

Politeness Strategies in Performing Commissive Illocutionary Acts in Joseph R. Biden's Inauguration Speech

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore the use of politeness strategies in the performance of commissive illocutionary acts in Joseph R. Biden's inauguration speech. The politeness strategies were classified based on the theory of politeness strategies by Brown and Levinson (1987). The commissive illocutionary acts performed are promise, guarantee, and refusal. The result showed that there are 39 performances of commissive illocutionary acts that are found in the speech. The classification and analysis showed that out of 39 utterances, there are 17 occurrences of bald on record, ten occurrences of positive politeness, and 12 occurrences of off-record. The result shows that, in delivering his inauguration speech, Biden tends to use the most straightforward way of speaking to issue an act.

Keywords: *commissive illocutionary act, inauguration speech, politeness strategy, political discourse, speech act.*

INTRODUCTION

Political discourse plays a significant role in politics since it uses language as an unavoidable means of conveying political ideas and carrying out political action (Usmonov, 2018, p. 49). One example of political discourse is presidential inauguration speeches. The president, as the speaker, presents his/her political objectives, as well as his/her visions and intentions, to the audience. In an inauguration speech, it is evident that political discourse serves as a tool for presidents to encourage the audience to do a particular action, which in this case is to support them during their presidential term.

As a political discourse that communicates the speaker's intentions, an inauguration speech carries speech acts that convey the intended function in

communication. During this speech, the leader of a country not only states his or her ideological priorities and main goals for the future of the country but also positions him/herself as a person and a leader in the public and political space of the country (Garifullina et al., 2021). In realizing political missions, a president often performs speech acts such as promises and pledges to show the president's solemnity in serving the country.

With the intention of being accepted, speeches should be delivered in such a way that employs politeness. Brown and Levinson (1987) define politeness strategies as methods of communication used to avoid or minimize the speaker's Face Threatening Act (FTA). FTA is defined as actions that jeopardize the hearer's positive and negative face. In this research, the main focus is to see how Biden used

politeness strategies in performing commissive illocutionary acts in his inauguration speech. Moreover, this research is intended to see how Biden takes the social condition into account while making his promises and political aims.

Reviewing the studies on speech acts, politeness strategies, and political discourse has resulted in the awareness of the lack of the study of commissive illocutionary acts and Biden himself since he is the new US president in office. Hence, this present study is conducted to look into not only commissive illocutionary acts but also their relationship to politeness strategies, as speech acts and politeness are inextricably linked. Politeness enables the delivery of commissive illocutionary acts to the hearer in an acceptable manner. The aim of this research is to examine how Biden used a politeness strategy in his inauguration speech to persuade people toward his commissive illocutionary acts, which are his political aims.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have been conducted in relation to the topic of politeness strategies, speech acts, and political discourse. Studies regarding political discourse have been conducted on various aspects of political discourse. Watts (2003) conducted a study on politeness in political discourse to see the political behavior of a politician. This study reveals that political behavior is largely related to the numerous types of habitus each of us develops in order to function successfully in social practice situations (Watts, 2003). According to this study, a degree of face-threatening act is permitted by the type of social practice employed in political debate. The face granted to the speaker by the audience contains the following characteristics: a friendly attitude toward the caller, demonstrated by being helpful, sympathetic, and non-argumentative; wit; knowledge of local events, topics, and characters, etc. However, only the sense of what is acceptable in such a setting, i.e., how such situations are socially replicated, can enable people to regard one's behavior as polite (Watts, 2003). In addition, Hinck and Hinck (2002) also conducted a study on politeness in presidential debates. According to this study, politeness theory is applicable to the

evaluation of politicians' qualifications for. A politician's objective in a political discourse is to persuade the audience to regard him/her and his/her proposals positively. Consequently, each has a goal to achieve, which is typically at the price of the image of another politician. By detecting where a speaker's face is attacked and studying how a speaker responds to face-threatening signals, we can characterize how face-saving skills influence views of leadership character and ability (Hinck & Hinck, 2002).

Phuc and Yen (2016) conducted a corpus study about politeness strategies in British and American political speeches. According to this study, the primary objective of speech delivery is to persuade the audience of the speaker's viewpoints through the use of appropriate language strategies. To make a successful speech in general and a successful political speech in particular, the speaker must employ methods to demonstrate politeness and persuade the audience. Therefore, language markers that reflect politeness play a crucial role in the communicative process, particularly when delivering a speech.

Numerous studies have been conducted within the area of inauguration speech as well. Biria and Mohammadi (2012) conducted a study on the socio-pragmatic functions of inauguration speech using a critical discourse analysis approach. This study explains how an inauguration speech demonstrates the complex relationships between language, power, and ideology. In an inauguration speech, the speakers show a broad repertoire of discursive mechanisms, such as the positive self and negative other-presentation strategies, for influencing their audiences. Personification can also be used by a president to express an idea, as what the former US president Barack Obama did in his victory speech in South Carolina. When he expresses an idea, he does not disclose it as if it were his own but gets another person (fictional or plausible) to express it. The discourse method he employs inverts the direction of influence from those in power to those who are influenced by them (Biria & Mohammadi, 2012).

Balogun and Murana (2018) examine the pragmatic assumptions and courtesy methods used by President Donald Trump in his inaugural address. The result demonstrates that, in making the speech, Trump considers the singularity of the event, the socioeconomic disaster afflicting America, and the

necessity and urgency of rescuing the country. Regarding politeness, the study reveals both the face-saving and face-threatening acts employed by the speaker. It concludes that, despite Trump's best efforts to lessen the risks to the faces of former American leaders and others, the threat's intensity remains uncomfortably memorable.

Capone (2010) conducted a study on Barack Obama's South Carolina speech from the perspective of pragmemes. In particular, this study examines the notion that this speech is composed of multiple voices (in other words, it exhibits polyphony) and that the audience is a part of this speech event, adding to and collaborating on its text. When Obama expresses an idea, he does not disclose it as his own; instead, he makes it as if another person express it. Since he cannot realistically get individuals on stage to convey his thoughts during an electoral speech, he personifies ideas by recounting what people tell him. His stories serve to personify his ideas. The discourse method he employs reverses the direction of influence from those in control to those who are influenced by them. Capone (2010) claims in this paper that Barack Obama's address echoes Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech and that its structure is best understood in the context of Afro-American sermons.

Despite the many studies of politeness strategies, only a few studies examine politeness strategies in the performance of commissive illocutionary acts, particularly the one performed by Joe Biden in his inauguration speech. Therefore, it is the aim of the present research to investigate the employment of politeness strategies in performing commissive illocutionary acts in Joe Biden's inauguration speech.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Speech Act

According to Austin (1962), a speech act is an action that occurs during the production of an utterance. Yule (1996) states that humans interpret the meaning of sentences in a variety of ways based on the message intended by the speaker. Speakers frequently indicate how they want the hearer to

'take' or interpret the purpose of their words. In general, the type of 'act' that a speaker performs when uttering a sentence can be detected. Austin (1962) classified Speech Acts into three levels: Locutionary Act, Illocutionary Act, and Perlocutionary Act.

Commissive Illocutionary Acts

Commissives are acts of obligating or proposing to obligate oneself to do something described in the intended meaning, which may also state conditions under which the deed must or may not be performed (Bach & Harnish, 1982). The illocutionary function of commissives is to bind the speaker to the truth of a statement or proposition. In terms of the communication function, commissives serve to affect the listener's beliefs and make the listener feel good (Lee, 1989). According to Bach and Harnish (1982), in committing to do A, one communicates the intention to do A and the belief that one's statement commits one to perform it, at least under the conditions specified or mutually believed to be relevant. These conditions may include the hearer approving or at least not rejecting one's proposal or commitment to do A. In general, the absence of an explicit rejection may be taken as an acceptance. In addition to stating such an intention and belief, the speaker communicates the desire that the hearer perceives the speaker to possess such an intention and belief. Examples of commissive illocutionary acts are "I'll pay you by the 6th" and "You'll have the money by the 7th, I guarantee." (Lee, 1989, p. 221). The sentence is uttered in a situation where someone lends money and promises to pay it back. Those sentences bind the speaker to an action of paying back by the mentioned date.

Searle and Vanderveken (1985) proposed several types of commissive illocutionary acts: promising, threatening, refusing, offering, and guaranteeing, as explained below.

Promise

A promise is a category of commissive acts that is distinct from the other categories. The act of promising is specifically performed for the benefit of the hearer and implies obligations, which raises the speaker's strength of commitment (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985).

Threat

A threat differs from the previous act in the way it is done to the hearer's loss or disadvantage rather than for their gain (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985). Given that there is no obligation in this conduct, it is counted as autonomous. This category has a hybrid connotation that can only be conducted through threatening gestures at someone other than through spoken acts.

Refusal

According to Searle and Vanderveken (1985), refusing is an illocutionary act that occurs when an utterance of presumed acceptance is done in that context, and the speaker turns it into denial. Thus, rejection has the extra preparation when given the choice of accepting or refusing.

Offer

An offer implies the speaker's willingness to do something for or give something to the hearer. It is the speaker's phrase for offering an act in the hearer's or addressee's interest.

Guarantee

A guarantee is a firm promise that the speaker will do something or that something will happen. It is a pledge that something will happen or that something is true. The degree of affirmation is the tool to differentiate guarantee from promise.

Politeness

Politeness is demonstrating an attempt to consider the feelings of those addressed or the hearer (Brown and Levinson, 1987). In other words, politeness is a collection of behaviors that demonstrate that individuals consider the feelings of others and how they should be treated. Politeness occurs through evaluative moments (the speaker's judgments of interactional behavior), and it is a critical aspect of interpersonal interaction because it enables people to develop and maintain interpersonal connections (Yule, 1985). When people act in a way, they think is polite in a certain situation, they try to show that they share the same values with others, which makes people feel good (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Speakers

utilize certain categories to guide the production of language, and it represents the hearer's perceived moral order of an interactional context, that is, their perceptions of 'how things should be' in a given scenario. Thus, examining politeness helps to understand the larger in-group, social, and cultural norms that guide people's productive and evaluative behavior in social situations.

Brown and Levinson (1987) assert that a politeness strategy is established in order to save the hearer's face. The social variables considered in Brown and Levinson's (1987) model are the relative power of the speaker and the hearer, the relative social distance between the speaker and the hearer, and the ranking of FTA imposition. Based on the calculation of these three variables, speakers can use potential politeness strategies to minimize FTAs. These strategies are categorized as follows: bald on record, negative politeness, positive politeness, and off-record indirect. Each category contains numerous strategies that specify the condition and purpose of the politeness strategies. The elaboration of each category is given below.

Bald on Record

Bald-on-record strategies are employed to address the hearer directly in order to communicate the speaker's demands. It is a straightforward method of communication that avoids imposition. With a bald-on-record strategy, the speaker makes no attempt to minimize the face-threatening acts. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), there are a variety of reasons why the bald on record is employed in various scenarios, as the speaker may also have a variety of reasons or motives for the FTA to be as effective as possible. With this strategy, the speaker usually embarrasses or makes the listener feel very uncomfortable by directly addressing them or by issuing a direct command.

Negative Politeness

Negative politeness, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), is a regressive behavior aimed against the hearer's negative face. In a negative politeness strategy, the speaker recognizes and incorporates the hearer's face into the method in which the speaker would speak to them. In simple terms, the negative politeness technique presupposes

that the speaker is attempting to impose on the listener, and there is a risk of awkwardness and humiliation for the speaker.

Positive Politeness

Positive politeness is frequently used in groups of friends or in situations when people are very familiar with one another or are close friends. The strategy of positive politeness tries to reduce the distance between the speaker and other individuals by expressing and demonstrating warmth and a genuine interest in minimizing FTA to the hearer. People may use it interchangeably or mistakenly believe it is an everyday, intimate language, but it is not. Simply put, the purpose of a positive politeness strategy is to make the listener feel good about themselves, their interests, and their belongings while also respecting the hearer's positive face.

Off-record

The primary objective of this strategy is indirectness or reducing or minimizing the speaker's pressure. As described by Brown and Levinson (1987), the off-the-record or off-record strategy uses indirect language to avoid sounding too imposing. If a speaker wishes to do or commit an FTA but does not wish to bear any responsibility for it, they may use the off-record method and defer to the hearer's judgment and interpretation.

METHODS

The data for this study were utterances containing commissive illocutionary acts taken from the inaugural speech of Joseph R. Biden, which was obtained via CNN's official YouTube channel. The data were collected by performing the following steps:

1. Watching the video of Joe Biden's inauguration speech on CNN's official YouTube channel. The video is 21 minutes and 25 seconds long.
2. Cross-checking the video with the transcripts from the White House official website, which has 2,380 words.

3. Classifying utterances that contain commissive illocutionary acts according to the classification of illocutionary speech acts by Searle (1976)

In regard to the data analysis, the collected data were analyzed through the following processes.

1. Identifying and categorizing the type of commissive illocutionary act of the utterances based on categories by Searle and Vanderveken (1985).
2. Identifying the politeness strategies of the collected utterances using the theory of politeness by Brown and Levinson (1987).
3. Categorizing the utterances into four classifications by Brown and Levinson (1987), which are bald-on-record, negative politeness, positive politeness, and off-record strategy.

Drawing conclusions to see which type of politeness strategy is dominant.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents and discusses the results of the analysis of the use of politeness strategies in 39 utterances containing the speech acts observed from the inauguration speech of Joseph R. Biden on January 21, 2021.

Based on the data source, there are 39 utterances that contain commissive illocutionary acts. The utterances will be classified according to the classification of politeness strategies by Brown and Levinson (1987). The frequency of the use of politeness strategies by Biden is presented in the following table. Further discussion on each politeness strategy is to be explained afterwards.

Table 1 below provides an overview of the use of politeness strategies found in the performance of commissive illocutionary acts by Biden in his inaugural speech. The data of utterances were identified and classified according to the taxonomy used by Brown and Levinson (1987). According to the taxonomy, there are four types of politeness

strategies. The subtypes are bald on record, negative politeness, positive politeness, and off-record.

Table 1. The frequency and distribution of politeness strategies of commissive illocutionary acts in Biden's inaugural speech

No.	Politeness Strategy	Token	%
1.	Bald on record	17	43.59
2.	Negative politeness	0	0
3.	Positive politeness	10	25.64
4.	Off-record	12	30.77
Total		39	100.00

The analysis found a total of 39 commissive illocutionary acts produced by Biden in his inaugural speech. Out of the 39 acts, 17 (43.59%) were performed using the bald-on-record strategies, 10 (25.64%) using positive politeness strategies, and 12 (30.77%) using off-record strategies. Below is the analysis of politeness strategies in utterances containing commissive illocutionary acts.

Bald on Record

As presented in Table 1, bald on record is the most common strategy found in Biden's speech, with a total of 17 occurrences, comprising 43.59% of all the strategies. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), performing an act baldly without redress entails doing it in the most straightforward, clear, explicit, and concise way possible.

The strategy of bald on record is employed in the following example (the speech act is underlined).

(1) [10:58 → 11:37] (PRO-BR)

Context: *In the excerpt below, Biden asked his political opposition to give him a chance. Biden committed to work across the aisle on policies and to win over those who did not support him. He promised to be a President for all Americans, which includes everyone who supported and voted for him and everyone who did not.*

“To all those who did not support us, let me say this: Hear me out as we move forward. Take a measure of me and my heart, and if you still disagree, so be it. That's democracy. That's America. The right to

dissent peaceably within the guardrails of our republic is perhaps this nation's greatest strength. Yet, hear me clearly: Disagreement must not lead to disunion. And I pledge this to you: I will be a President for all Americans. All Americans.”

The type of commissive illocutionary act performed in the above utterance is a promise. A promise is used by speakers to gain their confidence and commitment to carry out their utterances in the future; a promise is something that must be fulfilled (Searle, 1969). In the above example, Biden talked to the supporters of his opponent. He realized that there were a lot of people who did not vote for him as much as people who did. Here, he promised that he would be president for all Americans, regardless of whom they voted.

The utterance above shows that the speaker straightforwardly presented his promise. Biden, as the speaker, promised to the audience that he would be a president for all Americans, both those who supported him and those who did not. He repeated the phrase “All Americans” to make it more clear about whom he will be president for. In the above example, Biden used a direct way of delivering his promise without neglecting any imposition. The possible reason for this is because, in that particular utterance, there seems to be a need for efficiency. Biden seemed to need his promise to be as efficient as possible so that the audience would understand without any possible ambiguity.

By using the bald-on-record strategy, a speaker can potentially get advantages, which is also the factor influencing Biden in using this strategy. The speaker can get credit for being honest, for showing that he trusts the hearer, and for being outspoken (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Other than that, by using this strategy, Biden can avoid the danger of getting misunderstood and being seen as a manipulator.

Positive Politeness

The strategy of positive politeness in performing commissive illocutionary acts was not commonly performed in Biden's inauguration speech. It is found 10 times out of 39 occurrences, comprising 25.64% of all utterances. The strategy is employed in performing promises.

Positive politeness, according to Brown and Levinson (1987), is focused on the positive face of the hearer or the positive self-image that the hearer asserts for him/herself. In order to decrease the face danger, the speaker employs this strategy to provide the idea that the hearer's desire is similarly intriguing to the speaker.

Within the case of Biden's speech, positive politeness is employed to save his positive face and not the hearer's. The strategy is used to avoid acts that may threaten his own desire to be appreciated, liked, or approved by at least some of the members of the society. The following is an example of the commissive illocutionary acts containing a positive politeness strategy in Biden's inaugural speech.

(02) [03:11 → 03:18] (PRO-PP)

Context: Biden referred to the raging pandemic that has killed hundreds of thousands of Americans and a shredding body politic: two weeks after a riot backed by Donald Trump stormed the Capitol, this cannot be defined as a peaceful transition of power as the winter of peril and possibility. The message that Biden sought to convey is there will be brighter days but there will be storms too. Biden promised brighter days quickly.

"We will press forward with speed and urgency, for we have much to do in this winter of peril and possibility."

The type of commissive illocutionary act performed in this utterance is a promise. Here, Biden talked about how he has so many things to do after the pandemic. In the speech, he mentioned that he would provide jobs and build safe schools, among the things he promised to do. In the context of this utterance, Biden expressed his intention to fulfill his promises soon after.

In this utterance, Biden as the speaker used a positive politeness strategy to deliver his mission for his presidential term. To avoid feeling like he is in a rush with his mission, Biden gave reasons why they should speed up. He reminded them that, in the middle of a raging pandemic and after what happened two weeks prior, they had so many things to do. In this case, Biden wants the audience to see the urge of his programs. By doing so, he can get his

actions approved by the audience as they see the urgency of why they should speed up.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the speaker's efforts in employing politeness are compatible with the concept of social distance as a fundamental motivational reason underlying politeness. To a certain point, communicative politeness grows as social distance increases and reduces as social distance decreases. However, this is not the case here in the Biden speech. The social distance between Biden, the President of America, and the audience, who are American people, is of considerable size. Examining the number of occurrences of this strategy, Biden employed positive politeness despite the social distance between him and the audience. In fact, he employed this strategy to minimize the social distance, marked by the pronoun "we", which he used frequently to include the hearer in his actions. Therefore, the fundamental motivational reason for employing politeness may vary depending on the context or situation in which the strategy occurs.

Pufahl's (1986) study points out that, when intending to carry out an act, speakers frequently express concern about a social relationship. This is reflected in the use of syntactic and lexical strategies to make commissives less intimidating. In the case of Biden's speech, it is apparent that Biden used positive politeness to minimize the social distance and, therefore, make his commissives less imposing.

Off-record

Off-record strategy is identified in 12 out of 39 occurrences in Biden's inaugural speech, making up 30.77% in total. Brown and Levinson (1987) demonstrated that when a speaker performs an act off-record, there is more than one unambiguously identifiable intention; hence, the speaker cannot be judged to have committed himself to a single goal. Linguistic realizations of off-record methods include metaphor and irony, rhetorical inquiries, understatements, tautologies, and all kinds of indications as to what a speaker intends or intends to say, but not openly so that the meaning is negotiable to some degree. It denotes that when the speaker employs this method, he can do it indirectly, leaving his utterance up to interpretation by the listener.

The payoffs of employing an off-record strategy include potentially getting credit for being non-coercive and running less risk of responsibility for the interpretations that potentially damage his face. The realizations of off-record strategy can be seen in the following examples.

Within the context of Biden's speech, the strategy was performed by delivering his promises in an indirect way with any kind of hints as to what he wanted to say. In this case, Biden did not deliver his political aims directly and used other words or phrases to deliver it. The following demonstrates the strategy of off-record found in Biden's inauguration speech.

(3) [04:05 → 04:09] (PRO-OR)

Context: Biden wanted to reassure everyone in America that he will do all it takes to secure racial justice. He will promote equitable opportunities for all races, not just the majority.

"The dream of justice for all will be deferred no longer."

The above example shows the use of an off-record strategy in performing a promise. Instead of saying, "I will secure racial justice" or "I will promote justice for all races", he used the sentence to show his intention to create justice between races. He implied that racism is one of the biggest social issues in America. Throughout the speech, he also spoke on how racism thrives. Biden indirectly communicated that it is the time to once and for all create justice between races.

The off-record strategy is highly context-dependent. Usually, additional information must be conveyed between the speaker and the hearer. They are used to convey something indirectly in order to maintain someone's feelings in the conversation, which suggests they want to keep their image or face.

CONCLUSION

This chapter presents the conclusion derived from the analysis. The current study aims to investigate politeness strategies of commissive illocutionary acts performed by Joseph R. Biden during his inauguration speech.

The data collection was facilitated by the video from the CNN YouTube channel and the official transcript from the White House official website. Furthermore, the data were classified based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) classification of politeness consisting of four politeness strategies. In sum, there are 39 occurrences of politeness strategies in the performance of commissive illocutionary acts. The most common politeness strategy is bald on record with 17 occurrences, followed by off-record with 12 occurrences. Other politeness strategies occurred less than the two strategies mentioned. Positive politeness occurred 17 times, while negative politeness did not occur at all. The number of bald-on-record strategies identified in Biden's commissive illocutionary acts covered in the present study confirms Pan's (1996) compelling argument that in a situation where the speaker is in a higher relative power than the hearer, the speaker tends to issue an act to a using the bald-on-record strategy, which is the most straightforward way of speaking without the use of politeness strategy or modality markers. This also confirms Brown and Levinson's (1987) and Watts' (2003) model, where the relative power between the speaker and the hearer is one of the social variables taken into account when performing politeness strategies.

On the strength of the preceding findings, it is possible to assert that politeness exists in everyday conversational usage, including the use of commissive illocutionary acts. Power, especially the one owned by Biden as the speaker, appears to have influenced his linguistic behavior. The number of occurrences of the bald-on record strategy confirms Alavidze's (2018) argument that most politicians often threaten their faces in public. The use of politeness strategies in their speeches is just the way to cope with the face-threatening acts. The present study also confirms that pragmatics is a discipline that has the potential to explore social issues.

However, despite the fact that the current study has succeeded in identifying politeness in Biden's speech and classifying them into their respective categories, this study is inadequate in some way. Due to the delimitation, the present study only explores politeness in an inauguration speech. Therefore, the number of utterances may not be enough to represent politeness strategies of commissive illocutionary acts. A more in-depth

examination of politeness strategies in other forms of political discourse, such as campaign speeches and presidential debates featuring a large number of commissive illocutionary acts, may be necessary to reveal more comprehensive findings that have failed to be noticed by the present study. In addition, the impact of employing politeness in performing commissive illocutionary acts, particularly in political discourse, would be a recommended topic for future research.

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