Politeness Strategies by Logan Paul and Mike Ajlak in
THE DONALD TRUMP INTERVIEW – IMPAULSIVE EP. 418

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines the politeness strategies used by Logan Paul and Mike Ajlak in *The Donald Trump Interview – IMPAULSIVE EP. 418*. Using Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory as cited in Watts (2003), it focuses on spoken utterances directed specifically at Donald Trump. The data consists of utterances by Paul as the main host and Ajlak as the co-host. The findings show that both use more positive politeness strategies. Paul applies all four main politeness strategies, including bald on record, while Ajlak uses only three: positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record. Although both use these three strategies, they differ in the specific sub-strategies applied within each category. They also share some unused strategies. Their roles influence how they use these strategies: Paul leads the conversation, while Ajlak supports it. Despite the differences, both remain polite, especially considering their guest is a former president. The study concludes that they apply different strategies based on their roles. Further research on politeness in political interviews is recommended.

Keywords: Co-host, Host, Podcast, Politeness Strategies

INTRODUCTION

Communication plays an important role in conversation among people, and one important aspect in communication is politeness because it helps to maintain social harmony and build positive relationships. Brown and Levinson (1987) explain, politeness comes from our fundamental need to maintain face in social settings, and they argue that people use politeness strategies to reduce the threat created by face-threatening acts (FTAs), as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) which relate to positive and negative faces. Their theory introduces four primary politeness strategies: bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record, which are used based on the situation, power relations, and level of distraction. However, their model has been criticized for overlooking first-order politeness (Politeness1), which refers to how politeness is practiced in real social interactions and varies across cultures. In contrast, Watts (2003) distinguishes Politeness1 from second-order politeness (Politeness2), which is the expansion of Brown and Levinson's theory by focusing on the strategic use of politeness to reduce FTAs regardless of cultural context.

Impaulsive is a popular podcast hosted by Logan Paul and Mike Ajlak as co-host, launched in 2018 (Impaulsive, 2024a). The content is a podcast conversation with celebrities, influencers, athletes, and experts on a variety of topics. The writer chooses *The Donald Trump Interview – IMPAULSIVE EP. 418* (Impaulsive, 2024b), with the guest star Donald Trump, because it shows a pivotal moment in digital media where politics and entertainment come together. The writer conducts this study to identify and analyze the politeness strategies used by Logan Paul and Ajlak when interviewing Trump in *The Donald Trump Interview – IMPAULSIVE EP. 418.*

This study aims to examine the differences and similarities in politeness strategies used by Paul and Ajlak who have different positions in the podcast. The research questions are: (1) What politeness strategies are used by Logan Paul in interviewing Donald Trump in *The Donald Trump Interview – IMPAULSIVE EP. 418*? (2) What politeness strategies are used by Mike Ajlak in interviewing Donald Trump in *The Donald Trump Interview – IMPAULSIVE EP. 418*? (3) What are the differences and similarities between the politeness strategies used by Logan Paul and Mike Ajlak when interviewing Donald Trump?

In analyzing Paul and Ajlak's politeness strategies when interviewing Trump, the writer applies the politeness strategies' theory suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987) as cited in Watts (2003), which includes positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on record, and off record.

METHOD

The writer used a qualitative approach for this study. The source of the data was one of the episodes on YouTube, a channel titled *The Donald Trump Interview - IMPAULSIVE EP. 418* (Impaulsive, 2024b). The unit of analysis was utterances. The data were all of Paul's and Ajlak's utterances that are related directly to Trump and that contained politeness strategies. The writer organized the utterances into two groups: one for Paul's utterances and the other for Ajlak's utterances. The writer placed the utterances from the video into a Microsoft Word document containing Paul's and Ajlak's utterances during the interview. Next, the writer applied a two-digit numbering system to the utterances. Number one (1) represented Paul's utterances, while number two (2) represented Ajlak's utterances, for example, 1.1 indicated the first utterance of Paul. Meanwhile, 1.2 referred to Paul's second utterance and continued following this pattern. Similarly, 2.1 represented Ajlak's first utterance; 2.2 referred to Ajlak's second utterance and continued sequentially.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings and discussion of the writer's study. This section contains three sub-sections: (1) Politeness Strategies Used by Logan Paul When Interviewing Donald Trump (2) Politeness Strategies Used by Mike Ajlak When Interviewing Donald Trump (3) Differences and Similarities of Logan Paul's and Mike Ajlak's Politeness Strategies When Interviewing Donald Trump.

Politeness Strategies Used by Logan Paul When Interviewing Donald Trump

Paul used four main strategies with their strategy as stated in Table 1: positive politeness (Claim Common Ground), negative politeness (Don't presume/assume and Don't coerce H), Bald on Record (Non-minimization of face threat), and Off-record (Invite Conversational Implicatures).

Table 1. Politeness Strategies Used by Logan Paul When Interviewing Donald Trump

Name	Politeness Strategies											
	PP			NP					BOR		OFR	
	CCG	CC	F	BD	DPA	DC	C	R	NM	M	IC	BA
Paul	✔				✔	✔			✔		✔	

Paul's Politeness Strategies to Trump

(1) Logan: "How are you, boss?"

The writer puts this utterance under the claim common ground strategy with the sub-strategy: use in-group identity markers. This sub-strategy uses the surname or casual terms to address someone in order to feel closer to them. This matches Paul's utterance, where he uses the word "Boss" to call Trump. He uses it not only to get closer to Trump because they do not know each other beforehand, but also to create a sense of shared identity or camaraderie, as "Boss" is a friendly, informal term commonly used in casual circles.

(2) Logan: "And with you back in office you think we'll get that respect back?"

The writer puts this utterance under Don't Presume/ Assume, Paul uses a Question sub-strategy to ensure his own statement (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In this context, Paul asks a serious question, which is why he asks Trump directly about it. As Paul has the YouTube channel and is the main host, he has the freedom to ask what he wants.

(3) Logan: "Mr. President, I got the 10-minute warning from the team oh which is now 8 Minutes."

The writer puts this utterance under Don't coerce H, Paul uses "Mr. President" to address Trump because he wants to inform him that the podcast has 10 minutes left. Paul uses the 'give deference' sub-strategy, addresses Trump with a formal title, "Mr. President," which shows respect to a person of higher status. Paul uses "Mr. President" to show respect and humility toward someone of higher status.

(4) Logan: "What is your relationship like with Vladimir Putin?"

The writer puts this utterance under Non-minimization of Face Threat; Paul uses the strategy of non-minimization of face threat by asking straightforwardly about Trump's relationship without minimizing the face threat to Trump. This is considered non-minimization of face threat because Paul does not use polite or indirect language to soften the impact of the question. He openly discusses the issue without minimizing the face threat to Trump.

(5) Logan: "I'm so curious like what this conversation with really powerful world leaders looks like behind closed doors, like is it candid, or do you exercise grace, or you talk like boys?"

The writer puts this utterance under Invite Conversational Implicatures, Paul uses metaphor sub-strategy as in the example. The metaphor is found in the word's candid and boys. The word candid refers to being honest, and the word boys refers to speaking like a boy or man, which is characterized as straightforward. Instead of asking Trump straightforward questions, Paul uses figurative language to make his statements less direct.

Politeness Strategies Used by Mike Ajlak When Interviewing Donald Trump

Ajlak used three main strategies and their strategies as stated in Table 2: positive politeness (Claim Common Ground and Fulfill H's want for some X), negative politeness (Don't presume/ assume and Don't coerce H), and off record (Be Vague or Ambiguous) when interviewing Trump.

Table 2. Politeness Strategies Used by Mike Ajlak when Interviewing Donald Trump

Name	Politeness Strategies											
	PP			NP					BOR		OFR	
	CCG	CC	F	BD	DPA	DC	C	R	NM	M	IC	BA
Ajlak	✔		✔		✔	✔						✔

Ajlak's Politeness Strategies to Trump

(1) Ajlak: "You have a name for everything?"

The writer puts this utterance under Claim Common Ground, Ajlak uses the 'notice and attend to H's interest' sub-strategy of claim common ground because he uses a question as a form to show that he notices what Trump's habit is. Ajlak chooses to be more casual to reduce social distance and keep the conversation in the podcast the way they usually do.

(2) Ajlak: "If you're ever bored on a plane to Tuscaloosa or something you want to, give it a read."

The writer puts this utterance under Fulfill H's want for some X, Ajlak gives a book as a present to Trump, and he wants Trump to read it when bored on a plane. Ajlak uses give gifts to H, the sub-strategy of fulfilling H's want for some X. He uses this as a gift symbol of respect to give a present and shows closeness.

(3) Ajlak: "It's probably a good thing to get along with the leaders of the largest countries."

The writer puts this utterance under Don't Presume/ Assume, Ajlak uses a hedge sub-strategy under don't presume/ assume as seen in the word probably as a softener to show his confidence in the statement, making it less direct.

(4) Ajlak: "Well, Mr. President, people surely love it, they love the picture they rallied behind it they're rallying behind you now more than ever."

The writer puts this utterance under Don't coerce H, Ajlak uses a 'give deference' by calling Trump by using Mr. President, where Ajlak shows respect and humbleness to a person of higher status than himself.

(5) Ajlak: "And that's just AI, what, when, what about, when it becomes SI or super intelligence?"

The writer puts this utterance under Be Vague or Ambiguous, Ajlak uses the 'be ambiguous' strategy. Ajlak does not specifically explain super intelligence, and suddenly asks about it. In this utterance, Ajlak seems confused about what he wants to ask, making his question confusing. This is possible because he is talking to a former president, while Ajlak is an influencer, so there is a difference in social status.

Differences and Similarities of Logan Paul's and Mike Ajlak's Politeness Strategies When Interviewing Donald Trump

In interviewing Trump, Paul uses all main strategies, namely: positive politeness (Claim Common Ground), negative politeness (Don't presume/assume and Don't coerce H), Bald on Record (Non-minimization of face threat), and Off Record (Invite Conversational Implicatures).

However, Ajlak uses only three main strategies, namely: positive politeness (Claim Common Ground and Fulfill H's want for some X), negative politeness (Don't presume/assume and Don't coerce H), and Off Record (Be Vague or Ambiguous). It can be seen in Table 3 that there are three differences in the politeness strategy used by Paul and Ajlak. First, Ajlak uses two strategies of positive politeness, while Paul uses only one. Second, Paul uses one strategy of the Bald on Record, but Ajlak does not use any strategy under Bald on Record. Last, Paul and Ajlak use a different strategy of the Off-Record.

Table 3. Differences and Similarities of Logan Paul's and Mike Ajlak's Politeness Strategies When Interviewing Donald Trump

Name	Politeness Strategies											
	PP			NP					BOR		OFR	
	CCG	CC	F	BD	DPA	DC	C	R	NM	M	IC	BA
Paul	✔				✔	✔			✔		✔	
Ajlak	✔		✔		✔	✔						✔

The difference in Paul's and Ajlak's politeness strategies can be seen from their roles and backgrounds in the *Impaulsive* podcast. Logan, as the main host, plays a more dominant role in the conversation, which allows him to use all main strategies. Meanwhile, Ajlak, using three main strategies, takes a supporting role for Logan, which requires him to be more relaxed and supportive rather than leading the conversation. As the *Impaulsive* podcast encourages a casual style and informal interactions, Ajlak prioritizes maintaining a friendly tone. This influences his approach when communicating with Trump, who holds a high status.

The writer identifies the similarities: one positive politeness (Claim Common Ground) and two negative politeness (Don't Presume/Assume and Don't Coerce H). These similarities are used by Paul and Ajlak when interviewing Trump. The Claim Common Ground used by Paul and Ajlak when interviewing Trump shows that both of them, as podcast hosts, want to show that they are familiar with Trump by paying attention to his interests (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The Don't Presume/Assume is used by Paul and Ajlak because they know they are interviewing someone of a higher status. This leads them to ask questions instead of making assumptions, in order to avoid prejudice (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

The Don't Coerce H is also used by Paul and Ajlak due to the difference in status. Trump has a higher status than Paul and Ajlak, which is why both hosts use one sub-strategy (Give Deference) to show respect and humility in response to that status difference. Other similarities appear in unused strategies such as "Convey that S and H are cooperators," "Be Direct," "Communicate S's want to not impinge on H," "Redress other's wants of H's," and "Minimization of face threat" in Paul's and Ajlak's utterances during the *Impaulsive* podcast episode with Trump. These strategies are typically used in formal situations where the speaker does not aim to build closeness with the interlocutor. Although Trump's position as a former president allows him to communicate carefully, Paul and Ajlak present themselves as casual podcast hosts. As the main host and co-host, Paul and Ajlak focus more on creating relaxed, direct conversations rather than applying formal politeness strategies.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, both Paul and Ajlak remain polite throughout the conversation, even though Paul uses more strategies than Ajlak. Paul, as the main host, applies all main strategies to lead and maintain the atmosphere, while Ajlak, as the co-host, uses three main strategies and tends to be more careful and supportive. Despite these differences, the writer identified several similarities in their strategies, as well as other unused strategies in their utterance during the *Impaulsive* podcast episode with Trump. These strategies are not used due to their relaxed podcast style. Paul's and Ajlak's use of politeness strategies matches the informal style of *Impaulsive*, helping to keep the audience engaged and making the interaction feel natural and relatable. For further study, future researchers can identify politeness strategies in podcasts with a political context and analyze the politeness strategies used not only by the hosts but also by the guests or other participants.

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