

Politeness Strategies in Public Speech: A Case of Commencement Speeches in Graduation Ceremonies

¹Pappim Chuenjai, ^{2*}Thitapa Sinturat, and ³Krishna Kosashunhanan

Faculty of Liberal Arts, Rajamangala University of Technology Thanyaburi, Thailand.

E-mail: ¹pappim_c@mail.mutt.ac.th, ²thitapa_s@rmutt.ac.th, ³kritnako@hotmail.com

*Corresponding Author

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Abstract

This study aimed to 1) discover the type of politeness strategies employed in commencement speeches by Taylor Swift and Chadwick Boseman; 2) compare the politeness strategies found in the two commencement speeches; and 3) analyze the use of politeness strategies in the two commencement speeches. The theoretical framework of this study was based on six maxims of politeness strategies, which were proposed by Leech in 1983 and include tact, generosity, approval, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. The commencement speeches by Taylor Swift at New York University in 2022 and Chadwick Boseman at Howard University in 2018 served as the study's data sources. The data were collected from each university's official YouTube and analyzed using textual analysis to determine the type of politeness strategies where the number of maxims was counted and revealed as frequency and percentage. The results were found as follows:

1. Both commencement speeches employed six maxims to ensure successful communication. The generosity maxim was the most frequently applied in Taylor Swift's speech, while the approval maxim was the most frequently applied in Chadwick Boseman's speech. Even though they applied different maxims, they had used the same top three maxims: tact, generosity, and approval, respectively.

2. These two influential entertainers applied politeness maxims quite similarly, as their speech aimed to maximize praise to the audience, demonstrate generosity in sharing their experiences, and provide advice to the audience.

3. The difference between the two influential entertainers was the background and the relationship between themselves and the university. Chadwick was an alumnus of Howard University. He had a background with the university, while Taylor had not. Therefore, Chadwick maximized praise from the university and students and showed much gratitude to the lecturers as an alumnus, while Taylor focused on sharing her experiences.

Keywords: Politeness Strategies; Commencement Speeches; Graduation Ceremonies

Introduction

Communication plays an important role in people's lives. It is a vital skill that can create good connections among people and develop relationships in society. In addition, it can help people exchange information and knowledge with others. The importance of communication skills is mentioned in the Inner Development Goals Framework (IDGs), a plan related to abilities, qualities, and transformative skills necessary to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). IDGs explained communication skills as the capacity to communicate effectively with a variety of groups, encourage meaningful dialogue, expertly advocate one's viewpoints, and handle conflicts (Inner Development Goals, n.d.).

Public speaking is one important form of communication. It is a crucial social skill to communicate with diverse groups of people. Public speaking is a way to deliver some message from the speakers to the hearers and many people use public speaking as an important device to interact with many people. The speech of Martin Luther King Jr., "I Have a Dream" can be a good example from the past of how the importance of public speaking can drive society.

At present, public speaking has become an interesting topic to study. For example, Kraisriwattana and Poonpon (2020), investigated the moves and steps of speech in the most twenty-five views of TED Talks in 2019. Chen (2018) analyzes Donald Trump's inaugural speech using Systemic Functional Grammar to develop readers' analytical and critical faculties to uncover the speaker's political aim and aid in their comprehension of discourse (Chen, 2018; Kraisriwattana & Poonpon, 2020). According to the previous example of studies, different types of public speech have different techniques used in each speech. Studying public speaking will help many people understand the techniques, language used, and patterns that can be beneficial to improve public speaking skills.

There are various kinds of speech and one of them is a speech delivered at the graduation ceremony or commencement speech. Many universities in the United States of America offer an

honorary doctoral degree to influencers or public figures who are outstanding in their jobs and invite them to express commencement speeches to new graduate students. Moreover, commencement speeches from influencers or public figures always get interesting for many people and media. At the same time, commencement speeches are rarely encountered in study, especially in analyzing politeness strategies. Although some public speeches, for example, political speeches studied the application of the politeness maxims of Leech (1983), other types of public speeches such as commencement speeches are interesting to study how the politeness maxims are applied in this type of public speech because the theory of politeness of Leech (1983) is less found in commencement speeches.

In this study, the commencement speeches delivered by Taylor Swift and Chadwick Boseman were analyzed to find the maxims of politeness strategies of Leech (1983) employed in their speeches. The study can be advantageous to many people who would like to improve their public speaking skills and people who take responsibility for making the script of speech for others.

Therefore, this study can inform the aspect of applying politeness strategies in other forms of communication such as public speaking, especially in commencement speeches. The result can indicate the difference in language and politeness strategies produced by different genders, female and male, and also enhance a great understanding of politeness strategies in public speech and expand the linguistic data for the study in this field.

Research Objectives

1. To discover the type of politeness strategies employed in commencement speeches by Taylor Swift, and Chadwick Boseman.
- 2 . To compare the politeness strategies found in the speeches of two influential entertainers.
- 3 . To analyze the use of politeness strategies in commencement speeches in graduation ceremonies by two influential entertainers.

Literature Review

Politeness in Communication

Politeness means the consideration of speakers when they speak and act to listeners' feelings and wishes (Al-Deleimi, et al., 2016). Many academics are studying English communication behavior and assume that politeness is a normal behavior of people

(Qodirberganovna, 2020). Politeness also depends on culture, for example, British behavior is a negative politeness culture outstandingly restraint, cautiousness, and contact avoidance in public transportation, while Americans are mostly in positive-politeness mode (Fox, 2004).

The principle of negative politeness is part of a general communicative strategy of politeness or tact maxim, one of the maxims of Leech. The politeness of Leech can be connected to a set of scales containing a negative and a positive pole. In Leech's politeness, positive politeness is related to maximizing the politeness of polite illocutions while negative politeness is related to minimizing the impoliteness of impolite illocutions (Ryabova, 2015).

Gender and Politeness of Language

The use of language and the way communication between men and women are certainly different. Women have a greater emphasis on the emotional rather than communication's informative aspects. Women are better at pronunciation than men. Women avoid using swear words and dirty than men. Women are more conscious of using formal language and linguistic forms of politeness. Therefore, many linguists believe that women are more polite than men (Furkatovna et al., 2021; Xia, 2013; Coates, 2015). Additionally, the study of the language use between men and women in the Mayan community showed that women in the Mayan community were more polite than men and women employed positive politeness when they talked to women and employed negative politeness when they talked to men (Brown, 1980). Similarly with the study of Ambarita and Mulyadi in 2020. Women are more likely to keep the language, while men are creative and renewable. Therefore, politeness may reflect speakers' power dynamics (Ambarita & Mulyadi, 2020).

Politeness Theories

Many scholars propose the politeness theory. Grice (1975) introduced and explained conversational implicature and maintained the conversation for people (Hadi, 2013). Grice proposed 4 maxims of conversation under the "Cooperative Principle theory" including 1) Quantity maxim, 2) Quality maxim, 3) Relevance maxim, and 4) Manner maxim (Pfister, 2010). Lakoff (1973) adapted Grice's conversational maxims and proposed 2 rules including 1) "Be clear", and 2) "Be polite" (Shahrokhi & Bidabadi, 2013). Brown & Levinson (1987) proposed two different types of "face" including 1) Positive face and 2) Negative face, which is called "a face-saving theory of politeness" (Zhang, 2017). The face-saving theory is based on Goffman's notion of the face and builds on the Gricean model of the Cooperative Principle (Al-Duleimi, et al., 2016). Leech (1983) focuses on "minimizing the expression of impolite beliefs" and "maximizing the expression

of polite beliefs” (Leech, 1983). Leech proposed the Politeness Principle and six maxims that deal with polite behavior and focus on “minimizing the expression of impolite” and “maximizing the expression of polite”. The maxims include 1) Tact, 2) Generosity, 3) Approbation, 4) Modesty, 5) Agreement, and 6) Sympathy (Pfister, 2010).

Related Studies

Many studies applied the politeness strategies of Leech (1983) to analyze many types of content such as political speeches, letters, and communication in movies and daily life. The results of many studies revealed that six maxims were applied to make good public speech and communication. In many studies, politeness strategies were applied to convince people (Kamkeaw, 2019, Duangkhot, 2017). For example, in political communication, politeness was applied to avoid hard feelings and conflict same as the communication of Asian culture as Thai and Japanese (Kamkeaw, 2019, Tejarajanya, 2016). Another perspective of applying maxims in political speeches was to maximize the benefit of others and minimize the cost to others through his speech (Mariani, 2019).

In normal conversation for example, in the context of daily life or movies, politeness strategies were applied for many purposes. It has appeared that politeness strategies can help a better comprehension of personality and the connection between the characters and mental activities. To achieve successful communication in daily life, people should utilize the politeness maxims appropriately (Jie & Feifei, 2016; Yu & Ren, 2013).

In the context of communication through letters, it revealed that the benefit to the readers should be maximized, while the cost to the readers should be minimized following Leech’s (1983) Tact and Generosity maxim (Zheng, 2015). On the other hand, politeness strategies were applied in the job application letters to praise the applicant self and the organization that applies to that revealing the relationship between Modesty and Approbation maxims (Pardede, et al., 2019).

According to many theories presented above, Leech’s (1983) theory was chosen to be the theory of this study because the six maxims proposed by Leech classified the definition of each maxim distinctly and covered the situations of the speaker to the hearer (Kamkeaw, 2019).

Table 1 Theoretical framework

Leech's Maxim	Meaning
1. Tact	Minimize cost to others; Maximize benefit to other.
2. Generosity	Minimize benefit to self; Maximize cost to self.
3. Approbation	Minimize dispraise of others; Maximize praise of other.
4. Modesty	Minimize praise of self; Maximize dispraise of self.
5. Agreement	Minimize disagreement between self and other; Maximize agreement between self and other.
6. Sympathy	Minimize antipathy between self and other; Maximize sympathy between self and other.

Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework provides and explains the concept and process of this study that follows the research objectives. The details are as follows.

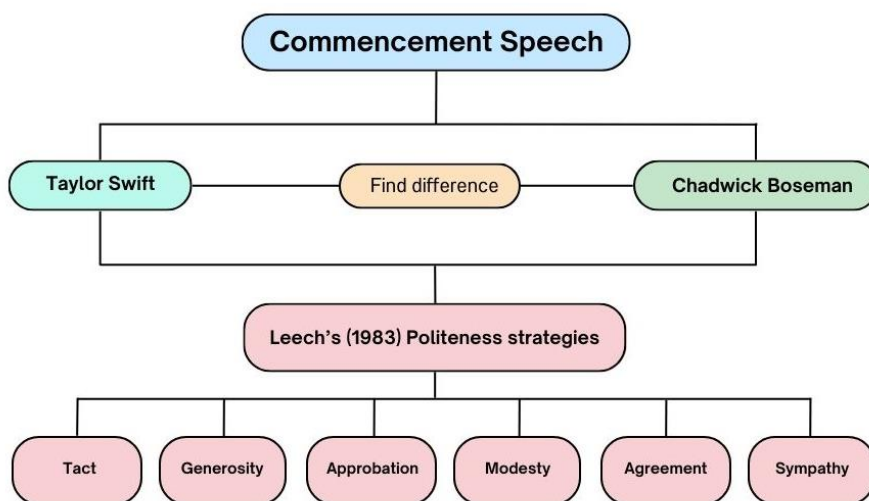


Fig.1 Conceptual Framework

Regarding the above figure, the two commencement speeches between Taylor Swift and Chadwick Boseman were analyzed to find the different uses of politeness strategies proposed by Leech (1983) which have six maxims including Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, and Sympathy maxim.

Research Methodology

The instruments of this study were the commencement speeches delivered by Taylor Swift at New York University's Commencement Ceremony in 2022 and Chadwick Boseman at Howard University's Commencement Ceremony in 2018.

The commencement speeches were collected from the official YouTube channel of each university. The text version of Taylor Swift's speech was collected from the website Billboard, and Chadwick Boseman's speech was collected from the website of the Washington Post. The text versions were re-checked for accuracy by the researcher by listening to the full video of the speeches along with the script.

The politeness maxims of each speech were counted and revealed the frequency and percentage. The results were compared to the different use of strategies. Finally, they were analyzed and discussed.

Research Results

Table 2 The number of maxims in Taylor Swift's speech

Maxim	Frequency	Percentage
Tact	15	32%
Generosity	16	34%
Approbation	7	15%
Modesty	2	4%
Agreement	5	11%
Sympathy	2	4%
Total	47	100%

According to the table above, Taylor Swift's speech contained 47 statements. Generosity maxim was employed the most in this speech. There were 16 times, (34%). Followed by Tact maxim, it was found 15 times, (32%). Approbation maxim was utilized 7 times, (15%). Then, Agreement maxim appeared 5 times, (11%). While Modesty and Sympathy maxims were found the least at 2 times, (4%) of each maxim.

Table 3 The number of maxims in Chadwick Boseman's speech

Maxim	Frequency	Percentage
Tact	14	24%
Generosity	14	24%
Approbation	18	31%
Modesty	1	2%
Agreement	9	16%
Sympathy	2	3%
Total	58	100%

In Chadwick's speech, there were a total of 58 statements. The most used maxim was Approbation maxim. There were 18 times, (31%) in this speech. Then, Tact maxim and Generosity maxim were employed similarly 14 times, (24%) in this speech. Next, Agreement maxim was found 9 times, (16%). Sympathy maxim was utilized 2 times, (3%). While Modesty maxim was found the least at only one time, (2%) in this speech.

Example of Two influential entertainers' speeches analysis

Tact maxim

"It is the reason you are on the planet at this particular time in history. Your very existence is wrapped up in the things you are here to fulfill. Whatever you choose for a career path, remember, the struggles along the way are only meant to shape you for your purpose".

Chadwick Boseman's Howard University 2018 Commencement Speech

May 12th, 2018

This statement can be classified as Tact maxim because Chadwick would like to give some advice to the audience. The word "remember" shows that the speaker tried to advise about choosing a career path for the audience.

Generosity maxim

"So as a rule, I try not to give anyone unsolicited advice unless they ask for it. I'll go into this more later. I guess I have been officially solicited in this situation, to impart whatever wisdom I might have and tell you the things that helped me in my life so far".

NYU's 2022 Commencement Speaker Taylor Swift

May 18th, 2022

In this statement, Taylor focused on the advice that she was solicited to share the things that have helped her life so far. This statement shows the kindness of Taylor to give some advice to the audience even though it breaks her rule, but she minimized benefit of herself. Consequently, this statement can be categorized as Generosity maxim.

Approbation maxim

"First, giving honor to the creator and my ancestors on whose shoulders. I stand happy mother's day to my mom she is not here in attendance but but by tomorrow she will have seen this. Let me also acknowledge my professors who have passed on to the other side because of work obligations over".

Chadwick Boseman's Howard University 2018 Commencement Speech

May 12th, 2018

Chadwick praised his ancestors and professors. He also mentioned his mother and blessed her on the occasion of Mother's Day. Therefore, this statement can be classified as Approbation maxim.

Modesty maxim

"Please bear in mind that I, in no way, feel qualified to tell you what to do. You've worked and struggled and sacrificed and studied and dreamed your way here today and so, you know what you're doing. You'll do things differently than I did them and for different reasons".

NYU's 2022 Commencement Speaker Taylor Swift

May 18th, 2022

This statement shows the self-dispraise. Taylor doesn't want to tell all graduated students what they must do because she thinks she is unqualified. She minimizes praise of herself. Therefore, this statement can be categorized as Modesty maxim.

Agreement maxim

"Howard University, I was riding here and I heard on the radio, somebody called it Wakanda University, but it has many names, the Mecca, the Hilltop. It only takes one hour, one tour of the physical campus to understand why we call it the Hilltop. Every day is leg day here. That's why some of you have cars".

Chadwick Boseman's Howard University 2018 Commencement Speech

May 12th, 2018

This statement shows the relevance of opinion between Chadwick and the audience. Everyone would agree with him why Howard University is called Hilltop. The statement "That's why some of you have cars" was spoken to gain the agreement of the audience. Consequently, this statement can be categorized as Agreement maxim.

Sympathy maxim

"Now you leave the structure and framework of school and chart your own path. Every choice you make leads to the next choice which leads to the next, and I know it's hard to know sometimes which path to take".

NYU's 2022 Commencement Speaker Taylor Swift

Taylor shows sympathy to all graduated students. She understands how hard it is to choose the right path because she faced it before. The sentence "I know it's hard to know sometimes which path to take" classified the statement to be Sympathy maxim.

Table 4 The comparison of maxim used between two commencement speeches.

Maxim	Frequency	
	Taylor Swift	Chadwick Boseman
Tact	15	14
Generosity	16	14
Approbation	7	18
Modesty	2	1
Agreement	5	9
Sympathy	2	2
Total	47	58

According to the above table, the total statement of Taylor Swift was less than Chadwick Boseman's because the total number of words in their speech was different. Taylor utilized Generosity maxim the most while Chadwick applied Approbation maxim. However, the aspect of using was not different that much because they applied the similar top three maxims. The purpose of expressing the commencement speech of two influential entertainers was the same. They would like to share their experience, give some advice, and encourage people. Therefore, Tact maxim, Generosity maxim, and Approbation maxim are applied as the top three.

Discussions

All six maxims of Leech's politeness strategies were applied in two commencement speeches. Applied all maxims can make successful communication (Yu & Ren, 2013) and hit some purposes for example, expressing appreciation, making some agreement between speaker and audience, making a connection, and making an impression on the audience (Pakzadian, 2012; Jie & Feifei, 2016; Mariani, 2019; Kamkeaw, 2019; Pardede, et al., 2019).

Speech of Taylor Swift and Chadwick Boseman showed good communication from speaker to hearers. Their speech was one of the most successful speeches that was mentioned a lot in the news and on social media. Therefore, the result of this study can support the idea that applying the six maxims of politeness can help communication success (Yu & Ren, 2013).

in Taylor Swift's speech, Generosity maxim was the most applied similar to Zheng's (2015) study that suggested applying Tact and Generosity maxim to minimize the cost to the readers and maximize the benefit to readers (Zheng, 2015). Approbation maxim was the most applied in Chadwick Bosman's speech similar to the inaugural speeches of Barack Obama and

Donald Trump studied by Kamkeaw in 2019. The reason for applying Approbation maxim of both two presidents was to express appreciation and praise to the audience (Kamkeaw, 2019) same as Chadwick's commencement speech.

Therefore, the purpose of speech and speaker is the main reason for applying maxims of politeness. This study revealed that the results of the analysis of applying politeness strategies of Leech in the commencement speeches between Taylor Swift and Chadwick Boseman are not much different, and the two speeches are not different from other studies either. Moreover, this study revealed that all six maxims could be applied in a commencement speech, especially Tact, Generosity, and Approbation maxim to make good communication.

Knowledge from Research

The results of this study revealed that applying politeness strategies in public speech can achieve good communication. Applying each maxim depends on the purpose of the speech. In the commencement speech of Taylor Swift and Chadwick Boseman, six maxims were applied, and the three most applied maxims were Tact, Generosity, and Approbation. These three maxims can make a good commencement speech and hit its purpose as the result revealed. This can be used as a guideline for having successful public speaking.

Conclusion

Both Taylor Swift and Chadwick Boseman employed six maxims in their commencement speeches. When the two speeches were compared, it was found that Generosity maxim was the most applied in Taylor Swift's speech while Approbation maxim was the most applied in Chadwick Boseman's speech. However, they applied the same three strategies in the top three range, Tact maxim, Generosity maxim, and Approbation maxim. Additionally, the result can be concluded that the purpose of a commencement speech is to encourage, share the speaker's experience, and give some advice to the audience; therefore, Taylor Swift and Chadwick Boseman applied those three maxims as the same top three even though they have different experiences and backgrounds.

Suggestions

This study provided the result of two commencement speeches from two public figures which is a case study of the analysis of politeness strategy in commencement speeches. However, there are many public speeches from various people not only from public figures that can be studied with politeness strategies. Therefore, other researchers who are interested in studying these kinds of fields can expand the number of commencement speeches to get deeper results that may indicate the exact use of politeness strategies in commencement speeches.

Moreover, politeness strategies can be applied to analyze various kinds of speech such as political speeches or speeches after receiving the award. The different purposes of speech may reveal the different aspects of applying politeness strategies in communication.

Furthermore, the politeness strategies of Leech can be studied in different cultural perspectives to find different uses. There will be other social factors including the place and atmosphere, the subject, and the meaning of the speech that can determine the use of politeness strategies. Other researchers who would like to study should be concerned about this issue.

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