
SPEECH ACTS AND POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN GITA WIRJAWAN-MAUDY AYUNDA PODCAST

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Abstract

The rise of podcasting has created new arenas for public intellectual discourse in Indonesia, characterized by unique interactional dynamics. This study investigates the pragmatic mechanisms that underpin these conversations, focusing on how communicative actions are performed and how interpersonal relationships are managed. Using a qualitative case study design, this research conducts a pragmatic analysis of the 'Endgame' podcast interview between host Gita Wirjawan and guest Maudy Ayunda. The study employs two key theoretical frameworks: Searle's Speech Act Theory and Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, interpreted through a contemporary lens. The analysis identifies the predominant speech acts used to construct the discourse and the politeness strategies employed to maintain face and foster a collaborative atmosphere. Findings indicate a high frequency of Assertive speech acts by Maudy Ayunda to establish expertise and present arguments, and Directive speech acts by Gita Wirjawan to guide the conversation. Crucially, these acts are consistently mitigated by sophisticated politeness strategies. Positive politeness (e.g., agreeing, showing admiration) builds rapport. In contrast, negative politeness (e.g., hedging, questioning, using indirectness) is employed to soften potentially face-threatening acts like disagreement or probing personal topics. This study concludes that the intellectual nature of the conversation is co-constructed through the content and a skillful interplay of speech acts and politeness strategies that allow for exploring complex and potentially sensitive ideas while preserving mutual respect and collaborative harmony.

Keywords

Discourse Analysis; Podcast; Politeness Strategies; Pragmatics; Speech Acts.



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INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital media ecosystem, long-form interview podcasts have emerged as a significant genre for public discourse, offering a platform for nuanced and extended conversations that stand in contrast to the brevity of other social media formats (Salimi & Mortazavi, 2023). In Indonesia, these podcasts frequently feature influential public figures engaging in "intellectual conversations"—discussions centered on complex topics such as education, politics, philosophy, and personal development (Bakri, 2016). These interactions are not merely exchanges of information; they are carefully orchestrated social events where participants perform identities, present arguments, and navigate delicate interpersonal dynamics (Aisah & Saifullah, 2020; Hanif et al., 2021). Understanding the linguistic mechanisms that enable these conversations is crucial for comprehending modern public discourse (Sert, 2022)

This study undertakes a pragmatic analysis of one such event: the 'Endgame' podcast interview hosted by Gita Wirjawan and Maudy Ayunda. To deconstruct how communicative intentions are realized and social harmony is maintained in this dialogue, this study is grounded in two cornerstone theories of linguistic pragmatics, viewed through a contemporary lens that acknowledges their application in mediated discourse (Eckert, 2000; Guo & Dong, 2025). The first is Speech Act Theory, systematically developed by Searle, which posits that utterances do more than just state facts; they perform actions. For this study, the most relevant of Searle's categories are Assertives (stating, claiming), which are the primary vehicle for presenting opinions; Directives (questioning, prompting), which are the host's primary tool for guiding the conversation; and Expressives (thanking, admiring), which manage the interpersonal dimension. Contemporary analysis recognizes that these speech acts are not performed in isolation but are embedded in larger activity types where their interpretation is highly context-dependent (Artati et al., 2020; Riana et al., 2018; Searle, 1976)

Beyond the actions performed, any social interaction involves the management of "face," defined by Brown and Levinson as the public self-image an individual wishes to claim. This "face" has two aspects: negative face (the desire to be unimpeded) and positive face (the desire to be approved of) (Blutner, 1989; Brown & Levinson, 2011). Many speech acts, particularly directives and disagreements, are inherently Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) because they risk damaging the hearer's face (Aporbo, 2022). To mitigate these threats, speakers employ politeness strategies, a framework continually refined by scholars like Spencer-Oatey and Culpeper. These strategies range

from Bald On-Record (direct) to Positive Politeness (appealing to solidarity), Negative Politeness (showing deference and minimizing imposition), and Off-Record (indirect hints). In an intellectual conversation where opinions may differ, the skillful use of positive and negative politeness is essential for fostering a collaborative rather than an adversarial environment (Culpeper, 2011, 2021; Kharisma, 2023; Spencer-Oatey, 2011).

While pragmatic analyses of public discourse in Indonesia are well-established, such studies have predominantly focused on potentially conflictual or formal contexts, such as political debates, television talk shows, or official speeches. Research into the newer domain of digital media, particularly the long-form intellectual interview podcast, remains scarce. This genre, however, possesses unique interactional dynamics that tend to foreground collaboration and the in-depth exploration of ideas over confrontation. This study, therefore, uniquely positions itself by analyzing the conversation in the 'Endgame' podcast to fill this research gap. It aims to demonstrate how speech act and politeness theories are strategically applied to construct collaborative intellectual discourse in an influential contemporary media format. This area remains underexplored in the context of Indonesian linguistics.

Meanwhile, the content of the 'Endgame' discussion is compelling, and the *how* of their communication is equally significant. How does Gita Wirjawan elicit deep reflections without being overly intrusive? How does Maudy Ayunda assert her well-reasoned opinions without appearing arrogant? This study argues that the answers lie in strategically deploying speech acts and politeness strategies.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the pragmatic mechanisms underlying the intellectual conversation in the 'Endgame' podcast. The focus of the analysis is twofold. First, it will identify the dominant speech acts (assertives, directives, expressives) performed by both participants and their role in shaping the flow and depth of the discussion. Second, it will examine the various politeness strategies (positive and negative) used to mitigate potential disagreements and maintain interpersonal harmony, ultimately fostering an environment conducive to a respectful and collaborative exchange of ideas.

METHOD

This research utilizes a qualitative descriptive methodology centered on a pragmatic case study. The case is the single 'Endgame' podcast episode, providing a clearly defined and rich corpus

for in-depth analysis (Leung et al., 2009; Lewis-Beck et al., 2012; Yin, 2018). Data was collected by first sourcing the official video of the podcast episode. A verbatim transcript of the entire conversation was then produced as the primary data. To ensure reliability, this transcript was subsequently cross-checked and verified against the original audio to confirm its accuracy before analysis. The unit of analysis is the conversational turn, with a focus on specific utterances that exemplify key speech acts and politeness strategies (Schiffrin et al., 2008; Thornborrow, 2013). The analytical process involved three steps:

1. Segmentation and Identification: The full transcript was segmented into conversational turns. Each turn was analyzed to identify the primary speech act being performed by the speaker (Quarteroni et al., 2011).
2. Pragmatic Coding: Utterances were coded using two parallel schemes. First, they were categorized according to Searle's speech act taxonomy (Assertive, Directive, Expressive) (Searle, 1976). Second, based on Brown and Levinson's framework, utterances that constituted potential FTAs (e.g., disagreement, probing questions) were analyzed to identify the specific politeness strategies employed.
3. Discursive Interpretation: The coded data were then interpreted to understand the interactional patterns. The analysis focused on how speech acts and politeness strategies were co-constructed by both speakers to achieve the overall goals of the intellectual conversation: exploring ideas deeply while maintaining a positive interpersonal relationship (Ullrich, 2022).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Table 1. Speech Acts and Politeness Strategies in the Endgame Podcast

No	Category	Subcategory	Example Utterance	Pragmatic Function
1	Speech Act	Directive - Requesting & Asking	Gita Wirjawan (2.26): "Singkat saja, lahir di Jakarta, sekolah di Al-Azhar, terus sampai ke mana pun. Silakan. Maudy" ("Briefly, born in Jakarta, schooled at Al-Azhar, then where to. Please, Maudy.")	Directing the guest to start her life story opens a segment and guides the conversation flow.
2	Speech Act	Directive - Elaborate Asking to	Gita Wirjawan (3.25): "Anda itu sangat multitalenta, bisa musik, bisa akting, apa yang bikin	Encouraging the guest to reflect and elaborate more deeply on her background, not just state

				Anda menggeluti bidang-bidang seperti itu dan menguasai juga?" ("You are very multitalented, you can do music, acting, what made you pursue fields like that and master them too?")	facts.
3	Speech Act	Directive - Discussion	Inviting	Gita Wirjawan (16.41): "- Kita ngobrol mengenai ketimpangan yuk." ("- Let's talk about inequality.")	Directing the conversation topic to a specific issue (inequality) and explicitly inviting the guest to join the discussion.
4	Speech Act	Assertive - Opinion/Claim	Stating an	Maudy Ayunda (14.26): "Dalam arti, filosofi itu benar-benar mengubah cara aku berfikir dan mau nggak mau jadi sangat kritis setelah itu." ("In a sense, philosophy changed the way I think and, like it or not, I became very critical after that.")	Asserting a claim about the transformative impact of philosophical education on her way of thinking.
5	Speech Act	Assertive - Information/Explanation	Giving	Maudy Ayunda (20.43): "tapi pendidikan yang seperti apa. Kurikulum, sistem mengajar, dan pembelajaran itu sangat-sangat berpengaruh." ("But what kind of education. The curriculum, the teaching system, and learning are very, very influential.")	Providing information and an expert opinion (based on experience) to support her argument about the importance of the education system's quality.
6	Speech Act	Assertive - Agreement	Expressing	Gita Wirjawan (1.09.00): "- Saya setuju. - Jadi manusianya. Perusahaan, founder, tim, individu, dan negara, menurut saya juga." ("- I agree. - So it's the people. The company, founder, team, individual, and the country, in my opinion, too.")	Affirming agreement with the guest's opinion to build common ground and strengthen the joint argument.
7	Speech Act	Expressive – Complimenting		Gita Wirjawan (2.18): "Halo teman-teman, hari ini kita kedatangan Maudy Ayunda, seorang pemikir muda yang keren banget." ("Hello friends, today we	Expressing admiration and giving compliments to the guest to build a positive and appreciative atmosphere.

			have Maudy Ayunda with us, a very cool young thinker.")	
8	Speech Act	Expressive - Thanking & Expressing Respect	Maudy Ayunda (2.18): "Terima kasih, Pak. Suatu kehormatan bisa di sini." ("Thank you, sir. It's an honor to be here.")	Responding to compliments by thanking and expressing positive feelings (respect) maintains interactional harmony.
9	Politeness Strategy	Positive Politeness (Giving compliments before requesting)	Gita Wirjawan (3.25): "Anda itu sangat multitalenta, bisa musik, bisa akting, apa yang bikin Anda menggeluti bidang-bidang seperti itu dan menguasai juga?" ("You are very multitalented, you can do music, acting, what made you pursue fields like that and master them too?")	Mitigating the Face-Threatening Act (FTA) of a personal question by attending to the guest's positive face (the need to be appreciated) beforehand.
10	Politeness Strategy	Positive Politeness (Showing solidarity/in-group identity)	Gita Wirjawan (16.41): "- Kita ngobrol mengenai ketimpangan yuk." ("- Let's talk about inequality.")	Reducing social distance by using inclusive markers ("Kita" [We], "yuk" [Let's]) to turn a directive into a collaborative suggestion, not a command.
11	Politeness Strategy	Negative Politeness (Softening potential disagreement)	Maudy Ayunda (52.17): "Nah mungkin ini saya agak kontrarian Sebenarnya, sedikit, Pak." ("Well, maybe I'm a bit contrarian on this. Just a little, sir.")	Using hedges like "maybe," "a bit," and "a little" to soften a potentially different opinion, so it does not seem confrontational.
12	Politeness Strategy	Negative Politeness (Showing respect/formality)	Maudy Ayunda (14.48): "...terus itu kita menulis esai, kita harus punya opini, Pak." ("...then we write an essay, we must have an opinion, sir.")	Consistently using a formal address ("Pak" [Sir]) to show deference and maintain a polite social distance in the interaction.

The analysis reveals a strategic and complementary deployment of speech acts and politeness strategies by both the host and the guest to co-construct the intellectual discourse. The host, Gita Wirjawan, primarily utilizes Directives to guide the conversation, skillfully pairing them with Positive Politeness strategies—such as offering compliments and using inclusive language ("Let's")—to foster a supportive environment and mitigate the face-threatening nature of his probing

questions. In turn, the guest, Maudy Ayunda, primarily uses Assertives to articulate her well-reasoned opinions while carefully maintaining interpersonal harmony by employing Negative Politeness, such as using hedges ("maybe," "a bit") to soften potentially contrarian views and formal address ("Pak") to show deference. This dynamic interplay allows for deeply exploring complex topics while ensuring the conversation remains collaborative and mutually respectful.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate a systematic and factual co-construction of intellectual discourse. The roles of host and guest are pragmatically defined through the patterned use of directives and assertives. The impact of these findings is significant, as it shows that even in a public intellectual debate, maintaining interpersonal harmony through politeness is paramount. The speakers meticulously attend to face-work, using a blend of positive and negative politeness to ensure the conversation remains collaborative and respectful. When compared to previous studies on classroom politeness, this analysis reinforces the idea that communication is culturally and contextually situated, but the fundamental principles of face-work are transferable (Himawan et al., 2022)

Furthermore, in contrast to the often-confrontational dynamics of broadcast news interviews where institutional goals can override interpersonal ones (cf. Dynel, 2011), the 'Endgame' podcast prioritizes relational harmony. The most sophisticated pragmatic work occurs when navigating potential disagreements. Maudy's strategy of agreeing first ("Sangat beda" / "Very different") before introducing a counterpoint mitigated by a hedge ("tapi mungkin juga tidak" / "but maybe also not") (7:34) is a highly effective method for maintaining rapport while asserting her perspective. This "agreement-first" structure, a classic politeness strategy, shows how theoretical concepts are applied in high-stakes, real-world conversations, creating an environment where intellectual exploration can flourish without interpersonal friction.

Ultimately, this study contributes to contemporary pragmatic research by illustrating the dynamic application and adaptation of foundational politeness theories within the increasingly influential genre of the long-form digital podcast.

CONCLUSION

This pragmatic analysis of the 'Endgame' podcast reveals that an intellectual conversation is a complex, co-constructed social event built upon a foundation of skillful linguistic action and

meticulous face-work. The study demonstrates that the host, Gita Wirjawan, and the guest, Maudy Ayunda, navigate their roles through a patterned use of speech acts—primarily directives to guide and assertives to inform—which are continuously cushioned by a rich deployment of positive and negative politeness strategies. The implications of this study are significant for both pragmatic analysis and language education. For the fields of pragmatics and public communication, this study's primary contribution is its detailed illustration of how relational goals are achieved through linguistic micro-strategies within new media, providing an empirical model of how civil, collaborative discourse can be successfully constructed and maintained in the public sphere. It provides a clear example of how classic theories function dynamically in modern, mediated contexts like podcasting. This analysis offers a powerful pedagogical model for English Language Teaching (ELT) and communication studies. Authentic materials like this podcast can be used to teach pragmatic competence, moving language education beyond grammatical accuracy and into effective, socially-aware communication, a crucial skill in a globalized world.

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