



Politeness Strategies of President Duterte During Inquest on War on Drugs: Implications on Teaching Communication

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Article Info

Article history:

Received Mar 9, 2025

Revised Apr 13, 2025

Accepted Apr 27, 2025

Online First Apr 30, 2025

Keywords:

Discourse Analysis

Inquest Proceeding

Philippine War on Illegal Drugs

Politeness Strategies

Rodrigo Duterte

ABSTRACT

Purpose of the study: This study aimed to explore and determine the politeness strategies employed by President Rodrigo Roa Duterte during the Inquest of the Blue-Ribbon Committee on the Philippine War on Illegal Drugs.

Methodology: A qualitative research design was used, specifically utilizing discourse analysis to examine the politeness strategies employed by President Rodrigo Duterte during the Inquest Proceeding. Data was gathered through video transcription and translation. These data were analyzed using Brown and Levinson's in 1987 politeness strategy framework to form discourse implications and conclusions.

Main Findings: Results revealed that President Duterte employed all the politeness strategies during the Inquest, namely: bald-on-record, negative politeness, positive politeness and off-record strategy. Findings also showed that Duterte's dominant use of Bald-On Record strategy mirrors his authoritative and assertive nature, projecting a straightforward and decisive leader. Meanwhile, his limited use of Off-Record strategies displays a strategic balance between explicitness and subtlety depending on the audience and context.

Novelty/Originality of this study: This study provides valuable insights into the role of politeness strategies in political discourse, offering a deeper understanding of how language shapes power dynamics and public perception in high-stakes settings. This also suggests how educators can meaningfully integrate Duterte's politeness strategies in discussing persuasive communication, public image construction, and the influence of authority in political settings and debates.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Political figures strategically use language to shape their public image, gain support, and justify their actions. In today's democratic systems, leaders often employ politeness strategies to influence how the public perceives them, handle controversies, and maintain their authority. While politeness is often perceived as respectful or soft-spoken behavior, it is also a tool that can help leaders assert their power while keeping a positive public image [1]. However, in recent years, former Philippine President Rodrigo Roa Duterte has often

challenged these expectations with his blunt, assertive and often provocative speech. He is the type of president whose “exercise of power and unprecedented cruelty go against democratic norms [2].

Branded for his straightforward and unapologetic approach when speaking, former President Duterte has been condemned for his lack of manners and tendency to mock detractors. As the “trash-talking president,” the public witnessed his speech, particularly his excessive swearing [3], as he often addresses the nation with threats and profanity. Specifically, his linguistic choice has been defined as sharp, authoritative, and sometimes offensive, involving him in controversies, especially since he uses so many metaphors and non-conventional rhetorical mechanisms to insult detractors [4]. His speech is frequently laden with insulting terms, including naming former U.S. Ambassador Philip Goldberg “gay,” calling Senator Leila de Lima “immoral,” and terming the Church and the International Criminal Court “hypocrites.” His provocative remarks have also gone to religious issues, most recently when he called God “stupid,” eliciting strong reactions from different quarters. Despite periodic vows to eliminate his use of obscenities—including a promise that he would refrain from swearing after an “order from God” [5]—he has persisted in the use of strong and inflammatory language in public appearances. Given the controversies surrounding many of his speeches, several studies have investigated them through various lenses, often focusing on his vulgar language, populist rhetoric, and discursive aggression [6].

Such controversies illustrate how government leaders choose their words and registers to avoid language that may be deemed unacceptable by the public is one of the greatest challenges for any nation in navigating the sociolinguistic landscape. This highlights that cultural differences significantly influence verbal and non-verbal expressions in leaders' statements, often shaping various aspects of politeness [7]. As such, rhetoric and leadership have always been inextricably intertwined since a leader's message can dramatically influence the course of events to a staggering degree [8].

Despite criticisms, supporters also perceive him as witty, politically astute, and a leader who speaks candidly to rally the public. From this perspective, Duterte's gutter and vulgar language signifies his urgency to save the nation [9]. Duterte's rhetoric, particularly his War on Drugs campaign, is often framed as a way of protecting the ordinary Filipino from crime and disorder—a strategy that, though controversial, positions him as a champion of the common people. This shows that Duterte's approach to populism focuses more on safety and security rather than equity, appealing to a public frustrated by crime and elite impunity [10]. This explains why Duterte was symbolized as a “populist, anti-establishment candidate” [11]. Furthermore, politeness strategies can sometimes be misused or manipulated during heated discussions or public disagreements [12]. Moreover, leaders enhance their country's reputation through authoritative yet refined communication, demonstrating linguistic competence and adhering to accepted standards of politeness [13].

While previous studies have focused more on Duterte's vulgar language and controversial remarks, there is a notable lack of research on his employment of politeness strategies in formal contexts such as legislative hearings or public inquiries. This study seeks to address this gap by analyzing Duterte's discourse during the Senate Inquest on the Philippine War on Drugs, providing insights into his strategic language use in high-stakes political settings. Moreover, this research argues that a crucial component of political leadership is the ability to shape public perception using varied politeness methods in complex communication environments.

Further, this study offers a novel perspective by exploring Duterte's formal political discourse based on Brown and Levinson's Universal Politeness Theory in 1987. It will analyze whether Duterte strategically shifts his language use when addressing sensitive topics, such as human rights abuses linked to the War on Drugs, in formal settings. Brown and Levinson's Theory posits that the words of a speaker can ‘have the ability to shape listeners' views of their public image in positive and negative terms’ [14]. Thus, the novelty lies in examining whether Duterte's language in these formal contexts aligns with or diverges from his more inflammatory remarks in other public forums.

Understanding the politeness strategies employed by political leaders like Duterte is crucial, given the significant impact of political discourse on public perception and policy support. Analyzing how leaders use language to manage public opinion, mitigate controversy, and assert authority provides insight into the dynamics of political communication. Given the global prominence of political discourse and the increasing importance of leaders' language in shaping national and international perceptions, this study is essential for understanding the intersection between language, politics, and public perception.

To examine, the study focused on the discourse analysis of the politeness strategies employed by President Rodrigo Roa Duterte. Specifically, it answered the following questions:

1. What are the politeness strategies used by President Duterte?
2. What are the implications of Duterte's politeness strategies during the Inquest Proceedings?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Politeness is a principle of every interaction in one's social life. To achieve respectful and smooth interpersonal communication, a speaker uses politeness to highlight or minimize different aspects of their face.

This "face" mirrors the desired self-image, a speaker has set on how they want to be viewed by others and naturally tries to protect and enhance it while also being mindful of how others want to be perceived. Moreover, people's social norms and expectations for politeness may differ since people come from diverse cultural perspectives [15]. In shaping how others perceive us, our way of speaking, behaving, and using gestures projects imperative roles. When conversing, we aim to make a positive impression, whether by being considerate of others' needs, showing competence or building rapport. Thus, our face, in a way, is our identity on the social stage—it influences our self-esteem, credibility, and sense of belonging in society [16].

Politeness is defined in terms of "face" formed by social approval [17]. Naturally, we try to protect our faces by regulating our emotions and interactions. At times, this means using strategies to save face when we feel vulnerable [18]. Accordingly, there are two types of face: Positive face, which represents our desire to be liked, appreciated, and seen as a social, approachable person [19]. It is the image we present to gain inclusion and approval from others. Meanwhile, the negative face is our need for independence—the desire to act freely without imposition from others. However, these two faces can sometimes clash due to communicative acts or FTAs that could damage the self-esteem of either party. For instance, Duterte's use of humor, sarcasm, and even insults can be seen as a deliberate challenge to his audience's positive face. Yet, he balances this by offering justifications or expressions of solidarity and inclusive language which align with the concept of positive politeness. Others might view this negatively, but this strategic politeness move is employed to maintain power and appeal to different sectors of the public.

During his State of the Nation Addresses (SONAs) in 2016 and 2021, Duterte often used derogatory terms such as "Put*ng ina" against everyone [20]. Yet, he softens the impact of his direct statements followed by laughter, apologies or conditional language to minimize perceived impositions to his audience. However, his frequent use of stark, direct language also challenges the expectations of politeness in political leadership, particularly in a culture that values respect and deference toward authority [21]. Specifically, suggestions, threats, and even questions can even challenge a person's sense of independence [22]. Ultimately, politeness is about balance—expressing oneself while respecting the personal space and expectations of others.

Politeness, in its simplest sense, is primarily a depiction of a person's interaction style. Based on his political speeches, President Duterte is often labelled as blunt, fearless, and often profane [23]. How the public perceives him comprises not only the linguistic choice he employed when conversing but also highlights his decorum. Consequently, a speaker's politeness is often linked to cultural norms, and the listener's perception may differ depending on certain differences. Given that each nation has its corresponding means of expressing politeness, some utterances such as Duterte's may be viewed as 'unusual, inappropriate, or even offensive in different cultural contexts' [24].

The importance of politeness in language learning has been widely acknowledged, serving as a tool to mitigate and redress FTAs – creating long-term, healthy relationships. Knowing the various social expectations regarding politeness allows speakers to manage interactions more effectively [24]. That is why Brown and Levinson's in 1987 work on politeness, specifically their paper "Universals in Language Usage: Politeness Phenomena, remains one of the most notable frameworks in politeness studies [25]. Their theory has been widely adopted across various cultures, showcasing its significance on a global scale [26].

Linguists and communication experts employ various theoretical frameworks, including politeness theory, to evaluate someone's speech performance. Understanding how and why individuals interact in particular ways within society is one of the main inquiries in politeness research. Additionally, the principle of equality in social, political, and economic affairs plays a role in shaping communication, particularly in professional settings. However, hierarchical structures within organizations create variations in speech levels and behavior. While workplaces may encourage egalitarian communication, interactions between subordinates and superiors often reflect power dynamics. In such cases, politeness strategies can serve as markers of authority and influence [27].

The concept of Face Threatening Acts (FTAs), as cited in the book of Santosa [28], posits that interactions can either support or defy a person's social identity. More importantly, factors affecting the weight of imposition, such as power dynamics, social distance, and other threats from the speaker, must be considered to assess the level of politeness to be used. Significantly, mitigating potential threats using these strategies to appeal to the hearer's face can contribute meaningfully to face-saving acts. However, speakers must acknowledge that non-verbal cues such as proxemics, facial expressions, gestures, and posture mirror politeness as well. Thus, the importance of using these strategies as an integral role in achieving healthy relationships [29].

In political discourse, FTAs often arise when government officials and political leaders make statements that could challenge the audience's self-perception or social identity. Duterte's bold criticisms, personal attacks and controversial stances can be seen as FTAs directed at political rivals or the media [30]. As highlighted, rudeness or inappropriate language may leave a lasting negative impression on the audience, underscoring undesirable public opinion [31]. Given that his language is provocative, it still resonates with the public due to its candor and frankness—traits that Filipinos do not typically expect from a national leader. This

rhetoical style is often perceived as a paternalistic approach, akin to a parent disciplining a child, aiming not only to “bend the young in the right direction” [32] but also to prepare them for future leadership [33].

Consequently, analysts view his use of FTAs as a strategic function. He frequently employs such acts to reaffirm his position as a strong, decisive leader who is unafraid to confront opposition. While this approach can alienate different segments of the public, it also gains support among his base, who see his directness and lack of conventional politeness as a sign of authenticity and strength. In the Philippine political setting, this is a carefully calibrated strategy to reinforce his authority and maintain control over the narrative, even when his rhetoric could be deemed offensive.

Moreover, politeness is also evident in structured relationships, such as between subordinates and executives. Conventionally, subordinates are believed to portray politeness toward their superiors. However, shifts in power dynamics may influence these interactions. For example, a subordinate may gain approval after achieving professional success, or a leader may adopt a more accommodating and friendly demeanor. By examining politeness strategies within these contexts, scholars can gain a more detailed understanding of different communicative dynamics [34].

As emphasized in the politeness principle, speakers such as Duterte, as aware, select politeness strategies to demonstrate awareness and respect for the social identity of others [35]. Given that speech is often spontaneous, building linguistic self-awareness is imperative as a vital influence over how individuals are viewed. At the same time, speakers must be cognizant of how their words impact others. Determining when and how to mitigate potential threats can help establish positive social interactions.

This need for strategic communication is especially evident in political discourse, where politeness strategies play a vital role in navigating power dynamics and cultural expectations. For instance, a study entitled ‘Team Identity and Politeness: An Analysis of the University of the Philippines Diliman Student Council Election Standard Bearers’ Speech in Philippine Collegian Interviews, highlights the distinct ways in which different cultures and social groups approach politeness. The study identifies four key frames of reference for analyzing politeness in speech [36]. Additionally, Brown and Levinson’s in 1987 framework on FTAs outlines five politeness strategies: Bald-on-Record Politeness, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, Off-Record Politeness, and Avoiding FTAs [37]. The greater the perceived threat to a listener’s face, the more elaborate the politeness strategy a speaker is likely to employ.

In conclusion, politeness strategies serve as essential tools for effective communication, particularly in maintaining positive social relationships and navigating power structures. Understanding these strategies allows speakers to adapt to different cultural and social expectations, ensuring more respectful and constructive interactions [38].

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1. Type of Research

This study utilized a qualitative descriptive research design, specifically employing discourse analysis to systematically classify and analyze the politeness strategies used by President Rodrigo Duterte during the Senate Inquest Hearing on the Philippine War on Illegal Drugs held on October 28, 2024. Discourse analysis is defined as “the study of the relationship between language and society, focusing on how discourse structures are connected to social structures” [34]. This method enabled researchers to draw valid inferences on how language is used in communication and examine not just the words but also the structure, function and meaning behind them in specific situations. As one scholar notes, discourse is “not a set of signs that stand for things; it is the system by which meaning is made” [35]. Through this approach, the study explored both the linguistic content and the underlying meanings, functions, and social structures embedded within the discourse [39].

3.2. Research Subjects

The primary subject of this study is President Rodrigo Duterte’s discourse during the 2024 Senate Inquest Hearing. The interactions between the former President and the senators during this session provided the contextual basis for data collection and analysis. No human participants were directly involved or interviewed in this research, as all data were obtained from publicly accessible and official sources.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments and Techniques

The primary data source for this study was the official 8-hour, 59-minute, & 30-second livestream video of the Senate Hearing obtained from Manila Bulletin’s official YouTube Channel. To comprehensively examine President Duterte’s politeness strategies, the researchers repeatedly viewed the video to extract relevant discourse for analysis. Using a manual transcription approach, the researchers converted spoken interactions between President Rodrigo Duterte and the senators into text. A direct translation is followed to preserve the linguistic features and meanings present in the original language. Through this, researchers can “convey the meaning of the text accurately [40].

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

The transcribed and translated data were analyzed using Brown and Levinson's in 1987 Universal Politeness Theory, which provided the analytical framework for identifying and categorizing politeness strategies. Each utterance from President Rodrigo Duterte during the Senate Inquest Hearing was examined and initially classified into one of four pre-defined categories: Code-1: Positive Politeness, Code-2: Negative Politeness, Code-3: Bald-on-Record, and Code-4: Off-Record. These initial codes were systematically arranged in a coding matrix to facilitate comparison and organization. Sub-categories were then developed based on linguistic markers, pragmatic functions, and observed interactional patterns. In cases where multiple strategies co-occurred within a single utterance, selective reduction was applied to identify the dominant strategy while still acknowledging the presence of embedded forms.

Following this, the researchers analyzed the data for recurring patterns, strategy frequency, and contextual nuances, such as shifts in tone depending on the interlocutor or topic. This allowed for a deeper understanding of how Duterte modulated his politeness strategies in formal political discourse.

To enhance the validity and credibility of the analysis, a triangulation process was implemented. Independent coders reviewed the data, and the resulting codes were cross-checked through inter-rater reliability procedures [41]. Moreover, the coding scheme was reviewed and refined in consultation with professors holding Doctorates in Applied Linguistics, who served as expert validators.

Finally, the interpretative phase linked these patterns to broader communicative and political implications, providing insights into the use of politeness strategies in high-stakes formal discourse. This stage of analysis highlighted how President Duterte's discourse varies based on interlocutors and topics, power relations, rhetorical intentions, and audience, contributing to insights on political communication and language use in formal hearings.

3.5. Research Procedures

The research process began with identifying the primary data source: the official livestream video of the Senate Inquest Hearing on the Philippine War on Illegal Drugs, dated October 28, 2024, as published by Manila Bulletin. This video served as the foundation for all subsequent analysis. Researchers watched the 8-hour, 59-minute, and 30-second recording multiple times to familiarize themselves with the discourse.

Next, a rigorous manual transcription of President Duterte's responses during the hearing was undertaken. This was followed by a direct translation of the transcribed data, maintaining the original structure and meaning of the utterances in the source language. These steps ensured that subtleties in language use were accurately captured for analysis.

The translated data were then subjected to initial coding based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory. This stage involved classifying responses into four main categories: Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, Bald-on-Record, and Off-Record strategies. A code matrix table was created to aid in identifying recurring patterns and assigning sub-categories to each strategy observed.

To ensure reliability and consistency, a triangulation process was employed. The researchers conducted multiple rounds of inter-rater reliability checks, complemented by expert validation from professors specializing in Applied Linguistics. This critical step is vital because it ensures that the research findings are consistent, credible, and dependable over time [42].

After validation, data interpretation was carried out by examining how politeness strategies varied based on context and interaction. Selective reduction was applied to responses that exhibited overlapping strategies, allowing the researchers to refine the categorization and focus on dominant patterns. The final step involved rechecking the content through relational analysis to confirm coherence, depth, and consistency of findings.

The research was conducted following the ethical guidelines for qualitative research, ensuring transparency, integrity, and respect for the data. All sources and methods were appropriately cited, and confidentiality was maintained in the analysis. The ethical considerations extended to ensuring that no personal biases influenced the interpretation of the data. Researchers adhered to the principles of objectivity, and all coding was done without allowing personal or ideological perspectives to interfere with the interpretation of President Duterte's politeness strategies.

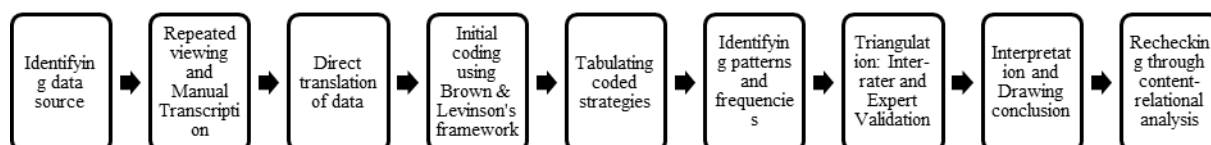


Figure 1. Research Procedure Flowchart for Analyzing President Duterte's Politeness Strategies

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Politeness Strategies of President Rodrigo Duterte during the Inquest Proceedings

Having analyzed all collected data, researchers found four (4) types of politeness strategies with 65 utterances used by President Rodrigo Duterte during the Inquest Proceedings.

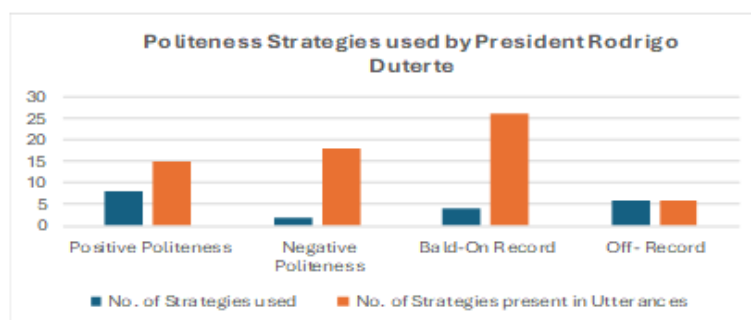


Figure 2. Politeness Strategies used by President Rodrigo Duterte during Inquest Proceedings

Figure 2 presents the frequency of politeness strategies employed by Duterte along with the number of strategies present in his utterances. The most dominant strategy used by Rodrigo Duterte during the Inquest Proceedings on Illegal War on Drugs based on Figure 1 is Bald -On Record with four (4) strategy types containing 26 utterances. This implies that Duterte communicated without redressive acts and in a straightforward manner. Additionally, the second most utilized politeness strategy is Negative Politeness with two (2) strategy types containing 18 utterances. This highlights that the President expresses his desire of respecting and considering the hearer's rights to lessen the impositions through apologizing and giving deference. Meanwhile, the third most evident strategy is Positive Politeness with eight (8) strategy types containing 15 utterances. This emphasizes the President's acts to revitalize the listener's positive face through showcasing the speaker's interest in the hearer, asserting common ground, and avoiding disagreement. Finally, the least frequently used type of politeness strategy is Off- Record with two (2) strategy types containing only three (3) utterances. This suggests that the President address questions using sarcasm, hints, overstating and the like to avoid confrontations.

Having analyzed the general trends of Duterte's politeness strategies, the following sections presented through tables investigated each politeness strategy in detail, highlighting specific utterances.

Table 1. Positive Politeness Strategies in Duterte's Speech

Positive Politeness Strategy	Code	Excerpts of President Rodrigo Duterte	Translation	Interpretation
Presuppose/ Raise/ Assert Common Ground	Code 1: A4	Marami ka rin sigurong pinatay, Sir. Alam ko.	You've probably killed a lot too, Sir. I know.	Expressing accusations
Intensify Interest to Hearer	Code 1: B1	I've been once upon a time also a congressman, prosecutor, fiscal... dinaanan ko na lahat, Sir.	I was once a congressman, prosecutor, and fiscal... I've been through it all, Sir.	Expressing credibility
Assert or Presuppose Speaker's Knowledge of and Concern for the Hearer's Wants	Code 1: C1	...Kawawa yang mga pulis. Ako...imbistigahan ninyo ako. Set a date for an investigation para sa akin.	... Let's not involve the police. They're pitiful. Investigate me instead.	Expressing willingness to take the burden
Notice, attend to hearer	Code 1: D2	mabuti dumating ako dito. Pasalamat talaga ako para.. lumabas...	it's good that I arrived here. I'm really thankful for...	Expressing gratitude
Joking	Code 1: E2	Hindi ko nga alam kong bakit ako andito kaharap mo.	I don't even know why I'm here in front of you.	Expressing self deprecating humor
Offer, Promise	Code 1: F	I am at your disposal, Sir...	I am at your disposal, Sir...	Expressing obedience
Avoid Disagreement	Code 1: G	Yung boses ko lang kasi.. kasi excited ... I'll try to do it	It's just my voice... because I'm excited...	Expressing possibility of

		moderate.. with moderation.	I'll try to do it in moderation	causing offense
Seek Agreement	Code 1: H	Correct. Correct. Alam mo kasi ang pulis hindi papatay yan ng kung maski sinong civilian. Bakit sila maghanap ng sakit ng ulo?...	Correct. Correct. You see, the police won't kill just any civilian. Why would they look for trouble? ...	Expressing confirmation of the statement

Table 1 presents the positive politeness strategies employed by Duterte along with sample excerpts evident in his speech. Of the 15 strategies that have Positive politeness, President Rodrigo Duterte applied eight (8) strategies with 15 utterances during the Inquest Proceedings. The above data reveals how he used various positive politeness strategies to build rapport, express credibility, and answer questions persuasively. The Presuppose/Raise/Assert Common Ground strategy (Code 1 – A4) emphasizes President Duterte's establishment of common ground to make accusations less direct. The Intensify Interest to Hearer strategy (Code 1 – B1) displays his effort to engage the audience by highlighting his past accomplishments. Additionally, the Assert or Presuppose Speaker's Knowledge of and Concern for the Hearer's Wants strategy (Code 1 – C1), where Duterte reaffirms the listener of his willingness to carry the burden and show a sense of responsibility. This implies his strong attempt to appear cooperative and considerate.

Moreover, he also applies the Notice, Attend to Hearer strategy (Code 1 – D2) to express gratitude, creating a connection by acknowledging the listener's role in the proceeding. Further, President Duterte makes use of the Joking (Code 1 – E2) strategy as a form of self-deprecating humor, to redress face threat. He also utilizes the Offer, Promise strategy (Code 1 – F) to convey a willingness to comply, demonstrating obedience and complete surrender. Finally, the Seek Agreement strategy (Code 1 – H) shows how he agrees with the listener's opinion.

This use of positive politeness strategies, particularly joking and self-deprecation, aligns with the findings of Gomez and Manuel [43], who explored Duterte's rhetorical strategies in his speeches. Duterte's use of humor and informal speech acts as a tool for mitigating face-threatening situations, effectively disarming opposition and appealing to the common people. By deploying humor, he softens his directness and asserts authority in a way that builds rapport with his audience. Consequently, Duterte often uses humor strategically to maintain a populist image while simultaneously reaffirming his position of power. These findings support the notion that Duterte's positive politeness strategies are not only employed to manage social interactions but are also deeply embedded in his broader political and rhetorical objectives.

Generally, these utterances reflect how Duterte uses positive politeness to maintain impressions, assert his stance, and raise common grounds.

Table 2. Negative Politeness Strategies in Duterte's Speech

Negative Politeness Strategy	Code	Utterances of President Rodrigo Duterte	Translation	Interpretation
Apologizing	Code 2: A1	In the same manner, I would like to express my apologies, especially to Sen. Hontiveros...	In the same manner, I would like to express my apologies, especially to Sen. Hontiveros ...	Expressing direct apologies
	Code 2: A2	... If you do not agree with me, I'm sorry...	... If you do not agree with me, I'm sorry...	Expressing apology with justification
Give Deference	Code 2: B1	May I interrupt you, Sir? Kindly...	May I interrupt you, Sir? Kindly...	Expressing respectful interruption
	Code 2: B2	Mr. Senator... Sir... Ma'am ... Mr. Chair...	Mr. Senator... Sir... Ma'am ... Mr. Chair...	Expressing courtesy through Honorifics

As shown in table 2, a total of 18 utterances lead to Negative politeness with two types from 10 strategies used by President Duterte during Inquest proceedings. The first expression, Code 2 – A1, is a concrete example of the President, acknowledging one's faults. By apologizing, the speaker recognizes disagreement while softening the impact of his words. Another expression is "If you do not agree with me, I'm sorry" (Code 2 – A2), illustrating reluctance while providing compelling reasons which serves as mitigation to the social tension that might happen from the disagreement. The third example, "May I interrupt you, Sir? Kindly..." (Code 2 –

B1), demonstrates Deference. By using polite forms like "May I" and "Kindly," President Duterte respects the other listener's position and authority, implying humility and at the same time saving the hearer's face. Moreover, President Duterte consistently uses honorifics such as Ma'am/Sir when addressing listeners. This goes to show that the president not only respects but also mitigates potential threats to the individuals he is speaking to. These expressions, through apology and deference, help navigate potentially confrontational situations, maintaining a sense of politeness and respect while also preserving the speaker's position.

This result is consistent with the findings of a study by Caguia et al. [44], titled "Politeness in President Duterte's Late-Night Public Address Talk to the People on COVID-19", which used Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory to examine Duterte's rhetorical strategies during the pandemic. The study identified "apologize" as the most frequently used negative politeness strategy, echoing the current observation of Duterte's use of apology as a means of softening disagreement and expressing humility. The analysis revealed that Duterte's speeches employ rhetorical elements such as admission, deference, and reasoning to manage face-threatening acts and pacify public tension. These strategies, whether in crisis communication or judicial contexts, reflect a patterned use of politeness to maintain authority while reducing interpersonal conflict.

Such consistent usage across different communicative contexts supports the argument that Duterte deliberately employs Negative Politeness strategies not only as a rhetorical device but also as a means of shaping public perception and minimizing friction in face-sensitive situations. This further underscores the relevance of politeness theory in analyzing political discourse, particularly when examining how language functions to navigate power and social dynamics.

Table 3. Bald-On Record Strategies in Duterte's Speech

Bald-On Record Strategy	Code	Excerpts of President Rodrigo Duterte	Translation	Interpretation
Maximum efficiency	Code 3: A3	...Pag ayaw mo mag surrender, lapitan mo. You must overcome the resistance, pagka nagkaputukan kayo sinasabi ko sa'yo.. at sabihin ko uli ngayon ang sinasabi ko sa pulis, wag kayong umuwi dito sa o mag report sa akin na may tama ka...	...If they refuse to surrender, approach them. You must overcome the resistance. If a shootout happens, I'm telling you—and I will say this again to the police—"Do not come back to me or report to me with a gunshot wound."...	Expressing authority and aggression
Metaphorical urgency for emphasis	Code 3: C5	...Nagtataka ako hanggang ngayon, ang Justice Department.. hindi pa nag file ng kaso hanggang ngayon. Pot*ngina. Katagal na. Katagal ko na.. matagal na ako pumapatay ng tao hanggang ngayon hindi pa sila naka file ng kaso... ...Protektado ko 'yan sila basta in the fulfillment of duty, Mr. Senator, yan sila naging chief of police 'yan... ...Pero alam nila ang mga pulis na pumasok ng kidnapping, hold upping, alam nila yung pulis nila pinatay ko...	..I'm wondering until now, the Justice Department... still hasn't filed a case. Son of a b*tch. It's been so long. I've been killing people for a long time, yet they still haven't filed a case... ...I protect them as long as they fulfill their duty, Mr. Senator, they became chiefs of police... ...But they know—those police officers who got involved in kidnapping, robbery—they know I had them killed...	Expressing frustration, authority, and justification
Task oriented way of instruction	Code 3: D2	...Actually, gusto ko nang habulin yung classmate mo, yung congressman para ma file-an ko ng kaso. Total hindi ko na kailangan nung affidavit mo, your narrative here is under oath... ...Hindi ko na kailangan yung	...Actually, I want to go after your classmate, the congressman, so I can file a case against him. After all, I no longer need your affidavit—your narrative here is under oath... ...I don't need your affidavit	Expressing legal intent

		affidavit mo. All I have to do is to take out your statement, the basis of filing a case of subornation of...	anymore. All I have to do is extract your statement as the basis for filing a case of subornation of...	
Power different between (S) speaker and (H) hearer (S is higher)	Code 3: B6	...No no, you have to pin me down lower.. Lawfully.. Do not pin me down on semantics...	"No no, you have to pin me down lower.. Lawfully.. Do not pin me down on semantics...	Expressing dominance, dismissal, and authority

Table 3 illustrates the bald-on record strategies utilized by President Duterte. Of the eight bald-on record strategies, Duterte applied 4 strategies with 26 utterances during the Inquest Proceedings. The above data reveals how he used various bald-on strategies to assert authority, express frustration, and respond decisively.

The Maximum Efficiency strategy (Code 3 – A3) highlights Duterte’s use of direct commands to eliminate ambiguity, often instructing law enforcers on handling criminals with urgency and aggression. The Metaphorical Urgency for Emphasis strategy (Code 3 – B5) shows how he reinforced the gravity of legal delays and law enforcement actions, using strong language to push his point. Additionally, the Task-Oriented Way of Instruction strategy (Code 3 – C2) demonstrates Duterte’s straightforward approach to legal matters, as seen in his dismissal of the need for an affidavit and his focus on extracting key statements for case filings. Finally, the Power Difference Between Speaker and Hearer strategy (Code 3 – D6) reflects his defiance and resistance in legal discussions, emphasizing his higher authority over the conversation.

Duterte’s repeated use of these strategies aligns with what Tatcho [45] describes as his politics of “I will,” a performative promise of execution and results. Duterte’s tough talk resonated with supporters who viewed other politicians as “all talk, no execution.” As such, his bluntness, though often criticized, was interpreted by many as a sign of decisive leadership. His unfiltered speech, therefore, was not mere rhetoric but a deliberate move to establish action-oriented credibility, reinforcing the belief that “actions speak louder than words.”

This is further supported by Montiel et al. [46], who examined 746 of Duterte’s speeches and found that his use of profanity served not merely to offend but to perform strategic discursive functions. These included affirming his identity with the masses, rejecting corrupt elite institutions, and asserting authority as a sovereign leader. Duterte’s bold language, including swearing and other bald-on-record utterances—functioned as rhetorical tools that helped consolidate a populist regime by making him appear authentic, relatable, and decisive in the eyes of the public. Overall, these strategies illustrate how Duterte employs bald-on-record politeness to assert dominance, manage discourse, and strengthen his position through unfiltered and direct speech.

Table 4. Off-Record Strategies in Duterte’s Speech

Off-record Strategy	Code	Utterances of President Rodrigo Duterte	Translation	Interpretation
Hints	Code 4: A1	...Baka gusto mong magtanong muna sa abogado...	...Maybe you’d like to ask a lawyer first...	Expressing indirect suggestion
Presupposition	Code 4: A2	...Dapat alam mo ‘yan kasi abogado ka...	...You should know that because you’re a lawyer...	Expressing assumed knowledge
Overstating	Code 4: A3	...Matagal na ako pumapatay ng tao hanggang ngayon hindi pa sila naka file ng kaso...	...I’ve been killing people for a long time, yet they still haven’t filed a case...	Expressing exaggerated emphasis
Using Contradictions	Code 4: A4	...If there’s killing there, I’m saying I’m the one... but I don’t take responsibility for specific crimes...	...If there’s killing there, I’m saying I’m the one... but I don’t take responsibility for specific crimes...	Expressing conflicting stance
Irony or Sarcasm	Code 4: A5	...Eh abogado ka pala eh...	...Oh, so you’re a lawyer...	Expressing sarcasm subtly
Using Metaphors	Code 4: A6	...Hihilahin kita sa impyerno...	...I’ll drag you to hell...	Expressing indirect comparison

Table 4 presents the off-record strategies applied by Duterte in his speech. During the Inquest Proceedings, President Rodrigo Duterte employed six Off-Record Strategies, each demonstrating a different way

of avoiding confrontation while asserting control over the discourse. He used Hinting to subtly guide the conversation, as seen in "Baka gusto mong magtanong muna sa abogado." ("Maybe you'd like to ask a lawyer first."), while Presupposing knowledge, as in "Dapat alam mo 'yan kasi abogado ka." ("You should know that because you're a lawyer."), subtly pressured the listener to acknowledge competence. He also engaged in Overstating, saying "Matagal na ako pumapatay ng tao hanggang ngayon hindi pa sila naka file ng kaso." ("I've been killing people for a long time, yet they still haven't filed a case."), using exaggeration to highlight frustration while keeping the statement ambiguous.

Additionally, Duterte employed Contradictions, such as "If there's killing there, I'm saying I'm the one... but I don't take responsibility for specific crimes.", allowing him to make bold claims while maintaining plausible deniability. His use of Irony and Sarcasm, as in "Eh abogado ka pala eh." ("Oh, so you're a lawyer."), subtly mocked his opponent's credibility, while Metaphors, like "Hihilahin kita sa impierno." ("I'll drag you to hell."), intensified his message without making direct threats.

Duterte's use of metaphors such as "war" (on "war on drugs") has been powerful because it fits the local cultural and political climate [47]. Duterte's aggressive tone resonates with many Filipinos who are frustrated with crime and government inefficiency. His style, though seems anti-democratic or harsh, remains popular because it connects with how people feel and think about safety, justice, and leadership.

Through these strategies, Duterte navigated sensitive discussions, redirected accountability, and maintained dominance, ensuring his words remained open to interpretation while asserting his authority.

4.2. Implications of Duterte's Politeness Strategies during Inquest Proceedings

Researchers found several implications of Duterte's politeness strategies used during the Inquest Proceedings. First, Duterte's dominant use of Bald-On Record strategy mirrors his authoritative and assertive nature, projecting a straightforward and decisive leader. This strategy further strengthens his appeal among supporters who prefer direct and strong leadership, especially in dealing with controversial issues such as the war on drugs. But the same approach can fuel a polarized political environment, as it may appear as aggressive, confrontational, or short on diplomatic sensitivity, particularly by critics.

Second, his deployment of Positive Politeness strategies like joking and establishing common ground helps him establish rapport with his audience. This approach aids in mitigating his directness at times, making him more relatable and convincing. By using humor and showing familiarity with his audience, Duterte creates an informal but engaging public discourse. However, this can also result in normalizing a more informal and casual political communication style, which may dilute the distinction between professional governance and humor-driven rhetoric.

Third, the low frequency of Negative Politeness indicates a low priority on mitigating imposition or expressing deference, reflecting a control-oriented leadership style at the expense of diplomacy. This could have long-term effects on political discourse in the Philippines, shaping how government officials, political figures, and even the public carry-on conversations—favoring directness over tact in political debates.

Fourth, his limited use of Off-Record strategies, which encompass ambiguity or indirect speech, displays a strategic balance between explicitness and subtlety depending on the audience and the setting. This implies that despite Duterte's bluntness, he also employs indirectness when the context requires it, which may serve to protect his persona, escape direct accountability, or create rhetorical flexibility in controversial utterances.

Further, having in-depth knowledge of Duterte's communication styles is imperative for effective discourse to exist in the context of teaching communication. Duterte's politeness strategies – branded primarily with directness, humor, and indirect speech serve as a springboard for educators to showcase its effect on leadership and public engagement. Utilizing this, as a case study, can help learners critically examine political rhetoric and formulate their communication skills by striking a balance between assertiveness with tact, ensuring clarity while maintaining diplomatic sensitivity. Moreover, mentoring learners to discern persuasive rhetoric versus factual discourse develops media literacy and encourages ethical public speaking. By incorporating these elements, educators can guide students to explore political and professional communication effectively, empowering them to interact meaningfully in discussions and debates.

Generally, Duterte's politeness strategies not only construct his public image but also broaden his influence on political discourse in the Philippines. His linguistic style influences how leaders communicate, how authority is perceived by the public, and how political debates are carried out in the country. More importantly, his communication style offers valuable insights for educators in teaching political and professional communication. Educators can aid learners to critically assess Duterte's communicative strategies and their underlying effects on leadership, persuasion and public engagement. Through this, investigating Duterte's politeness strategies serves not just as an analysis of political language but more as a venue for fostering informed, articulate, and responsible communicators in both political and professional settings.

The impact of this research lies in its contribution to understanding the role of language in shaping political leadership and public perception. By analyzing Duterte's use of politeness strategies during inquest

proceedings, the study offers valuable insights into how communicative behavior reflects broader ideological and leadership frameworks [47]. It provides educators, researchers, and students with a lens through which they can explore political discourse, fostering critical thinking, rhetorical awareness, and responsible communication [48]. However, the research also has limitations. It focuses solely on Duterte's utterances during inquest proceedings, which may not fully represent his communication across diverse contexts and audiences [49], [50]. Additionally, the study relies on content analysis without including audience reception or public response data, which could offer a more holistic understanding of the impact of his rhetorical strategies.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that President Rodrigo Duterte employs various politeness strategies. He predominantly employs the bald-on-record politeness strategy (40.00%), highlighting his preference for direct and unfiltered communication, emphasizing clarity and urgency. This suggests an authoritative approach, reinforcing his image as a decisive leader. The negative politeness strategy follows with (27.70%), reflecting his occasional attempts to acknowledge the hearer's autonomy through apologies and deference. This demonstrates that while Duterte often speaks directly, he also occasionally employs strategies that acknowledge the hearer's autonomy and minimize imposition. Meanwhile, the positive politeness strategies (23.10%), show Duterte's efforts to build rapport, assert credibility, and lessen social distance mitigate between himself and his audience through humor and shared identity. The minimal use of off-record politeness (9.20%), portrays that Duterte rarely relies on indirect or ambiguous speech, preferring to choose explicit statements instead.

Generally, Duterte's politeness strategies emphasize a distinctive communication style that incorporates directness, authority, strategic deference, and selective rapport-building. His predominant use of bald-on-record strategies reinforces his image as a strong and straightforward leader, while his application of positive and negative politeness strategies mirrors an effort to manage audience view and maintain control over interactions. Although off-record strategies appear less frequently, their occasional use demonstrates a calculated approach to rhetorical ambiguity. This study provides insights into the role of politeness strategies in political speech, offering a deeper understanding of how language shapes power dynamics and public perception. Thus, educators can meaningfully integrate these insights into discussions on ethical and persuasive communication.

Future research could investigate how politeness strategies vary across different political figures, ideologies, and contexts, both locally and internationally. Comparative studies between leaders with contrasting communication styles could yield insights into the cultural and situational factors influencing politeness. Additionally, exploring how audiences interpret and respond to these strategies, particularly on social media, may deepen understanding of their impact on public opinion, political engagement, and media discourse. This line of inquiry could also support the development of more responsive, ethical, and context-sensitive communication education frameworks, particularly in political science, linguistics, and media studies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the University of Southern Mindanao, particularly the Research and Development Office, for their invaluable support throughout this research endeavor.

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