Spell of Words: Exploring Politeness Strategies employed by Pakistani Motivational Speakers

Mehreen Zafar
Lecturer Department of English, Ghazi University, D.G. Khan, Pakistan.

Ambreen Kaukab
Lecturer Department of English, Ghazi University, D.G. Khan, Pakistan.

Shumaila Khalid
MPhil Scholar, Department of English, Ghazi University, D.G. Khan, Pakistan.

Dr. Muhammad Ahsan
Assistant Professor, Department of English, Ghazi University Dera Ghazi Khan, Pakistan.
Email: mahsan@gudgk.edu.pk

Abstract

The current research deals with the realization of politeness strategies by Pakistani motivational speakers. 'Politeness' being the area of pragmatics has been given huge importance and been investigated from different views. Gillani & Mahmood (2014) identify politeness as evasive term and it is cagey to get its clear interpretation in pragmatics. The checklist of politeness model was applied as a tool under the theoretical framework set by Brown and Levinson (1987) on the data that is comprised motivational lectures of 94 minutes and 38 seconds. The findings of the data indicate that the positive politeness is used as the most frequent (93.60%) strategy to represent the motivational speakers as optimistic and interested in hearer's activity. Negative politeness (85.30%) identifies the worth of audience to the speakers and bald on record (83.30%) minimizes the face threatening acts (FATs) implicitly. The use of indirect strategy, off record, presents the speakers as non-coercive. Overall the politeness strategies represent the individual and social persona of Pakistani motivational speakers.

Keywords: Politeness strategies, Motivational Speakers, Face threatening Acts, Pragmatics, Brown & Levinson

Introduction

The current study deals with the realization of politeness strategies by Pakistani motivational speakers. The study presents the linguistic construction of motivational lectures with focus on some salient features of Brown and Levinson (1987) theory of politeness. A critical

interpretation of the motivational lectures aims to explore the politeness strategies in use. During last fifty years a considerable research has been done on linguistic politeness; the study aims to cover the gap in the existing available work on politeness. Politeness is the act performed by the linguistic choices to save hearer's face. Politeness helps to convey our message very easily and makes it very effective and influencing. 'Politeness' being the area of pragmatics has been given huge importance and been investigated from different views. Gillani & Mahmood (2014) define politeness as evasive and finds it tricky to get its sense in real social world.

This paper addresses the research into politeness strategies used by the motivational speakers in Pakistani context. The primary objective is to identify the strategies and to find the frequency of the strategies. The other objectives are to explore the effect of the politeness strategies on audience and mark the language of the speakers as formal or informal. The current research will help to understand the phenomenon of politeness strategies in public speaking and open the doors for further research in future. Language production is more 'writing-like' or 'speaking-like' (Tribble, 1997: 21). Therefore, the findings of the research will help to devise the public speaking techniques for the speakers.

Review of Literature

Pragmatics is the study of meaning in context. The notions of pragmatics (Leech, 1983), speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) and conversation- maxims (Grice, 1989) made the relationship of speech community clear and helped to identify the nature of the conversations among them. Maxims of conversation explain how the interpretation of an utterance may convey indirect message. Ruytenbeek (2020) identified the effect of indirect requests in the conversation. Politeness as socio-cultural representation works in social context. The theoretical aspects shared by Goffman (1955), Lakoff (1973) and Leech (1983) are linked with the concept of politeness in real world. Brown and Levinson's theory (1987) followed the concept of face theory (Goffman, 1955), speech acts (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) and cooperative principles (Grice, 1989). '*Face*' is the self-representation on anyone in the society (Arundale, 2010).

Wang (2008: 688) pointed that *"face threatening act (FTA) refers to the verbal act that essentially puts face at risk and requires the litigating".* During conversation, the speakers may use different strategies to represent themselves positive and respectful in others' eyes; such strategies are called politeness strategies.

Brown and Levinson (1987) explained the connection of social norms and values with politeness hat every politeness approach. The speakers try to avoid FATs by reflecting certain set of strategies which are to represent model of politeness strategies. Brown and Levinson (1987) commented that people adopt multiple approaches and avoid FTAs to conversate in public so that they can be appreciated and accepted by the society. These strategies are used and filtered by the speaker making the face threatening acts (FTAs) indirect to reduce the burden of the threat. Brown and Levinson (1987) have mentioned main points for analyzing politeness strategies; Power, Social distance and cultural rank of the subject are three highlighted ones. In the context of the given three points, they have developed five politeness strategies for the purpose of dealing with face threatening acts (FTAs). For the mentioned acts, there are five major strategies as politeness strategies.

Spell of Words: Exploring Politeness Strategies employed by Pakistani Motivational Speakers

1. Bald on record (Without Redressive action)
2. Positive politeness
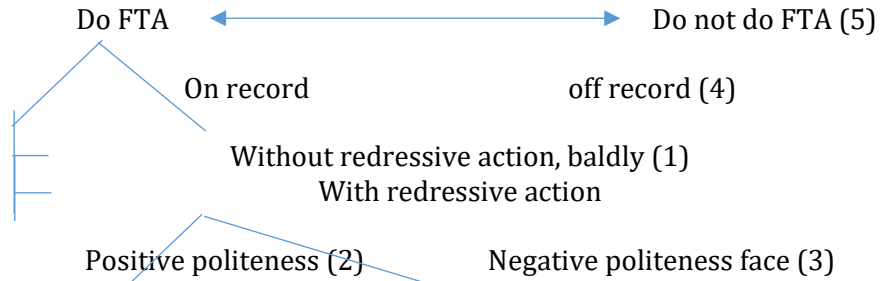3. Negative politeness
4. Off record
5. Avoid FTA's

Figure 1: Model of Politeness Strategies (Brown and Levinson 1987)

According to Al-Duleimi et al. (2016), there is no politeness associated with on-record strategy. It is a straight forward act which a speaker performs. He also noted that on-record strategy corresponds to the Grecian maxims of cooperative principals. In off record the speakers try to avoid using direct FTA. First four super-strategies are arranged on a scale from less polite to more polite, and each of the super-strategies has a number of sub-strategies.

The listeners or other receivers can identify the speakers' communication through Bald on record. Through positive politeness, the both speakers and listeners' wishes to be approved and respected by each other are identified whereas negative politeness is the way to grasp power of talk on addressee by the speakers. Indirect way of interpreting the communication of speakers in multiple ways is by the strategy of off record.

Alfattah (2010) supported the claims of Brown and Levinson (1978) when he observed Yamani EFL learners' orientation towards negative politeness by attempting to negate the opposite approaches like care for the receiver and endurance for pointing Illocutionary Force indicating Devices (IFIDs such as I am sorry, I apologize) and explanatory strategies. On the other hand, Nureddeen (2008) went to the other extent of by observing that Sudanese Arabs attempted to present their positive policies by adopting the indirect apology approach.

Liu et al. (2014), discussed the politeness strategies used by teachers during EFL classes. How they create a comfortable language learning environment and use positive politeness and negative politeness. Hayati, Rizka (2015), analyzed a TV talk show "Talk Indonesia" to observe the politeness strategies of host of the TV talk show.

It is generally claimed that the motivational speakers being confident use indirect, interesting, energetic and twisted language to convey the positive semantic notions in a pragmatic way. It is very interesting to analyze the language of the motivational speakers to identify the politeness strategies. Previous researches have authenticated the universality and penetration of the said model in any social world. Therefore, Brown & Levinson's hierarchical theory of Politeness Strategies helped to interpret or evaluate the tricky, ambiguous and indirect language of Pakistani motivational speakers during their motivational lectures.

Research Questions
1.   How does the frequently used politeness strategy represent their talk effective?
2.   What are the linguistic features indicating politeness employed by Pakistani motivational speakers?
3.   What is the level of formality of language used by Pakistani motivational speakers?

Methodology
The current research is qualitative and quantitative in nature to find out the politeness strategies by Pakistani motivational speakers. The theoretical framework for this study is Models of Politeness by Brown and Levinson (1987) in pragmatics. Pragmatics is the study of contextual meaning which are social. Qualitative approach has been used for descriptive analysis and interpretations of politeness strategies in motivational lectures by motivational speakers of Pakistan, while quantitative approach has been used for the occurrence of the enlisted politeness strategies. The checklist of politeness strategies was the major tool for this study. The checklist on the model of Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of politeness strategies has been adapted and tailored for the data. The researcher has downloaded eight motivational lectures of four Pakistani motivational speakers from www.youtube.com dated 1.2.2023. The identity of motivational speakers is kept hidden.

Table 1: Representing Motivational Speakers and Duration of their Lectures

Motivational Speakers	Duration of lecture 1	Duration of lecture 2
Speaker 1	14 minutes	11 minutes 02 seconds
Speaker 2	08 minutes 12 seconds	14 minutes 55 seconds
Speaker 3	09 minutes 54 seconds	13 minutes 56 seconds
Speaker 4	07 minutes 56 seconds	16 minutes 03 seconds

Thus the total length of visual clips is 94 minutes and 38 seconds. The visual motivational lectures were transcribed first and afterwards analysed under theory of Brown and Levinson (1987).

Data Analysis & Discussion
The researcher has used Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of Politeness Strategies for analyzing the data of the motivational lectures by Pakistani motivational speakers. The described major and sub- strategies of politeness were used as the yardstick. Each strategy with its use in the talk of motivational speakers is discussed below;

Bald on record
This strategy is without indicting acts. The speakers use direct speech acts in the interactions to get close to the audience. Alahi et al. (2023) mentioned that users try to adopt imperative way without any mitigating device. Therefore, the motivational speakers use this strategy in a controlled way. The given table identifies the limited use of this strategy.

Table 2: Representing Bald on record in text (motivational lectures)

Text	Main strategy	Supportive strategy
1. Today I tell you…	Bald on record	Necessary efficiency
2. …It is to work on yourself First!	Bald on record	Urgency

3. Asalam o alekum dosto(friends)…	Bald on record	Implicitly minimized threat

Motivational speakers have witty nature and they use this strategy just to have the acquaintance with the audience. There is general way of greetings; there is no use of specific naming or title in their lectures which is to confirm the situation where the threat is minimized implicitly. The speakers communicate in a friendly way to change the mindset of the hearer so they do not impose the idea directly. Therefore, they adopt the story telling style and in indirect way, with examples, convey the message. In the start of the conversation, they minimized threat implicitly by addressing the audience or introducing the topic directly. After that they emphasize on the need of the target and repeat the same concept using different words.

Table 3: Supportive strategies of bald on record with frequency and percentage

Number of motivational lectures	Supportive strategy	Frequency	Percentage
08	Necessary efficiency	05	62.5%
08	Urgency	07	87.5%
08	Implicitly minimized threat	08	100%

The frequent use of implicitly minimized threat (100%) highlights the value of direct address. The speakers and audience are not close in the relationship so to make the communicative relationship, the speakers greet the audience or introduce the topic of the lecture or themselves. Overall, the use of bald on record politeness strategy is limited. Only three supportive strategies were observed in eight lectures. The least percentage of necessary efficiency reveals the selfless personality of speaker whereas 100% implicitly minimized threat and 87.5% urgency reflect the conscious and confident behavior of the speakers.

Positive Politeness

Positive politeness reflects the desire of hearer to be respected. According to the theory of politeness strategies, the speaker uses such strategies to show the closeness towards the hearer and reduces the positive face threats of hearers. The motivational speakers use current strategy maximum. The motivational speakers aim to bring positivity in the thoughts of the listener and change the behaviors of the public and transform the society with positivity. That's why, the language and words are more polite which is to reduce the gap between speakers and audience.

Table 4: Representing Positive Politeness in text (motivational lectures)

Text	Main strategy	Supportive strategy
1. …When you adopt the problem, it becomes your opportunity…	Positive Politeness	Be optimistic
2…To be successful, you have to be quite unique…	Positive Politeness	Interest
3. I am from the same society, I took time to adopt the change…	Positive Politeness	Solidarity in group
4.You and I will work together and change the current scenario..	Positive Politeness	Include hearer and speaker in same activity

Spell of Words: Exploring Politeness Strategies employed by Pakistani Motivational Speakers

5. If you start only thinking positively, I give you the guarantee of your success..	Positive Politeness	Promise
6. Don't say negative words to yourself, say Yes! I can do this..	Positive Politeness	Avoid disagreement

The motivational speakers introduce the positive ideas and actions and reject the negativity. They converse in a way to grasp the attention of the audience fully. They talk about the hearer's interest; use pronoun 'You' in a manner to stimulate the listeners and reduce the gap between speaker and the listener. While they are reflecting hearer's interests, they keep themselves separate from the audience in the feelings or coping the situation to highlight the solidarity in group. The researcher found maximum use of positive politeness in motivational lectures by Pakistani motivational speakers. The speakers share jokes, exemplify the incidents from society, quote the works of scholars, reflect the knowledge of the mentioned topic and audience needs or expectations.

Table 5: Supportive strategies of Positive Politeness with frequency and percentage

Number of motivational lectures	Supportive strategy	Frequency	Percentage
08	Jokes	07	87.5%
08	Be optimistic	08	100
08	Include hearer and speaker in same activity	08	100
08	Interest	08	100
08	Offer/promise	06	75%
08	Solidarity in group	08	100%

Motivational Speakers use positive politeness much to minimize the FTAs of hearer so that the speakers can build a rapport with the listeners. Being optimistic (100%), they show interest in hearer (100%), keep their solidarity (100%), avoid negativity in ideas and actions, ensure the collective activity (100%), and offer the services or promise (75%) about the change. They all are witty in their behavior during motivational lectures. They share the jokes (87.5%) to keep the conversation interesting. Performing positive politeness, the speakers involve the hearers with themselves. To be more polite and save the face, the speakers use the three factors effectively. They are addressing public; it means they are in **power** to lead and guide the audience. They come closer to the audience physically and mentally during the lectures. Sometimes, they pat the shoulder of the hearer during the lectures. That is to reduce the **social distance** so that they can convey message easily. They leave their place at rostrum and come close to the public to reduce the physical distance and involve themselves by using pronoun "I" to show the audience that they are from them and if they can develop the positivity, they can prosper in life. The pronoun 'I' highlights the individualism in the social group and perform at two corners; brings positivity and avoids negative face threat.

Picture 1: Pakistani motivational speakers addressing public

The use of the language or linguistic choices and topics reflect the **ranking imposition.** They use informal language to make the communication better. They use cultural references to highlight the problems.

 i. Motivational Speaker 1: There are certain andaz *(manners)* of preparing...Acha dosto *(ok, friends)* the story is to reach high, give your hundred percent and question comes, kaise *(how)....*

ii. Motivational Speaker 2: Hua Kuch yon*(what happened actually),* the fast car has hit the upcoming car and pumper sharif (innocent) has broken down.

The motivational speakers maintain self-respect and social integrity, use polite language to express their ideas, create pleasant and friendly atmosphere without any directive or command. The maximum use of Positive politeness reflects the effort of speakers to be connected with the group.

Negative Politeness

Brown and Levinson (1987) state that negative politeness is reforming action communicated to the hearer's negative face; such strategy is basically evasion based. Brown and Levinson (1987) have argued that negative politeness is the core way for attaining the respectable image; this is the way to minimize the over required pressure that could be put by the FTA unintentionally.

Table 6: Representing Negative Politeness in text (motivational lectures)

Text	Main strategy	Supportive strategy
1.Are we really tolerant?	Negative Politeness	Question
2. Nice, Sir...	Negative Politeness	Give Deference
3.Thanks for being so patient...	Negative Politeness	Gratitude
4.So, we need to learn about how to keep our mind positive...	Negative Politeness	Plural pronoun
5.I would like to share an incident with you..	Negative Politeness	Be Indirect
6.It is a possibility to find the corrupted reality, if there may be the corruption	Negative Politeness	Hedges

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Spell of Words: Exploring Politeness Strategies employed by Pakistani Motivational Speakers

of mind ...		

The motivational speakers are aware of how to catch the attention of the public during lectures. One feature of public speaking is a different level of formality that is sometimes described as 'distance' and 'closeness', i.e. language production is more 'writing-like' or 'speaking-like' (C. Tribble, 1997:21). Therefore, they use more questioning. In public speaking, questioning is very important technique. Neirotti (2021) identified the importance of questioning that is to develop interest and motivate students to become actively involved in lessons, develop critical thinking skills and inquiring attitudes, nurture insights by exposing new relationships and stimulate students to pursue knowledge on their own.

Questioning by the speakers is not only to introduce the topics but also to stimulate the listeners to response; thus the speaking turn in the 'talk'. The motivational speakers are less thankful to the audience and use limited hedges. The reason is that they want to incite the public to react while listening them. The words dosto *(friends), sir,* shadishuda log, *(married persons),* As a qoom *(Nation)* reflect the general addressees. Interestingly, they represent very less gratitude and high giving deference. All motivational speakers use plural pronoun for suggesting and recommending the action. They adopt story telling manner during lectures; rather than to incite the public for the change, they quote incidents of past, give references from history, exemplify the works and life style of scholars and create the imaginary outcomes of the efforts. For attaining the negative politeness, they avoid the pessimistic and apologetic attitude, passive statements, and high use of imposition on hearer. That, in turn, affirms the more use of positive politeness.

Table 7: Supportive strategies of Negative Politeness with frequency and percentage

Number of motivational lectures	Supportive strategy	Frequency	Percentage
08	Question	07	87.5%
08	Hedges	06	75%
08	Give deference	08	100%
08	Plural pronoun	08	100%
08	Be Indirect	08	100
08	Gratitude	04%	50%

100% use of giving deference, being indirect and plural pronoun are to ensure the negative politeness. They don't prefer to discomfort their addressees by enforcing their views. Only 50 % gratitude shows that they are focused on their ideas to convey instead of appreciating the audience. They are more direct to communicate with the public and ensure positive politeness by not using much individual identity.

Off record
This is indirect strategy to keep the speaker away from any potential to impose on the listener. U=sing positive and negative politeness, the speakers indirectly involve the audience and incite them to imitate the ideas and actions of the speakers. This strategy helps to avoid the direct FTAs.

Table 8: Representing off record in text (motivational lectures)

Text	Main strategy	Supportive strategy

Spell of Words: Exploring Politeness Strategies employed by Pakistani Motivational Speakers

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1. Speaker: Every problem has opportunity… Pakistan has many problems, so it has many…. Audience: opportunities	Off Record	Non-coercive
2. What you have understood?…	Off Record	Ambiguity

The first three politeness strategies develop the flow for the audience and speakers that both of them find comfortable to communicate and create their 'mindfulness aura' to absorb the thought provoking ideas and concepts. It is evident that speaker is reluctant to impose and without getting personal and direct, tries to convey the intended meanings.

Research Questions Revisited
After analyzing the motivational lectures of motivational speakers in Pakistani context, it is required to discuss the research questions separately.
1. How does the frequently used politeness strategy represent their talk effective?
The analysis of the data suggested the use of four politeness strategies by motivational speakers. Bald on record with only three supportive strategies is in use where as positive and negative politeness play almost equal role.
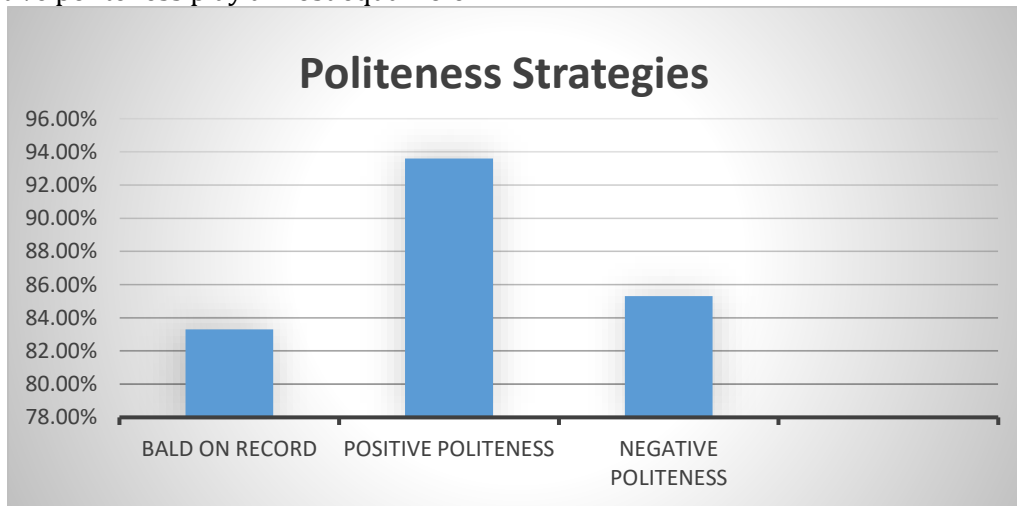
Overall, the motivational speakers use positive politeness (93.60%) frequently, next to that is negative politeness (85.30%) and bald on record is 83.30%. The use of positive politeness is prominent due to the excessive use of supportive strategies. The motivational speakers reflect 100% supportive strategies of positive politeness for being optimistic, keeping hearer and speaker in same activity, showing interest in hearer and representing solidarity in group. The motivational speakers target to change the negative mindset of hearers with positive ideas, motivate them to bring positive change in their personalities, incite them to do something good, new and positive. To do all that, they use positive politeness maximum. The more supportive strategies of positive politeness and frequent use of those strategies help

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Spell of Words: Exploring Politeness Strategies employed by Pakistani Motivational Speakers

them to achieve the target. With the use of this strategy, they can develop rapport with listeners easily and quickly. 87.5 % use of jokes in motivational lectures makes the thick philosophical ideas or concept easy and interesting. The determinative offers and strong promises (75%) give worth to the words of motivational speakers.

1.   What are the linguistic features indicating politeness employed by Pakistani motivational speakers?

There is difference between politeness and polite behavior. That's why, the limited use of gratitude (50%) is observed. They use thanking words rarely. They emphasize on hearer; '**you** are the pillars of change', 'shabash **tm** ye kar sakte ho' *(well done! You can do that).* Plural pronoun, collective nouns as nominalization, questions about attitude of hearer, singular pronoun with reference to you and we. It shows their optimistic approach towards problems, interest in hearer, individuality (their own identity as motivational speaker) and non-coercive attitude. They add politeness in their words by using jokes and adopting indirect way of sharing ideas. This reduces the face threats and minimizes the imposition on hearer and hearer, participating fully, feels to be in the same politeness boat of speaker.

2.   What is the level of formality of language used by Pakistani motivational speakers?

The less formal use of language was observed. The motivational speakers use mixed vocabulary as their linguistic choice reflects their understanding of the audience and brings them closer to the hearer. They are more concerned with the content so in a short span of time, they convey their message. Dianne Dukette and David Cornish (2009) shows that, on average, adults can only sustain attention for around 20 minutes and that their short-term response to the stimulus that attracts attention is only seconds. Therefore, the motivational speakers have less time to grasp the attention of the audience and they use mixed vocabulary and less formal language. It also reveals their individual style (self-identity) and reduces the social distance.

Conclusion

The current research aimed to explore politeness strategies by Pakistani motivational speakers in their motivational lectures and identified various politeness strategies (positive & negative politeness, off record and bald on record) exercised by Pakistani motivational speakers. Among mentioned strategies, the most frequent employed strategy is positive politeness to reflect positive but serene communicative style. Moreover, greeting audience, introducing topics and developing the friendly atmosphere during their motivational lectures are done by the definite linguistic features of English and Urdu languages. The use of mix languages and para linguistic features helps to make the impression of the speaker positive, shape the social web and bring the participants in close zone of communication from social and public zone. The in depth analysis provided the insights for less formal language use although the motivational lectures are set in a formal context. The high frequency of positive politeness strategies proposes that the members of Pakistani society generally are interested to save the positive face of the interlocutors in a concrete speech situation. The speakers also try their utmost to save their own face (individuality) by selecting least face threatening strategies such as 'offering services/compliments', 'paying deference' and 'introducing questions and hedges'. The preference for the positive politeness strategies indicates that the Pakistani society is socially bonded society. This socialism confirming heterogeneity and

stratification of Pakistani society is reflected in all motivational lectures.

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