

Politeness Strategies and Diplomatic Identity: A Pragmatic Analysis of Prabowo Subianto's UN General Assembly Speech

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Article History: Received on 8 September 2025, Revised on 6 October 2025,
Published on 3 December 2025

Abstract: In political communication, language serves not only as a medium of communication but also as a strategic tool for diplomacy and image building. This study investigates the pragmatic politeness strategies employed by Prabowo Subianto in his United Nations General Assembly speech. This research aims to identify the types of pragmatic politeness strategies employed in his speech, uncover how these strategies reflect intercultural awareness and diplomatic intent. Guided by Searle's (1979) speech act theory and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, this qualitative descriptive research analyzes the speech transcript through pragmatic analysis. The findings reveal that Prabowo utilizes four speech acts (assertive, directive, commissive, and expressive) and all politeness strategies (positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on record, and off record), such as solidarity, mitigating face threats in his speech to express solidarity, respect, and inclusivity toward a diverse global audience. These strategies reflect intercultural sensitivity by emphasizing respect, inclusivity, cooperation, aligning with the conventions of global political discourse, and achieving persuasive and diplomatic effects. Furthermore, the pragmatic functions of these strategies contribute to projecting Indonesia as a peace-oriented, collaborative, and globally responsible nation. The study highlights how pragmatic politeness in political communication serves diplomatic purposes, reinforces the role of language as a bridge in international relations. The study concludes that Prabowo's strategic use of politeness is central to constructing Indonesia's diplomatic identity as a collaborative and responsible global actor.

Keywords: Intercultural Awareness, Political Communication, Prabowo Subianto, Pragmatic Politeness, United Nations Speech

A. Introduction

Digital technology has developed and revolutionized all aspects of human life, including in the field of education and communication. In this digital era, political figures utilize digital advancements to deliver their speech. Speech conveys ideas and opinions in the form of sentences or utterances (Nurpadillah, 2019). Political figures do not simply speak, but they perform (Abellan, 2025). However, digital technology

has developed and influenced the way people connect and communicate. Political communication has become a central aspect of public persuasion and image management, where politicians communicate or give speeches in English to reach wider audiences. Political communication, particularly in international forums such as the United Nations (UN), functions not only as a medium of persuasion but also as a site for intercultural negotiation and image construction. Within this context, pragmatic politeness has a crucial role in mitigating potential conflict, managing face, and fostering cooperation among nations with diverse cultural backgrounds. It involves strategic use of language to balance authority, persuasion, and diplomacy. Through politeness strategies, leaders can mitigate potential conflict, enhance cooperation, and demonstrate sensitivity to intercultural norms. Politeness is a universal phenomenon that all languages have unique definitions for. This highly examines the social and cultural values of individuals from diverse political and cultural backgrounds, which is relevant to the pragmatics field (Umami Ashim Azzahra, 2023). (Venera Nagimovna Yapparova, 2019) state that the most important instrument of diplomacy is language, which serves as a means of fulfillment of the state foreign policy, but also as an instrument for maintaining world order and prosperity. Therefore, language politeness still becomes one of the important aspects that reflects the social and cultural values of society. It plays a pivotal role in ensuring productive and respectful discussions, especially in contentious political dialogues (Putri, 2025). Therefore, politeness can influence the level of the relationship between people in communication. It creates a social society always compact including contextual adequacy, adherence to social and cultural norms, and social behavior (Evi Lestaria, 2024). Politeness theory was introduced by Brown and Levinson in their 1987 book 'Politeness: Some Universals in Language Use,' which focuses on how individuals manage social relationship through language using strategies to mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs). It functions not only to preserve individual face but also to sustain diplomatic harmony. (Rajik J. , 2025). Politeness is therefore, the application of good linguistic manners and etiquette in interactive and general communicative contexts (Damilola Oluseyi Fafiyebi, 2023). (Penelope Brown, 1987) state that politeness strategy is a communication strategy that emphasizes words and actions. Brown and Levinson classify them into four (4) strategies, namely:

Bald on record

Bald on record applies when the speaker is unable to minimize the risk to the hearer's face. This strategy refers to direct representation of an action. For example, "we must not give up".

Positive politeness

Positive politeness aims at enhancing the listener's positive face (Rajik, 2025). Positive politeness strategies include the use of (1) empathy and sympathy, (2) group identity

markers, (3) asking for agreement, (4) repetition of utterances, (5) humor, (6) being optimistic, (7) offers and promises, (8) involving the listener and the speaker activities, (9) seeking reasons or posing questions, and (10) giving presents (Jazeri, 2018).

Negative politeness

Negative politeness emphasizes respect for the listener's autonomy. The strategies include the use of (1) indirect utterances, (2) asking for apologies, (3) impersonal forms, (4) general rules of interaction, and (5) respect (Jazeri, 2018).

Off record

The off-record politeness strategy is used when the speaker wants to avoid direct responsibility for a statement or when they want to convey something sensitive implicitly (Mohammad Ali Yafi, 2025). Off record strategies employed indirect and create ambiguity.

Prabowo Subianto's speech at the United Nations General Assembly presents an interesting case for pragmatic analysis. Delivered in a multicultural, international forum, the speech illustrates how an Indonesian leader employs language to construct a positive image of Indonesia while addressing global audiences. Despite the extensive research on politeness in political discourse, most studies have focused on native English-speaking contexts whose communication styles are influenced by distinct cultural norms and socio-political systems, limited attention has been given to the pragmatic politeness aspects in Indonesian political communication, especially in international diplomatic context. This study addresses the following questions: (1) what types of pragmatic politeness strategies are implemented in Prabowo Subianto's UN General Assembly Speech? and (2) How do these politeness strategies reflect intercultural awareness and diplomatic intent?

B. Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to identify and describe the politeness strategies utilized in political discourse, specifically focusing on the speech of President Prabowo Subianto. The choice of a qualitative approach allows detailed interpretation of linguistic phenomena, particularly speech acts and politeness strategies that are embedded in naturally occurring political speech. The data for this research were derived from the speech of Prabowo Subianto. The speech was held in New York City on 23rd September 2025 at the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). The video was retrieved from a publicly accessible YouTube platform. The authors chose the full version of Prabowo's international speech <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a9inAduPdFY>, ensuring authentic and spontaneous discourse. The data were transcribed manually to preserve

accuracy. The transcribed data were identified and classified into speech units based on (Searle, 1979) five classes of speech acts: declarative, expressive, assertive, commissive, and directive, which represent complete pragmatic acts for analysis. Then, the identified utterances were categorized into four main types of politeness strategies as outlined by Brown and Levinson: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record. The study then classified the utterances to provide a general overview of strategies and followed by a descriptive analysis regarding the strategies that reflect intercultural awareness and diplomatic intent.

C. Results and Discussion

The qualitative analysis of Prabowo Subianto’s international speech revealed 25 selected utterances that demonstrated a rich use of pragmatic politeness strategies within political communication. Using Searle’s (1979) classification of utterances, the data show that assertive and directive speech acts dominated the discourse, followed by commissive and expressive acts, while declarative acts were not found. There were 9 utterances classified as assertiveness, 6 directives, 3 commissive utterances, and 1 expressive. Several utterances in Prabowo Subianto’s UN General Assembly speech demonstrated that a single utterance may contain more than one speech act. In pragmatics, this occurs when one utterance performs multiple illocutionary functions depending on its communicative goals and contextual nuances. Then, there were 17 utterances categorized as positive politeness, 4 utterances in bald on record, 1 utterance in negative politeness. Some utterances were identified as a strategic blend of politeness strategies which showed positive politeness as the dominant strategy in the utterances. Here are the classified utterances based on pragmatic politeness strategies. The distribution is as follows:

Pragmatic Politeness Strategies

No	Utterances	Speech Acts	Politeness Strategies	Context
1	It is indeed a great honor for me	Expressive	Positive Politeness	Opening remark to show gratitude and humility, establishes respect and cordiality.
2	We differ in race, religion, and nationality. Yet, we gather together today as one human family.	Assertive	Positive Politeness	Highlights global unity and inclusivity, acknowledges diversity while reinforcing shared humanity
3	All men are created equal	Assertive	Positive Politeness	Refers to universal human rights and equality, aligning with global democratic principles
4	Human folly fuelled by fear	Assertive	Bald on Record	Criticizes the destructive nature of fear and prejudice

5	We Indonesians know what it means to be denied justice	Assertive/ Expressive	Positive Politeness	in world politics, introduce moral reflection Relates Indonesia's historical struggle for independence to current global injustices, evokes empathy
6	the United Nations stood with Indonesia	Assertive	Positive Politeness	Expresses gratitude and appreciation for United Nation's past support, reinforces diplomatic ties
7	our world today is driven by conflict	Assertive	Bald on Record	Describe current global instability to frame the urgency of international cooperation
8	We must not give up.	Directive	Bald on Record	Motivational call to perseverance in addressing global challenges and moral encouragement
9	Together, we must strive to achieve our hopes, our dreams.	Directive	Positive Politeness	Encourages collective effort and optimism, inclusive for unity
10	We remain committed to internationalism	Commissive	Positive Politeness	Declares Indonesia's ongoing dedication to global cooperation and peace
11	We must never be silent while Palestinians are denied that same justice and legitimacy in this very hall.	Directive/ Assertive	Bald on Record/ Positive Politeness	Advocates for justice for Palestine, moral appeal urging action consistent with international law
12	We believe in the United Nations.	Assertive	Positive Politeness	Expresses trust and confidence in the United Nation's moral authority, strengthens diplomatic solidarity
13	Indonesia is prepared to deploy 20,000	Commissive	Positive Politeness	Shows Indonesia's concrete commitment to peacekeeping or humanitarian action under the UN.
14	Madame President, excellencies, I propose to this assembly a message of hope	Directive (Suggestion)	Negative Politeness	Formal appeal addressed to UN delegates, polite proposal for cooperation and optimism
15	We need the United Nations, even though we still struggle.	Assertive	Positive Politeness	Acknowledging ongoing challenges while reaffirming reliance on multilateral cooperation
16	Can we remain silent?	Directive (Rhetorical Question)	Off Record/ Positive Politeness	Rhetorical call to moral conscience, invites reflection on collective responsibility
17	Madame President, we must act now.	Directive	Bald on Record	Urgent appeal to take immediate action, formal tone balanced with

18	Let us continue humanity's great journey. Let's rising nations help others to lift themselves.	Directive/ Commissive	Positive Politeness	assertiveness Encourages developing nations to take part in global progress, expresses shared moral duty
19	I am convinced that the leaders of the great world civilizations, I am convinced they	Assertive	Positive Politeness	Expresses strong belief in the wisdom and responsibility of global leaders, motivational in tone
20	No one country can bully the whole community	Assertive	Bald on Record/ Positive Politeness	Condemns unilateralism, asserts equality and the need for mutual respect among nations
21	I would like to reiterate again Indonesia's complete support for the two-state solution	Commissive	Positive Politeness	Reaffirms Indonesia's diplomatic stance towards the Israel-Palestine conflict, commitment to peace
22	We must have an independent Palestine. But we must also we must also recognize we must also respect and we must also guarantee the safety and security of Israel.	Directive/ Assertive	Positive Politeness	Advocates balance and fairness in Middle East peace, promotes reconciliation and mutual respect
23	Two descendants of Abraham must live in reconciliation, peace and harmony.	Directive/ Assertive	Positive Politeness	Symbolic appeal to unity through shared religious heritage, moral persuasion toward coexistence
24	Is this a dream? Maybe. But this is the beautiful dream	Directive/ Expressive	Off Record/ Positive Politeness	Uses reflection and emotion to inspire hope, softens political appeal with visionary language.
25.	Let us work towards this noble goal. Let us continue humanity's journey of hope.	Directive (Inclusive Invitation)	Positive Politeness	Closing appeal encouraging collective global action, inclusive and motivational ending.

Table 1 above provides a detailed breakdown of the speech acts and politeness strategies identified in his speech. The analysis of Prabowo Subianto's UN General Assembly speech reveals that he employs a variety of pragmatic politeness strategies based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. The utterances are distributed across different speech acts such as assertive, directive, commissive, and expressive. Those speech acts are used to achieve diplomatic effectiveness, maintain positive interpersonal relations, and project Indonesia's moral and political stance on global issues. While, the most dominant strategy identified throughout the speech is positive politeness. Prabowo begins his speech by expressing respect through a formal address to the assembly, saying "Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen". This opening exemplifies a positive politeness strategy, as it

demonstrates the speaker's effort to show deference, maintain harmony, and establish rapport with an international audience. Such an expression is a common rhetorical convention in diplomatic discourse, serving to uphold cross-cultural communicative etiquette and project an image of humility, respect, and credibility. This strategy appears in the majority of utterances, such as "It is indeed a great honor for me," "We differ in race, religion, and nationality. Yet, we gather together today as one human family," and "We believe in the United Nations". These utterances highlight inclusivity, shared values, and collective identity. These become essential components of diplomatic communication that aim to build solidarity and mutual respect among nations. For instance, the frequent use of the inclusive pronoun 'we' reflects positive politeness by emphasizing unity and shared responsibility. Similarly, expressions such as "It is indeed a great honor for me" and "Your excellencies, distinguished delegates" illustrate the use of honorifics and respectful address forms that signal deference and humility. Then, the repetition of collective appeals such as "Let us continue humanity's great journey. Let's rising nations help others to lift themselves.", "Let us work towards this noble goal. Let us continue humanity's journey of hope." reinforce solidarity and optimism, softening directives through inclusive and cooperative tone. Positive politeness allows the speaker to express optimism, appreciation, and cooperation, thereby strengthening intercultural rapport and aligning Indonesia with global humanitarian principles.

Negative politeness appears less frequently, but it is used in contexts requiring formal respect and cautious appeals, such as "Madame President, Excellencies, I propose to this assembly a message of hope." This strategy demonstrates deference and acknowledges the authority of international delegates, emphasizing politeness and diplomacy. Meanwhile, bald on record strategies are used to convey urgency and moral assertiveness, as seen in utterances such as "We must act now", and "We must not give up." These strategies are typically associated with moments of moral clarity and leadership, signaling the speaker's strong commitment to global justice and peace. These utterances still maintain a respectful tone even when making firm calls to action. Prabowo also employs off record strategy in his speech through rhetorical questions or reflective expressions. This strategy can be found in some utterances such as "Can we remain silent?", "Is this a dream? Maybe. But this is the beautiful dream..." This strategy serves to engage the audience's moral reasoning and emotional empathy. This indirect approach invites reflection rather than confrontation. Based on the results found that Prabowo Subianto's speech demonstrates a strategic blend of politeness strategies, with positive politeness as the predominant mode. This reflects his effort to foster unity, respect, and cooperation while balancing assertiveness with humility. Through the pragmatic use of politeness strategies, the speech not only communicates political messages but also projects Indonesia's image as a nation committed to peace, justice, and intercultural understanding. This pattern indicates that the speech primarily functions to inform, persuade, and reaffirm moral commitment, rather than to declare institutional changes. In terms of Brown and

Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, positive politeness strategies were the most frequently used, followed by negative politeness, bald on record, and off record. This dominance of positive politeness reflects Prabowo's emphasis on solidarity, cooperation, and shared values.

The Reflection of Intercultural Awareness and Diplomatic Intent

Prabowo Subianto's speech at the United Nations General Assembly demonstrates high degree of intercultural awareness and diplomatic sensitivity reflected through his consistent use of pragmatic politeness strategies and inclusive rhetoric. The speech reveals a balance between national identity and global solidarity, aligning Indonesia's stance with universal humanistic and multilateral values. Throughout the speech, Prabowo acknowledges cultural diversity and shared humanity, as in his utterance "We differ in race, religion, and nationality. Yet, we gather together today as one human family." This utterance reflects positive politeness by emphasizing unity and collective identity across cultural differences (Brown, 1987). He employs positive politeness strategies repeatedly in his utterances, such as "It is indeed a great honor for me". "Together we must strive to achieve our hopes, our dreams". These utterances emphasize inclusivity, solidarity, and mutual respect and these are characteristics of intercultural sensitivity as they recognize the shared values and collective aspiration of a multicultural audience. (Venera Nagimovna Yapparova J. V., 2019) emphasize that verbal politeness is a vital tool in diplomacy, serving to maintain mutual respect, mitigate potential conflicts, and strengthen international relations through linguistic tact.

Moreover, assertive speech acts dominantly use in his speech, such as "All men are created equal" and "Our world today is driven by conflict". These utterances serve moral reflection, global concern, and display an awareness of human values with equality, justice, and peace. While the use of negative politeness and off record strategies in formal proposal such as "Madame President, Excellencies, I propose to this assembly a message of hope." Reflects diplomatic sensitivity and respect for the institutional hierarchy of the UN. Prabowo's directive and commissive acts, for instance, "We must act now", "We must not give up", and "Indonesia is prepared to deploy 20,000..." state Indonesia's commitment to global peace and cooperation. These speech acts combine directness with positive politeness markers, which soften imperatives and project a tone of shared responsibility rather than command. Furthermore, Prabowo's rhetorical style reflects Indonesia's diplomatic identity as a nation that values harmony, collectivism, and respect. His preference for inclusive language, such as "we", "our", "together", and indirect appeals illustrate Indonesia's orientation toward cooperative and relational diplomacy. This aligns with (Ting-Toomey, 1999) view that communication reflects deeper cultural values and social identities. This contrasts with many Western political speeches, which often emphasize individual agency and directness. Such linguistic choices mirror

Indonesia's broader foreign policy stance that prioritizes multilateralism, peacekeeping, and cultural respect in international engagement.

D. Conclusions

According to the data presented, Prabowo Subianto's speech at the 80th United Nations General Assembly reflects a deliberate use of pragmatic politeness strategies as conceptualized by Brown and Levinson (1987), integrated with Searle's (1979) speech acts framework. The results reveal that Prabowo skillfully employs various types of speech acts, particularly assertive, directive, commissive, and expressive to convey Indonesia's stance on global issues while maintaining diplomatic decorum. These acts are strategically embedded with all politeness strategies that project solidarity, respect, and international cooperation. The analysis demonstrates that Prabowo's linguistic choices go beyond mere political expression. His frequent use of inclusive expressions reflects positive politeness aimed at establishing shared identity and collective responsibility. Meanwhile, the use of mitigated directives and honorifics exemplifies negative politeness, reinforcing deference and respect toward international audiences. This study contributes to the field of political pragmatics by demonstrating how Brown and Levinson's model, developed in largely Western contexts, manifests in the diplomatic speech of an Indonesian leader, revealing a distinct preference for solidarity-building (positive politeness) over deference-based (negative politeness) strategies. It underscores that diplomatic effectiveness is co-constructed through pragmatic choices that reflect underlying cultural values. The findings underline that effective diplomacy relies not only on political content but also on the pragmatic and cultural sensitivity embedded in language use. Future research could employ a comparative discourse analysis, contrasting the politeness strategies of leaders from Asian collectivist cultures with those from Western individualistic cultures in similar international settings.

E. Acknowledgement

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to all those who contributed to the completion of this research. Deep thanks are also extended to the Doctoral Program in Educational Science at Universitas Negeri Makassar for providing an inspiring academic environment and scholarly support.

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