Oprah Winfrey Talk Show: An Analysis of the Relationship between Positive Politeness Strategies and Speaker's Ethnic Background

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Abstract. This research paper analysed the positive politeness strategies used by Oprah Winfrey and her guests in the *Oprah Winfrey Talk Show*. By analysing four full interviews for each group (African-Americans and Caucasians), the study also aimed to investigate the effect of the speaker's ethnic background on the use of positive politeness strategies in *Oprah Winfrey Talk Show*. Based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework, the study revealed that both Oprah and her guests employed positive politeness strategies when addressing each other to avoid face threatening or face damage. The data also revealed that Oprah and her Caucasian guests used more positive politeness strategies than with the African-Americans. In addition, it was found that the most frequently used strategies in Oprah's talk with both groups were "Seek agreement", "Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)", "Give (or ask for) reasons", "Presuppose/raise/assert common ground" and "Assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants", respectively. However, the study showed that there was a difference in the use of positive politeness strategies due to the addressee's ethnic group background (African-American and Caucasian). However it was not dominant. Based on the findings, this article concludes with some implications for foreign/second language speakers.

Keywords and phrase: politeness, face-threatening, language and culture, ethnic background, Oprah talk show

Introduction

The concept of politeness, which is considered an essential part of both verbal and non-verbal communication, maintains that people's interactions should be polite. Some politeness theories have emerged since the notion of "face" was first introduced by Goffman (1955). He defines face as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" (Goffman 1955, 213). Ever since, several scholars have attempted to define face and politeness, and have examined the various aspects that may influence the use of politeness strategies. These aspects include the addressees' personality, the relationship between them, gender, social status and ethnic background (Brown and Levinson 1987; Fraser 1990; Lakoff 1973; Leech 1983). Despite this fact, Bargiela-Chiappini (2003) confirms that although there are some studies conducted on politeness, "the field still lacks an agreed definition of what politeness is" (1464). However, the most common feature that is shared by most researchers is "face threat". For example, Lakoff (1989, 102) defines politeness as "a means of minimizing the risk of confrontation in discourse – both the possibility of confrontation occurring at all, and the possibility that confrontation will be perceived as threatening". Mills (2003, 6) relates politeness to face stating that "politeness is the intention to mitigate face threats carried by certain face threatening acts toward another expression of the speakers".

Lakoff's (1973) theory assumes that pragmatic competence involves two general sets of rules: "Be clear" and "Be polite". The second rule, "Be polite", constitutes other sub-rules that represent Lakoff's conceptualisation of politeness: (1) Don't impose. (2) Give options. (3) Make (the hearer) feel good. Lakoff (1973) considers politeness as a means of avoiding conversational conflicts at the expense of clarity. She rationalises this assumption as follows. "Politeness usually supersedes: it is considered more important in a conversation to avoid offense than to achieve clarity" (297). This makes sense since in most informal conversations, "actual communication of important ideas is secondary to merely reaffirming and strengthening relationships" (Lakoff 1973, 289). Her conceptualisation of politeness is represented by other sub-rules to consider when determining whether a person is polite or rude: formality (keep aloof), deference (give options) and camaraderie (show sympathy).

Later, Leech (1983) discusses politeness through illocutionary functions that he classified into four types according to "how they relate to the social goal of establishing and maintaining comity". The goals can be competitive, convivial, collaborative and conflictive. To illustrate, the illocutionary goal can "compete" with the social goal (e.g., ordering or asking), can "coincide" with it (e.g., inviting

or thanking), can be "different" to the goal (e.g., asserting or reporting) or can "conflict" with it (e.g., threatening or cursing). Leech (1983) suggests six maxims of politeness, namely tact-maxim, generosity maxim, approbation maxim, modesty maxim, agreement maxim and sympathy maxim (104).

The most influential politeness theory up to date is that of Brown and Levinson's (1987). In Brown and Levinson's view, the focus is on the hearer's positive face. They defined "face" as the "the public image that everyone wants to claim for himself". It implies that speakers try to maintain each other's face in interaction and should avoid threatening/damaging the hearers' face. Face involves "a socially attributed aspect of self that is temporarily on loan for the duration of the interaction in accordance with the line or lines that the individual has adopted" (Watts 2003, 125), where a line refers to the speaker's "own evaluation of the interaction and all of its participants" (Bargiela-Chiappini 2003, 1458). According to Locher (2004), to show respect to the addressee, the speaker tends to display behaviour that shows "positive concern" for the addressee and preserves his desire for independence. If the speaker's intention to show positive concern is correctly understood by the addressee, the behaviour (utterance) will be interpreted as polite. The addressee, in return, will interpret the speaker's intended behaviour as polite (Locher 2004, 91). This indicates that there is "no faceless communication" (Scollon and Scollon 2001, 48).

Brown and Levinson (1987) categorise face-threatening acts into four major strategic classes: bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness and off-record strategies. Bald-on-record is basically stating the message. Positive politeness entails showing respect to the hearer's wants or liking the message offered by the speaker (e.g., the expression of friendliness towards others). In negative politeness, the speaker avoids offending the other by showing deference (e.g., interrupting less, being less direct and using more hedges). An off-record strategy is used when the speaker is indirect, and he/she is avoiding imposition.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987, 79), there are three universal sociological variables that determine the risk of loss of face and strategy choice, viz., D, P and R: (1) D is the social distance between the participants, (2) P is the relative power of the speaker over the hearer, and (3) R is the absolute ranking of imposition in the particular culture.

Although *Oprah Winfrey Talk Show* has attracted the attention of several scholars (e.g., Elvheim 2006; Ilie 2001; Xiao-yan 2014), none of these studies investigated politeness strategies used by Oprah and her guests when hosting two different ethnic groups (African-Americans vs. Caucasian Americans). Therefore, the present study

aims to investigate the positive politeness strategies used by Oprah and eight of her guests (four African-Americans and four Caucasians) in order to find the strategies used and whether the strategy choice is affected by the ethnic background of the speaker as a sociolinguistics variable. The researchers of the present study used Brown and Levinson's framework because it is the most appropriate to achieve the objectives of the study and answer the research questions.

Politeness and Culture

Despite the universality of politeness, Brown and Levinson (1987, 62) state that "the content of face will differ in different cultures", implying that there is a certain cross-cultural variation. In support of Brown and Levinson, other researchers agree that the form of politeness varies from one culture or subculture to another because cultural presuppositions held by interlocutors might be fundamentally different (Blum-Kulka 1992; Eelen 2001; Kang 2001; Watts 2003).

There are different politeness strategies specific to one culture/ethnic group or another, called ethos of communication, which is defined as "the effective quality of interaction characteristic of members of a society" (Brown and Levinson 1987, 62). They suggest that upper classes have a negative politeness ethos and the lower classes have a positive politeness ethos (20). In studying the effect of gender and ethnicity on language use, Boekesteijn (2015) concludes that "the familiarity of the participants and the participants' membership of the same social in-group exceeds what possible effects the social variables 'gender' and 'ethnicity' could have had on the participant's language use" (37).

Blum-Kulka (1992, 270) suggests that culture interferes in politeness features across societies. She did not question the equation of politeness with face-threat mitigation proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), but she believes that its realisation is subject to a cultural filtering. She assumes that four essential parameters affect politeness, namely social motivations, expressive modes, social differentials and social meanings. Social motivation refers to the need to maintain face. The expressive mode is the linguistic expressions available in any language to realise politeness. Social differentials refer to factors, such as social distance, power and degree to which speech acts constitute an imposition on the addressee. According to Blum-Kulka (1992), social meanings refer to "the degree to which any linguistic expression is deemed polite by members of a given culture in a specific situation" (275). Likewise, Kang (2001) suggests that what is seen as "good/bad", "honest/dishonest", "polite/impolite" and many other moral axes may vary greatly from one culture to another.

However, ethnicity can be salient in the communication styles of people who speak the same language. Barron and Schneider (2009) assert that speakers who share the same native language do not necessarily share the same culture. Americans in the US, for instance, use English in different ways. Najeeb, Maros and Mohd Nor (2012) also believe that social traditions have an influence on the use of various politeness strategies in every society. They continue that "these strategies could be received and understood differently from the speaker's intention according to the hearers' personal and cultural expectations" (127). This is relevant to this research because we are looking into politeness strategies used among two ethnic group, namely African-Americans and Caucasian Americans. According to Brown and Levinson (1987, 102), there are 15 strategies which are used to express positive politeness:

1. Notice and attend to H or hearer (his interests, wants, needs and goods)

2. Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)

3. Intensify interest to H: It is achieved by involving the H in the communication, which can be undertaken by exaggerating facts as well as making a good story

4. Use in-group identity markers: This can be achieved by claiming common ground with H, and by using in-group usages of address forms, language or dialect, jargon or slang, and ellipsis

5. Seek agreement: It can be achieved either by pursuing a safe topic or repetition to show emphatic agreement

6. Avoid disagreement: It can be achieved in four ways – token agreement, pseudo-agreement, the use of hedges and the use of white lies in order to save the H's face

7. Presuppose/raise/assert common ground

8. Jokes

9. Assert or presuppose S's (speaker's) knowledge of and concerns for H's wants

10. Offer and promise

11. Be optimistic

12. Include both S and H in the activity: It can be achieved by using "we" and "let's"

13. Give (or ask for) reasons

14. Assume reciprocity: S asks the H to do something for him/her if he/she does something for H in return

15. Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding and cooperation)

Literature Review

Some researchers have shown interest in examining the relationship between politeness, and ethnicity or social distance. For example, Britain (1992) examined the social distribution and the potential social meanings of the high rising terminal (HRT). He found that ethnicity emerged as a significant variable, along with the suggestion that the HRT was an "other-oriented" positively polite pragmatic device whose use was very appropriate among those whose culture emphasised solidarity. This conclusion was further supported by Bell and Johnson (1997).

Researches (Henley 1995; Popp et al. 2003) suggest that African-American women generally adopt a different (more assertive/androcentric) communication style than Caucasian American women. According to Filardo (1996), African-American females' assertiveness is primarily found in the frequency of their speech forms in comparison to other interactants (both males and females), and their usage of aggravated speech forms such as threats, challenges, interruptions, direct commands and derogatory terms. This diversion from Caucasian/white "women's style" suggests that the two ethnicities (Caucasian-American and African-American) have different gender norms. This brings us to the second reason.

In examining the influence of the socio-cultural values and norms on politeness and im/politeness, Holmes, Marra and Vine (2012) found that the distinctive features of politeness and im/politeness in New Zealand English workplace discourse show that such features are influenced by the socio-cultural values and norms. The analysis also showed how these influences are evident in a number of specific aspects of workplace interaction, such as small talk, humour and meeting protocols.

Similarly, AlAfnan (2014) investigated politeness strategies in workplace emails in relation to the ethnicity of the communicators, power relations and social distance. The study revealed that the Malaysian employees (i.e., Malay, Chinese Malaysians, Indian Malaysians) mainly used the indirect positive and negative politeness strategies to establish rapport and connect with the recipient on the personal level. The study also revealed that social distance played a more significant role than power imbalance since Malaysians seemed to be more polite to distant colleagues than they were to close colleagues.

In a more recent study, Das and Herring (2016) found that there is a relationship between the degree of social distance, and the forms and frequencies of Bangla greetings. However, some aspects of the interplay between interpersonal closeness

and greetings can only be understood if cultural nuances and medium factors are taken into consideration.

Abushihab (2015) studied how some politeness expressions, which convey the message of respect and love, used in two different contexts: Jordanian and Turkish societies. They can mislead the learners who study the target language or the speakers who use the target language in its society. There are some common polite expressions between Turkish and Arabic, but they are used in a different way and imply a different connotation. He took the polite expression ان شاء الله /ʔinʃaʔlah/ [if Allah wills] that is used in both Arabic and Turkish contexts. However, "it refers to a negative sense in Arabic (I will see) whereas in Turkish it refers to an affirmative answer (yes)" (Abushihab 2015).

Oprah Winfrey Talk Show also gained the interest of several researchers. For example, Ilie (2001) analysed excerpts taken from two American talk shows: *Oprah Winfrey Talk Show* and the *Geraldo Rivera Show* to find the distinguishing characteristics of the talk shows by comparing the excerpts with casual conversations and institutional interactions. Elvheim (2006) compared *Oprah Winfrey Talk Show* with *Dr. Phil's Talk Show* to determine the gender differences between the two hosts' linguistic strategies. El Saj (2012) explored Oprah's use of personal pronouns while hosting Queen Rania of Jordan. El Saj (2013) also examined the values discussed in Oprah's conversation with Queen Rania of Jordan.

In analysing the politeness principle and its redressive strategies in *Oprah Winfrey Talk Show,* Xiao-yan (2014) found that "both the guest and the host perform Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) with various strategies, predictable by the variables of experience and risk. The success of the program largely lies on various politeness strategies" (385). However, none of the previous literature has investigated the use of politeness strategies either by Oprah or her guests.

In conclusion, the literature review has shown that the previous research conducted on the *Oprah Winfrey Talk Show* has neither examined the positive politeness strategies used in such a TV show nor the influence of the host and the speaker's ethnic background on strategy use and strategy choice. In our study, it is hypothesised that since Oprah interviews various people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, she adopts various politeness strategies to protect her interviewees from embarrassment and to maintain a friendly atmosphere during the interviews. The present study, therefore, adopting Brown and Levinson's politeness framework (1987) aims to analyse the positive politeness strategies used by Oprah Winfrey and her guests, and to examine the effect of ethnic background (African-Americans vs. Caucasian) on strategy use and strategy choice.

Methodology

Aims and questions of the study

This study aims to analyse the positive politeness strategies used by Oprah Winfrey and her African-Americans and Caucasians guests, and to determine the effect of the speakers' ethnic background on politeness strategy use.

More specifically, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the positive politeness strategies used by Oprah Winfrey and her interviewees (African-Americans vs. Caucasians) in her TV talk show?

2. Are there any differences between the positive politeness strategies used by Oprah and by her guests?

3. What is the influence of the speaker's background on the use of positive politeness strategies?

Data collection

Eight full interviews were selected from *Oprah Winfrey Talk Show*. Four were conducted with four African-Americans: Tina Turner, Fantasia Barrino, Ayana Mathis and Alicia Keys. Tina Turner is a good friend of Oprah. She is a singer and dancer; she is described as the "triumphant queen of rock 'n' soul" on Oprah's official website. Fantasia Barrino is a winner from a reality programme, *American Idol*. Ayana Mathis is a famous author, and Alicia Keys is an American singer and song writer. The other four interviews were conducted with four well-known Caucasians: Tina Fey, Julie Taymor, Cheryl Strayed and Caroline Myss. Tina Fey is a producer; she is described as "one of the most masterly comedians of our time", according to Oprah's official website. Julie Taymor is an American director of theatre, opera and film. Cheryl Strayed is a memoirist, novelist and essayist. Caroline Myss is a famous book author. The interviewees were selected purposefully to represent ethnic group differences in order to find the effect of the interviewer and the guests' ethnic background on the politeness strategies used in the show. All the data were taken from Oprah Winfrey's official website.

Data analysis

The transcripts of the interviews were thoroughly examined to find and classify the positive politeness strategies used by both Oprah and her guests using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework. After capturing the utterances with

positive politeness strategies, they were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. In the quantitative analysis, frequencies and percentages were found. To maximise its validity, along with the transcripts, our classification was given to three colleagues who hold an MA in Linguistics to assess and to present suggestions for modifications. They were also given the definition of each positive politeness strategy with an example to serve them as a guide. Their suggestions and comments were taken into consideration when we revised our final list of positive politeness strategies used by Oprah and her African-American and Caucasian interviewees. Besides, the data were analysed further using Mann-Whitney U Test to compare the means of using positive politeness strategies used by Oprah and her African-American guests to see if there are any significant differences between the two groups' strategy use. The qualitative analysis was accomplished by selecting four scripts from the corpus and all positive politeness strategies found were discussed to show how and why each strategy was used.

Results

Quantitative analysis

Frequencies and percentages of positive politeness strategies used in the corpus

In this section, the frequencies and percentages of positive politeness strategies used in the eight selected interviews were tabulated and discussed. Table 1 shows the frequencies and percentages of the total positive politeness strategies used by Oprah and her guests (African-Americans and Caucasians).

The most significant finding in Table 1 is that more positive politeness strategies were used during Oprah's interviews with Caucasian guests (210), accounting for 55 percent of the total number of positive politeness strategies. It is also noticed that strategies 8, 11 and 14 did not appear in any of the eight selected interviews. Another significant finding is that Oprah and her Caucasian guests used more positive politeness strategies in 11 categories out of 15. However, strategy 9 recorded more instances during Oprah's interviews with African-Americans than with Caucasians, 30 and 12 instances, respectively. Strategy 5 (seeking agreement) recorded the highest frequency in the two groups' interviews, 32 and 42, respectively.

Table 1. Frequencies and percentages of the total positive politeness strategies used by Oprah and her guests

Strategy	Oprah and African-Americans		Oprah and Caucasians		Total	%
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%		
1. Notice and attend to H (his interests, wants, needs and goods)	10	6	6	2.86	16	4.17
2. Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)	26	15	32	15.24	58	15.1
3. Intensify interest to H	18	10	20	9.52	38	9.9
4. Use in-group identity markers	2	1	0	0	2	0.52
5. Seek agreement	32	18	42	20.00	74	19.27
6. Avoid disagreement	6	3	10	4.76	16	4.17
7. Presuppose/raise/assert common ground	12	7	30	14.28	42	10.94
8. Jokes	0	0	0	0	0	0
9. Assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concerns for H's wants	30	17	12	5.72	42	10.94
10. Offer and promise	2	1	2	1	4	1.04
11. Be optimistic	0	0	2	1	2	0.52
12. Include both S and H in the activity	14	8	20	9.53	34	8.85
13. Give (or ask for) reasons	18	10	32	15	50	13.02
14. Assume reciprocity	0	0	0	0	0	0
15. Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)	4	2	2	0.95	6	1.56
Total	174	100 45	210	100 55	384	100 100

As shown in Table 2, while conversing with African-American guests, Oprah used many more positive politeness strategies than her guests, 130 and 44 instances, respectively. Strategies 9, 2, 5 and 3 recorded the highest frequencies, 26, 24, 24, and 16 instances, respectively. It is also noted that Oprah did not use some strategies at all, such as strategies 8, 10, 11 and 14. Another finding is that both Oprah and her African-American guests did not use some strategies, such as strategies 8, 11 and 14. On the other hand, the African-American interviewees replied to Oprah using mostly three positive politeness strategies, namely, 5 (8 instances), 12 (8 instances) and 13 (14 instances). It is also worth noting that while responding to Oprah's questions, the African-Americans interviewees did not employ some politeness strategies at all, such as strategies 4, 7, 8, 11, 14 and 15.

Table 2. Strategies used by Oprah addressing her African-American guests and vice versa

	Strategy	Oprah		African-American guests		Total	%
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%		
1.	Notice and attend to H (his interests, wants, needs and goods)	8	6.15	2	4.55	10	5.75
2.	Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)	24	18.46	2	4.55	26	14.94
3.	Intensify interest to H	16	12.31	2	4.55	18	10.34
4.	Use in-group identity markers	2	1.54	0	0	2	1.15
5.	Seek agreement	24	18.46	8	18.18	32	18.39
6.	Avoid disagreement	4	3.08	2	4.55	6	3.45
7.	Presuppose/raise/assert common ground	12	9.23	0	0	12	6.90
8.	Jokes	0	0	0	0	0	0
9.	Assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concerns for H's wants	26	20	4	9.09	30	17.24
10.	Offer and promise	0	0	2	4.55	2	1.15
11.	Be optimistic	0	0	0	0	0	0
12.	Include both S and H in the activity	6	4.61	8	18.18	14	8.05
13.	Give (or ask for) reasons	4	3.08	14	31.80	18	10.34
14.	Assume reciprocity	0	0	0	0	0	0
15.	Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)	4	3.08	0	0	4	2.30
	Total	130	100	44	100	174	100

The most significant finding in Table 3 is that Oprah employed many more positive politeness strategies than her Caucasian guests, 140 and 70 instances, respectively. Oprah adopted the following strategies most frequently: 2 (26 instances), 3 (20 instances) and 5 (32 instances). The table also shows that Oprah did not employ the following strategies: 4, 8, 10 and 14. The Caucasian guests replied with different positive politeness strategies, namely 5, 7, 12 and 13. It is also noted that the Caucasian guests did not use the following strategies: 1, 3, 4, 8, 9, 11, 14 and 15.

Table 3. Strategies used by Oprah addressing her Caucasian guests and vice versa

Strategy	Oprah		Caucasian guests		Total	%
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%		
1. Notice and attend to H (his interests, wants, needs and goods)	6	4.28	0	0	6	2.86
2. Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)	26	18.57	6	8.57	32	15.24
3. Intensify interest to H	20	14.29	0	0	20	9.52
4. Use in-group identity markers	0	0	0	0	0	0
5. Seek agreement	32	22.86	10	14.29	42	20
6. Avoid disagreement	2	1.43	8	11.43	10	4.76
7. Presuppose/raise/assert common ground	14	10	16	22.86	30	14.29
8. Jokes	0	0	0	0	0	0
9. Assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concerns for H's wants	12	8.57	0	0	12	5.71
10. Offer and promise	0	0	2	2.85	2	0.95
11. Be optimistic	2	1.43	0	0	2	0.95
12. Include both S and H in the activity	10	7.14	10	14.29	20	9.52
13. Give (or ask for) reasons	14	10	18	25.71	32	15.25
14. Assume reciprocity	0	0	0	0	0	0
15. Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)	2	1.43	0	0	2	0.95
Total	140	100	70	100	210	100

Mann-Whitney U Test results

The data were analysed further using Mann-Whitney U Test to compare the means of using positive politeness strategies used by Oprah and her African-American guests. Table 4 presents the results related to Oprah's interviews with the African-Americans.

Table 4. Mann-Whitney U Test results related to Oprah's interview with the African-Americans

Group	Number of interviews	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Sig.
Oprah Winfrey	4	71.06	4263.50	0.000
African-Americans	4	49.94	2996.50	

Table 4 shows that there are significant differences between Oprah and her African-American guests' use of positive politeness in favour of Oprah, implying that Oprah used more positive politeness strategies than any of her African-American guests.

In comparing the means of positive politeness strategies used by Oprah and her Caucasian guests, Table 5 shows that there are also significant differences between Oprah and her Caucasian guests' use of positive politeness in favour of Oprah. This implies that Oprah used more positive politeness strategies than any of her Caucasian guests.

Table 5. Mann-Whitney U Test results related to Oprah's interview with the Caucasians

Group	Number of interviews	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Sig.
Oprah Winfrey	4	68.17	4090.00	0.011
Caucasians	4	52.83	3170.00	

Table 6 reveals that there are no significant differences between the Caucasians and the African-American guests' use of positive politeness strategies at α 0.05, implying that both groups almost used equal number and means of positive politeness strategies.

Table 6. Mann-Whitney U Test results related to the Caucasians and the African-Americans' use of positive politeness strategies

Group	Number of interviews	Mean rank	Sum of ranks	Sig.
Caucasians	4	63.38	3803.00	0.052
African-Americans	4	57.62	3457.00	

Quantitative analysis

This section will discuss the positive politeness strategies in context. Scripts 1 and 2 are taken from Oprah's interviews with Tina Turner and Fantasia Barrino. We will illustrate how positive politeness strategies were used by Oprah and her African-American guests. All utterances representing politeness strategies are italicised to make it easy for readers to understand each highlighted positive politeness strategy.

Script 1. Oprah's interview with Tina Turner (African-American)

Oprah: *But you started to dream when you first saw Loretta Young?* (Strategy 9: Assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concerns for H's wants)

Tina: *Before that. Remember Betty Grable?* (Strategy 7: Presuppose/raise/assert common ground)

Oprah: No.

Tina: *You're 15 years younger than me.* Betty Grable [a World War II pin-up girl and actress] had beautiful short legs. She was in proportion (Strategy 7: Presuppose/raise/assert common ground).

Oprah: *Your legs are endless* (Strategy 2: Exaggerate [interest, approval, sympathy with H]).

Tina: That's what I didn't like. *I didn't know how to buy clothes for that. As I grew up, I learned what worked for me. That's where the short dresses came from.* And you can't dance in a long dress (Strategy 13: Give [or ask for] reasons).

Oprah: No, no. But *let's start with Nutbush. What carried you to the next point?* (Strategy 12: Include both S and H in the activity)

Tina: Fate. When my parents went off to Knoxville to work, I lived with my father's mother. She was strict—the kind who starched and ironed dresses. … sometimes when their parents separate—school can be really cruel. I got teased, and it interfered with my learning. But I grew out of that, and I fell in love in high school. *Why did I fall so deeply in love? I think when you haven't had that much love at home, and then you find someone you love, everything comes out* (Strategy 5: Seek agreement + Strategy 13: Give [or ask for] reasons).

Oprah: *The first love can be the most difficult to get through because you've had no experience* (Strategy 5: Seek agreement).

Tina: That's right. When I think of Harry now, my heart beats faster. He was the most good-looking guy. Everything was in the right place his eyes, his nose, his mouth. He was a basketball star. Sometimes I'd wear his jacket. It was fainting hot, but because it was his jacket, I wore it. It was magical.

Oprah: I can see that.

In Script 1, Oprah starts with strategy 9, in which she asserts her knowledge and concerns for Tina's wants, whereas Tina's answer implies strategy 7, in which she asserts common ground. The use of strategies 7 and 9 suggests that the host and the guest share common ground. Tina uses strategy 7 again later in the interview by offering personal information about Oprah Winfrey; she states: "You're 15 years younger than me". Oprah also adopts strategy 2 in this part of the interview; she uses exaggeration to show interest and approval regarding Tina's beautiful legs: "Your legs are endless". On the other hand, Tina answers by giving reasons for not liking her own long legs (strategy 13); she states: "I didn't know how to buy clothes for that. As I grew up, I learned what worked for me. That's where the short dresses came from". Oprah uses the utterance "let's", including herself and Tina in the activity (strategy 12). In her answer to Oprah's question, Tina uses three positive politeness strategies: choosing a safe topic to seek agreement and satisfy Oprah's wants (strategy 5), including both S and H in the activity (strategy 12), exemplified when she states: "Oooh, Oprah! You know what happens to children sometimes when their parents separate—school can be really cruel", and finally giving reasons for certain actions (strategy 13). In the last part of Script 1, Oprah also chooses a safe topic in order to stress agreement and satisfy Tina's wants by stating: "The first love can be the most difficult to get through because you've had no experience".

Script 2: Oprah's interview with Fantasia Barrino (African-American)

Oprah:	*It's not a curse. It's a family cycle* (Strategy 13: Give [or ask for] reasons). And you can break that cycle with knowledge, which gives you power. *That is why you must insist on an education for your daughter* (Strategy 13: Give [or ask for] reasons). *When you know better, you do better* (Strategy 15: Give gifts to H).
Fantasia:	That's true.
Oprah:	Did you feel like your life was over once you got pregnant?
Fantasia:	That's what everybody made it seem like. *I knew I couldn't just get a job in a store, because I wasn't good at counting, and I didn't want to mess up anybody's money.* And every time I tried to fill out an application, *I wouldn't finish it because I wasn't a strong enough reader. My only plan was to sing* (Strategy 13: Give [or ask for] reasons).
Oprah:	When was the first time you saw American Idol?

Fantasia: My daughter was about 2, and I was living with a man who took good care of us … Anyway, I remember all my friends talking about the show, but I never watched until the episode Ruben Studdard won. I just cried and cried.

Oprah: For him or for yourself?

Fantasia: Both. I had given up on myself. I was crying because someone had finally gotten something he wanted. I was also a little angry: *Why am I sitting here in the ghetto, living on food stamps and a tiny government check?* (Strategy 13: Give [or ask for] reasons) *I'll be honest* (Strategy 10: Offer and promise). They had the money to provide for their children, and they would brag about what they had. *At Christmas I stole a couple of educational toys for Zion because I didn't want her to turn out like me* (Strategy 13: Give [or ask for] reasons). I tried to teach her everything I could. Even now I want to get all the education I can so that when she gets home from school, I can help her with her homework. But living like that was hard.

Oprah: *It's designed to be hard. It's not the government's job to break the cycle of educational impoverishment; that's your responsibility. If it was easy, you might still be in that situation* (Strategy 5: Seek agreement).

Fantasia: It's true. After I saw Ruben win, that's when I thought, "Okay, I've got to do something". I found out that the next auditions were in Atlanta. People in High Point started talking: "I think that Fantasia girl is tryin' to sing again". I felt like I was coming back; I had faith again.

Oprah: So when you got to the audition at the Georgia Dome—*I love this part of your story* (Strategy 3: Intensify interest to H)—*the place is flooded with potential contestants* (Strategy 2: Exaggerate [interest, approval, sympathy with H]).

Fantasia: *There were thousands of people!* I couldn't believe there were *so many* singers in the world. After I made it past the first round, one of the security guards—a sweet old black man—called me over and *we talked and laughed as if we'd known each other forever*. He said, "You're going to make it through". I had my doubts, but he kept reassuring me. Rico and I were up at 6 the next morning, but when we got there, the doors were already locked. *About a hundred of us were outside, but the security guards told us to go*

home. While everyone else was cussing and fussing, I prayed like I ain't never prayed before! But they didn't let us in. We cried on the way to our cousin's house, where we were staying. I told him what happened, and he went inside and came back with an American Idol assistant, who got me in. *Out of more than 40,000 people, I was the last person to audition. I've never seen that security guard again, never even knew his name.* I talk about him in interviews, thinking he'll pop up and say, "That was me". He never has (Strategy 3: Intensify interest to H).

Oprah: *He was your angel, honey* (Strategy 4: Use in-group identity markers). You've said the experience restored your hope.

Fantasia: *Yes, but I had a hard time in the beginning of the show* (Strategy 6: Avoid disagreement). Some of the voters didn't like the fact that I had dropped out of school and had a baby out of wedlock.

In Script 2, Oprah uses strategy 13 (asking and giving reasons to satisfy the hearer's wants) and strategy 15 (giving gifts to the hearer). By stating "When you know better, you do better", Oprah offers Fantasia emotional support in response to the obstacles she faces in her life. Fantasia makes a promise to Oprah to be honest in her answers and explanations (strategy 10). In response, Oprah chooses a safe topic to discuss with Fantasia to seek agreement (strategy 5). Subsequently, she uses strategies 3 and 2 simultaneously; she intensifies her interest in Fantasia's story: "I love this part of your story" (strategy 3) and exaggerates the number of people by using "the place flooded with potential contestants" (strategy 2). In response to Oprah's use of strategy 3, Fantasia says, "I couldn't believe there were so many singers in the world". Fantasia provides an answer to Oprah's exaggeration. To minimise the distance with her interviewee, Oprah uses the in-group identity marker "honey" (strategy 4). Consequently, Fantasia avoids disagreement (strategy 6); she does not disagree with Oprah's words.

The following two scripts (Scripts 3 and 4), which were taken from Oprah's interviews with Tina Fey and Julie Taymor (Caucasians) show how positive politeness strategies were used by both Oprah and her Caucasian guests. All utterances representing politeness strategies are italicised to make it easy for readers to understand each highlighted strategy.

Script 3. Oprah's interview with Tina Fey (Caucasian)

Oprah: *Why were you lashing out?* (Strategy 13: Give [or ask for] reasons)

Tina: It was the kind of thing where if I liked a boy and he liked some other girl, then that girl was in trouble.

Oprah: *You were one of those girls!* (Strategy 3: Intensify interest to H)

Tina: Yes—in my circle of loser friends. I don't think I ever truly bullied anyone; it was about jockeying for position and trying to take the attention off myself. But that's a dangerous habit for girls to get into.

Oprah: If this were *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, I'd be asking if there was anyone you wanted to apologise to...

Tina: *Well you know, when I wrote 'Mean Girls', I had some archetypes in my head—like the prettiest girl and the most popular girl* (Strategy 7: Presuppose/raise/assert common ground) … When they saw the movie, they were like, "What did I do to her?" I was inadvertently hurtful. So, I apologise to the women whose names I used.

Oprah: *Okay. Changing the subject now: At the University of Virginia you started as an English major and then switched to drama* (Strategy 12: Include both S and H in the activity).

Tina: Yes, I studied playwriting and acting, but somehow, I knew that serious acting was not really quite what I was intended for.

Oprah: And when you moved to Chicago in 1992 to do improv at *Second City*, did you know you'd found your calling?

Tina: Yes. In Chicago, improv is a cult. Everyone who's in it is so into it—all you do is go out four or five nights a week and watch other people improvise. I can't think of anything else like it.

Oprah: *It's its own art form* (Strategy 5: Seek agreement).

Tina: It is. And when people try to televise it, it shrinks. The thing that comes closest is free-form jazz. *Sometimes when you listen to a recording, you're like, "This is quite long", but if you're there hearing it in person, it's so exciting* (Strategy 5: Seek agreement).

Oprah:	A couple of years ago, the cast of *Thank God You're Here* [an improvisational sketch comedy series that ran on NBC in 2007] visited my show. It was the first time I'd tried improv. You have to be 100 percent in the moment (Strategy 7: Presuppose/raise/ assert common ground).
Tina:	That's right. When I studied acting technique, I could never understand what I should be thinking about when I was onstage. I'd be standing there thinking, "Hmm, how does my hair look?" But with improv, the focus is clear: *You're supposed to be listening to the other person so you know how to respond* (Strategy 5: Seek agreement). Improv involves a lot of agreement. It's all about saying yes to the person you're across from, because if you don't say yes, the sketch is over. *That can even shape your worldview. It breeds positivity* (Strategy 5: Seek agreement).
Oprah:	*For many years, I was a news anchor-woman.* I hated it, but it was a good job, so I kept it. The day they fired me and put me on as a talk show host, I felt like I'd come home to myself. *Is that what happened to you with improv?* (Strategy 7: Presuppose/ raise/assert common ground)
Tina:	Yes. *It's better than acting because you can play people you don't remotely look like. It feels like a sport—and it was the fit I was looking for* (Strategy 13: Give [or ask for] reasons).
Oprah:	*At Second City, does everybody know when the SNL scout is coming?* (Strategy 5: Seek agreement)
Tina:	Oh, yes—like puppies in a pound: "Take me, take me, take me!"
Oprah:	*SNL is still a sketch comedian's big dream?* (Strategy 5: Seek agreement)

Script 3 shows that both Oprah and Tina used a variety of positive politeness strategies. As noticed, Oprah questions Tina about her reasons for lashing out (strategy 13), followed by intensifying her interest in Tina by stating: "You were one of those girls!" (strategy 3). Further, Tina tries to minimise the distance between herself and Oprah by asserting their common ground; she says, "Well you know" (strategy 7). Oprah also tries to minimise the distance by changing the subject: "Okay. Changing the subject now: At the University of Virginia you started as an English major and then switched to drama" (strategy 7). Subsequently, both seek agreement from each other by choosing safe topics (strategy 5). Again, Oprah asserts common ground when mentioning an experience that is similar to

Tina's. Tina responds again seeking agreement from Oprah (strategy 5), who in turn answers by sharing an experience similar to Tina's (strategy 7). Tina tries to explain and give reasons for her actions (strategy 13). During the final stage of this segment, Oprah chooses a safe topic to discuss with Tina (strategy 5).

In general, Oprah's utterances mainly registered four positive politeness strategies (3, 2, 7 and 13). By using strategy 3, Oprah intensifies her interest in Tina's wants and tries to satisfy her positive face. In addition, Oprah exaggerates her interest towards Tina's wants (strategy 2). Oprah also employs strategy 7 in her talk with Tina by sharing similar experiences and situations to satisfy Tina's positive face. Added to that, Oprah asks and gives reasons throughout the interview to minimise the distance between the two women. Tina mainly uses strategies 5 and 13, in which she seeks agreement from Oprah and asks/gives reasons to satisfy Oprah's positive face.

Script 4. Oprah's interview with Julie Taymor (Caucasian)

Oprah:	Does it make you nervous to have so much attention on it? Or is that a good thing?
Julie:	*You know what that's like* (Strategy 7: Presuppose/raise/assert common ground).
Oprah:	*You just gotta deal with it* (Strategy 7: Presuppose/raise/assert common ground).
Julie:	*That's right. Although I hate it* (Strategy 6: Avoid disagreement). *Lion King* cost $29 million 14 years ago—which would probably be equivalent to $50 million now. But back then people didn't care about money like they do today. It's the same with movies: Everything is about box-office gross. Just once can we please talk about the film, for God's sake?
Oprah	*I know what you mean* (Strategy 7: Presuppose/raise/assert common ground). On Monday everybody wants to know about the weekend grosses—not about what was good.
Julie:	Right. *Our entire sensibility is gone* (Strategy 12: Include both S and H in the activity). To me, this is an enormous tragedy. Because people don't see the movies that would move them or could be interesting.

Oprah: *You're right. More important, you can't put this much of your heart, your soul, your energy, your sacrifice—100 percent of yourself ... you're not doing all that for a dollar return* (Strategy 5: Seek agreement).

Julie: And why would you be upset about the cost when it's not your money? It's not public money. It's the investors' money—and they're happy. They wanted to do Spider-Man on Broadway—of course it's going to be complicated and technically challenging. … There's flying and motors and wires and things that I don't even know how they did them. I mean, what are you going to do—fly like Peter Pan onstage? Mary Poppins—we're supposed to go like that? Is that what the audience wants? So, it's up to the producers. Tell me what kind of show you want, and I'll think it up.

Oprah: Watching just the few scenes I saw last night, *it feels like an enormous thing to get done on time* (Strategy 2: Exaggerate [interest, approval, sympathy with H]).

Julie: It is. *It's a big story* (Strategy 2: Exaggerate [interest, approval, sympathy with H]). And in this day and age, everyone gets to see you working the kinks out, because we don't go out of town for previews anymore.

Oprah: The previews happen right here.

Julie: *Lion King* had its first preview in Minneapolis, and we actually had to stop in the middle of it. The producers came out onstage—it was very funny—and said to the audience, "Aren't you the lucky ones—you're at the first preview", and guess what? … We spent the rest of that week writing a new scene, downstage, so we'd have time to change the scenery. That's what previews are about.

Oprah: Figuring all that out.

Julie: *But now there's no point in going out of town, because of the Internet* (Strategy 13: Give [or ask for] reasons).

Oprah: *Because everyone's a critic. So by the time you finish the first preview, whatever happened is already out there* (Strategy 13: Give [or ask for] reasons).

Julie: Right. *You know, you asked me once about fear* (Strategy 7: Presuppose/raise/assert common ground); well, that's a fear we

	all have—will people see through the technical mishaps that can happen? *All we can do is pray that the audience will say, "There's a show there"* (Strategy 12: Include both S and H in the activity).
Oprah:	Listen, I've never cared about Spider-Man—and I've called four people already. I can also tell you that I left the set yesterday with a greater sense of the possible. *I actually had flying dreams last night, for the first time in maybe three years* (Strategy 3: Intensify interest to H).
Julie:	*That's beautiful* (Strategy 2: Exaggerate [interest, approval, sympathy with H]).

Script 4 shows that Julie answers Oprah's question by asserting their common ground (strategy 7); she uses the expression "you know" to minimise the distance between herself and the host. Oprah also uses the same strategy to highlight their common ground. Moreover, Julie includes Oprah by using the term "our" (strategy 12), whereas Oprah answers using two strategies, namely 5 (choosing a safe topic) and 2 (exaggerating her interest in Julie's work). Similarly, Julie uses strategy 2 (exaggerating interest in the H) by agreeing with Oprah's opinion. Both Julie and Oprah give reasons for specific actions or opinions (strategy 13). Subsequently, Julie mixes two strategies, namely, 7 and 12 to minimise the distance between herself and Oprah; she asserts common ground (strategy 7) and includes Oprah by using the term "we" (strategy 12). Likewise, Oprah intensifies her interest in Julie's work (strategy 3), who in turn exaggerates her interest towards Oprah (strategy 2).

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework, this study analysed a sample of interviews taken from *Oprah Winfrey Talk Show* to examine the positive politeness strategies used by Oprah and her guests, and the effect of the speaker's ethnic background on strategy use. The analysis led to some findings and conclusions. Concerning the first question related to the positive politeness strategies used by Oprah and her guests (Caucasians and African-Americans), it was found that Oprah and her guests used many politeness strategies in their talk. This implies that the interviewer (Oprah) and her interviewees, although she knows some of them as friends, follow the politeness patterns proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). Another significant finding related to the first question is that the corpus revealed that two or more strategies were realised by an utterance.

As far as the second research question is concerned, the study revealed that there were significant differences between Oprah's use of politeness strategies and her guests whether they were African-Americans (sig. 0.000) or Caucasians (sig. 0.011) at α 0.05. This indicates that Oprah used many more strategies than her guests whether they are African-Americans (130 instances) or Caucasians (140 instances). Oprah employed a total of 270 positive politeness strategies while her guests only used a total of 114. Another significant finding is that the Caucasian guests used more positive politeness strategies in the selected interviews than the African-American guests, 70 and 44, respectively.

The results indicate that there were some differences in Oprah's use of positive politeness strategies directed to her guests. For example, in asserting common ground, it was found that Oprah (the host) used an almost equal number of instances with Caucasians (14) and African-Americans (12); this implies that Oprah was trying to minimise the distance between herself and her guests. During her interviews with the African-American guests, she used strategy 9 (30 instances) to assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concerns of H's wants, strategy 2 (24 instances) to exaggerate [interest, approval, sympathy with H], and strategy 5 (24 instances) to seek agreement. Meanwhile, some strategies were not used at all, namely strategies 8 (jokes), 11 (be optimistic) and 14 (assume reciprocity). However, in Oprah's interviews with the Caucasian guests, strategy 5, assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concerns of H's wants (32 instances); strategy 2, exaggerate [interest, approval, sympathy with H] (26 instances); and strategy 3, intensify interest to H (20 instances) recorded the highest number of positive politeness strategies. Contrary to Oprah's interviews with the African-Americans, Oprah used strategy 9 (14 instances) only to assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concerns of H's wants. The study also revealed that Oprah used more strategies when interviewing the Caucasians, namely, Tina Fey and Julie Taymor, such as intensifying interest in the hearer (strategy 3), seeking agreement (strategy 5), implying that Oprah wanted to satisfy their positive face and minimise the distance between herself and these two guests.

With respect to the third research question concerning the effect of ethnic background of the speaker (African-Americans vs. Caucasians), the study revealed that there are some differences which can be attributed to the ethnic background of the speaker. The results have shown that the Caucasian guests used more positive politeness strategies than the African-American guests. For example, the Caucasians used 16 instances of strategy 7 (presuppose/raise/assert common ground). This implies that they were trying to minimise the distance between themselves and Oprah, while the African-Americans did not use this strategy at all. This indicates that the African-American guests did not need to minimise the distance as they

belong to the same ethnic group and maintain their personal friendship, which implies closeness and relatedness. However, the statistical analysis showed that there are no significant differences (sig. 0.052) between the Caucasians and the African-American guests' use of positive politeness strategies at α 0.05.

Based on the findings of the present research, it can be concluded that the host and guests ethnic background has an influence on the use of some positive politeness strategies. However, this difference is not dominant in the interlocutors' choice of a particular positive politeness strategy. It was also found that the guests differed in their use of the positive politeness strategies. For example, the Caucasian guests employed strategy 7 which requires presupposing common ground; whereas, the African-American guests did not use this strategy at all. This implies that the Caucasian guests were trying to minimise the distance between themselves and Oprah. However, the closeness between Oprah and the African-American guests resulted in a different use or preference of the positive politeness strategies. The African-Americans, for example, mainly focused on strategy 13 (give or ask for reasons) and ignored strategy 7 because they did not need to minimise the social distance between themselves and Oprah.

The findings of the present research lend some support to previous research conducted in the field of politeness and pragmatics. The study is in line with El Saj (2013) who found that both Queen Rania and Oprah used some politeness strategies, namely sharing common ground and similar values. Furthermore, El Saj's (2012) research finds that the choice of pronouns is one of the main factors in maintaining a good conversation and fostering a dynamic interchange. These findings correspond to the findings of the present research. Oprah used the term "we" and "let's" as a politeness strategy to include both the speaker and hearer in the activity. The results of this present research are also in line with Xiao-yan's (2014) research, which analysed the application of the politeness principle and its redressive strategies in *Oprah Winfrey Talk Show* from a pragmatic perspective. Xiao-yan found that both face threatening acts (impoliteness) and face-saving acts (positive politeness) strategies were used in Oprah's show. Xiao-yan argued that Oprah's show was successful due to the various politeness strategies adopted by the host.

Moreover, according to Locher and Watts (2005), it is argued that "appropriateness is determined by the frame or the habitus of the participants within which face is attributed to each participant by the others" (17). This agrees with the results of the present study which show the difference in the politeness strategies used by Oprah Winfrey when interviewing an African-American guest or a Caucasian guest. The strategies used by Oprah were determined by the ethnic background of her guests.

The current research presents implications for foreign/second language users. Firstly, being acquainted with the positive politeness strategies and how they can be used to avoid face threatening and the addressee's wants is very essential in the globalisation era, which necessitates intercultural communication. Secondly, knowing that the interlocutor's ethnicity is a factor that impacts the use of positive politeness strategies and how such strategies are used in talk shows can help second language users understand why things happen, and how they can address people representing a different ethnic group.

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