

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the study

In today's contentious political climate, effective communication is even more crucial than ever. Politeness strategies have an important impact on political discourse when conducting political interviews as politeness strategies are a person's attempt to be respectful, avoid conflict, and maintain social interaction. In political situations, where emotions can run high and opinions often clash, using polite language may help generate a more positive atmosphere. Politicians and interviewers who use this strategy can connect better with their audience, making their intended points clearer and easier to understand. By using politeness strategies, they can also reduce tensions and encourage open discussion, essential for democracy.

As stated by Brown & Levinson (1987) politeness theory focuses on how people control their social interactions to prevent actions that could endanger their reputation known as face-threatening acts. However, the concept of politeness may differ in one culture to another because every culture has its own standards for what is considered as acceptable or polite actions which results in various ways these strategies are applied. This underscores the significance of cross-cultural pragmatics, which is the examination of how language functions in social interactions between different cultures.

Since politicians must carefully consider how they reply in order to control their face and public image, interviews create a setting where politeness is necessary. For this study, the writer explores how politicians from a variety of

cultural backgrounds participate in heated discussions on sensitive topics on shows such as Al Jazeera English's 'Head to Head'. To avoid possible conflict and appeal to a wide audience, participants of this platform have to employ strategies of politeness alongside their responses. This study examines how politeness strategies are employed in political interviews across different cultural contexts. Therefore, the corpus consists of four political interviews from a major show, "Head to Head" by Al Jazeera English, to investigate how interviewees from different cultural and political backgrounds use politeness strategies to manage face-threatening situations and navigate sensitive topics. The selected interviews feature politicians discussing issues that reflect their nations' foreign policy, geopolitical stances, or internal affairs. "Head to Head" has become one of the most interesting interviews with Mehdi Hasan as the host. With an average audience of 2 million each episode on YouTube since its debut 12 years ago, this programme has been a platform to convey aspirations and thoughts from the panellists, audience, and most importantly politicians as the main guest stars.

Each of the curated videos deeply discussed current world issues through each country's representative. Four of these interviews critically analyses violent government response to anti-corruption and rising living expenses rallies, economic dominance, the spread of far-right and populist movements. Lastly, it also discusses the authoritarianism and the stability of a democracy. The interviews contained country representatives, which in this research focused on four countries, namely Kenya, China, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Through the different cultural backgrounds of each politician present as guest-stars, the writer conducts research by combining politeness theory with the cultural dimensions model of

Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1998). The Cultural Dimensions Model was created by Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner to examine how individuals from various cultural backgrounds interact in an organisational setting. The theory highlights how cultural values influence communication styles and decision-making among societies. The seven dimensions of the model set one culture apart from another. But, to explore the use of politeness strategies among political figures from different cultures, this study focuses on two specific dimensions from Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1998) cultural framework: Individualism vs Communitarianism and Neutral vs Emotional. These dimensions are chosen because they most clearly shape the way individuals present themselves and interact during public interviews. By focusing on how personal or group-oriented values (individualism vs communitarianism) and emotional expression (neutral vs emotional) affect communication, the study is able to examine how cultural values influence face management in political discourse. By restricting the analysis to these two dimensions, the study becomes more specific to the political interview setting, where decisions regarding communication are frequently connected to cultural perspectives on individuality and emotion display.

Studies on politeness techniques have been done by a variety of sources, such as the study by Asgher & Scholar (2020) that examines how politeness strategies differ across cultural lines, focusing specifically on politicians from Pakistan and the United States. The study utilizes Brown & Levinson (1987) politeness theory, which categorizes politeness strategies into positive and negative forms. Positive politeness seeks to minimize the distance between speakers, emphasizing solidarity, while negative politeness maintains formality and social

distance, reflecting respect for the interlocutor's autonomy. This study indicate that both Pakistani and American politicians use these strategies, but their application varies significantly due to cultural norms. This reflects a cultural preference for individualism and assertiveness, which is often conveyed through the use of last names and direct pronouns that signals authority. The study concludes that while the fundamental politeness strategies are consistent across cultures, their execution reflects deep-rooted cultural norms. Similarly, a previous study by Odey & David (2022) also explored the use of politeness strategies in political settings. Their research found that, among all the strategies, bald on record was used only occasionally and was less common than other strategies such as positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record. In line with these studies, the relevant paper of Al-Duleimi et al. (2015) explores how interviewees and interviewers employ strategic linguistic devices to manage conflict and maintain connection. These are crucial in political interviews, where interviewees must balance their responses to critical questions with the need to maintain a positive public image.

Furthermore, according to Afful (2017), in the context of adversarial radio interviews, previous research has shown that the bald on record strategy is not only used to manage information but also plays an important role in controlling group offenses and creating humor. Additionally, Li (2008) showed that in interviews about sensitive topics, politicians often use vague language and refer to different sources instead of giving a clear personal opinion. This approach helps them stay polite and avoid direct conflict, while also protecting their country's image.

Meanwhile, previous research by Becker (2007) has found that there is no single national style in political interviews. Instead, politeness strategies and

interviewing practices are shaped by a range of cultural and social factors, including the roles of participants, the nature of the program, and the context of the interview.

Despite the existence of research on politeness strategies, there is a lack of research that specifically examines the use of politeness strategies and classify them to specific cultural dimensions across a variety of backgrounds specifically in political interview. Additionally, according to Brown & Levinson (1987) theory, the need to control one's face is universal. However, the practical management of face varies throughout cultures. Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1998) model is useful in this case since it helps to investigate the reason. Therefore, by revealing the variance between contexts, the cultural dimensions complement rather than contradict Brown & Levinson (1987). The study attempts to uncover how cultural backgrounds impact political figures' ways of speaking through evaluating politeness tactics in political interviews from this platform, specifically the 'Head to Head' segment of Al Jazeera English's Youtube channel. The findings of this study have implications for understanding the interplay of language, culture, and politics across global media platforms.

1.2. Research Questions

This study's primary focus is determined by the following research questions:

1. What strategies of politeness do political figures in different cultures use during political interviews of Head to Head to manage face and public image?
2. How do politeness strategies used in Head to Head political interviews reflect underlying cultural dimensions of individualism vs

communitarianism and neutral vs emotional of Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1998) cultural theory?

1.3. Purpose of the study

This study aims to find out what kinds of politeness strategies employed by the political figures. Additionally, the study will find out how these politeness strategies reflect underlying cultural dimension that shapes interactions in political interviews and how politicians present themselves to the public based on their cultural background.

1.4. Significance of the study

This study offers valuable contributions to several fields by analyzing the use of politeness strategies in Head to Head political interviews. For the english study programme, it deepens understanding of cross-cultural pragmatics, specifically focusing on how politeness strategies manifest across cultures in political discourse. Students and scholars can benefit from practical examples of linguistic politeness in real-life interviews, enhancing their grasp of discourse analysis, intercultural communication, and sociolinguistics. This study provides insight for general readers into how politicians from diverse backgrounds navigate interviews to maintain face and public image. Understanding how cultural norms influence these strategies allows readers to better interpret political communication.

Lastly, for future researchers, it lays a foundation for further exploration into politeness theory in political contexts. By demonstrating the impact of cultural differences on communication outcomes, this study gives future comparative

research in media, linguistics, and political communication through encouraging exploration of how cultural values shape interpersonal interactions in different settings. This study not only bridges the gap between linguistic theory and political communication but also offers practical perspectives that can benefit educators, researchers, and broader public.

1.5. Scope and limitation of the study

This study restricts its scope to the analysis of two cultural dimensions which are Individualism vs Communitarianism and Neutral vs Emotional, from the whole set developed by Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (1998). The decision to limit the study to these dimensions comes from their connection to patterns of politeness and communicative style observed in political interviews. Other dimensions, while significant in broader organizational or societal contexts, are less directly observable in political interviews. By narrowing the focus, the study avoids unnecessary complexity and overlapping variables, as a result, it creates a clearer and more coherent interpretation of how cultural background shapes politeness strategies in political talk.

Additionally, this study analyses politician's utterances from Head to Head show by Al Jazeera English. Focusing on the first segment of each episode, this study examines the conversation between the host and the main guest before the panel discussion. The data analysed is limited to the verbal transcripts of each politician's statements without analysing facial expressions. To demonstrate the diversity of political cultures, this study involves four episodes featuring politicians from four different countries: Kenya, China, United Kingdom, and United States.