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The Analysis of Bald On-Record Strategy in The Diary of a CEO Podcast on WW3 Threat Assessment Episode

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Abstract

This study investigates the use of politeness strategies in one episode of The Diary of a CEO podcast discussing the Iran–United States conflict and examines the social factors associated with the dominant strategy. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, the study analyzed 107 utterances using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and Holmes and Wilson's (2022) social factors, while frequencies and percentages were used to support the qualitative interpretation. The findings revealed that Bald On-Record was the dominant politeness strategy, accounting for 45.79% of the data. Further analysis showed that Function was the most frequently identified social factor (38.78%), followed by Participant (34.69%), Topic (14.29%), and Setting (12.24%). These findings suggest that speakers frequently employed direct utterances to provide explanations, request clarification, challenge arguments, express disagreement, and communicate opinions efficiently during the political podcast discussion. This study provides insights into how social factors are associated with the realization of the dominant politeness strategy in this episode of a contemporary political podcast.

1. Introduction

Pragmatics examines how speakers convey meaning and how utterances are interpreted within specific communicative contexts (Yule, 1996). In interaction, speakers' opinions, disagreements, criticisms, and arguments may threaten the interlocutors' face. Brown and Levinson (1987) conceptualize such expressions as face-threatening acts (FTAs) and propose four politeness strategies: bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. The choice among these strategies is also shaped by the social and situational context of communication.

Holmes and Wilson (2022) argue that speakers continuously adjust their linguistic behavior according to the social circumstances in which communication takes place. Therefore, understanding politeness requires attention not only to the linguistic forms used but also to the contextual factors motivating those choices. In this study, four social

factors proposed by Holmes and Wilson (2022), namely function (the communicative purpose of an utterance, such as informing, questioning, criticizing, or persuading), participant (the relationship between interlocutors), topic (the subject matter), and setting (the situational environment), are employed to explain why particular politeness strategies are selected.

The rapid development of digital communication has transformed podcasts into an increasingly influential medium for public discussion. Unlike conventional broadcast media, podcasts often encourage relatively spontaneous interaction in which speakers negotiate ideas, respond immediately to opposing viewpoints, and construct meaning collaboratively. Such spontaneous conversations enable researchers to observe authentic pragmatic phenomena that may not appear in scripted discourse. Consequently, podcasts have become an increasingly valuable source for investigating language use in naturally occurring communication.

Political podcasts, however, differ in important ways from films and entertainment podcasts. Films generally rely on scripted dialogue carefully designed to support fictional narratives, whereas entertainment podcasts primarily emphasize casual conversation, humor, or celebrity experiences. In contrast, political podcasts involve real-world issues requiring participants to defend professional credibility, negotiate competing viewpoints, challenge opposing arguments, justify claims with evidence, and persuade both interlocutors and audiences. Because discussions frequently concern controversial and high-stakes issues, speakers continuously perform face-threatening acts while simultaneously managing interpersonal relationships and maintaining professional authority. These characteristics make political podcasts a particularly rich context for examining how politeness strategies operate within spontaneous public discourse.

Political podcasts share several characteristics with political interviews (Yafi & Maris, 2025), particularly in how speakers manage persuasion, disagreement, credibility, and interpersonal relationships during spontaneous interaction. In these discussions, participants are required to respond to opposing viewpoints, defend their arguments, and present evidence while maintaining professional credibility and audience engagement. Furthermore, political podcasts represent a form of mediated political communication in which speakers address both their interlocutors and broader audiences through digital media.

This dual communicative context requires speakers to consider not only their interpersonal relationships but also audience expectations and the demands of public discourse, such as clarity, accessibility, and persuasion. These characteristics distinguish political podcast discourse from ordinary conversation and make it a relevant context for examining how politeness strategies are used to manage face-threatening acts in spontaneous political discussions.

One widely followed podcast discussing contemporary global issues is The Diary of a CEO, hosted by Steven Bartlett. The podcast regularly invites experts from various professional backgrounds to discuss politics, economics, science, psychology, and international affairs through spontaneous and unscripted conversations. This study focuses on the episode entitled “WW3 Threat Assessment: Trump Bombing Iran Makes WW3 More Likely!”, which discusses the Iran–United States conflict. Throughout the discussion, the participants exchange arguments, disagreements, criticism, clarification, and professional opinions regarding military intervention, intelligence, nuclear threats,

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and geopolitical security. Such interactions frequently involve persuasion, negotiation, and face-threatening acts, making the episode an appropriate source for investigating politeness strategies and the social factors associated with their realization.

Previous studies have examined politeness strategies across a variety of communicative contexts. In cinematic discourse, Budiartini et al. (2025), Putra and Marantika (2024), Utari and Budiartha (2025), and Damayanti et al. (2026) investigated politeness strategies in movie dialogues and consistently reported that Positive Politeness was the dominant strategy employed to establish solidarity among fictional characters. Outside cinematic discourse, politeness has also been examined in family interaction (Dharma et al., 2023), social media comments (Fitriyah & Virgianti, 2026), and EFL classroom interaction (Jayanti et al., 2024). Ohorella and Susim (2025) investigated politeness strategies during formal meetings in a multicultural community and found that Positive Politeness contributed significantly to maintaining social harmony among participants.

Similarly, Afriana et al. (2025) analyzed politeness strategies in formal business correspondence, demonstrating that politeness functions to maintain professionalism in structured written communication. Research on impoliteness in podcast discourse has also highlighted the role of confrontational language in shaping digital interactions. Anjani et al. (2026), in their analysis of the Close the Door Podcast, identified five impoliteness strategies, with Negative Impoliteness emerging as the most dominant strategy. Their findings showed that criticism, mockery, teasing, and pressure can serve various communicative functions, including expressing emotions and generating humor.

Research concerning podcast discourse remains relatively limited. Rahardi and Noviance (2025) offered an integrative pragmatic analysis of politeness strategies in podcast communication, and Nurmalia and Fazharani (2025) analyzed Positive Politeness strategies in Mark and Eric Nam's Podcast, an entertainment-oriented conversation. However, Nurmalia and Fazharani's study examined only one politeness strategy and did not investigate the remaining three strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). Moreover, the analysis did not explore the social factors underlying speakers' linguistic choices, thereby providing only a partial understanding of politeness realization in podcast discourse.

More recent pragmatic research has expanded beyond politeness to examine impoliteness in public communication (Anjani et al., 2026; Wambugu et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025), demonstrating that disagreement, criticism, confrontation, and conflict frequently emerge in spoken interaction. These studies provide valuable insight into how interpersonal conflict is negotiated through language and indicate that public discourse often contains both politeness and impoliteness phenomena.

Nevertheless, such studies largely emphasize identifying and interpreting impoliteness rather than explaining how speakers strategically employ politeness strategies to manage disagreement and maintain interaction during discussions of politically sensitive issues. Internationally, for example, Zhang et al. (2025) examined how journalists' questions at Chinese diplomatic press conferences were perceived as face-threatening impoliteness and how spokespersons responded, and Martínez Abellán (2024) analyzed face-work in North American presidential debates using a corpus of debates from seven elections.

Despite the valuable contributions of previous studies, several important gaps remain. First, existing studies have predominantly examined politeness strategies in fictional movies, community interactions, written communication, and entertainment podcasts. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to spontaneous political podcast discussions involving experts debating real-world geopolitical issues. Unlike fictional dialogue, political podcasts involve authentic interaction in which participants negotiate competing viewpoints, defend professional credibility, challenge arguments, justify claims with evidence, and respond immediately to one another. These characteristics create a more dynamic pragmatic environment in which face-threatening acts and politeness strategies naturally emerge throughout the interaction.

Second, although recent studies have expanded the scope of pragmatic research to include political interviews and debates (Martínez Abellán, 2024; Yafi & Maris, 2025), mediated political communication (Mubarok & Budiono, 2025; Salimi & Mortazavi, 2024), and impoliteness (Wambugu et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025), they generally examine these phenomena separately. Studies on political interviews and debates primarily focus on argumentative interaction and persuasive communication, whereas research on mediated political communication emphasizes the role of digital media in shaping political discourse.

Likewise, impoliteness studies mainly investigate confrontational language and conflict management in public communication. Consequently, limited attention has been given to explaining how politeness strategies are realized within spontaneous political podcast discourse, particularly through the integration of pragmatic and sociolinguistic perspectives.

Third, previous studies have largely concentrated on identifying the types or frequencies of politeness strategies employed by speakers. While these findings contribute to understanding what politeness strategies are used, they provide only limited explanation of why a particular strategy becomes dominant within a specific communicative context. In other words, the relationship between speakers' linguistic choices and the social factors motivating those choices remains underexplored. Since language use is inherently influenced by communicative purposes, participant relationships, discussion topics, and interactional settings, a more comprehensive explanation requires integrating politeness theory with sociolinguistic analysis.

The novelty of this study lies in applying Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory together with Holmes and Wilson's (2022) social factors to explain not only what politeness strategies are employed but also which social factors are associated with the dominant strategy in a spontaneous political podcast, a context that has received little attention in previous research.

Based on the identified research gaps, this study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: What types of politeness strategies are employed by the participants in The Diary of a CEO podcast episode "WW3 Threat Assessment: Trump Bombing Iran Makes WW3 More Likely!"?

RQ2: Which politeness strategy is dominant, and which social factor is most frequently associated with its realization?

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To answer these questions, this study identifies politeness strategies using Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework and analyzes the dominant strategy through Holmes and Wilson's (2022) four social factors: function, participant, topic, and setting. By examining a spontaneous political podcast discussing the Iran–United States conflict, this study provides insights into how social factors are associated with the realization of politeness strategies in this episode of a contemporary political podcast.

2. Method

The data source was the complete episode WW3 Threat Assessment: Trump Bombing Iran Makes WW3 More Likely! from The Diary of a CEO podcast (The Diary of a CEO, 2026), hosted by Steven Bartlett and featuring Andrew Bustamante, Annie Jacobsen, and Benjamin Radd as guest speakers. The entire episode, with a total duration of 2 hours, 16 minutes, and 52 seconds (2:16:52), was analyzed to ensure comprehensive coverage of the interaction. The research data consisted of 107 utterances containing politeness strategies.

In this study, an utterance was operationally defined as a single spoken unit expressing one complete communicative intention, bounded by a change of speaker or a clear shift in communicative purpose. When a speaker's turn contained more than one communicative intention, it was segmented into separate utterances, whereas consecutive clauses expressing the same communicative intention were treated as a single utterance. Only utterances containing politeness strategies and supported by sufficient conversational context were included in the analysis. The transcript was repeatedly verified against the audiovisual recording to ensure the accuracy of speaker attribution, timestamps, and contextual information.

Data were collected through documentation, repeated observation, transcript verification, and systematic note-taking. The researcher served as the primary research instrument, supported by a structured data sheet used to record the timestamp, speaker, contextual excerpt, target utterance, identified politeness strategy, dominant social factor, and preliminary interpretation of each datum. This procedure ensured that every utterance was analyzed within its conversational sequence rather than as an isolated sentence.

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). First, the transcript was segmented into individual utterances based on the operational definition described above. Second, each utterance was classified according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) four politeness strategies using their linguistic characteristics and communicative functions as the coding criteria. Bald On-Record was assigned to utterances in which speakers formulated a potentially face-threatening act (e.g., a request, challenge, disagreement, or criticism) in the most direct, clear, and unambiguous form, without redressive action. Positive Politeness was identified through expressions of solidarity, approval, shared interests, and common ground.

Negative Politeness was identified through linguistic expressions that minimized imposition, acknowledged the hearer's autonomy, or conveyed deference. Off-Record was identified when speakers communicated indirectly, requiring the hearer to infer the intended meaning from the conversational context. Directness as a general linguistic feature was distinguished from Bald On-Record as a politeness strategy. An utterance was coded as Bald On-Record only when, in its interactional context, it imposed on or

challenged the hearer (e.g., through a challenge, rejection, disagreement, criticism, imposing request, or demand for explanation) and no redressive action was used. Following Brown and Levinson (1987), redress may be omitted when efficiency matters more than face or when the threat is small; such low-threat utterances were coded as Bald On-Record only when they still imposed on the hearer.

Direct utterances that performed no discernible face-threatening act (e.g., plain statements of fact or ordinary answers) were not coded as Bald On-Record. The classification considered both the linguistic form and the communicative function of each utterance within its conversational context. Third, the frequency and percentage of each strategy were calculated to identify the dominant politeness strategy. The quantitative component served a descriptive purpose by showing the distribution of the four strategies and identifying the most frequently occurring category. These numerical results were subsequently interpreted qualitatively by examining representative utterances and their conversational contexts. Therefore, frequencies and percentages supported the qualitative analysis rather than serving as a basis for statistical hypothesis testing.

Subsequently, utterances containing the dominant politeness strategy were analyzed using Holmes and Wilson's (2022) four social factors: Function, Participant, Topic, and Setting. These factors were examined in relation to the communicative context of each utterance. Although multiple social factors could be relevant to a single utterance, each datum was assigned one dominant factor to identify the contextual consideration most directly associated with the speaker's choice of politeness strategy. The determination was based on the primary communicative purpose (Function), the relationship between the interlocutors (Participant), the subject being discussed (Topic), and the situational circumstances of the interaction (Setting). Dominant factors were assigned by asking which factor best explained why the speaker used no redress in that utterance, based on evidence in the utterance and the neighboring turns. Participant was assigned when the directness was aimed at the co-participant as a speaker, for example by rejecting, correcting, or questioning that speaker's claim, source, or credibility.

Function was assigned when the utterance performed a communicative task (e.g., requesting clarification or demanding justification) and the directness was not tied to a co-participant's position. Topic was assigned when the directness was aimed at the subject matter, even if another speaker's contribution prompted it, and the sensitivity or seriousness of that subject was the clearest explanation. Setting was assigned when the speaker's role in the media format (e.g., the host acting on behalf of the audience) was the clearest explanation. When Function and Participant were both relevant, Participant was assigned if the utterance challenged or rejected a co-participant's contribution, and Function if it mainly requested or supplied information. The other relevant factors were treated as supporting contextual elements and were not counted as the dominant factor.

Finally, representative utterances were interpreted by relating their linguistic forms to the conversational context, speaker roles, face-threatening potential, and communicative purposes. To enhance the trustworthiness of the analysis, the researcher repeatedly compared the transcript with the audiovisual recording to verify utterance segmentation, speaker attribution, and contextual interpretation. In addition, the research supervisor reviewed the draft of the analysis, including the classification of politeness strategies and the identification of dominant social factors, and provided feedback. Differences in interpretation were discussed and resolved by referring to

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Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies and Holmes and Wilson's (2022) social factors framework. This supervisory review served as an additional check on the consistency of the analysis; it was not independent double coding, and no agreement coefficient was calculated.

3. Results

A. Distribution of Politeness Strategies

To address the first research question (RQ1), all utterances containing politeness strategies were first identified and classified according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) four politeness strategies. A total of 107 utterances were identified throughout the podcast episode "WW3 Threat Assessment: Trump Bombing Iran Makes WW3 More Likely!". The distribution of each politeness strategy is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Politeness Strategies

No	Politeness Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
1	Bald On-Record	49	45.79%
2	Positive Politeness	13	12.15%
3	Negative Politeness	25	23.36%
4	Off-Record	20	18.69%
	Total	**107**	**100%**

Table 1 shows that Bald On-Record was the most frequently employed politeness strategy, accounting for 49 utterances (45.79%) of the total data. This finding indicates that the participants predominantly conveyed their ideas directly without employing redressive actions to minimize the face-threatening acts. Such a tendency is understandable because the podcast centers on politically sensitive issues involving international conflict, security, and military affairs, where participants frequently challenge opinions, request clarification, defend arguments, and respond immediately to one another. In this interactional context, direct communication appears to facilitate the efficient exchange of information and the development of evidence-based discussion.

The second most frequent strategy was Negative Politeness, occurring in 25 utterances (23.36%). This strategy suggests that, despite the direct nature of the discussion, participants also used expressions that acknowledged one another's autonomy and minimized potential imposition, particularly when expressing disagreement, asking questions, or presenting alternative viewpoints. Such linguistic choices may reflect an awareness of maintaining professional relationships while discussing controversial issues.

Off-Record was identified in 20 utterances (18.69%). This strategy was generally realized through indirect statements that required contextual interpretation. The participants occasionally employed indirectness when discussing sensitive political matters, allowing them to present opinions or implications without expressing them explicitly. This strategy appears to reduce the potential interpersonal risk associated with controversial topics while encouraging listeners to infer the intended meaning.

The least frequent strategy was Positive Politeness, with 13 utterances (12.15%). Although comparatively limited, this strategy was employed to establish rapport, express agreement, acknowledge shared perspectives, or appreciate other participants' contributions. The relatively low occurrence of Positive Politeness may be attributed to the nature of the discussion, which focused primarily on analytical debate and geopolitical issues rather than interpersonal relationship building (Chaerdiani & Ekawati, 2024). Since Bald On-Record emerged as the dominant politeness strategy, the subsequent analysis focuses on examining the social factors associated with its realization using Holmes and Wilson's (2022) framework, namely Function, Participant, Topic, and Setting.

B. Social Factors Associated with the Dominant Bald On-Record Strategy

As presented in Table 1, Bald On-Record emerged as the most frequently employed politeness strategy, accounting for 49 of the 107 utterances (45.79%). Since this strategy was found to be dominant, further analysis was conducted to address the second research question by examining the social factors underlying its realization. Following Holmes and Wilson's (2022) framework, the analysis focuses on four social factors: Function, Participant, Topic, and Setting. Although more than one social factor may be present in a single interaction, each utterance was assigned one dominant factor based on the contextual element that was most strongly associated with the speaker's choice of the Bald On-Record strategy. The distribution of these social factors is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Social Factors Associated with the 49 Bald On-Record Utterances

No	Social Factors	Frequency	Percentage
1	Function	19	38.78%
2	Participant	17	34.69%
3	Topic	7	14.29%
4	Setting	6	12.24%
	Total	**49**	**100%**

This finding suggests that the Function factor was most frequently associated with the realization of Bald On-Record strategies, particularly when speakers sought to accomplish specific communicative purposes, such as requesting clarification, challenging arguments, providing factual information, and expressing disagreement. The Participant factor ranked second, accounting for 17 utterances (34.69%), indicating that interpersonal relationships among the host and invited experts were also relevant to the use of this strategy. The gap between the two leading factors is narrow (two utterances, or 4.09 percentage points), so they are treated as comparably prominent rather than Function being clearly dominant.

Meanwhile, Topic accounted for 7 utterances (14.29%), while Setting represented the smallest proportion, with 6 utterances (12.24%). These findings show that communicative purposes were the most frequently identified contextual consideration associated with Bald On-Record strategies in the analyzed episode, although only marginally ahead of the participant relationship.

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4. Discussion

The analysis of each example below follows the same three steps, so the definitions are not repeated for every datum. First, the utterance is classified as Bald On-Record by showing how it performs a challenge, rejection, disagreement, criticism, or imposing request in context without redress (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Second, the face threat is read from the neighboring turns. Third, the social factor most strongly associated with the choice is identified (Holmes & Wilson, 2022). The analysis therefore highlights what differs from one excerpt to the next, and interpretations are offered as readings of the interaction rather than claims about speakers' private intentions. Two excerpts are presented for Function and Participant, the two most frequent factors (38.78% and 34.69% of the 49 utterances), and one each for Topic (14.29%) and Setting (12.24%), in rough proportion to their share of the data.

A. Bald On-Record Strategy Associated with Function

Function operates as the dominant social factor when the direct utterance primarily serves a specific communicative purpose, such as requesting clarification or demanding justification. The following examples illustrate this pattern.

Data 1 (00:00-00:08)

Andrew: *"What does the United States think it is going to gain from decapitating the Iranian leadership?"*
Annie: *"Well, that's kind of obvious based on what the president has said."*
Andrew: *"**On what the president has said**?"*

Andrew's echo, "*On what the president has said?*", comes right after Annie calls the U.S. rationale "*kind of obvious*." Repeating her words as a bare question, without a softener such as "*Could you clarify…?*", questions the basis of her claim and can be read as a challenge to her expertise (positive face); this challenge, rather than the question form alone, is the ground for coding it as Bald On-Record. Function appears to be the main explanation, because the echo works to make Annie supply the evidence behind "*obvious*," in line with the role of direct communication in achieving clarity and efficiency noted by Rahardi and Noviance (2025) and Julianti and Rahmani (2024).

Data 2 (01:23:14–01:23:38)

Steven: "***Andrew, where does your skepticism come from?** You did spend almost a decade as an undercover spy for the United States in the CIA. **Why shouldn't we believe people on the ground who are saying what they're saying?***"
Andrew: "*I have seen this stuff firsthand. I've been trained in how this stuff works. I've had to deploy this in pursuit of American goals and ambitions in the past.*"

Steven's two questions, "*Andrew, where does your skepticism come from? … Why shouldn't we believe people on the ground who are saying what they're saying?*", are initiated by the host rather than prompted by a claim just made, as in Data 1. The second question is framed as a challenge and puts Andrew's credibility in question without any cushioning (positive face), which supports the Bald On-Record coding. Function again appears to be the main explanation: the questions ask Andrew to justify his position, and

his reply, which draws on his professional experience, shows the challenge moving the discussion toward evidence.

B. Bald On-Record Strategy Associated with Participant

Participant operates as the dominant social factor when the direct utterance is primarily shaped by the immediate relationship between the two speakers involved, such as a personal challenge, rejection, or defense of one's own credibility, rather than by the topic or the communicative purpose alone. The following examples illustrate this pattern.

Data 3 (00:10–00:19)

Andrew: *"You can't trust anything that you're hearing right now. You can't trust anything that you're reading right now."*
Annie: *"Well, that's, I mean, that's paranoid."*
Andrew: ***"It's not paranoid."***
Annie: *"It's paranoid."*
Andrew: ***"It's healthy. It's obviously, it's healthy skepticism**."*

Data 3 is a run of direct contradictions in which each turn is built on the other speaker's last turn. Annie labels Andrew's warning "p*aranoid*"; Andrew answers "*It's not paranoid*," and, after Annie repeats the label, replaces it with "*healthy skepticism*." He offers no hedge or concession, and "*obviously*" presents his view as beyond dispute, which can be read as dismissing Annie's assessment (positive face) and defending his own credibility. Because the directness is generated turn by turn by this particular disagreement, rather than by the topic or purpose alone, the Participant factor appears to carry the most explanatory weight.

Data 4 (40:58–41:08)

Annie: *"But hang on, ODNI didn't or at least according to, shall we say, New York Times, which must have come from the White House. CIA provided the intelligence. So, there you go."*
Andrew: ***"That's fake**. **I don't think that's real. I don't think CIA, here's the thing.** CIA is the Central Intelligence Agency, which by design means that every other intelligence agency inside the national security infrastructure has to come through CIA."*

Andrew's statement, "*That's fake. I don't think that's real*," rejects Annie's claim about the source of the intelligence before any explanation is given. The categorical "*That's fake*" challenges the reliability of her source (positive face); although "*I don't think*" is a hedge, it follows the unqualified rejection and does not soften it. As in Data 3, the directness is tied to two speakers' opposing positions, but here the dispute concerns the sourcing of evidence rather than an evaluation of the other speaker's stance, and Annie's "*So, there you go*" presents her point as settled, which makes Andrew's rebuttal a direct response to her.

C. Bald On-Record Strategy Associated with Topic

Topic operates as the dominant social factor when the seriousness or sensitivity of the subject matter itself, rather than the relationship between speakers or the communicative purpose of the utterance, motivates the use of direct language. The

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following example illustrates how discussion of high-stakes geopolitical issues encouraged unmitigated, explicit expression.

Data 5 (01:17:43-01:17:52)
Steven: *"Have we not been here before to some degree?"*
Benjamin: *"Too many times."*
Andrew: *"What is the lesson from history that everyone seems to have forgotten?"*
Benjamin: "***We are shitty learners of history. That is the lesson.***"

Benjamin's utterance, "*We are shitty learners of history. That is the lesson*," answers Andrew's question about the lesson from history that everyone seems to have forgotten, after Benjamin has agreed that such situations have occurred "*too many times.*" It is coded Bald On-Record on the criteria in the Method section, not merely because of the profanity or the absence of hedging. First, it is a face-threatening act: a direct, explicit criticism of people's capacity to learn from experience. Second, the criticism reaches the hearers. The inclusive "*we*" covers Andrew, Steven, and Annie as well as Benjamin himself, so the judgment "*shitty learners*" applies to them too and threatens their positive face, although the threat is diluted because the speaker includes himself. Third, no redressive action is used: the evaluation is not hedged, "*That is the lesson*" closes the point, and "*shitty*" intensifies rather than softens it.

Because the threat is moderate, this is a low-threat case in the sense of the Method section, coded Bald On-Record because it still imposes an unqualified negative evaluation on the hearers. Topic, rather than Participant, is treated as the dominant factor: the criticism is aimed at the subject matter, the recurrence of international conflict, and not at a co-participant's claim, source, or credibility, so the gravity of the subject, rather than the relationship between the speakers, best explains the bluntness.

D. Bald On-Record Strategy Associated with Setting

Setting operates as the dominant social factor specifically through Steven's role as podcast host: his responsibility to keep complex geopolitical and technical information accessible to a broad, non-expert audience motivates direct requests for simplification and explanation, independent of the topic or his relationship with the guests. The following example illustrates this pattern.

Data 6 (15:39–16:00)
Steven: *"**So, explain to me in simple terms why Trump right now has decided that this is the best time to attack Iran.**"*
Andrew: *"I think the question that you just asked is the most pertinent question that we will talk about today."*

Steven's request, "*Explain to me in simple terms why Trump right now has decided that this is the best time to attack Iran,*" is an imperative without a softener such as "*Could you explain…?*". It imposes on Andrew's negative face by requiring an immediate explanation, which supports the Bald On-Record coding. What sets it apart from the Function examples is "*in simple terms*": the request is shaped by the host's role in making a complex geopolitical question accessible to a general audience, so Setting appears to be the better explanation. Andrew's reply, which calls the question "*the most pertinent*

question," suggests that the request was received as appropriate rather than offensive. This is in line with studies that link direct requests to clarity and efficient information exchange (Julianti & Rahmani, 2024; Utari & Budiartha, 2025).

E. Why Directness Prevails in Political Podcast Discourse

Taken together, the data suggest that the prevalence of Bald On-Record in this episode is not simply a matter of speakers disregarding face. Several features of the genre appear to encourage directness. The episode is an expert debate in which participants are expected to test one another's claims, so challenges, rebuttals, and requests for justification are part of the interactional task rather than departures from it (Function and Participant).

This is compatible with research on political debates, in which politicians defend their image when attacked (Martínez Abellán, 2024), and with studies in which bald on-record forms are tied to the institutional context of contentious political talk: in the Parliament of Ghana, insults, accusations, and imperatives were used by the Speaker and by members of both sides and were linked to the Standing Orders and the contentious character of debate (Ghampson & Afful, 2024), and in Indonesian televised political debates, bald on-record impoliteness was among the most frequent strategies, which the authors attribute to the face-threatening nature of the debate setting itself (Sriwati et al., 2026).

That study, however, used Culpeper's impoliteness framework rather than Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies, and its findings are cited here only as contextual support, not as direct evidence of Bald On-Record dominance. The subject, military escalation and the recurrence of international conflict, raises the cost of ambiguity and seems to favor unequivocal assessments (Topic). The host speaks on behalf of a non-expert audience, which makes explicit questions and requests for simplification part of his role (Setting); in a Nigerian televised political interview, the host likewise produced more bald on-record acts than the guest (Yakubu et al., 2026). Because the talk is mediated and addressed to listeners as well as co-participants, clarity and efficiency are also public-facing demands.

This raises the question of whether directness here signals reduced politeness. Brown and Levinson (1987) treat Bald On-Record as a strategy that may be chosen when efficiency outweighs face redress or when the face threat is small or mutually accepted, not as impoliteness by definition. In the excerpts analyzed, challenged speakers respond by continuing the exchange (e.g., Andrew's reply in Data 2 and Annie's replies in Data 3) rather than with visible repair or withdrawal, which is compatible with the view that bluntness is largely sanctioned by the conventions of expert debate.

Research on political discourse, however, cautions that the same form can be evaluated differently: in Chinese diplomatic press conferences, interviewees' judgments of whether a journalist's question was impolite depended on their background knowledge, political stance, and attention to how the question was worded (Zhang et al., 2025), and bald-on-record forms have been analyzed as impoliteness in the Kenyan Senate (Wambugu et al., 2025). This reading therefore remains tentative: the study did not analyze hearers' responses systematically or apply an impoliteness framework, and separating Bald On-Record from impoliteness remains a task for future research.

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This pattern contrasts with studies of movie dialogue (Budiartini et al., 2025; Damayanti et al., 2026; Putra & Marantika, 2024; Rayani et al., 2023; Utari & Budiartha, 2025) and community meetings (Ohorella & Susim, 2025), where Positive Politeness was reported as predominant; a study of an entertainment podcast (Nurmalia & Fazharani, 2025) also focused on Positive Politeness but, because it examined only that strategy, cannot show how it ranks against the others.

Three considerations qualify the contrast. First, the interactional goals differ: those settings foreground solidarity, rapport, or social harmony, which Positive Politeness serves, whereas the main business of this episode is to test claims and explain complex events, and here Positive Politeness was the least frequent strategy (12.15%). Second, the data differ in kind: scripted dialogue is written to display relationships between characters, whereas this episode is spontaneous expert talk, so the studies do not necessarily measure the same thing. Third, the studies differ in unit of analysis and coding, and this study counted only utterances judged to contain a politeness strategy, with Bald On-Record assigned through an interpretation of face threat in context; the rank order of strategies should therefore not be compared across studies as if it were a like-for-like measure. Studies of political talk also suggest that the dominant strategy varies with format and speaker.

A Nigerian televised interview was dominated by Positive Politeness (50.7%), with humor used by both speakers to soften challenges, although the host again produced more bald on-record acts than the guest (Yakubu et al., 2026), and in a U.S. presidential debate one candidate relied mainly on bald on-record strategies while the other relied mainly on positive politeness (Prasatyo & Gustary, 2024). Because each of these studies is small and qualitative, they are better read as an indication that Bald On-Record dominance in the present episode is more likely to reflect the confrontational, claim-testing format of expert debate than a general property of political talk. Read together with the impoliteness studies discussed above, the contrast suggests that the distribution of strategies is sensitive to genre and interactional goals, but the evidence is suggestive rather than conclusive.

The social-factor results should be read with similar caution. Function (19 utterances, 38.78%) leads Participant (17 utterances, 34.69%) by only two utterances, so the data do not support treating Function as overwhelmingly dominant; communicative purpose and interpersonal relationship appear to work together, as in Data 3, where Andrew's rebuttal both rejects an evaluation (Function) and defends his credibility (Participant). Because each utterance was assigned a single dominant factor, the figures simplify the interaction among four overlapping factors: they show which factor offered the strongest explanation for a datum, not that the others were absent.

5. Conclusion

This study identified four politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) in an episode of The Diary of a CEO podcast discussing the Iran–United States conflict, with Bald On-Record emerging as the most frequently used strategy. Further analysis of the 49 utterances representing this dominant strategy revealed that Function was the most frequently identified social factor (38.78%), followed by Participant (34.69%), Topic (14.29%), and Setting (12.24%). Although Function ranked first, its percentage was relatively close to that of Participant, indicating that both communicative

purposes and interpersonal relationships were relevant to the use of Bald On-Record strategies in the discussion.

These findings suggest that speakers used direct utterances to accomplish various communicative purposes, including providing explanations, requesting clarification, challenging arguments, expressing disagreement, and presenting opinions. The frequent use of Bald On-Record may also reflect the characteristics of political podcast discourse, in which speakers are expected to communicate complex information, respond to opposing viewpoints, and support their arguments through explicit expressions. Therefore, directness in this context does not necessarily indicate a lack of politeness; rather, it may function as a communicative resource for maintaining clarity and facilitating discussion. In contrast to studies of movie dialogue and community talk, where Positive Politeness predominated, this expert debate showed Bald On-Record as dominant and Positive Politeness as least frequent, which suggests that strategy distribution reflects the interactional goals of the genre. This study contributes to pragmatic research by providing insights into how politeness strategies are realized in political podcast discourse, and how their use is associated with social factors, in a mediated discussion of complex geopolitical issues.

This study has several limitations. First, it focuses on only one episode of The Diary of a CEO podcast; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all political podcasts or other communicative contexts. Second, the analysis assigns one dominant social factor to each datum, although Function, Participant, Topic, and Setting may simultaneously interact in shaping an utterance. This classification simplifies the relationship among these factors for analytical purposes. Third, the consistency of the coding was checked through supervisory review of the analysis rather than independent double coding, and no agreement coefficient is reported. Fourth, the analysis relies on the recorded interaction and verified transcript without direct confirmation from the speakers regarding how they understood their own utterances.

Future studies are recommended to examine politeness strategies in different political podcasts and other forms of digital communication to compare how social factors are associated with strategy use across communicative contexts. Further research may also involve multiple independent coders and report an agreement coefficient to strengthen the reliability of data classification and may examine hearers' responses to distinguish Bald On-Record from impoliteness. In addition, integrating politeness theory with other pragmatic approaches, such as stance, turn-taking, and impoliteness, may provide a broader understanding of how speakers negotiate interpersonal relationships, disagreement, and meaning in public discourse.

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