the language itself, as it is located at outer layer of

language which cannot be identified with micro-linguistics such as semantics, phonology, or syntax by linguistic scholars. As a consequence, pragmatics as a scientific study of language in context is required to observe language phenomena related to circumstances.

Under pragmatics, politeness is one of linguistic strategies that plays an important role in understanding the speaker's meaning. When someone understands what someone else's wants, the social interaction runs well. Based on Yule (1996: 60), politeness can be defined as the linguistic action to show awareness of another person's face. Here, face refers to the individual's self-image in public. For instance, people have to choose the appropriate words and also attitudes when communicating with others in order to maintain or threaten other's face.

There are four types of politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson namely bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record strategy. Each type of politeness strategies consists of some sub-strategies as the realizations of the strategy. First, there are eight realization of bald on record strategy. Next, fifteen sub-strategies are involved in positive politeness strategies. Then, there are 10 sub-strategies of negative politeness strategies. Meanwhile, off record strategy contains fifteen sub-strategies.

In this study, the researcher is interested in conducting a research regarding politeness strategies in the conversation at the United State of Women Summit in 2016 between Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey owing to following rationales. First, both Michelle and Oprah are two famous and influential women in the United States of America. Michelle Obama is the 44th United States President's wife, and Oprah Winfrey is a famous talk show host. As a result, they consciously or unconsciously consider the appropriate linguistic features in order to convey their ideas or their intended meaning in public. Second, the live talk-show is watched by thousands of American whom the majority are women. Being live means that the interaction between Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey spontaneously occurs, and as a

consequence, what they express (e.g. verbal and nonverbal communication) comes naturally. It, therefore, reflects their true politeness strategies. Third, investigating their politeness strategies illuminates how they as impactful people utilize politeness strategies unconsciously to show their awareness of each other's image.

The objectives of this study are to explain the types of politeness strategies used by Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey in their conversation at the United State of Women Summit in 2016, and to describe the realizations of the politeness strategies used by Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey in the conversation at the United State of Women Summit in 2016.

This research is expected to give some benefits both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this research is useful as a reference for other researchers who conduct a pragmatic study related to the use of politeness strategies in the real conversation between public figures. Meanwhile, this research is also useful for the readers in understanding the types and realizations of politeness strategies. As a result, the readers are expected to choose and to apply the appropriate strategy of politeness in a real-life conversation.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research used a qualitative method. According to Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009: 7), the result of qualitative research is narrative or textual description of the phenomena under the study which the researcher focuses on. They add that qualitative research is more descriptive since it aims to obtain depth understanding of the viewpoint of a research participant (2009: 167). In addition, the researcher analyzed the types of politeness strategies and their realizations found which belong to pragmatic study. As a consequence, the most appropriate approach to be used in this research is pragmatics dealing with the meaning of language use in context.

In conducting the research, the researcher analyzed the utterances performed by Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey. The context of data was the dialogues among Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey in the conversation at the United State of Women Summit 2016 that employs

politeness strategies. The sources of the data were the video and the transcript of the whole conversation between Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey at the United State of Women Summit in 2016.

Dealing with the qualitative research, the researcher reacted as the primary instrument of the research (Merriam, 2009: 15). Moreover, the secondary instrument was a data sheet for collecting data from the object. The data sheet was in the form of a table and was used to note the utterances that employ politeness strategies uttered by Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey in the conversation at the United State of Women Summit 2016.

The researcher employed note-taking as the technique of data collection. Note-taking is a method which is used to collect the data by recording them manually (Thomas, 2003: 185). Thus, the researcher watched the video and then took relevant notes as the data based on Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness strategies.

Moreover, the researcher adopted qualitative method with an inductive approach. Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009: 168) state that an inductive approach is a reasoning process in which theory is deployed as a guideline to observe the data.

The researcher utilizes triangulation to create data trustworthiness. Triangulation is a method of using more than one methodology to address the same question to provide the trustworthiness of the research data (Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009:179). Thus, the researcher discussed and consulted the research data with her lecturer to gain credibility. The researcher also asked her fellow linguistics students to triangulate the data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There are four types of politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson. They are bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record strategy. All four types of politeness strategies found in the conversation between Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey at the United State of Women Summit in 2016 script.

In terms of the realizations of politeness strategies, there are three sub-strategies of bald on record, eleven sub-strategies of positive politeness, three sub-strategies of negative politeness, and six sub-strategies of off record that are employed in the conversation. Furthermore, positive politeness strategy has the highest variation of the realizations presented in the conversation. In contrast, the fewest variations of the realizations occur in bald on record strategy and negative politeness strategy. It indicates that both Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey want to come closer with the hearers rather than to make an effective communication, or to show the social status distance even though the conference is in a formal situation.

Subsequently, there are some sub-strategies which do not occur in the conversation between Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey at the United State of Women Summit in 2016 due to the context of the conversation tends to be formal and also the limited time of the conversation which are unlikely to employ all of the sub-strategies of politeness strategies.

In relation to the objectives of the study, the following section discusses about the types of politeness strategies and their realizations performed in the conversation between Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey at the United State of Women Summit.

1. Bald on Record Strategy and the Realizations

According to Brown and Levinson (1987: 69), bald on record is used to deliver a person's intended meaning in a direct, clear, unambiguous, and efficient way. In the conversation, bald on record as the type of politeness strategy is found in Michelle's utterance since she reacts as the interviewee who talks more than Oprah as the interviewer. By using bald on record strategy, Michelle shows that she wants to communicate her conveyed meaning explicitly. Additionally, there are three variations of bald on record strategy found in the conversation.

The first realization of bald on record used by Michelle is using metaphorical urgency for emphasis.

MRS. OBAMA: (...) **Look, I told people this from the very start, when I -- started running -- Barack Obama is exactly who he says he is.** (...)

(Datum 32)

This utterance occurs when Michelle answer Oprah's question about Obama. In this case, the word "look" is classified as a metaphor urgency to emphasize Michelle's utterance. Michelle uses this strategy because she wants to say an important thing that she has told about Obama is just the way he is. Thus, face redress is not necessary.

Another realization of bald on record is showing sympathetic advice or warning provided in Michelle's utterance.

MS. WINFREY: There's a lot of cool men out here. I love the President's speech saying you're looking at a feminist. What can men do leaving here?

MRS. OBAMA: **Be better.** (Laughter and applause.) Be better at everything. (Applause.) (...)

(Datum 34)

Michelle replies Oprah's question by giving a sympathetic advice. Thus, Michelle's utterance goes baldly on record as the intention is clear, unambiguous, and direct. In this case, Michelle does not need to lessen her utterance as she shows her care toward the hearer at the same time.

2. Positive Politeness Strategy and the Realizations

As stated by Brown and Levinson (1987: 103), positive politeness is used to maintain the addressee's positive face which is the need to be connected. By using this strategy, the speaker indicates that she wants to be friendly with the hearer or to come closer to the hearer. There are eleven realizations of positive politeness strategy used by Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey in the conversation at the United State of Women Summit in 2016.

The first example is noticing or attending the hearer as the output of positive politeness strategy. The example is taken from Oprah's utterance.

MS. WINFREY: (...) and what can you share with our audience here and online that would help us stand more inside ourselves and own that space?

MRS. OBAMA: **Very good question.**

Well, one of the things that I always -- I tell my mentees, I tell my daughters is that our first job in life as women, I think, is to get to know ourselves. (...)

(Datum 9)

In the expression "very good question," Michelle gives an appreciation to Oprah's question as a notice to Oprah and as a way to be friendly with the hearer since the use of positive politeness strategy is not always to mitigate the FTA, but also to come closer with the hearer.

The next example of this strategy is presented in datum 10 when Michelle tells a story about her daughter's life that is changing after coming into the White House.

MRS. OBAMA: (...) So you remember, Malia and Sasha were little itty-bitties when we came into office. I mean, it still moves me to tears to think about the first day I put them in the car with their Secret Service agents to go to their first day of school. **And I saw them leaving and I thought, what on Earth am I doing to these babies?** So I knew right then and there my first job was to make sure they were going to be whole and normal and cared for in the midst of all this craziness. (Applause.) And then I started to understand that if I was going to protect them, I had to, number one, protect myself and protect my time. (...)

(Datum 10)

In the expression “I saw them leaving and I thought, what on Earth am I doing to these babies?” Michelle tries to make a good story by switching back and forth between past and present continuous tense in order to intensify her interest to the hearers

Furthermore, exaggerate as the realization of positive politeness strategy is found Michelle’s utterance.

MRS. OBAMA : (...) And I just love you all for the work -- **the amazing work you all have done today** and that you do every single day.

(Datum 4)

Michelle invites the speaker to remind about the tragic in Orlando. Then, she shows her respect to the audience’s positive face which is the desire to be appreciated using an exaggerative word “amazing.” It means that she exaggerates in saying her appreciation about the work that the audience has done in order to come closer to the hearers.

The next example of using in-group membership as the realization of positive politeness strategy is presented in datum 36 in which Michelle gives a question to the audience.

MRS. OBAMA: Just be better. (Laughter and applause.) I could go on but I’m not. (Laughter.) **You get the point, fellas, right? Fellas?** (Applause.) What are you going to be?

(Datum 36)

In responding to Oprah’s question about what men can do, Michelle explains that men can be better at everything. Subsequently, Michelle tries to ensure that the audience understand what she says by revealing a question which consists of an address form “fellas.” Here, the addressing term “fellas” is deployed by Michelle in order to be friendly with the audience although the audience are not Michelle’s real fellas or friends.

The use of positive politeness is provided in Oprah’s utterance talking about Michelle’s suggestion for the men.

MS. WINFREY :(...) What can men do leaving here?

MRS. OBAMA :Be better. (...)

MS. WINFREY :**Be better.**

MRS. OBAMA :Be better.

MS. WINFREY :**Be better.** (Applause.) **I love that.**

(Datum 35)

“Be better” is Michelle’s answer in replying Oprah’s question what men can do leaving there. Michelle adds to describe what she means in suggesting “be better.” In response to this, Oprah repeats what Michelle says in the expression “be better.” It signifies that Oprah agrees with Michelle since they share common opinion about what men can do. Hence, Oprah can attend to Michelle’s positive face as the need to be approved.

This strategy is also used by Michelle Obama during her conversation with Oprah Winfrey at the United State of Women Summit in responding to Oprah’s statement about bravery.

MS. WINFREY: (...) what you just described was brave -- “any advice or tips on bravery?”

MRS. OBAMA: **That’s a good question. Gosh, I don’t know. If I ever -- I don’t ever view it as bravery.**

(Datum 16)

Oprah states that what Michelle just described about the things that Michelle does is brave before asking an advice or tips on bravery. Michelle attempts not to answer it with a blatant “no.” Hence, Michelle appreciates the question at first in the expression “that’s a good question,” then she chooses to be vague to hide the disagreement by saying, “I don’t ever view it as bravery.” It indicates that Michelle maintains Oprah’s positive face which is the need to be appreciated and to be approved.

Additionally, The use of personal-center switch from the speaker to the hearer to presuppose common ground is performed by Michelle Obama as the realization of positive politeness strategy.

MRS. OBAMA : Good lord. Watching my husband walk off of Marine One and go to the Oval Office, it's like, mmm, mmm, mmm. (Laughter and applause.)

MS. WINFREY : Mmm, mmm, mmm. (Laughter.)

MRS. OBAMA : And **you know he's got that walk, right?**

MS. WINFREY : I know! (Laughter.)
(Datum 31)

In this case, Michelle uses point-of-view flip by saying, "you know" where Oprah can possibly not know. On the other hand, Oprah responds to the question by saying, "I know" which identifies that Michelle is successful to fulfill Oprah's positive face.

Another example of this strategy is found in Michelle's utterance.

MS. WINFREY: This is the United State of Women. There are a lot of cool men out here. I love the --

MRS. OBAMA : **Let's give it up for the brothers, for the men out here.** (Applause.)

(Datum 33)

Oprah states that there are a lot of men attending the United State of Women Summit. Suddenly, Michelle interrupts Oprah's speaking by saying "Let's give it up for the brothers." The utterance demonstrates that Michelle employs an inclusive *we* form in the words "let's" originated form "let us" in which the word "us" also refers to herself. Thus, Michelle includes herself and the audience appreciating the men who join the summit. As a result, this strategy is used by Michelle in order to make cooperative interaction with the audience and therefore the audience can be connected with Michelle.

3. Negative Politeness Strategy and the Realizations

Negative politeness strategy is the opposite form of positive politeness strategy. This strategy is used to mitigate the face threat by maintaining the hearer's negative face (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 129). In the conversation between Michelle

Obama and Oprah Winfrey at the United State of Women Summit in 2016, three realizations of negative politeness are performed.

An example of using hedge as the realization of negative politeness is expressed by Oprah Winfrey talking about bravery with Michelle Obama.

MS. WINFREY: You didn't think that was brave? Saying, look, I'm going to be paid full time?

MRS. OBAMA: Right.

MS. WINFREY: **I think that's brave.**
(Datum 17)

Michelle does not think that what she did is a kind of bravery as stated by Oprah. However, Oprah argues Michelle's thought by saying "I think that's brave". It signifies that Oprah avoids to make a direct assumption by weakening her claim using a hedge in the words "I think". Hence, Oprah attempts not to presume or assume Michelle to agree with Oprah's statement to be true. As a consequence, Oprah can attend Michelle's negative face or the right to get freedom of action.

Next example of the realization of negative politeness is giving deference. Oprah performs this strategy in order to address Michelle before starting the conversation at the United State of Women Summit in 2016.

MS. WINFREY: Hello.

MRS. OBAMA : We have Oprah Winfrey here.
(Applause.)

MS. WINFREY: **And our First Lady of the United States.**
(Applause.)

(Datum 5)

Oprah welcomes the audience at first by saying "Hello," then Michelle continues to introduce the host at that time, namely Oprah Winfrey. In respond to this, Oprah addresses Michelle as "the First Lady of the United States." It displays that Oprah uses the title as the addressing term to give deference in which Michelle belongs to the highest social status in United States of America and by this means, Oprah shows her respect to Michelle. Thus, Oprah

attempts to lessen the potential threat of coercion by clarifying that Oprah considers Michelle's power value.

4. Off Record Strategy and the Realizations

This strategy is used when the speaker wants to do an FTA, but at the same time, she also wants to avoid the responsibility for doing it (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 211). Thus, the speaker leave the hearers to decide the interpretation of her act. Six realizations of off record strategy are employed by Michelle Obama in her conversation with Oprah Winfrey at the United of Women Summit in 2016.

The first example is the use of contradiction as the output of off record strategy performed by Michelle Obama.

MS. WINFREY:(...) You were talking about the next phase. I heard you say that when you all are done -- we saw your new house -- when you're --

MRS. OBAMA :**We're neither confirming or denying.** (Laughter.)

MS. WINFREY:Okay. (Laughter.) When you all are done – (...) (Datum 37)

Michelle Obama performs contradiction once when she reacts to Oprah's statement that Oprah see Michelle's new house as the place where Obama's family lives after leaving the White House. In this case, the two contradictive actions employed by Michelle are "confirming" and "denying". The utterance indicates that Michelle cannot tell the truth whether she really has a new house or not. Thus, Michelle encourages the hearers to look for an interpretation that reconciles her utterances. In this case, the conveyed meaning of Michelle's utterance goes off record by violating the quality maxim as a way to invite conversational implicature.

Furthermore, Michelle Obama uses metaphor as the realization of off record strategy to tell the audience her current condition, as in the following dialogue.

MS. WINFREY: You live in the White House.

MRS. OBAMA: **We've been to the mountain top**, and it was a hard climb but we made it. (Laughter.) We made it! (Applause.) (...)

(Datum 27)

In the expression "we've been to the mountain top", Michelle does not mean literally to say that she has been to the peak of a mountain but rather to mean that Michelle has been like at the mountain top. Thus, Michelle violates the quality maxim in which the utterance connotes something quite different from the literal meaning. Consequently, Michelle's intention goes off record.

The next example of off record strategy is presented in datum 12.

MRS. OBAMA: **You know why?** Because they don't have to balance anything. Sorry. (Laughter and applause.) And I hope that that is changing, but so many men don't have to do it all.

(Datum 12)

Michelle explains that a woman who decides to go to work has to balance her time for taking care of the family and doing the job. Oprah, then, tells that none of the men who have ever been interviewed by her can find the way to balance their time. In responding to the Oprah's statement, Michelle utters a question "(do) you know why?" In this case, Michelle does not intend to obtain an answer from the hearers since she directly conveys the reason. Thus, Michelle violates the quality maxim by using rhetorical question.

Being vague as the realization of off record strategy is also found in the conversation. The utterance is portrayed in datum 22.

MRS. OBAMA: (...) So that's one thing. With social media and - - I don't read that stuff. I learned that early in the campaign. I couldn't keep reading stuff about my husband and what people thought and -- because I knew who he was. I knew what was going on in our home, in our lives. So I didn't need to read about it from **somebody else**. (...)

(Datum 22)

In this occasion, Michelle uses the word "somebody else" which shows that Michelle tries to be unclear on who she actually refers to. It indicates that Michelle violates the manner maxim and thereby her intention goes off record in referring the object.

Another example of off record strategy is shown in datum 23.

MRS. OBAMA: So when it came to this role, I just said, you know, let me just be First Lady. Let me wake up every day and work hard to do something of value, and to do it well, and to do something consequential, and to do something that I care about. And then let that speak for itself. And that would shut up the haters, because I would have a whole portfolio of stuff that defined me because it's what I did, not what you called me. (Applause.) **So the best revenge is success** –

(Datum 23)

Michelle explains how she handles the haters. Then, Michelle adds an advice by stating an instant rule in which the hearers has to be success to conquer the haters. In using this strategy, Michelle actually gives the hearers an option to decide whether success can take revenge the haters or not in their own case.

Moreover, datum 29 is taken as the example of off record strategy performed by Michelle Obama.

MRS. OBAMA: Mmm, mmm, mmm. (Laughter.) **Dinner with the Queen of England, just like, mmm, mmm, mmm.** (Laughter.)

(Datum 29)

Datum 29 shows that Michelle leaves her utterance incomplete marked in the expression "mmm, mmm, mmm." Therefore, the hearers are burdened to interpret what Michelle wants to say when she tells that she had dinner with the Queen of England. Hence, Michelle's utterance goes off record since it identifies as an obscurity of expression.

Concisely, all types of politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson are applied in the conversation. Meanwhile, in terms of the realizations of each politeness strategy, there are only 23 sub-strategies that occurs in the conversation. Hence, both Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey do not use all realizations of politeness strategies because the context of the conversation does not support them to reveal all the sub-strategies derived from Brown and Levinson theory of politeness strategy.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

This research explain types of politeness strategies and the realizations of each type of politeness strategy used by Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey at the United State of Women Summit in 2016. Based on the findings and discussion, some conclusions are drawn related to the two objectives of the research.

Dealing with the first objective of the research which is to explain the types of politeness strategy used by Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey in their conversation at the United States of Women Summit in 2016, the data of the research are classified based on the theory of politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson. There were four types of politeness strategies found throughout the data. The types are bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record strategy. In addition, the choice of politeness strategies performed by

Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey depends on the circumstances and the speakers' wants related to maintaining the hearers' face.

Concerning with the second objective which is to describe the realizations of politeness strategies, the researcher could find 22 sub-strategies of politeness strategies in the object of the research. As a consequence, there are some sub-strategies that cannot be found in both Michelle's and Oprah's utterances since they have limited time which do not support them to apply all the sub-strategies. In addition, positive politeness strategy has the highest variation of the realizations achieving 11 out of 22 realizations of politeness strategy performed in the conversation. It signifies that both Michelle and Oprah attempt to come closer or to be friendly even though the conference tends to be in a formal situation.

Suggestions

Based on the conclusions of the research and the lacks of the research, some suggestions are presented for the following parties. First, the researcher suggests English literature students, especially for those who belong to linguistics concentration, to be serious in learning pragmatics since the use of the appropriate strategy may help them to make successful communication with others. Besides, there are some other approach related to the linguistics study that can be applied by future researchers to analyze the object of this research such as sociolinguistics, stylistics, or semantics. Hence, the researcher suggests future researcher to discuss the conversation between Michelle Obama and Oprah Winfrey at the United State of Women Summit in 2016 using other perspective.

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