Research Article

Politeness strategies used by Tom Cotton to ask questions in congress interviews: A comparative analysis

Mutiara Mutiara[a], Affifah Syahlina Br. Hutagalung[a], Thesia Aprianti Purba[a], Elizabeth Rusida Yosephine Br. Tamba[a]

[a]English Department, Universitas Sumatera Utara, Jl. Universitas No.19, Padang Bulan, Kec. Medan Baru, Kota Medan, Sumatera Utara 20155

mutiaradamanizhy20@gmail.com

Abstract

This research aims to examine the politeness strategies used by Tom Cotton to ask questions in congress interviews. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method by collecting the data from his two congress interview videos with the TikTok CEO, Shou Zi Chew, and the Secretary of the Army, Christine E. Wormuth, on YouTube. The data are in the form of phrases and clauses that contained politeness strategies. In analyzing the data, the researchers compare the data using the theories of politeness strategy by Brown and Levinson (1987) to outlines the different types of politeness strategy such as: bald on record, positive politeness, and negative politeness, that Cotton used in the interviews. The data is never analyzed yet by any researcher before. After analyzing the data, the researchers found three types of politeness strategies in the Tom Cotton's question interviews at congress: Bald on record, positive politeness, and negative politeness, and also found the differences and similarities of the way of Tom Cotton's interviews.

Keywords: Politeness Strategies; Tom Cotton; Interview; TikTok CEO; Secretary Army

1. Introduction

1.1. Tom Cotton Background

According to Cotton Bio (Cotton Bio, 2021), Tom Cotton is a United States Senator from Arkansas. Tom's committees include the Judiciary Committee, where he serves as the Ranking Member for the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice and Counterterrorism, the Intelligence Committee, and the Armed Services Committee, where he serves as the Ranking Member of the Air Land Power Subcommittee.

Tom grew up on his family's cattle farm in Yell County. He graduated from Dardanelle High School, Harvard, and Harvard Law School. After a clerkship with the U.S. Court of Appeals and private law practice, Tom left the law because of the September 11th attacks.

After briefly working in law, he served as U.S Army captain as deploying to Iraq and Afghanistan. Tom served nearly five years on active duty in the United States Army as an Infantry Officer. Tom served in Iraq with the 101st Airborne and in Afghanistan with a Provincial Reconstruction Team. Between his two combat tours, Tom served with The Old Guard at Arlington National Cemetery. Tom's military

decorations include the Bronze Star Medal, Combat Infantry Badge, and Ranger Tab. Between the Army and the Senate, Tom worked for McKinsey & Co. and served one term in the House of Representatives.

Cotton entered politics in 2012 and winning a seat in congress before successfully campaigning for the Senate 2014 against incumbent Mark Pryor. Known for his conservative stance, he has served on several key senate committees and gained attention for his controversial actions, such as signing a letter to Iranian leaders and calling for military intervention during protests in 2020.

Cotton has authored two books and has been frequently mentioned as a potential presidential candidate, although he announced he would not run in 2024. Cotton renowned for his direct and firm style when asking questions, often using a challenging approach. He tends to ask questions that spark debate and encourage clear responses, especially in Committee Hearings, reflecting his strong position and beliefs on certain issues in 2023 and 2024. Cotton participated in congress to interview the TikTok CEO, Shou Zi Chew, and the Secretary of the Army, Christine E. Wormuth. His two interviews are from YouTube which the data that will be analyze by the researchers using politeness strategies.

1.2. About Politeness Strategies

Language plays a crucial role in human life by connecting individuals with one another. It enables us to communicate and interact socially, serving as a key factor that distinguishes humans from other beings. According to Purba et al., (2023) language is one maintain relationship with other people in an interaction. As social being, almost everyday people use language to communicate with others.

Politeness is a social behavior that showing to someone in respect, consideration, and kindness. Based on Yule (1996:60), politeness refers to social behavior characterized by showing good manners toward others. It involves being courteous, using appropriate language, and behaving in a way that acknowledges the feelings and rights of others (Brown & Levinson, 1987.; Meiliana et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2022; Togi Hutahaean & Friska Ferawati Girsang, 2020).

There are have several in politeness that is named Politeness Strategies. Based on Brown and Levinson (1987), politeness is divides into four strategies. These are can be expressed through various forms of questions or answers. Brown and Levinson (1987) identified four strategies of politeness: bald-on record, negative politeness, positive politeness, and off-record (Santoso & Amini Isnaini, 2023).

1.3. About This Research

In this research, the researchers want to explore and elaborate the politeness strategies used by Tom Cotton to ask questions in two congress interviews, with the TikTok CEO, Shou Zi Chew, and the Secretary of the Army, Christine E. Wormuth.

The researchers choose that Tom Cotton's interviews as the data source because of Tom Cotton is a political public figure that can be a role model in U.S. for the society, many people watch and listen to his interview because he is a firm senator and impactful person for U.S. politics.

2. Methods

The methodology used in this research is descriptive qualitative. Descriptive qualitative is where researchers cannot manipulate data, but explain existing samples or variables (Rahman et al., 2022). So that the qualitative descriptive refers to an in-depth description of the research variables. In this research,

the researchers want to explore and elaborate the politeness strategies used by Tom Cotton to ask questions in two congress interviews, with the TikTok CEO, Shou Zi Chew, and the Secretary of the Army, Christine E. Wormuth.

The researchers analyze the data by using the theories of politeness strategy by the Brown and Levinson (1987) including bald-on record, negative politeness, positive politeness, and off-record. The researchers collect data first for analysis. According to Maulida (2020) in (Rahman et al., 2022), data are things in the form of information, phenomena, or conditions that are collected. In this research, the researchers collecting the data from videos on YouTube then make the transcripts of Tom's interview questions into sentences. The data are in the form of phrases and clauses that contained politeness strategies.

Techniques for collecting data are things or steps used by researchers in collecting. There are several steps that the researchers will take, a) Transcript the Tom Cotton's questions in the two congress interviews, b) Analyze the differences and similarities of the data, c) Classify the data base on the type of politeness strategy, and c) Compare the results. After all of the steps, then the researchers make a conclusion.

3. Results

3.1. Tom Cotton's interview with the TikTok CEO, Shou Zi Chew

1. Bald on Record:

   Direct Questions: Cotton's questions such as "What nation are you a citizen?" and "Do you have a Singaporean passport?" exemplify bald on record strategies. These questions are straightforward, pressing, and lack any politeness markers. They challenge Chew Shou Zi's credibility and authority directly, creating a confrontational atmosphere.

2. Negative Politeness:

   Confrontational Inquiries: Questions like "Have you ever applied for Chinese citizenship?" and "Have you ever been associated or affiliated with the Chinese Communist Party?" fall under negative politeness. These inquiries challenge the interlocutor's competence and reasoning, placing them in a defensive position without softening the approach. The directness indicates a lack of deference to Chew Shou Zi's status.

3.2. Tom Cotton's interview with the Secretary of the Army, Christine E. Wormuth

1. Positive Politeness:

   Expressions of Condolence and Gratitude: Cotton begins by expressing condolences for fallen soldiers and appreciating the Secretary's service. These statements aim to build rapport and reduce social distance, showcasing a positive politeness strategy that fosters a sense of camaraderie.

2. Negative Politeness:

   Respectful Inquiry: When Cotton asks about the status of the gender-neutral standards, his phrasing, "I want to talk about," softens the demand, respecting the Secretary's autonomy and providing an option for refusal, indicative of negative politeness.

3. Bald on Record:

   Direct Assertions: Statements like "the law called on the army to establish the standards by June" illustrate bald on record strategies. Cotton delivers these assertions matter-of-factly, showing no attempt to mitigate the impact of his demands.

3.3. Comparison of The Politeness Strategies from The Transcript Video

This analysis examines the differences and similarities of politeness strategies used by Tom Cotton to ask the TikTok CEO, Chew Shou Zi, and the Secretary of the Army, Christine E. Wormuth.

1. Similarities:

    Use of Bald on Record: In both transcripts, Cotton employs bald on record strategies to assertively challenge his interlocutors. This reflects a consistent approach when addressing authority figures.

    Direct Confrontation: Both scenarios showcase Cotton's willingness to directly confront issues, which is evident in his questioning style.

2. Differences:

    Emotional Tone: The hearing with the Secretary of the Army features more positive politeness strategies, aimed at building rapport and establishing goodwill, while the questioning of Chew Shou Zi is more aggressive and confrontational.

    Contextual Respect: Cotton shows greater respect for the Secretary's position through expressions of gratitude and condolences, whereas his interaction with Chew Shou Zi is characterized by skepticism and challenge.

4. Discussion

4.1. The transcripts of Tom Cotton's interview with the TikTok CEO, Shou Zi Chew

These below are the transcripts of the Tom Cotton's question interviews with TikTok CEO, Chew Shou Zi. The researchers found the negative politeness and bald on record from these data.

Data 1: (0.01-0.08)
"So you said today as you often say that you live in Singapore of what nation are you a citizen?"

The first data is in the second of 0.01 until 0.08 of the video. This question challenges the Chew Shou Zi's position directly, found in the sentence "What nation are you a citizen?" is a form of question that is straightforward and presses the interlocutor. The straightforwardness is designed to pressure Chew Shou Zi to provide strong justification and this is a Bald on Record strategy.

Data 2: (0.09-0.11)
"Are you a citizen of any other nation?"

The second data in second (0.09-0.11) A blunt request for evidence, this question attempts to undermine the Chew Shou Zi's argument by forcing them to provide strong evidence. This lack of politeness falls under Negative Politeness and implies that the Tom Cotton doubts the opponent has sufficient support for their claim.

Data 3: (0.11-0.17)
"Have you ever applied for Chinese citizenship?"

The third data in the second (0.11-0.17) shows accusatory question directly attacks the Chew Shou Zi's reasoning, suggesting that they are deliberately overlooking important information. This question falls

into Negative Politeness because it is confrontational and designed to put Chew Shou Zi on the defensive.

Data 4: (0.18-0.22)
"Do you have a Singaporean passport?"

The fourth data in the second (0.18-0.22) shows This question directly challenges the Chew Shou Zi's credibility. It's Bald on Record because it questions the Chew Shou Zi's authority without any attempt to soften the critique or show respect for their expertise.

Data 5: (0.22-0.53)
"Do you have any other passport from any other nation?"

The fifth data in the second (0.22-0.53). This question challenges the opponent's position directly, found in the sentence "any other passport from any other nation?" is a form of question that is straightforward and presses the interlocutor. The straightforwardness is designed to pressure the Chew Shou Zi to provide strong justification and this is a Bald on Record strategy.

Data 6 : (0.36-0.41)
"Have you ever been a member of the Chinese communist party?"

The sixth data in the second (0.36-0.41), this question is Negative Politeness because highly confrontational, as it directly challenges the opponent's comprehension of the debate topic. It is not softened by any polite markers, making it a personal attack on the Chew Shou Zi's understanding or intelligence.

Data 7: (0.41-0.46)
"Have you ever been associated or affiliated with the Chinese communist party?"

The seventh data in the second (0.41-0.46) shows this question implies that the opponent is willfully ignoring or dismissing clear evidence. This question is Negative Politeness because directly attacks their credibility and reasoning without politeness markers, putting them in a defensive position.

4.2. The Transcripts of Tom Cotton's interview with the Secretary of the Army, Christine E. Wormuth

These below are the transcripts of the Tom Cotton's interviews the Secretary of the Army, Christine E. Wormuth. The researchers found the positive politeness, negative politeness, and also bald on record.

Data 1: (0:06-0:25)
"So, I also want to express my condolences for the soldier whose lives were lost in the crash of two Blackhawk helicopters on near Fort Campbell overnight".

The opening sentence used by Tom is Positive Politeness. This is proven by the opening sentence spoken by Tom Cotton to the Secretary of the Army, which expressed his condolences to the soldiers who died.

Data 2: (0:26-0:50)

"I want to add my thanks and congratulations to you for a highly distinguished and decorated career of service to the Army, I know you're not retiring yet and you'll run through the tape later this year but we're very grateful for what you've done for our country."

This sentence uses positive politeness. These sentences aim to reduce social distance and highlight friendship and appreciation for the recipient, which is consistent with positive politeness strategies.

Data 3: (0:51-1:18)

"Secretary warmth, I want to talk about the army combat fitness test and these ongoing years long saga of the last year the army unveiled a gender-based standards after many years of promising gender neutral standards as result this committee directed the army within 180 days of the enactment of last year's Nda to promulgate new gender neutral standards for combat arms moss, what is the status of those new standards "

This sentence includes Negative Politeness where Tom Cotton shows respect for the secretary's freedom not to feel pressured. He used phrases such as "I want to talk about" and asks about status politely, without immediately demanding an answer. This strategy keeps requests from being too pushy, respecting the secretary's autonomy.

Data 4: (2:10-2:20)

"So the law called on the army to establish the standards by June not to brief congress by June. Are you going to prepared to meet that requirement to establish the state standards?"

The next sentences Tom uses Bald on Record. This is because Tom directly asserts what must be done ("establish the standards by June") without any attempt to soften the request or reduce the impact on the listener. Questions like "are you going to be prepared to meet that requirement" are delivered firmly and matter-of-factly, which is typical of the Bald on Record strategy.

Data 5: (2:30-2:33)

"Can you tell us what those combat moss are today or what branches at least"
This sentence is Negative Politeness because Tom uses the polite expression "can you tell us"

which gives the listener the option to refuse. By offering the option "or whatever branches at least," Tom attempts to reduce pressure, maintain the listener's freedom, and demonstrate politeness.

Data 6: (2:38-2:50)

"Okay but you understanding that the expectation of this commitee is that we have a single standard for the combat arms branches and then for all the other non-cambat arms branches there's be a male and female standard"

This sentence is considered Bald on Record because Tom directly states the committee's expectations without elaborating or reducing the impact of his statement. Tom states the facts clearly and firmly, without using politeness strategies aimed at avoiding threats to the listener's face.

Data 7: (3:05-3:56)

"Yes, because I mean and that wasn't the only one i mean senator Ernst and Gillibrand and Duckworth expressed concerns about this as well as did most of the committee, i mean when you're talk about things like the infantry there's irreducible physical demands. you have to be able to carry a 75 or 100 pound pack or carry up to 250 pounds wounded comrade whether you're a man or a woman or if you're an artillery or Armor. you have to able to handle shells that can weigh up to 100 pounds of standards we all think should be somewhat different if you're say working on a computer that work is very vital but it's not the same kind of physical demands that the combat arms are and in the middle of a recruiting crisis. I don't think we should be talking steps swaying anyone young men or young women who may not be up to the physical rigor of Armor and artillery but are able to perform all those other roles, that you understanding of what this congress intended right?"

This sentence includes Positive Politeness because Tom is trying to build closeness and agreement with the listener. Tom uses phrases like "we all think" and "that's your understanding" to demonstrate shared views and build positive relationships. He tries to connect the listener with the generally accepted view, thereby demonstrating a desire to cooperate and avoid conflict.

5. Conclusions

After analyzing the data, the researchers concluded that there are three types of politeness strategies found in the Interview with Chew Shou Zi and Secretary of the Army. These three types of politeness strategies are: Bald on record, positive politeness, and negative politeness.

The researcher found there are distinct approaches to politeness strategies emerge, reflecting varying degrees of confrontation and rapport-building. Cotton employs bald on record strategies in both contexts, asserting his position with direct questions and statements that challenge authority. However, the tone and emotional undertones differ significantly. The interaction with the Secretary of the Army is marked by positive politeness strategies that seek to establish rapport through expressions of condolence and gratitude, fostering a sense of camaraderie. In contrast, the questioning of Chew Shou Zi is characterized by a more aggressive stance, emphasizing skepticism and a lack of deference. This comparative analysis highlights the adaptability of politeness strategies based on the interlocutor's status and the context, revealing how emotional tone and respect can shape the dynamics of authority in discourse.

References

B. Penelope, L. Stephen. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage. Vol. 4. Cambridge University Press.* Retrieved from https://pure.mpg.de/rest/items/item_64421/component/file_2225570/content

CNA. (2024, Feb 1). "No, I'm Singaporean": TikTok CEO Chew Shou Zi responds to US Senator's questions about China ties [Video file]. Retrieved from https://youtu.be/RgLQCfypDLk?si=nbcdQ-DcPAQs2B0E

Cotton Bio. (2021). Retrieved from https://www.cotton.senate.gov/about

Forbes Breaking News. (2023, April 1). Tom Cotton Questions Secretary Of Army About Possible Different Standards For Men & Women In US Army [Video file]. Retrieved from https://youtu.be/PXl6x3dshsA?si=roU_h9a4jTIB-VoK

Meiliana, R. A., Sukmaningrum, R., & Shopia B., Th. C. (2023). Language Politeness Strategies Spoke by Boy William in the Breakout Interview with Ruel. *Lingua Franca*, *2*(1), 13–25. https://doi.org/10.37680/lingua_franca.v2i1.2247

Purba, A., Nasution, T., Matondang, M. K., Zulkarnain, Z., & Purba, R. (2023). APPLICATION OF BROWN AND LEVINSON'S MODEL ON JOE BIDEN'S VICTORY SPEECH: A CASE ON POLITENESS STRATEGY. *English Review: Journal of English Education*, *11*(1), 75–82. https://doi.org/10.25134/erjee.v11i1.7575

Rahman, F., Rangkuti, R., & Mono, U. (2022). Politeness Strategies Used by Anies Baswedan in the Interview on Humanities in Southeast Asia. In *LingPoet: Journal of Linguistics and Literary Research* (Vol. 3, Issue 1). Retrieved from http://talenta.usu.ac.id/lingpoet

Santoso, D., & Amini Isnaini, R. (2023). STRATEGI KOMUNIKASI KESOPANAN DARI MAHFUDZ M.D DALAM DISKUSI TENTANG HUKUM DI ACARA "NARASI" COMMUNICATION POLITENESS STRATEGY OF MAHFUDZ M.D IN ANSWERING ABOUT THE LAW ON 'NARASI.' *Journal of Social and Economics Research*, *5*(2). Retrieved from https://idm.or.id/JSER/index.

Togi Hutahaean, D., & Friska Ferawati Girsang, A. (n.d.). *Wanastra : Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra An Analysis Of The Politeness Strategies Utilized By Pesbukers In Their Variety Show*. https://doi.org/10.31294/w.v12i1