

THE USE OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES BY PRABOWO SUBIANTO IN NAJWA SHIHAB'S YOUTUBE INTERVIEW "PRESIDEN PRABOWO MENJAWAB"**Iksan Inayatulloh**

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Abstract: This study investigates the politeness strategies used by President Prabowo Subianto in a political interview with six senior Indonesian journalists. Using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, the study aims to identify the strategies used and the social factors influencing their use. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed to analyze President Prabowo's utterances from a publicly broadcast interview on the Najwa Shihab YouTube channel. The data were collected through observation and note-taking and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model. The findings show that all four politeness strategies were used, with Positive Politeness being the most frequent (28 occurrences), followed by Negative Politeness (21 occurrences). Bald-on-Record and Off Record strategies were used less frequently. Among the social factors, Social Distance had the strongest influence, followed by Rank of Imposition, while Relative Power had the least influence. The findings also indicate that journalists' questions influenced the choice of politeness strategies. Overall, politeness in political interviews involves managing authority, solidarity, accountability, and face during ongoing interaction and public scrutiny.

Keywords: political interview, political pragmatics, politeness strategies

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of digital media has changed political communication, including how political actors build credibility, gain public trust, and interact with citizens. Digital platforms are no longer only channels for delivering political messages; they also provide interactive spaces where political leaders can communicate directly with the public and manage their public image (Yule, 1996; Mey, 2001). YouTube, in particular, has become an important platform for political communication because it allows politicians to explain policies, respond to public concerns, and participate in interviews that can reach and remain accessible to large audiences. Therefore, political communication in digital environments requires political leaders to communicate effectively while maintaining interpersonal relationships, credibility, and public trust.

Political interviews are a distinctive form of political discourse because they are highly interactive. Unlike political speeches or official statements, politicians have less control over the direction of communication and must respond to journalists' questions while also addressing a wider public audience. This situation creates pragmatic challenges. Politicians need to provide clear and accountable answers, maintain their authority, build good relationships with journalists, and protect their public image. Since digital interviews can be repeatedly viewed and evaluated by the public, managing face becomes even more important. Political interviews therefore provide a useful context for examining how politeness works under institutional and public pressure.

These characteristics can be seen in the interview between President Prabowo Subianto and six senior Indonesian journalists, including Najwa Shihab, conducted on April 6, 2025, and broadcast on the Najwa Shihab YouTube channel. The interview discussed several sensitive political issues, including the Free Nutritious Meal Program, anti-corruption efforts, economic policies, defense, and legislative reforms. As the head of state, Prabowo's responses may have important political and social consequences. His linguistic choices therefore serve not only to provide information but also to maintain institutional legitimacy, manage relationships with journalists, and construct his public image.

From a pragmatic perspective, politeness refers to the ways speakers manage interpersonal relationships and achieve communicative goals in context (Yule, 1996; Mey, 2001). Pragmatics examines how meaning is constructed and interpreted in particular contexts rather than through linguistic forms alone (Yule, 1996; Mey, 2001). Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory is one of the major frameworks for explaining how speakers manage their own face and that of others. The theory identifies four main strategies: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record politeness. These strategies are influenced by factors such as social distance, relative power, and rank of imposition.

These factors are particularly relevant to political interviews, where politicians need to balance authority, solidarity, and face management. However, recent politeness studies also view politeness as an interactional and social practice rather than simply a set of fixed strategies. Watts (2003) argues that politeness depends on participants' evaluations of appropriate behavior in a particular context. Similarly, Locher and Watts (2005) describe politeness as relational work through which speakers continuously negotiate social relationships. This perspective is useful for political interviews because institutional roles, interpersonal relationships, and communicative goals operate at the same time.

Previous studies have shown that Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory can be applied to various forms of public communication. In political contexts, Asmara and Kusumaningrum (2020) found that President Joko Widodo used positive politeness in diplomatic speeches to present an approachable and persuasive leadership style. Azizah (2024) also found that interviewers and interviewees used various politeness strategies to maintain interaction and political credibility during a YouTube interview with Ridwan Kamil.

Similar findings have been reported in other interview contexts. Arianti and Yutika (2022) found that an interviewer's politeness strategies varied according to the interviewee's gender. Wardhani (2023), Rosemary (2024), and Bintangtrichahya (2023) found that positive politeness was common in podcast, celebrity, and cross-cultural interviews. These studies show that politeness strategies help speakers reduce social distance, build solidarity, and maintain audience engagement.

However, previous studies mainly focus on identifying and classifying politeness strategies or measuring their frequency. Less attention has been given to why speakers choose particular strategies and how interactional factors influence these choices. Political interviews, in particular, have received limited attention as interactions shaped by journalists' questions, institutional roles, and the public visibility of digital media.

Building on this gap, the present study focuses on the contextual and interactional functions of politeness strategies rather than only their classification. It uses Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework to examine how President Prabowo uses politeness to negotiate authority, maintain solidarity, manage face, and sustain public legitimacy. The study also considers journalists' questions as interactional triggers that help explain why particular strategies are selected. Thus, the interview is analyzed as a situated institutional interaction

rather than as a collection of isolated utterances.

Theoretically, this study contributes to political pragmatics by extending the application of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory to digitally mediated political interviews. It highlights that politeness strategies function not only to mitigate face-threatening acts but also as context-dependent resources for negotiating authority, building solidarity, maintaining public legitimacy, and responding to journalistic questioning.

Accordingly, this study aims to identify the politeness strategies used by President Prabowo Subianto in a political interview published on YouTube and analyze the social factors influencing their selection based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) concepts of social distance, relative power, and rank of imposition. It also examines how these strategies function in institutional political interaction to negotiate authority, maintain solidarity, manage face, and sustain public credibility.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to investigate the use of politeness strategies in a naturally occurring political interview. This qualitative approach is particularly appropriate for language research because it enables researchers to interpret linguistic phenomena contextually by examining naturally occurring discourse rather than isolating language from its communicative setting (Mahsun, 2017). Guided by Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, the analysis focuses not only on identifying the politeness strategies and sub-strategies employed by President Prabowo Subianto but also on explaining the contextual factors underlying their selection. Specifically, the analysis examines how social distance, relative power, and rank of imposition influence the selection of politeness strategies within institutional political interaction. Consistent with the objectives, the analysis extends beyond descriptive categorization by interpreting how politeness functions as a communicative resource for negotiating authority, maintaining solidarity, managing face, and responding to interactional pressures during a digitally mediated political interview.

The data were obtained from a political interview featuring President Prabowo Subianto and six senior Indonesian journalists, broadcast on the Najwa Shihab YouTube channel on April 6, 2025. The interview has a duration of approximately three hours and twenty-six minutes and represents a naturally occurring institutional interaction in which the President responds to questions concerning major governmental policies and politically sensitive issues. The unit of analysis comprises President Prabowo Subianto's verbal utterances throughout the interview. However, because political interviews are inherently dialogic, each utterance was interpreted in relation to the journalists' preceding questions and the evolving interactional context. Accordingly, journalists' contributions were not analyzed as independent units of analysis but were treated as essential interactional triggers that contextualize and motivate the President's selection of particular politeness strategies.

Data were collected through non-participant observation and systematic note-taking. Since the interaction had already occurred and was publicly available through YouTube, the researcher observed the interview without participating in the communicative event, thereby preserving the authenticity of the discourse. The interview was viewed repeatedly to ensure the accuracy of the transcription before President Prabowo Subianto's utterances were transcribed and compiled into a corpus for analysis. Utterances containing realizations of politeness strategies were subsequently identified and extracted. The extracted data were then organized into analytical tables containing the conversational context, the relevant utterance, the identified politeness strategy and sub-strategy based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, and the contextual social factors influencing their selection. This systematic

organization facilitated comparison across interactional situations and supported consistent pragmatic interpretation.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During the data reduction stage, the interview transcript was examined to identify utterances relevant to the research objectives, while utterances unrelated to politeness strategies were excluded. The selected utterances were then coded according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) classification of politeness strategies and sub-strategies. In the data display stage, the coded data were systematically organized to facilitate comparison across different interactional contexts and to identify recurring pragmatic patterns. Finally, conclusions were drawn through continuous interpretation and verification of the identified patterns. Rather than relying solely on the frequency of occurrence, the analysis focused on explaining why particular politeness strategies were selected under specific interactional conditions, how journalists' questions influenced those linguistic choices, and how the identified strategies functioned to negotiate institutional authority, maintain interpersonal solidarity, manage face, and preserve public legitimacy within digitally mediated political communication. Throughout the analytical process, emerging interpretations were continuously verified against the original transcript to ensure that the findings remained consistent with the interactional context in which the utterances were produced.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Politeness Strategies and Sub-strategies Employed by President Prabowo Subianto

This section presents the findings concerning the politeness strategies employed by President Prabowo Subianto during his interview with six senior Indonesian journalists. Based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, the identified utterances were classified into four major categories: Bald on Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, and Off Record, together with their respective sub-strategies. A total of 52 instances of politeness strategies were identified throughout the interview. The distribution of the identified strategies is presented in Table 1.

Tabel 1. Types and Sub-strategies of Politeness Strategies Employed by President Prabowo Subianto

No	Types Politeness Strategy	Sub Types	Frequency	Total
1	Bald on record	Case that does not minimize the threat to face	1	1
2	Positive Politeness	Assert Common Ground	12	28
		Include both speaker and hearer in the activity	7	
		Seek Agreement	3	
		Promise / offer	3	
		Be Optimistic	2	
		Use-in-group identity marker	1	21
3	Negative Politeness	Hedge	19	
		Give Deference	1	
		Impersonalize speaker and hearer	1	2
4	Off record	Overstate	1	

Use Rhetorical Question	1
Total	52

As presented in Table 1, Positive Politeness emerged as the most frequently employed strategy, accounting for 28 of the 52 identified instances. Within this category, Assert Common Ground was the most dominant sub-strategy (12 occurrences), followed by Include Both Speaker and Hearer in the Activity (7 occurrences), Seek Agreement (3 occurrences), Promise (3 occurrences), Be Optimistic (2 occurrences), and Use In-group Identity Markers (1 occurrence). The predominance of Positive Politeness indicates that Prabowo consistently sought to establish solidarity and reduce interpersonal distance while responding to journalists' questions, despite his higher institutional status as President.

Negative Politeness was the second most frequently employed strategy, with 21 occurrences. The Hedge sub-strategy dominated this category, appearing 19 times, whereas Give Deference and Impersonalize each occurred once. The frequent use of hedging suggests that Prabowo often moderated the force of his responses when addressing politically sensitive issues, thereby mitigating the potential face threat associated with direct assertions in a highly visible public setting.

In contrast, Off Record strategies appeared only twice, consisting of one instance of Overstate and one instance of Use Rhetorical Question, while Bald on Record occurred only once in the form of a direct statement without any attempt to minimize face threat. The limited occurrence of these strategies suggests that direct or highly indirect expressions were relatively uncommon throughout the interview. Overall, the distribution demonstrates a clear tendency toward strategies that facilitate interpersonal cooperation rather than confrontation. Rather than relying primarily on direct expressions of institutional authority, Prabowo predominantly employed Positive and Negative Politeness strategies, indicating a preference for balancing authority with interpersonal rapport within the interactional setting of a digitally mediated political interview.

Bald on Record Politeness

Among the four politeness strategies identified in this study, Bald on Record occurred least frequently, appearing only once. The limited use of this strategy indicates that direct and unmitigated expressions were generally avoided throughout the interview. The single occurrence appeared when President Prabowo responded to a journalist's challenge regarding the government's performance and the implementation of bureaucratic reform.

Excerpt 1: "*Anda bisa cek sekarang.*" (You can check it now.)

This utterance was produced at 1:50:48 in response to Sutta Dharmasaputra's question concerning the government's commitment to accelerating bureaucratic reform and addressing structural problems during the first 150 days of the administration. Rather than merely asserting that progress had been achieved, Prabowo directly invited the journalist to verify the available evidence, thereby reinforcing the transparency and accountability of his administration.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), Bald-on-Record strategies are characterized by direct expressions that do not attempt to minimize potential face threats. In this case, the utterance functions as a direct command without mitigation or hedging. However, the communicative function of the strategy extends beyond its structural classification. Rather than threatening the journalist's face, the directness primarily serves to reinforce the

credibility of Prabowo's response by demonstrating confidence in the verifiability of the government's performance. The command therefore functions less as an exercise of interpersonal dominance than as an invitation to evaluate publicly available evidence.

The interactional context also plays an important role in explaining the selection of this strategy. The journalist's question explicitly challenged the effectiveness of governmental reform, creating an interactional environment that required an immediate and unequivocal response. Under these circumstances, a highly mitigated answer could have weakened the persuasive force of Prabowo's argument or suggested uncertainty regarding the government's achievements. Consequently, the Bald-on-Record strategy enabled him to project institutional confidence while addressing a potentially face-threatening question directly.

This finding supports Brown and Levinson's (1987) argument that direct strategies are more likely to occur when speakers possess greater institutional authority and perceive little risk in delivering an unmitigated response. Nevertheless, the present study extends this explanation by demonstrating that the strategy cannot be interpreted solely through differences in social power. Instead, its selection was simultaneously shaped by the interactional pressure generated through journalists' questioning. In other words, the directness of the response emerged not merely because Prabowo occupied the highest political office, but because the conversational context demanded an explicit demonstration of accountability and credibility.

The finding also partially supports Anthony (2025), who reported that President Duterte employed Bald-on-Record strategies to eliminate ambiguity through direct commands and instructions. However, the present study identifies a different pragmatic function. While Anthony's findings emphasize directive authority, Prabowo's directness primarily functions as an evidential strategy that reinforces governmental transparency and public accountability. This difference suggests that identical politeness strategies may perform different institutional functions depending on the interactional context in which they are produced.

Overall, the limited occurrence of Bald-on-Record strategies indicates that Prabowo reserved direct communication for situations in which factual verification and institutional credibility became more important than mitigating interpersonal face threats. This finding further supports the interaction-oriented perspective adopted in the present study, demonstrating that politeness strategies in political interviews are shaped not only by institutional authority but also by the communicative demands created through journalists' questions and the broader context of digitally mediated political communication.

Positive Politeness

Positive Politeness emerged as the most frequently employed strategy in the interview, occurring 28 times. The identified sub-strategies comprised Assert Common Ground (12 occurrences), Include Both Speaker and Hearer in the Activity (7 occurrences), Seek Agreement (3 occurrences), Promise (3 occurrences), Be Optimistic (2 occurrences), and Use In-group Identity Markers (1 occurrence). The predominance of Positive Politeness indicates that Prabowo consistently sought to reduce interpersonal distance and construct solidarity while responding to journalists' questions on politically significant issues.

Excerpt 2: "*Kita harus bikin efisien semua ladang, semua kawasan sawah dan lahan-lahan pertanian yang ada kita harus efisienkan. Kita harus memudahkan para petani kita untuk berproduksi. Kita harus membuat petani makmur.*" (We must make all agricultural fields and farming areas more efficient. We must make it easier for our farmers to produce. We must

ensure that farmers prosper.)

This utterance was produced at 06:15, when Prabowo was explaining the priorities and achievements of his administration during its first 150 days in office. In responding to questions concerning the government's economic agenda, he emphasized that national economic development should begin with strengthening food security and improving agricultural productivity. Rather than presenting these objectives as solely governmental responsibilities, Prabowo repeatedly employed the inclusive expression *kita harus* (we must), inviting both the interviewer and the broader public to perceive these goals as shared national responsibilities.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the Include Both Speaker and Hearer in the Activity sub-strategy enables speakers to minimize interpersonal distance by presenting actions and responsibilities as jointly shared. In this instance, the repeated use of *kita harus* does more than satisfy the structural characteristics of Positive Politeness. Pragmatically, the inclusive pronoun constructs collective commitment by positioning governmental policies as common objectives rather than unilateral political decisions. Consequently, Prabowo reduces the hierarchical distance typically associated with presidential discourse and projects himself as a collaborative leader working alongside the public rather than acting above them.

The interactional context further explains the selection of this strategy. The journalist's question required Prabowo to account for his administration's performance during its first months in office. Rather than primarily emphasizing his institutional authority, he reframed the discussion by presenting economic development as a collective endeavor that requires cooperation among the government, farmers, and society. Through this interactional choice, Positive Politeness functions not merely to maintain harmonious interpersonal relations but also to transform potentially evaluative questioning into an opportunity to reinforce solidarity and shared responsibility.

This finding supports Brown and Levinson's (1987) proposition that Positive Politeness serves to strengthen social solidarity by emphasizing common goals and shared identity. However, the findings of the present study suggest that, within institutional political interviews, Positive Politeness may perform broader communicative functions beyond strengthening social solidarity. Rather than functioning solely to satisfy the hearer's positive face, the inclusive expression simultaneously enables political leaders to negotiate institutional authority while maintaining public engagement under journalistic scrutiny. The strategy therefore operates as a mechanism for balancing leadership with collaboration in a highly visible communicative setting. This interpretation is consistent with the findings of Njuki and Ireri (2021), who reported that members of Kenya's National Assembly employed Positive and Negative Politeness strategies to minimize face-threatening acts while maintaining effective interaction in institutional settings. Although conducted in different political contexts, both studies indicate that Positive Politeness facilitates cooperative interaction while enabling political actors to achieve institutional communication goals.

The present finding is also consistent with Asmara and Kusumaningrum (2020), who found that President Joko Widodo frequently employed inclusive expressions such as *harus kita selesaikan* (we must solve this) to encourage audience involvement despite speaking in a predominantly one-way communicative setting. Nevertheless, the present study identifies a distinct interactional function. Unlike political speeches, where audience participation remains largely symbolic, the interview format requires politicians to respond directly to

journalists' questions while simultaneously addressing a wider public audience. Consequently, the inclusive expression *kita harus* functions not only to build solidarity but also to negotiate accountability and reinforce collective commitment within an interactional environment characterized by continuous public evaluation.

Overall, the predominance of Positive Politeness throughout the interview demonstrates that Prabowo consistently relied on inclusive language to negotiate institutional authority without creating interpersonal distance. This finding reinforces the interaction-oriented perspective advanced in the present study by showing that Positive Politeness in political interviews functions not merely as a strategy for maintaining the hearer's positive face, but as a context-dependent communicative resource through which political leaders construct solidarity, respond strategically to journalists' questioning, and sustain public legitimacy within digitally mediated political communication.

Negative Politeness

Negative Politeness was the second most frequently employed strategy, occurring 21 times throughout the interview. The identified sub-strategies comprised Hedge (19 occurrences), Give Deference (1 occurrence), and Impersonalize (1 occurrence). The predominance of hedging indicates that Prabowo consistently moderated the certainty of his statements when responding to politically sensitive issues, particularly those involving future governmental targets, policy implementation, and public expectations.

Excerpt 3: "*Saya perkiraan mungkin Oktober, November sudah bisa hampir mencapai 100% sasaran.*" (I estimate that perhaps by October or November we will have achieved nearly 100% of the target.)

This utterance was produced at 13:47, when Prabowo explained the progress of his administration's Free Nutritious Meal Program during the first 150 days of government. Responding to questions concerning the implementation and expected achievement of the program, he estimated that the target would be almost fully realized by October or November. Rather than presenting the projection as an absolute certainty, he introduced the expressions *saya perkiraan* (I estimate) and *mungkin* (perhaps), explicitly signaling that the statement represented a carefully qualified prediction rather than a definitive commitment.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), Hedge is a Negative Politeness strategy through which speakers reduce the force of their assertions by expressing uncertainty or limiting their degree of commitment. In this instance, the combined use of *saya perkiraan* and *mungkin* softens the certainty of the projected timeline while allowing room for future developments that may affect policy implementation. Rather than obligating the audience to accept the prediction as an unquestionable fact, the utterance preserves the hearers' freedom to evaluate the statement independently, thereby minimizing the potential face threat associated with making highly confident public claims.

The interactional context is particularly important in explaining the selection of this strategy. The journalist's question required Prabowo to account for the government's progress while simultaneously projecting future policy outcomes. Such questions place political leaders in a communicative dilemma: providing overly confident predictions risks undermining credibility if the targets are not achieved, whereas excessive uncertainty may create impressions of weak leadership. Under these circumstances, hedging functions as a pragmatic resource that balances institutional confidence with communicative caution. By

presenting the projected timeline as an informed estimate rather than a categorical promise, Prabowo demonstrates accountability while acknowledging the inherent uncertainty surrounding large-scale public policy implementation.

This finding supports Brown and Levinson's (1987) argument that Negative Politeness enables speakers to minimize imposition and reduce potential face threats through indirectness and qualification. However, the present study extends this explanation by demonstrating that, within institutional political interviews, hedging serves broader communicative purposes than interpersonal politeness alone. Rather than merely protecting the hearer's negative face, hedging also enables political leaders to manage public expectations, preserve institutional credibility, and respond strategically to journalistic scrutiny in situations where policy outcomes remain contingent upon future developments. These findings suggest that hedging functions not only as a strategy for protecting face but also as a broader communicative resource that enables political leaders to navigate institutional responsibilities and public expectations in high-stakes interactions. This interpretation is consistent with Deng et al. (2024), who found that hedging strategies in political press conferences are employed to address sensitive and uncertain issues, mitigate potential criticism, maintain credibility, soften the tone of communication, and enhance politeness. Similarly, Yafi and Maris (2025) reported that politeness strategies in political interviews function not merely as linguistic choices but also as strategic resources for image management, institutional power negotiation, and facework when responding to critical questions. Taken together, these studies reinforce the present finding that political interviews require speakers to balance interpersonal politeness with broader institutional and communicative objectives.

The present finding is also consistent with Suyono and Andriyanti (2021), who found that speakers employed hedging expressions such as *maybe* and *I think* to soften assertions and avoid threatening the interlocutor's face during television interviews. Nevertheless, the present study identifies a distinct institutional function. Unlike everyday conversational interaction, the political interview examined here involves governmental accountability under continuous public observation. Consequently, Prabowo's use of hedging functions not only mitigates interpersonal face threats but also manages political risk by preventing future projections from being interpreted as unconditional promises within a digitally mediated public sphere.

Overall, the predominance of Negative Politeness demonstrates that Prabowo consistently relied on cautious linguistic choices when addressing issues involving uncertainty, policy implementation, and future governmental performance. This finding reinforces the interaction-oriented perspective advanced in the present study by showing that Negative Politeness in political interviews functions not merely as a strategy for protecting the hearer's negative face, but as a context-dependent communicative resource through which political leaders negotiate accountability, manage public expectations, preserve institutional credibility, and respond strategically to journalists' questioning within digitally mediated political communication.

Off Record Politeness

Off Record was the least frequently employed indirect politeness strategy, occurring only twice throughout the interview. The identified sub-strategies comprised Overstate (1

occurrence) and Use Rhetorical Question (1 occurrence). The limited occurrence of Off Record suggests that Prabowo generally preferred explicit communication while resorting to indirectness only when discussing issues requiring broader contextual interpretation rather than direct evaluation.

Excerpt 4: "*Apalagi dengan program tarif yang dicanangkan oleh Presiden Trump dari Amerika Serikat yang menggoncangkan seluruh dunia.*" (Moreover, with the tariff policy introduced by President Trump of the United States that shook the entire world.)

This utterance was produced at 23:56, when Prabowo was explaining the achievements of his administration during its first 150 days while addressing the broader international economic situation. After outlining several domestic accomplishments, he shifted the discussion toward external challenges by referring to the tariff policy introduced by President Donald Trump. Rather than explicitly describing the policy's specific economic consequences for Indonesia, Prabowo characterized the policy as one that *menggoncangkan seluruh dunia* (shook the entire world), emphasizing its global significance through an intentionally exaggerated expression.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), overstatement is an Off Record strategy in which speakers intentionally exaggerate a statement to communicate an implied meaning rather than expressing it explicitly. In this instance, the expression *menggoncangkan seluruh dunia* functions as a hyperbolic characterization rather than a literal description of the policy's effects. Instead of explicitly evaluating the policy or assigning responsibility for its consequences, Prabowo invites the audience to infer the seriousness of the global economic situation. The indirectness of the utterance therefore reduces the need to present an explicit political judgment while still communicating the magnitude of the international challenges confronting Indonesia.

The interactional context further explains the selection of this strategy. The discussion had shifted from evaluating domestic governmental performance to explaining external factors influencing Indonesia's economic conditions. Under these circumstances, directly criticizing the policy of another country's leader could have introduced unnecessary diplomatic implications within a publicly broadcast political interview. By employing overstatement instead of an explicit evaluative statement, Prabowo contextualized Indonesia's economic challenges without directly attributing blame or creating diplomatic confrontation. Consequently, the Off Record strategy enabled him to broaden the discussion from domestic accountability to global economic uncertainty while maintaining diplomatic caution. This finding supports Brown and Levinson's (1987) argument that Off Record strategies enable speakers to communicate sensitive meanings indirectly, allowing hearers to infer the intended interpretation without imposing a single explicit conclusion. However, the present study extends this explanation by demonstrating that, within institutional political interviews, indirectness also serves broader strategic purposes. Rather than functioning solely to mitigate face-threatening acts, Off Record expressions enable political leaders to discuss politically sensitive international issues while preserving diplomatic neutrality and institutional credibility before multiple public audiences.

The present finding is also consistent with Silitonga and Pasaribu (2021), who found that speakers employed overstatement through exaggerated expressions to convey meanings indirectly rather than literally. Nevertheless, the present study identifies a different pragmatic

function. Whereas the previous study primarily examined overstatement as a rhetorical device in political communication, the present analysis demonstrates that, within a political interview, overstatement functions as a strategic resource for managing international political sensitivity under journalistic scrutiny. The strategy therefore serves not only rhetorical purposes but also institutional ones by allowing political leaders to acknowledge global challenges without making direct diplomatic evaluations.

Overall, the limited occurrence of Off Record strategies indicates that Prabowo relied on indirectness selectively, particularly when discussing issues with potential international or diplomatic implications. This finding further reinforces the interaction-oriented perspective advanced in the present study by demonstrating that Off Record strategies in political interviews function not merely as mechanisms for indirect communication, but as context-dependent communicative resources through which political leaders manage diplomatic sensitivity, preserve institutional credibility, and respond strategically to journalists' questions within digitally mediated political communication.

Social Factors Influencing the Selection of Politeness Strategies

This study also examines the social factors underlying the selection of politeness strategies employed by President Prabowo Subianto. Following Brown and Levinson (1987), the identified strategies were analyzed according to three contextual variables: social distance, relative power, and rank of imposition. The distribution of these social factors is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Social Factors Influencing the Selection of Politeness Strategies

No	Social Factors	Types Politeness Strategy	Sub Types	Frequency	Total
1	Social Distance	Positive Politeness	Use in-group identity markers	1	26
			Seek agreement	3	
			Assert common ground	12	
			Be optimistic	2	
			Include both S and H in the Activity	7	
		Negative Politeness	Give Deference	1	
2	Power	Bald on Record	Cases of nonminimization of the facial threat	1	4
		Positive Politeness	Promise	3	
3	Rank of Imposition	Negative Politeness	Hedge	19	22
			Impersonalize	1	
		Off record	Overstate	1	
Total					52

As shown in Table 2, social distance was the most influential contextual factor,

accounting for 26 of the identified instances. This category primarily consisted of Positive Politeness strategies, particularly Assert Common Ground, Include Both Speaker and Hearer in the Activity, and Seek Agreement. These findings indicate that Prabowo frequently attempted to reduce interpersonal distance by emphasizing shared understanding and cooperative interaction with journalists despite the institutional asymmetry between the participants. One instance of Give Deference further reflects the use of respect as a strategy for maintaining harmonious interaction.

The second factor, rank of imposition, accounted for 22 instances and was dominated by the Negative Politeness sub-strategy Hedge. Additional occurrences of Impersonalize, Overstate, and Use Rhetorical Question also appeared within this category. The predominance of these strategies suggests that Prabowo exercised greater linguistic caution when responding to questions involving politically sensitive or potentially face-threatening issues. Rather than presenting categorical or unequivocal assertions, he frequently moderated his responses to minimize the interpersonal risks associated with public political communication.

By comparison, relative power was identified in only four instances: one occurrence of Bald-on-Record and three occurrences of the Positive Politeness sub-strategy, Promise. Although Prabowo occupied the highest institutional position in the interaction, these findings indicate that his linguistic choices were shaped less by hierarchical authority than by the interactional demands of the interview. Instead of relying primarily on direct expressions of power, he more frequently employed strategies that balanced institutional authority with solidarity and accountability.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the selection of politeness strategies was shaped more strongly by the interactional dynamics of the interview than by institutional status alone. Throughout the interview, Prabowo's responses were consistently oriented toward maintaining cooperative interaction, managing face, and responding strategically to the communicative demands created by journalists' questioning within a publicly accessible digital media environment.

Social Distance

Social Distance was the most influential social factor underlying the selection of politeness strategies, accounting for 26 of the identified instances. This factor was predominantly realized through Positive Politeness, particularly the sub-strategies Assert Common Ground (12 occurrences), Include Both Speaker and Hearer in the Activity (7 occurrences), Seek Agreement (3 occurrences), Be Optimistic (2 occurrences), and Use In-group Identity Markers (1 occurrence). Only one instance of Negative Politeness, realized through the Give Deference sub-strategy, was identified under this social factor. The predominance of Social Distance suggests that Prabowo consistently sought to reduce interpersonal distance while maintaining professional respect toward the journalists throughout the interview.

Excerpt 5: *"Terima kasih, Mbak Valerina dan semua rekan-rekan jurnalis senior yang saya hormati. Mas Vito, Mbak Uni, Pak Lalu, Mbak Nana, Pak Sutta, kemudian Mbak Reno. Terima kasih kedatangannya di sini."* (Thank you, Ms. Valerina and all respected senior journalists. Mas Vito, Mbak Uni, Pak Lalu, Mbak Nana, Pak Sutta, and Mbak Reno. Thank you for coming here.)

This utterance was produced at 01:17, during the opening of the interview held at

Hambalang. Before discussing the first 150 days of his administration, Prabowo welcomed the participating journalists by mentioning each of their names individually while expressing appreciation for their attendance. The opening occurred in a formal institutional setting in which Prabowo acted as the interviewee and host, whereas the journalists served as interviewers representing the public.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), social distance refers to the degree of familiarity or solidarity between interlocutors, influencing speakers' selection of politeness strategies. In this instance, although the participants shared the same communicative event, their relationship remained institutional rather than personal. Prabowo therefore employed the Negative Politeness sub-strategy Give Deference by addressing the journalists with respectful honorifics such as *Mbak*, *Mas*, and *Pak*, while collectively referring to them as *rekan-rekan jurnalis senior yang saya hormati* (respected senior journalists). These expressions acknowledge the journalists' professional status and demonstrate respect while preserving the institutional boundaries between interviewer and interviewee.

The interactional context further explains the selection of this strategy. As the interview had not yet entered substantive political discussion, the opening sequence functioned as an opportunity to establish a cooperative communicative atmosphere before potentially challenging questions were introduced. Rather than emphasizing his higher institutional position as President, Prabowo recognized the journalists as legitimate interlocutors whose professional role deserved respect. This interactional choice contributed to creating a respectful environment that facilitated subsequent political discussion while reducing the potential adversarial nature of the interview. This finding supports Brown and Levinson's (1987) proposition that deference functions as a strategy for acknowledging social relationships and respecting the interlocutor's autonomy.

However, the present study demonstrates that, within institutional political interviews, the management of social distance serves broader communicative purposes than interpersonal politeness alone. Expressions of deference not only acknowledge professional roles but also contribute to constructing an atmosphere of mutual respect that enhances the speaker's public credibility before a wider audience observing the interaction through digital media. Overall, the predominance of Social Distance as the principal contextual factor indicates that Prabowo consistently managed interpersonal relationships by balancing institutional authority with professional respect. This finding reinforces the interaction-oriented perspective advanced in the present study by demonstrating that the selection of politeness strategies is shaped not only by speakers' institutional

status but also by the relational dynamics established through interaction with journalists within a digitally mediated political interview.

Power

Power was the least influential social factor, accounting for only four of the identified instances. This factor was realized through one occurrence of Bald on Record and three occurrences of the Positive Politeness sub-strategy Promise. The limited influence of Power suggests that, although Prabowo occupied the highest institutional position in the interaction, he rarely relied on hierarchical authority alone when responding to journalists' questions. Instead, he more frequently employed politeness strategies that emphasized cooperation, accountability, and shared responsibility.

Excerpt 6: *"Saya canangkan bahwa tahun ini kita akan buka 200 sekolah rakyat berasrama*

(boarding school) *dari SD sampai SMA khusus untuk golongan ekonomi yang paling bawah.*"
(I have initiated a program so that this year we will establish 200 boarding public schools, from elementary to senior high school, specifically for the lowest economic groups.)

This utterance was produced at 1:23:48, in response to Lalu Mara's question regarding the government's strategy for ensuring equitable access to quality education for economically disadvantaged communities. Rather than merely describing general policy intentions, Prabowo announced a concrete governmental commitment to establish 200 boarding schools for underprivileged students. The statement therefore presented a specific future-oriented policy initiative supported by his institutional authority as President.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), power refers to the degree of authority one participant possesses over another, influencing the level of politeness considered appropriate in interaction. In this instance, Prabowo employed the Positive Politeness sub-strategy Promise through the expression *saya canangkan* (I have initiated), followed by a concrete governmental commitment. Although the utterance reflects his authority to formulate and implement national policy, the promise functions not as an assertion of dominance but as an assurance directed toward addressing public concerns. By committing his administration to a measurable policy objective, Prabowo utilizes institutional authority to strengthen public confidence rather than to reinforce hierarchical distance.

The interactional context further explains the selection of this strategy. The journalist's question explicitly challenged the government's responsibility to reduce educational inequality, requiring Prabowo to demonstrate not only awareness of the problem but also a credible policy response. Under these circumstances, merely expressing concern would have been insufficient. Instead, the promise enabled him to transform institutional authority into political accountability by providing a concrete commitment that could subsequently be evaluated by the public. Consequently, institutional power is realized through political responsibility rather than interpersonal domination.

This finding supports Brown and Levinson's (1987) proposition that power affects speakers' selection of politeness strategies. However, the present study further demonstrates that, within institutional political interviews, power does not necessarily lead to more direct or authoritative communication. Rather, institutional authority may be strategically expressed through commitments that reassure the public while maintaining cooperative interaction with journalists. The findings therefore suggest that power in political interviews operates less as a mechanism for controlling interaction than as a communicative resource for demonstrating governmental responsibility under public scrutiny.

Overall, the relatively low frequency of Power indicates that Prabowo did not primarily depend on his presidential authority when responding to journalists' questions. Instead, institutional authority was generally exercised through communicative strategies that emphasized accountability and commitment rather than hierarchical dominance. This finding further reinforces the interaction-oriented perspective advanced in the present study by demonstrating that the influence of power in political interviews is shaped not only by institutional status but also by the communicative demands created through journalists' questioning within a digitally mediated political interview.

Rank of Imposition was the second most influential social factor, accounting for 22 of the identified instances. This factor was predominantly realized through the Negative Politeness strategy, particularly the Hedge sub-strategy (19 occurrences), followed by Impersonalize (1 occurrence). In addition, two instances of Off Record were identified, namely Overstate (1 occurrence) and Use Rhetorical Question (1 occurrence). The predominance of Rank of Imposition indicates that Prabowo consistently adopted more cautious and indirect linguistic strategies when responding to questions involving politically sensitive issues, policy decisions, and matters with potentially significant public consequences.

Excerpt 7: "*Kalau dia sudah diberi yang cukup, kenapa harus ditambah?*" (If they have already been given sufficient authority, why should it be increased?)

This utterance was produced at 1:32:22, in response to Najwa Shihab's question regarding whether the Indonesian National Police should be granted additional authority. Rather than directly rejecting the proposal, Prabowo responded by asking a rhetorical question that encouraged listeners to consider the issue from the perspective of necessity. Instead of explicitly stating that additional authority was unnecessary, he allowed the implied conclusion to emerge through the structure of the question itself.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), Use Rhetorical Question is an Off Record strategy through which speakers communicate an intended meaning indirectly, leaving the hearer to infer the conclusion without expressing it explicitly. In this instance, the question *kenapa harus ditambah?* (why should it be increased?) does not genuinely request information. Instead, it implicitly conveys Prabowo's position that expanding police authority would be unnecessary if existing authority is already adequate. By presenting his evaluation indirectly, the utterance

minimizes the imposition associated with openly rejecting an alternative viewpoint while allowing the audience to reach the intended interpretation independently.

The interactional context further explains the selection of this strategy. The journalist's question concerned the distribution of governmental authority within a major state institution, making the topic politically sensitive and potentially controversial. A direct rejection could easily be interpreted as an explicit political judgment with broader institutional implications. By responding through a rhetorical question, Prabowo reframed the discussion around the principle of necessity rather than engaging in direct disagreement. Consequently, the Off Record strategy enabled him to communicate a clear policy position while reducing the interpersonal and political risks associated with making categorical public statements.

This finding supports Brown and Levinson's (1987) proposition that Off Record strategies enable speakers to express sensitive meanings indirectly, thereby reducing the potential face threat created by explicit disagreement. However, the present study extends this explanation by demonstrating that, within institutional political interviews, the selection of indirect strategies is influenced not only by interpersonal politeness but also by the degree of imposition associated with the issue under discussion. Questions involving institutional authority, governmental policy, and public accountability encourage political leaders to employ indirect linguistic resources that preserve communicative flexibility while maintaining institutional credibility before multiple audiences.

The present finding also complements previous research on political politeness by

showing that rhetorical questions perform broader communicative functions within interview settings. Unlike political speeches, where politicians primarily present predetermined messages, political interviews require immediate responses to challenging questions posed by journalists. Consequently, rhetorical questions function not merely as stylistic devices but as strategic interactional resources through which political leaders negotiate disagreement, manage politically sensitive topics, and maintain legitimacy under continuous public scrutiny.

Overall, the prominence of Rank of Imposition demonstrates that the perceived sensitivity of an issue substantially influences the selection of politeness strategies. Rather than responding with direct assertions when confronted with potentially controversial questions, Prabowo frequently relied on indirect and mitigated expressions that balanced political accountability with communicative caution. This finding further reinforces the interaction-oriented perspective advanced in the present study by demonstrating that politeness strategies in political interviews are shaped not only by institutional authority but also by the degree of imposition created through journalists' questioning and the broader demands of digitally mediated political communication.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the politeness strategies used by President Prabowo Subianto in a political interview with six senior Indonesian journalists using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. The findings show that all four politeness strategies were used. Positive Politeness was the most frequent, followed by Negative Politeness, while Bald-on-Record and Off-Record were used less frequently. Among the contextual factors, Social Distance had the strongest influence, followed by Rank of Imposition, while Relative Power had the least influence. These findings show that Prabowo balanced institutional authority with interpersonal rapport when responding to political issues under public scrutiny. This result is consistent with Rajik (2025), who found that political leaders use different politeness strategies depending on the communicative context.

The findings also show that politeness strategies were influenced by the interactional dynamics of the interview. They functioned not only to manage face but also to negotiate authority, maintain solidarity, manage accountability, and respond to journalists' questions. Positive Politeness was mainly used to create common ground and shared responsibility, while Negative Politeness was used for cautious responses to sensitive political issues. Bald-on-Record and Off-Record strategies were used in specific situations that required directness or indirectness.

These findings suggest that politeness in political interviews cannot be explained only by Social Distance, Relative Power, and Rank of Imposition. Journalists' questions also influenced the President's choice of politeness strategies. Therefore, politeness in political interviews can be understood as a dynamic process shaped by both the interviewer and interviewee. This study contributes to political discourse by showing that political interviews differ from political speeches because they require politicians to respond to unpredictable questions while addressing a wider public audience. In this context, politeness helps politicians maintain public legitimacy, balance authority and solidarity, and manage face.

Future research could examine politeness as a co-constructed process by analyzing both politicians' and journalists' utterances across different political interviews, media platforms, and cultural contexts. Such studies could provide further understanding of how interactional and institutional factors shape politeness in contemporary political communication.

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