

Politeness Strategies Used In Jimmy Fallon's Interview With Millie Bobby Brown

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Abstract

This study investigates politeness strategies employed in Jimmy Fallon's interview with Millie Bobby Brown on The Tonight Show, utilizing Brown and Levinson's politeness theory framework. Celebrity interviews present a unique communicative challenge where hosts must extract engaging content while guests simultaneously protect professional obligations and personal boundaries, creating persistent face-threatening conditions that require carefully calculated linguistic strategies. The research aims to identify and analyze the types of politeness strategies used by both host and guest and to examine how these strategies function in maintaining interpersonal relationships while managing face-threatening acts in celebrity interview contexts. Employing qualitative descriptive methodology, this study analyzes the complete interview transcript, systematically categorizing utterances according to politeness strategy types including bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. The findings reveal that both speakers predominantly employ positive politeness strategies, particularly through noticing and attending, intensifying interest to hearer, using in-group identity markers, and seeking agreement while avoiding disagreement. Bald on-record strategies appear primarily in procedural contexts where institutional demands for efficiency override face concerns, such as when the host directs segment transitions or manages audience attention. Negative politeness and off-record strategies are also identified through strategic ambiguity, hedging expressions, and formulaic deflections such as "I can't confirm or deny it," allowing the guest to navigate confidentiality constraints without appearing uncooperative. The analysis demonstrates sophisticated face management when discussing sensitive topics, with both speakers utilizing collaborative boundary-setting to protect professional obligations while maintaining conversational engagement. The established relationship between Fallon and Brown, developed over eleven previous interviews, facilitates comfortable deployment of solidarity-building strategies. These findings indicate that relational history functions as a critical contextual variable shaping politeness strategy selection in media discourse. This research contributes empirical evidence supporting Brown and Levinson's framework applicability to contemporary media discourse.

Keywords: *politeness strategies, celebrity interview, media discourse, face-threatening acts, talk show discourse*

Introduction

Communication serves as the fundamental pillar of human interaction, enabling individuals to exchange ideas, express emotions, and build relationships. In every communicative act, speakers navigate complex social dynamics to achieve their

communicative goals while maintaining interpersonal harmony (Dujani & Asril, 2019). The way people communicate is not merely about conveying information but also about managing social relationships and protecting both their own and others' dignity. This delicate balance between achieving communicative efficiency and maintaining social harmony has been a central concern in pragmatic studies, particularly in the examination of politeness phenomena in human discourse. Politeness, as a linguistic and social phenomenon, plays a crucial role in shaping how messages are delivered and received in various communicative contexts. Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, introduced in 1987, remains one of the most influential frameworks for understanding how speakers employ linguistic strategies to mitigate face-threatening acts. Their theory proposes that individuals possess two types of face: positive face, which represents the desire to be appreciated and approved by others, and negative face, which reflects the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition. When speakers engage in communication, they must carefully select appropriate strategies to protect these face needs, thereby ensuring smooth and successful interaction (Saragih et al., 2025).

However, celebrity interviews present a unique communicative challenge that remains underexplored in politeness research. In this setting, the host is expected to extract entertaining and personal information from the guest, while the guest must simultaneously protect confidential professional obligations and maintain a carefully managed public image. This tension becomes particularly complex when sensitive topics arise, such as plot spoilers of a major television series or personal life developments, where a single unguarded utterance can carry significant professional consequences. Moreover, the asymmetrical relationship between host and guest, in which the host controls the direction and pace of conversation, creates persistent face-threatening conditions that require both parties to employ carefully calculated linguistic strategies. Despite the communicative complexity inherent in this format, semi-casual celebrity interviews have received limited scholarly attention in politeness research, leaving a gap in understanding of how professional communicators navigate these competing demands in real-world media discourse.

In contemporary media landscape, talk shows have emerged as a significant platform for observing authentic linguistic behavior and politeness strategies in action. These programs provide a unique communicative setting where hosts and guests engage in semi-structured conversations that balance entertainment value with genuine interpersonal exchange. Talk show interviews, particularly those conducted by experienced hosts, demonstrate sophisticated use of politeness strategies to create comfortable atmospheres, elicit interesting responses, and maintain positive relationships with their guests (Muhtadi et al., 2022). The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon represents one of the most popular late-night talk shows, known for its host's warm interviewing style and ability to create engaging conversations with diverse guests. The interview between Jimmy Fallon and Millie Bobby Brown offers particularly rich data for analyzing politeness strategies due to several compelling factors. First, the relationship between the host and guest demonstrates a long-standing professional rapport, as indicated by Brown's mention of appearing on the show eleven times. This established relationship provides insight into how politeness strategies evolve and function within ongoing professional friendships. Second, the conversation encompasses sensitive topics including Brown's personal life, her adoption of a baby, and confidential information about the popular series *Stranger Things*, requiring careful navigation of face-threatening situations through strategic politeness deployment (Trump et al., 2020).

The significance of studying politeness in media discourse extends beyond mere linguistic analysis. Media interactions serve as models of communication that influence public discourse and shape social expectations about appropriate conversational behavior. Talk show hosts, in particular, function as professional communicators whose strategic use of language demonstrates effective interpersonal management techniques (Tyas et al., 2024). By examining how Jimmy Fallon employs various politeness strategies from bald on-record statements to positive politeness markers researchers can gain valuable insights into the practical application of politeness theory in real-world, high-stakes communicative situations where maintaining positive relationships is paramount to professional success. Previous studies on politeness strategies have predominantly focused on formal interviews, educational settings, or scripted media content, leaving a gap in the examination of semi-casual celebrity interviews that blend entertainment with genuine interpersonal communication. The Tonight Show format presents a unique hybrid context where professional obligations intersect with personal rapport, requiring hosts to balance multiple communicative goals simultaneously. Furthermore, the specific dynamics of interviewing young celebrities about both their professional achievements and personal lives necessitates particularly nuanced politeness strategy deployment, making this interaction an ideal case study for pragmatic analysis (Probosini et al., 2020).

The conversation between Fallon and Brown exhibits diverse manifestations of politeness strategies across multiple categories. The preliminary analysis reveals instances of bald on-record strategies when directness serves communicative efficiency, positive politeness strategies that emphasize camaraderie and shared interests, and strategic avoidance of disagreement when discussing sensitive topics such as plot theories and spoilers (Sahib et al., 2023). The frequency and distribution of these strategies reflect both the institutional constraints of the talk show format and the personal relationship dynamics between the interlocutors, providing multidimensional insights into politeness phenomena. Understanding how politeness strategies function in this specific communicative context contributes to broader theoretical discussions about the universality and cultural specificity of politeness norms. While Brown and Levinson's framework has faced criticism for its Western-centric orientation, analyzing its application in contemporary American media discourse helps validate and refine the theory's predictive power. Furthermore, examining politeness in celebrity interviews illuminates how power dynamics, solidarity, and social distance influence linguistic choices in contexts where interlocutors must simultaneously maintain professional boundaries while projecting authentic personal connections (Rahardi & Noviance, 2025).

This study seeks to address two fundamental questions regarding the deployment of politeness strategies in the interview between Jimmy Fallon and Millie Bobby Brown. First, what types of politeness strategies, according to Brown and Levinson's framework, are employed by both the host and guest throughout their interaction? This question aims to identify and categorize the various linguistic forms and pragmatic functions of politeness strategies present in the discourse, providing a comprehensive taxonomy of how both speakers navigate face concerns during their conversation. Second, how do the identified politeness strategies function to maintain interpersonal relationships and manage face-threatening acts in the context of a celebrity talk show interview? This question examines the pragmatic motivations behind strategy selection and the effectiveness of different approaches in achieving communicative goals while preserving social harmony, particularly when discussing sensitive topics such as confidential entertainment industry information and personal life developments.

The primary objective of this research is to systematically identify and analyze the politeness strategies utilized by Jimmy Fallon and Millie Bobby Brown during their interview, categorizing these strategies according to Brown and Levinson's theoretical framework. By providing detailed linguistic evidence and pragmatic analysis, this study aims to demonstrate how specific utterances function as politeness devices within the broader conversational context. Additionally, this research seeks to explain the relationship between strategy selection and contextual factors such as topic sensitivity, relationship dynamics, and institutional constraints of the talk show format. Through comprehensive analysis, this study aims to contribute empirical evidence supporting the applicability of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory to contemporary media discourse while illuminating the sophisticated ways professional communicators manage face concerns in public interactions.

This research offers valuable theoretical contributions by applying Brown and Levinson's politeness framework to authentic contemporary media discourse, thereby testing the theory's explanatory power in a real-world communicative context. The findings will provide empirical support for understanding how politeness strategies function in professional entertainment settings, potentially revealing patterns and practices that extend or refine existing theoretical models. Furthermore, this study contributes to the growing body of research on media pragmatics, an increasingly important field as mediated communication continues to shape public discourse and social norms. From a practical perspective, this research offers insights for communication professionals, including talk show hosts, interviewers, public relations specialists, and anyone engaged in professional communication requiring careful face management. By examining successful politeness strategy deployment in a high-profile media context, the study provides models of effective interpersonal communication that balance multiple competing demands. Additionally, the findings may inform media literacy education and communication training programs, helping individuals develop sophisticated awareness of how linguistic choices shape interpersonal dynamics in both professional and personal contexts.

Method

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to analyze politeness strategies used in Jimmy Fallon's interview with Millie Bobby Brown. The qualitative approach allows for in-depth examination of linguistic phenomena within their natural communicative context, focusing on understanding how politeness strategies function pragmatically rather than quantifying their occurrence. This design is particularly suitable for exploring the nuanced ways speakers navigate face concerns in talk show interviews. The descriptive nature of this research enables comprehensive documentation and analysis of politeness strategies as they occur in authentic discourse. By examining actual utterances from the interview transcript, this study provides detailed descriptions of linguistic forms and their pragmatic functions according to Brown and Levinson's theoretical framework. The descriptive approach facilitates identification of patterns and relationships between strategy types and contextual factors without manipulating variables or imposing experimental conditions.

Data Source

The primary data source for this research consists of the complete transcript of the interview between Jimmy Fallon and Millie Bobby Brown on *The Tonight Show*, which

was aired and publicly accessible via the official YouTube channel of The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon. The interview was selected purposively due to its rich display of various politeness strategies and the established relationship between the host and guest. The transcript captures authentic conversational exchanges including discussions about Brown's personal life, professional achievements, and confidential entertainment industry information. The data encompasses verbal utterances from both speakers throughout the interview segment, providing sufficient material for comprehensive politeness strategy analysis. The transcript includes conversational turns where speakers navigate potentially face-threatening situations, such as discussing plot theories about *Stranger Things* and personal topics like Brown's recent adoption. This variety of topics and communicative situations ensures diverse manifestations of politeness phenomena suitable for thorough pragmatic examination.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection was conducted through careful transcription and documentation of the interview conversation. The transcript was obtained and verified for accuracy, ensuring that all verbal utterances were captured precisely as spoken. Special attention was paid to preserving the sequential organization of conversational turns, as context is crucial for understanding the pragmatic function of politeness strategies. The collection process involved three systematic stages. First, the researcher repeatedly watched the interview recording to ensure familiarity with the conversational flow and contextual nuances. Second, the interview was transcribed verbatim, capturing not only the exact wording of each utterance but also relevant paralinguistic cues such as pauses and overlapping speech where applicable. Third, the transcript was cross-checked against the original recording to ensure transcription accuracy before proceeding to analysis. Each utterance was extracted with sufficient surrounding context to enable accurate pragmatic interpretation. The researcher documented speaker identity, exact wording, and conversational placement for each identified instance, creating a comprehensive corpus of politeness strategy examples suitable for systematic analysis.

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis follows a systematic qualitative procedure based on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory framework. The analytical process was carried out through several sequential steps. First, each utterance in the transcript was examined to identify instances of politeness strategy deployment. Second, the identified utterances were categorized according to the four main politeness strategy types: bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. Third, within each major category, utterances were further classified into specific sub-strategies as outlined by Brown and Levinson. Fourth, detailed pragmatic interpretation was conducted to explain how each identified strategy functions to manage face concerns within its specific conversational context. The researcher also examines the relationship between strategy selection and contextual factors such as topic sensitivity, social distance, and power dynamics. Findings are presented through descriptive explanation supported by concrete linguistic examples drawn directly from the data. The analytical process ensures systematic application of theoretical categories while maintaining sensitivity to the unique characteristics of talk show discourse.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity, this study employs theoretical triangulation by grounding the analysis firmly in Brown and Levinson's established politeness framework while considering contextual factors specific to media discourse. The researcher maintains analytical rigor by providing explicit justification for categorization decisions and supporting interpretations with clear textual evidence. Multiple reviews of the data ensure consistent application of theoretical categories across all analyzed utterances. In addition, member checking was applied by revisiting the data iteratively to confirm that interpretations remained consistent with the original conversational context. Reliability is enhanced through transparent documentation of the analytical process and detailed presentation of findings. The study includes representative examples for each identified strategy type, allowing readers to assess the appropriateness of categorization decisions. By maintaining clear connections between theoretical concepts and empirical evidence, this research ensures that findings accurately reflect the politeness phenomena present in the data rather than imposing predetermined interpretations onto the conversational material.

Results And Discussion

Bald On-Record Strategies in Directive Speech Acts

The analysis reveals that Jimmy Fallon and Millie Bobby Brown employ bald on-record strategies primarily through imperative forms and direct requests. Fallon uses imperatives such as "Just say it, just say it," "Take a look," and "Stick around" to maintain the show's pace and engage the audience. These direct commands occur in contexts where efficiency is prioritized over politeness mitigation, particularly during transitions between segments or when directing attention to visual materials. The imperative "Can we zoom in on that birthday there?" demonstrates how bald on-record strategies can function as institutional directives within the talk show format, where the host exercises procedural authority without threatening the guest's face because the directive is not aimed at the guest personally but at the production crew. This distinction is pragmatically significant, as it reveals that bald on-record strategies in talk show discourse are not uniformly face-threatening but are instead carefully calibrated according to their intended recipient and communicative purpose. Brown also employs bald on-record strategies, notably in "Go on" and "Give it to your girls and they can be a superhero." The latter utterance, while grammatically imperative, functions as a generous suggestion rather than an imposition, demonstrating how context transforms potentially face-threatening acts into positive social actions. Specifically, the directive is embedded within a gesture of goodwill, making the imperative form serve as an enthusiastic encouragement rather than a command. This finding aligns with Brown and Levinson's assertion that bald on-record strategies are appropriate when face threat is minimized by contextual factors such as shared goals or benevolent intent. The frequency of bald on-record strategies in this interview reflects the semi-formal nature of talk show discourse, where institutional requirements for brevity and audience engagement necessitate direct communication. However, these strategies are strategically deployed in non-threatening contexts, such as procedural directions or enthusiastic encouragements, ensuring that directness does not damage the interpersonal relationship. This selective deployment demonstrates sophisticated pragmatic awareness of when face concerns can be temporarily suspended in favor of communicative efficiency (Indahsari, 2021).

Positive Politeness Through Noticing and Attending

Jimmy Fallon extensively employs positive politeness strategies through noticing and attending to Millie Bobby Brown's achievements and personal circumstances. Utterances such as "You adopted a baby, a beautiful baby. Congratulations!" and "So happy for you and your husband, Jake" demonstrate explicit recognition of significant life events, showing appreciation for the guest and validating her experiences. The deliberate use of the adjective "beautiful" in describing the adopted baby is particularly noteworthy, as it intensifies the compliment beyond mere acknowledgment and signals genuine emotional engagement rather than formulaic courtesy. Similarly, the personal mention of her husband's name "Jake" indicates familiarity and attentiveness, reinforcing the host's investment in Brown's personal life rather than treating her solely as a professional guest. The host's statement "That is unbelievably the most thoughtful thing ever" in response to Brown's gift of her character's bracelet exemplifies how attending strategies amplify the positive evaluation of the guest's actions, thereby enhancing her positive face. These noticing strategies serve multiple communicative functions within the talk show context. First, they establish rapport between host and guest by demonstrating genuine interest and emotional investment in the guest's life. Second, they create engagement opportunities for the audience by highlighting newsworthy or emotionally resonant topics. Third, they position Fallon as an empathetic interviewer who values personal connections over mere professional exchanges. The compliment "This is gorgeous" when receiving the bracelet further illustrates how attending to the guest's gestures reinforces mutual appreciation and solidarity. Notably, Fallon's attending strategies are not confined to verbal expressions alone but are accompanied by immediate, enthusiastic reactions that signal authenticity rather than performative politeness. The effectiveness of noticing and attending strategies in this interview demonstrates their fundamental role in positive politeness. By explicitly recognizing Brown's generosity, family developments, and professional accomplishments, Fallon satisfies her positive face needs while simultaneously creating a warm conversational atmosphere. This approach aligns with Brown and Levinson's theory that positive politeness strategies emphasize shared values, mutual appreciation, and in-group membership, all of which are evident in Fallon's attentive acknowledgments throughout the interview (Hartati, 2021).

Intensifying Interest to Hearer as Engagement Strategy

Fallon employs intensifying interest strategies through questions that demonstrate curiosity about Brown's experiences and perspectives. Questions such as "How exciting is that?" "How's little Winnie dealing with this?" and "Does Winnie think that she is a human?" show exaggerated interest in the guest's life details, particularly regarding her dog and family dynamics. The question "Does Winnie think that she is a human?" is especially illustrative, as it attributes human cognitive capacity to Brown's pet in a humorous yet endearing way, signaling that Fallon has paid close attention to Brown's previous descriptions of her dog's personality. These questions function not merely as information-seeking devices but as positive politeness markers that signal the host's genuine engagement with the guest's personal narrative, transforming casual biographical details into subjects worthy of enthusiastic exploration. The statement "And that must have been bittersweet" exemplifies how intensifying interest can involve empathetic speculation about the guest's emotional experiences. By projecting understanding of Brown's feelings regarding her co-star's character development in *Stranger Things*, Fallon demonstrates emotional intelligence and validates her potential mixed reactions without requiring Brown to explicitly articulate them. This empathetic

projection is a sophisticated politeness move, as it allows Brown to feel understood while also giving her the conversational space to either confirm or redirect the emotional framing. This strategy enhances solidarity by suggesting shared emotional frameworks and mutual understanding, key components of positive politeness that strengthen interpersonal bonds through demonstrated empathy and attention. These intensifying strategies prove particularly effective in the talk show context where creating engaging, emotionally resonant content is paramount. By expressing heightened interest in Brown's experiences, Fallon not only satisfies her positive face needs but also models enthusiastic engagement for the audience. The strategic use of questions and empathetic statements creates conversational momentum while ensuring the guest feels valued and heard, demonstrating how positive politeness strategies can simultaneously serve interpersonal and institutional communicative goals (Rizka & Febrianti, 2024).

Using In-Group Identity Markers to Establish Solidarity

Both Fallon and Brown employ in-group identity markers through the strategic use of inclusive pronouns, particularly "we." Fallon's utterances "We did a TikTok together once," "We're not going to hold you on the line," and "We're watching it together" create a sense of shared experience and collective identity. The use of "we" in "We did a TikTok together once" is particularly significant because it invokes a specific shared memory, thereby constructing a relational history that distinguishes their bond from a typical host-guest interaction. Rather than positioning himself as the interviewer and Brown as the interviewee, Fallon linguistically places both parties on equal footing as co-participants in a shared experience, effectively dissolving the institutional hierarchy that characterizes the talk show format. These statements position both speakers as members of a common in-group, whether defined by their shared history, professional relationship, or mutual engagement with *Stranger Things* content. Brown reciprocates this solidarity-building strategy with "We get to be superheroes together," referring to her character Eleven and Will gaining powers in the series. This utterance demonstrates how in-group markers can extend beyond immediate conversational participants to include fictional characters, thereby creating multiple layers of shared identity. The use of "we" in this context also signals Brown's comfort with Fallon and her willingness to share insider information about her emotional reactions to script developments, suggesting that in-group membership facilitates more intimate disclosure. Furthermore, the fact that Brown chooses to use this inclusive pronoun when discussing a plot detail she is otherwise reluctant to confirm indicates that in-group identity markers can function as a mechanism for selective disclosure, allowing speakers to share information within the safety of an established relational context. The effectiveness of in-group identity markers in this interview illustrates their power in reducing social distance and enhancing interpersonal warmth. By linguistically constructing shared experiences and collective identity, both speakers minimize the institutional hierarchy inherent in the host-guest relationship. This finding supports Brown and Levinson's assertion that positive politeness strategies emphasizing common ground and shared membership strengthen social bonds while mitigating potential face threats inherent in interview situations where personal or sensitive topics are discussed (Ali, 2023).

Seeking Agreement and Avoiding Disagreement as Face-Saving Mechanisms

Fallon employs seeking agreement strategies through minimal responses and validation statements such as "It is," "Okay. That's good, that's good," and "Yeah." These utterances function as conversational lubricants that signal alignment with Brown's

statements and encourage continued disclosure. The repetition in "Okay. That's good, that's good" is particularly noteworthy, as the doubled affirmation intensifies the expression of agreement and conveys genuine relief or approval rather than mere procedural acknowledgment. This redundancy serves a pragmatic function of reassurance, signaling to Brown that her response is not only accepted but welcomed, thereby reinforcing a supportive conversational environment. By expressing agreement, even in minimal forms, Fallon creates a supportive conversational environment where the guest feels validated and understood, reducing the face threat associated with discussing potentially controversial topics like plot theories or personal decisions. The avoiding disagreement strategy manifests clearly in Fallon's statement "We're not going to get you in trouble" and Brown's response "I can't confirm or deny it." These utterances demonstrate mutual recognition of face-threatening territory, particularly regarding confidential information about *Stranger Things*. Fallon's preemptive assurance that he will not press Brown for information she cannot disclose is a sophisticated face-saving move that simultaneously protects Brown's negative face by removing the pressure of forced disclosure and protects his own positive face by positioning himself as a considerate and trustworthy host. Brown's formulaic response "I can't confirm or deny it," in turn, functions as a politely ambiguous deflection that honors the spirit of engagement without crossing professional boundaries. Rather than pressing Brown for definitive answers that could compromise her professional obligations, Fallon explicitly frames the conversation as non-threatening, allowing Brown to maintain her positive face by appearing cooperative while protecting her negative face by not being forced to reveal information she wishes to withhold. These strategies prove essential in navigating the delicate balance between entertainment value and professional boundaries in celebrity interviews. By seeking agreement and avoiding overt disagreement, both speakers maintain conversational harmony while addressing potentially contentious topics. This approach demonstrates sophisticated understanding of face management, where the appearance of consensus and mutual support takes precedence over extracting controversial statements, thereby preserving the long-term relationship between host and guest while still creating engaging content (Efriyati et al., 2025).

Strategic Ambiguity in Discussing Sensitive Topics

The interview demonstrates extensive use of strategic ambiguity when discussing *Stranger Things* plot theories and potential spoilers. Brown's repeated phrase "I can't confirm or deny it" serves as a formulaic response that acknowledges the question while refusing definitive answers. This strategy allows her to engage with fan theories without violating confidentiality agreements or disappointing audience expectations. The formulaic nature of this phrase is itself significant, as its repeated deployment throughout the interview creates a recognizable conversational ritual that both host and audience come to anticipate, transforming what could be an awkward refusal into a source of humor and entertainment. The ambiguous response therefore protects both her professional obligations and her positive face by appearing cooperative and good-humored rather than evasive or dismissive. Fallon facilitates this strategic ambiguity through framing devices that reduce face threat. His statements "I know you can't say anything" and "We're not going to hold you on the line for any of these theories" preemptively acknowledge Brown's constraints, thereby removing pressure for definitive responses. This collaborative approach to managing sensitive topics demonstrates how both speakers cooperate in maintaining face while still creating entertaining content. Notably, Fallon's framing of the theory discussions as playful speculation rather than

serious interrogation creates a conversational frame in which Brown's non-answers become part of the entertainment rather than conversational failures. The playful tone surrounding theory discussions transforms potential face threats into opportunities for humor and audience engagement. The effectiveness of strategic ambiguity in this context highlights how politeness strategies adapt to institutional constraints in media discourse. Unlike everyday conversation where clarity might be prioritized, celebrity interviews often require speakers to discuss topics they cannot fully address. By employing ambiguous language and mutual acknowledgment of conversational boundaries, Fallon and Brown successfully navigate these constraints while maintaining positive interpersonal dynamics, demonstrating that politeness strategies can function simultaneously as professional survival tools and relationship maintenance mechanisms (Luh et al., 2024).

The Interplay Between Politeness Strategies and Relationship Dynamics

The distribution and selection of politeness strategies throughout the interview reflect the established, ongoing relationship between Fallon and Brown. The predominance of positive politeness strategies, particularly noticing, attending, and in-group identity markers, suggests a relationship characterized by familiarity, mutual respect, and genuine affection. Brown's decision to gift Fallon her character's bracelet and her explicit statement "because you've been such a paternal figure and always looked out for me" demonstrates trust and emotional intimacy that transcends purely professional interaction. This characterization of Fallon as a "paternal figure" is linguistically significant, as it invokes a familial rather than professional relational frame, indicating that the politeness strategies employed throughout the interview are not merely strategic performances but authentic expressions of an established interpersonal bond. Such a characterization would be inconceivable in a first-time or purely professional encounter, underscoring how relational history fundamentally shapes the range and depth of politeness strategies available to interlocutors. This relational foundation enables both speakers to navigate potentially face-threatening topics with minimal friction. The discussion of confidential plot information, personal life developments, and industry speculation could create tension in relationships with less established trust. However, Fallon and Brown's strategic deployment of solidarity-building and agreement-seeking strategies, combined with their shared history of eleven previous interviews, creates a conversational environment where sensitive topics can be addressed without damaging face or relationship quality. The eleven-interview history is not merely a biographical detail but a pragmatically consequential relational resource, as it provides both speakers with a shared repertoire of conversational norms, mutual expectations, and established trust that new interlocutors would not possess. The analysis reveals that politeness strategies function not merely as isolated linguistic choices but as components of ongoing relationship management. Each strategy selection builds upon previous interactions and contributes to future relationship development. This finding extends Brown and Levinson's framework by highlighting how politeness strategies accumulate relational meaning over time, with established relationships enabling more direct communication in some contexts while simultaneously creating higher expectations for face protection in others. The interview demonstrates that sophisticated politeness strategy deployment requires awareness of both immediate contextual factors and broader relational histories (Afriyanti et al., 2023).

Conclusion

This study reveals that Jimmy Fallon and Millie Bobby Brown employ diverse politeness strategies throughout their interview, predominantly utilizing positive politeness to maintain interpersonal harmony and build solidarity. The analysis identifies bald on-record strategies in procedural contexts, extensive positive politeness through noticing, attending, intensifying interest, and in-group identity markers, alongside strategic ambiguity and agreement-seeking mechanisms when navigating sensitive topics. Fallon's interviewing approach demonstrates sophisticated face management by balancing institutional demands for engaging content with genuine respect for Brown's boundaries, particularly regarding confidential entertainment information. The established relationship between host and guest, evidenced by Brown's eleventh appearance and emotional gift-giving, facilitates comfortable deployment of solidarity-building strategies while enabling successful negotiation of potentially face-threatening discussions. These findings validate Brown and Levinson's politeness framework applicability to contemporary media discourse, demonstrating how professional communicators strategically select politeness strategies based on contextual factors including topic sensitivity, relationship history, and institutional constraints. The study contributes empirical evidence showing that effective celebrity interviews require nuanced understanding of face needs and strategic politeness deployment to simultaneously achieve entertainment goals and preserve interpersonal relationships.

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