

## **Politeness Strategies by Taylor Swift in The Ellen Show**

**Cindi Rizka Ariana<sup>a,\*</sup>, Fika Febrianti<sup>b</sup>**

<sup>a,b</sup>Universitas Trunojoyo Madura, Indonesia

\*Corresponding author. E-mail address: [220511100145@student.trunojoyo.ac.id](mailto:220511100145@student.trunojoyo.ac.id)

### **ABSTRACT**

This article discusses the politeness strategies used by Taylor Swift in her interview on The Ellen Show. This research aims to understand how Taylor Swift uses polite language to build social relationships, maintain a positive image, and deal with various situations during the interview. The approach used in this study is Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, especially on positive politeness and negative politeness strategies. The results show that Taylor Swift predominantly uses positive politeness. This strategy can be seen from the way she compliments Ellen, shares personal stories, and uses humor to create a warm and familiar atmosphere. These actions show respect and create closeness with the interlocutor and the audience. In addition, Taylor also uses negative politeness, especially when answering sensitive questions. This strategy helps her maintain privacy without appearing evasive, for example by using polite expressions or careful answers. This research shows that politeness strategies play an important role in creating effective communication, especially in the context of media interviews. By using this approach, Taylor Swift was able to maintain a good relationship with Ellen and her audience, while projecting a friendly and professional image. The findings provide insight into how celebrities use language strategies to build successful interactions.

**Keywords:** Positive politeness, Negative politeness, Interview, Taylor Swift.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Politeness is a concept in the area of pragmatics and conversational analysis in which the speaker considers several factors to be polite, including their relationship with the hearer, their age, the power they have over the hearer, the importance of their utterances, etc. (Pirdehghan, 2024). In any event such as an interview, the way a person speaks is not only about conveying a message, but also showing the attitude and impression he or she wants to create. Politeness is one of the important aspects of communication that helps maintain a good relationship between the speaker and the listener. The face-saving view of politeness places emphasis on the wants of the participants involved in a given interaction rather than on the interaction itself or the norms operating in society (Wagner, 2017).

This article analyzes how politeness strategies are applied by Taylor Swift in interviews on The Ellen Show in the Youtube channel. Taylor Swift has many fans who pay attention to her

politeness, so her every word and response in an interview can be noticed by many people. The casual and formal style of The Ellen Show also makes this interview interesting, as Taylor Swift needs to maintain politeness while still being entertaining. This provides an opportunity to observe how she answers questions, including those of a personal or sensitive nature, without offending anyone. Taylor Swift often uses humor or topic diversions to keep her answers polite and friendly. Showing politeness through gestures and respectful speeches can be a sign that a person is aware of others' feeling and tries his best not to embarrass or make them feel uncomfortable (Suyono & Andriyanti, 2021). In the Taylor Swift interview often involves jokes, which requires Taylor's ability to respond in a humble and respectful manner, resulting in good communication. This analysis will help understand more about how celebrities use politeness to strengthen their image in front of the host and the public.

In analyzing the politeness strategies applied by Taylor Swift in her interview with Ellen use the politeness theory of Brown and Levinson (1987). This theory discusses how people maintain the image or honor of "face" when speaking, especially when the topic or question can feel sensitive. There are several politeness strategies used in this theory but this article will only use two strategies which are positive politeness and negative politeness. Positive politeness is redress directed to the addressee's positive face, his perennial desire that his wants (or the actions/acquisitions/values resulting from them) should be thought of as desirable (Brown and Lavinson 1987). Negative politeness is redressive action addressed to the addressee's negative face: his desire to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded (Brown and Lavinson 1987). In the context of an interview between Taylor Swift and Ellen DeGeneres can use this theory to see how Taylor Swift maintains politeness, especially when responding to questions that could be personal or sensitive.

This study has some differences compared to previous studies. The main focus of this article is to analyze politeness strategies in Taylor Swift's interview on The Ellen Show, a show with a casual and humorous atmosphere. Previous research tends to discuss politeness in more formal context, such as political speeches. For example, One of Barack Obama's popular speeches and interviews is about the development of Islamic Center near Ground Zero. This speech triggering the controversy within America society even around the world (Aulia, 2013). Different from the previous studies this article explores how Taylor Swift, as a public figure, uses politeness strategies to maintain her image when answering questions, including those of a personal or sensitive nature. In contrast to previous research that focuses more on formal situations, this article provides a new perspective by discussing politeness strategies in entertainment and celebrity interactions.

## **METHOD**

The research method that the researcher uses in this research is qualitative method. Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This research employed a qualitative descriptive design to delve into the personal perspective of Taylor Swift. This approach allowed for a detailed exploration and understanding of her image, meanings, and viewpoints, aiming to uncover deeper insights rather than quantifiable data. The research instrument in this study is

researchers herself. The data source for this study is a YouTube video title "Taylor Swift Full Interview with Ellen (2019)" from the "The Ellen Show" channel. This video, released on May 18, 2019. The data of this research are utterances from Taylor Swift that contain politeness strategies. Data collection involved a systematic process of watching the video and transcribing relevant segments. The researcher focused on identifying and analyzing Taylor Swift's utterances, paying particular attention to her image of personal experiences, opinions, and beliefs. The analysis involved transcribing the interview, identifying and categorizing polite expressions, and examining both verbal and non-verbal cues in context.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study uses data from Taylor Swift's utterances as a guest star on The Ellen DeGeneres Show. All of Taylor Swift's utterances in the interview were converted into written transcripts. The researcher studied the transcripts to identify the politeness strategies used by Taylor Swift during the interview. This analysis is based on the politeness theory developed by Brown and Levinson (1987), this study examines two types of politeness developed which are positive politeness and negative politeness. This research was conducted using a descriptive qualitative method. This method is used to understand how Taylor Swift chooses words and polite ways of speaking when interacting with Ellen DeGeneres. The aim is to provide a clear image of the politeness strategies used in the context of the interview.

### 1). Positive Politeness

Positive politeness strategies are ways in which a person speaks to make others feel valued, accepted, and comfortable in a conversation. These strategies aim to create closeness and strengthen social relationships by showing attention, appreciation, or respect. Positive politeness strategies are used to create closer relationships, avoid emotional distance, and strengthen a sense of community in conversation. The table below shows the types of positive politeness and also describes the functions of positive politeness used by Taylor Swift in her interview with Ellen DeGeneres.

**The Percentage of Positive Politeness Strategy**

No	Positive Politeness	Frequency	%
1	Exaggerate	10	19%
2	Intensify interest to hearer	12	23%
3	Expressing Agreement	5	10%
4	Engage, Offer	4	8%
5	Be Optimistic	4	8%
6	Include Both S and H in the Act	6	11%
7	Give or Ask Reason	8	15%

8	Give Gift or Say Thank You	3	6%
---	----------------------------	---	----

1. Exaggerate

*Ellen DeGeneres: "I mean usually people promote their music because it helps sell albums you don't have to do that"*

***Taylor Swift: "Because i am dramatic, yeah that's a very dramatic think but it rhymed it was kind of catchy and so i stuck with it"***

*Ellen DeGeneres: "Right is that I one of your songs because if it isn,t should be"*

This data example shows Taylor Swift's positive politeness strategy, Taylor Swift applies exaggerate in the context of positive politeness to create a warm and interesting atmosphere. When Taylor says, "Because I am dramatic, yeah that's a very dramatic thing but it rhymed, it was kind of catchy and so I stuck with it," she intentionally calls herself "dramatic" in a joking tone. This expression reflects honesty and a sense of humor, and shows part of her creative process. This style not only adds to the appeal of the communication but also creates a sense of humbleness, where Taylor presents herself authentically without being overbearing. In response, Ellen DeGeneres stated, "Right, is that one of your songs? Because if it isn't, it should be," with humor. Ellen's comment strengthens the interpersonal relationship, affirms Taylor's creativity, and validates that her speech has interesting qualities. In this interaction, both used positive politeness to create a relaxed, friendly, and respectful conversation, which ultimately strengthened their social relationship.

2. Intensify interest to hearer

*Ellen DeGeneres: "That's how happy I was, and now you do it too you said"*

***Taylor Swift: "I's caught on yeah that's a great sound if you go back and watch it on YouTube listen for her laugh"***

This data example shows that Taylor Swift's positive politeness strategy is very interested in listening to Ellen talk about their past events together where Ellen surprised Ellen by coming to Taylor Swift's house without telling Taylor Swift about her visit. This made Taylor remember and be interested in listening to Ellen's story and Taylor told her to watch the show again on YouTube to hear how Ellen laughed when she surprised Taylor in her own house. Taylor Swift is interested in listening to show the same excitement or interest as Ellen when telling the events they have experienced together.

3. Expressing Agreement

*Ellen DeGeneres: "Because people and usually your fans are pretty good at figuring it out right?"*

***Taylor Swift: “They’re excellent at figuring out”***

This data example shows that Taylor Swift's positive politeness strategy agrees with Ellen DeGeneres' opinion about people or fans who are good at figuring out well behind watching music videos and also the background behind the reason why Taylor Swift said it in French. Taylor Swift agrees with the statement about her fans who always find out excellent, this proves that Taylor Swift does this to Ellen to strengthen her relationship by expressing agreement with Ellen's opinion and also recognizing or validating Ellen's views so as to create a more friendly and familiar atmosphere with each other.

4. Engage, Offer

*Ellen DeGeneres: “Explain the eggs are to people who don’t understand”*

***Taylor Swift: “I also want people to be like watching the music video, and what’s that thing in the background, and what’s that song playing underneath there, and what’s is there a reason she said that in French”***

This data example shows that Taylor Swift's positive politeness strategy is to engage or offer. She engages her fans to watch her music video and find out more about the creative process behind the song, including the reason for using French in the song. This move shows that Taylor Swift is not just releasing work, but also trying to create an emotional connection with her fans. She wants her fans to understand the meaning and messages contained in her songs. This reflects Taylor's care and attention to the needs and interests of her fans, creating the impression that she cares and is committed to continuing to strengthen that relationship in the future. This strategy can also be seen as an attempt to build a more intimate community, where her fans feel valued and involved in her creative journey.

5. Be Optimistic

*Ellen DeGeneres: “I mean usually people promote their music because it helps sell albums you don’t have to do that”*

***Taylor Swift:” Well that’s nice of you to say, i mean i am having fun being back here it’s been really great to be back here and like i definitely do”***

This data example shows that Taylor Swift's positive politeness strategy is to be optimistic. From Ellen's statement that she does not need to bother to promote her music for album sales, Taylor Swift responds in a positive and polite way. She expressed gratitude for the opportunity to return to music and showed confidence in the quality of her work. Taylor Swift's response reflects her ability to maintain good relationships with the public, including Ellen. Her optimistic attitude and polite response also create a positive atmosphere that reinforces her image as an individual who is professional, respectful of others, and confident in her potential. In addition, this action also shows Taylor's

appreciation for the high expectations placed on her, as well as emphasizing her commitment to giving her best to her supporters.

6. Include Both S and H in the Act

*Ellen DeGeneres: "The most rebellious thing did as a teenager"*

***Taylor Swift: "We laugh about it now that was mouthy yeah just alright teenage stuff there well"***

This data example shows that Taylor Swift uses positive politeness strategies to create a close relationship with her audience. By including the speaker (herself) and the hearer in a moment of humor or laughter together as a teenager, Taylor Swift manages to build a sense of community and solidarity. This approach shows Taylor Swift's concern for her audience, by making them feel valued as an important part of the interaction. In this way, Taylor Swift not only strengthens the emotional connection with her audience but also creates a warm and familiar atmosphere that can increase audience engagement and loyalty towards her. This kind of strategy also reflects her ability to create a closer or intimate relationship.

7. Give or Ask Reason

*Ellen DeGeneres: "Did you know French already or did you learn it for that"*

***Taylor Swift: "I've tried to learn French several times in my life because i think it's really beautiful life and i definitely made sure that i had native French speakers on set"***

This data example shows that Taylor Swift's positive politeness strategy is give a reason or explanation for the question asked by Ellen, which was about why she learned French. By explaining that French is very beautiful and that she has tried to learn it several times, Taylor Swift not only answers the question, but also gives reasons why she has an interest in it. This action reflects Taylor Swift's respect for Ellen and her audience, as she tries to give a complete answer rather than just a short response. By providing a detailed explanation, Taylor Swift creates a sense of respect for Ellen, as she takes the question seriously and provides a deeper understanding. This can also strengthen the relationship between her and Ellen and increase mutual respect between the two.

8. Give Gift or Say Thank You

*Ellen DeGeneres: "Because I can't top how I did it the first time you were the best"*

***Taylor Swift: "Thank you so much for going to above and beyond to make people happy"***

This data example shows that Taylor Swift's positive politeness strategy expressed her gratitude to Ellen as a form of appreciation for her outstanding contribution in making

people feel happy, even more than expected. By saying thank you, Taylor Swift not only shows appreciation for Ellen's hard work, but also recognizes the positive impact that Ellen's actions have made. This action reflects Taylor Swift's humble attitude and sincere gratitude. By appreciating Ellen, Taylor Swift not only honors the efforts of others, but also inspires her audience to do the same. This message can motivate audiences to do good and make positive contributions in their lives, both now and in the future. Taylor Swift's gratitude also reinforces her image as someone who cares, values others, and is able to make a positive impact through her words. This not only creates a closer relationship with Ellen, but also sets a positive example for her fans to do good and give credit to others.

## 2.) Negative Politeness

Negative politeness is a way of communicating that aims to reduce the sense of burden on the interlocutor while respecting his or her personal freedom and boundaries. This strategy is often used in formal, indirect, or private situations, where the speaker wants to show awareness of the possibility of applying pressure and tries to avoid making the interlocutor feel uncomfortable or pressured.

### The Percentage of Negative Politeness

No.	Negative Politeness	Frequency	%
1.	Indirectness	1	25%
2.	Hedges	2	5%
3.	Apologize	1	25%

### 1. Indirectness

*Ellen DeGeneres* : “What’s your favorite movie?”

*Taylor Swift* : “That’s a tough one”

This data example shows that Taylor Swift acknowledges the difficulty of the question. Taylor Swift's understated response, "That's a tough one," offers a glimpse into the complexity of the question posed to her. This simple phrase reveals a deeper layer of meaning, suggesting that the query was not easily answered. It hints at a challenge that requires careful consideration and a thoughtful response. Her acknowledgment of the difficulty underscores her commitment to providing well-considered answers, even when faced with complex or sensitive topics. By acknowledging the challenge, Swift invites the audience to consider the depth of the question and the potential nuances involved. When someone says "That's a tough one," it means they're thinking hard about a question. It shows that the question is tricky, maybe it's complicated or there's no easy answer. In

Taylor Swift's case, it suggests that the question she was asked was really difficult, and she needed to think carefully before responding. This simple phrase highlights how even famous people like Taylor Swift can be faced with tough questions. It also shows that thinking deeply about a question is important, even if it takes time.

## 2. Hedges

*Ellen DeGeneres : "Did you know French already or did you learn it?"*

***Taylor Swift : "I think it's a really beautiful language"***

*Ellen DeGeneres : "What does that mean?"*

***Taylor Swift : "I don't know what that means, but that sounded real french"***

This data example shows the speaker's opinion and a polite way of acknowledging the French phrase without claiming to understand it fully. She once talked about the French language and said, "I think it's a really beautiful language." This means she thinks French is pretty and sounds nice. But she also said something funny. When she heard a French phrase, she didn't understand, she said, "I don't know what that means, but that sounded real French." This shows that she doesn't know much French, but she can still appreciate how it sounds. What Taylor Swift said is interesting because it shows how language can be beautiful, even if you don't understand it. It also shows that it's okay to not know everything. Sometimes, just enjoying the sound of a language is enough.

## 3. Apologize

*Ellen DeGeneres : "Did you leave an easter egg during our interview?"*

***Taylor Swift : "I'm not supposed to do it"***

This data example shows a polite way of declining a request, while also acknowledging the reason for the request. Taylor Swift, a famous singer, once said, "I'm not supposed to do it." this is a polite way of saying no to someone. When someone says this, they're basically saying, "I can't do that because I'm not allowed to." It's a gentle way of declining a request without being rude. By saying "I'm not supposed to," they're acknowledging the other person's request but politely refusing it. This phrase is a good example of how to say "no" in a kind way. It's better than simply saying "no," because it shows that you're considering the other person's feelings.

Taylor Swift's interaction with Ellen DeGeneres provides an excellent example of tactful communication and graceful refusal in a public setting. This exchange, which centered around the possibility of an "easter egg" during their interview, showcases how celebrities and professionals can navigate potentially awkward situations with diplomacy and grace. When Ellen directly asked about the easter egg, Swift's response - "I'm not supposed to do it" - demonstrated a masterclass in polite declination. This phrase carries multiple layers of meaning and serves several social functions simultaneously. Instead of delivering a harsh or abrupt "no," Swift chose words that softened the refusal while

maintaining clear boundaries. This approach acknowledges both the legitimacy of the question and the existence of external constraints that prevent a more detailed response.

The beauty of this response lies in its versatility and effectiveness. By using the phrase "not supposed to," Swift creates a buffer between herself and the refusal, implying that while she might personally want to share the information, there are larger forces at play preventing her from doing so. This could include contractual obligations, professional agreements, or strategic marketing decisions. The phrasing removes personal responsibility while maintaining professionalism and friendliness.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the data presented in the analysis and discussion, Taylor Swift applies politeness strategies on The Ellen Show. The most data found in this study is positive politeness strategies, this shows that Taylor Swift is a friendly and warm face to everyone, this is also supported by previous studies which found that Taylor Swift uses a lot of positive politeness. The most dominant type of politeness strategies in The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon with Taylor Swift as guest star is positive politeness (Christina et al., 2024). With positive politeness, Taylor Swift creates a warm and friendly atmosphere. For example, she often agrees with Ellen's statements, memories funny moments together, and engages the audience in conversation. This makes the relationship between Taylor, Ellen, and the audience feel closer. In other ways, she also uses negative politeness to answer sensitive or difficult questions. Taylor chooses polite words, such as gently rejecting a request or giving a careful answer so as not to offend. This shows her respect for others while maintaining her personal boundaries. This combination of strategies shows that Taylor is able to maintain a friendly and professional demeanor in public. From this data, we can see the importance of politeness strategies in creating good relationships and maintaining a positive image, even in situations of public attention.

## REFERENCES

- Aulia, Karbelani. 2013. "Politeness Strategies Usage in Accompanying Assertive Illocutionary Acts on Barack Obama'S Speech and Interview Towards the Development of Islamic Center Near Ground Zero." *The International Journal of Social Sciences* 16(1):52–60.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*.
- Brown, Penelope, and Stephen C. Levinson. 1987. *Politeness: Some Universal in Language Usage*. Cambridge University Press.

- Christina, A., Girsang, S., Pandiangan, R., Vega, H., & Siahaan, F. (2024). Politeness Strategies In The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon With Taylor Swift As A Guest Star. *Jurnal Litera: Fakultas Sastra Darma Agung*, 3.
- Pirdehghan, Ali. 2024. "Politeness Strategies in a Speech by Jordan B. Peterson about 'How to Be Articulate.'" *Journal of Language and Literature* 24(1):134–43. doi: 10.24071/joll.v24i1.7146.
- Suyono, Meidiana, and Erna Andriyanti. 2021. "Negative Politeness Strategies in What Would You Do? TV Show." *Journal of Language and Literature* 21(2):439–52. doi: 10.24071/joll.v21i2.3430.
- Wagner, Lisa C. 2017. "Positive- and Negative-Politeness Strategies : Apologizing in the Speech Community of Cuernavaca , Mexico Lisa C . Wagner University of Louisville Abstract." 22–30.