



<https://jurnal.unigal.ac.id/index.php/jall/index>

JALL (Journal of Applied Linguistics and Literacy), ISSN 2598-8530, September, Vol. 9 No. 2, 2025
Received: July 02nd, 2025. Accepted: September 04th, 2025. Published September 30th, 2025

POLITENESS STRATEGIES USED IN KAMALA HARRIS'S AND DONALD TRUMP'S 2024 POST-ELECTION SPEECHES

Mega Uli Arta Silitonga*, Rahmadsyah Rangkuti, Syahron Lubis, Deliana

Universitas Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

meggsltg@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

After the election results were announced, to maintain a personal face and respect the face of the audience, Kamala Harris and Donald Trump performed their post-election speeches on November 6th, 2024. This study focused on politeness strategies used by Kamala Harris to handle her defeat and by Donald Trump to achieve his victory. This study used a qualitative approach with a content analysis design to analyse and discuss the use of politeness strategies in Harris's and Trump's post-election speeches using the politeness strategies framework of Brown and Levinson (1987). The data were collected from the YouTube platform. The data showed that Harris's and Trump's speeches used different politeness strategies. According to this study, Kamala Harris was the only speaker to employ all four of the main politeness strategies, while Trump only used 2 main strategies. However, the usage of positive politeness: including the speaker and the hearer in the activity, was the first dominant strategy between both candidates. In the context of gender, Harris used feminine politeness and tended to perform collaborative strategies, whereas Trump mostly employed demands and exaggerating, which he performed as masculine politeness.

Keywords: pragmatics; politeness strategies; face threatening acts; face; political discourse

INTRODUCTION

The language choices of speakers are influenced by the diverse circumstances in which the conversations occur. In order to comprehend and communicate in a context-rich conversation, pragmatics is necessary to use. According to Levinson (1983), pragmatics deals with the connections between language and context embedded within a language's structure, focusing on aspects of meaning that semantics does not cover. In the pragmatic study, the social factors influence the discovery of politeness (Batubara et al., 2022). Politeness is a manner of communication that shows respect to others (Purba et al., 2023). According to Holmes (2013), politeness is essential in building social harmony and controlling social conflict, as it consists of discourse strategies or linguistic devices. Politeness is fundamental to the growth of social order and essential for human interaction, serving as the base of human social existence.

According to Abuya (2012), language can be considered the medium of politics. Regardless of political objectives, such as convincing, persuading, entertaining, promising, enlightening, or informing, language links people's hearts in politics. Political speech is performed in a pragmatic framework. When a politician delivers a speech, whether after defeat or victory in the election, politeness becomes crucial in managing face, maintaining credibility, and fostering unity. According to Chilton (2004), politeness phenomena are complex to notice in political conversations because they seem normal in everyday social interactions. According to Bull and Fetzer (2010), there are three faces that politicians have to deal with: their own, the faces of their significant others, and the faces of the party they represent. Being liked by others is what a positive face is all about. It may be the most important thing for politicians, regardless of what they are talking about, whether they are being interviewed, giving a speech, debating with another politician, or answering a question from a member of the public. Because of this, a political leader will be careful not to say things that could limit their ability to act in the future.

After the results released, Kamala Harris and Donald Trump carefully made their speeches to engage the audience after the election results, eagerly anticipating the 2024 United States presidential election. Whether victory or defeat, post-election speeches are crucial in political communication, shaping public opinion, and maintaining political politeness. In Kamala Harris's concession speech, she said, "I am so proud of the race we ran, and the way we ran it, and the way we ran it over the 107 days of this campaign." Applying "we" instead of "I" in the utterance creates an image of collective accomplishment and maintains solidarity. Harris's statement showed a politeness strategy to promote solidarity, appreciation, and group pride among the audience, supporters, and campaign members. Thus, the remark is the use of positive politeness that includes both the speaker and the listener. Harris could have hurt the audience's positive attitude by only pointing out her efforts. It would have made them feel less valued.

There are some studies supporting this study that have related to politeness strategies: The first study was Aperocho and Lapiña's (2022) Face-Saving Strategies in Leni Robredo's Post-Election Speech. This research analysed the various face-saving discursive strategies

used by a politician like VP Leni to save her face in the eyes of the public, especially her supporters, after losing the presidential race. She employed five face-saving discursive techniques in her 21-minute post-election speech: embracing defeat, indirect mudslinging, optimism or positivity, highlighting progress, and avoiding naming the rivals. The researchers believed that after facing face loss and face threats, officials like Vice President Leni Robredo employed various discursive strategies for protecting their reputations.

The second study was done by Purba et al., (2023) Application of Brown and Levinson's model on Joe Biden's Victory Speech: A Case on Politeness Strategy. The researchers selected Joe Biden's speech as the subject because it provides information on politeness strategies. The objectives of this research are to identify the types of politeness strategies present in Joe Biden's victory speech and to identify the dominant categories of politeness strategies identified in Joe Biden's victory speech. This study employed qualitative research centered on pragmatics. Qualitative research focuses on the processes, meanings, and understandings conveyed through words or sentences. Three types of politeness were identified in Joe Biden's victory speech. The results were Positive Politeness (81.8%), Negative Politeness (4.5%), and Off Record (13.6%). The data analysis indicates that the dominant politeness technique in Joe Biden's victory speech was a positive politeness strategy. Positive politeness enhances relaxed and comfortable conversation, therefore minimizing the imposition between the speaker and the listener.

The third research (Batubara et al., 2022) observed how Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton tried to be polite during the 2016 presidential debate. In the DT and HC presidential debate 2016, the researcher found 13 expressions of politeness. The positive politeness in researcher obtained 24 expressions of politeness in the debate. In negative politeness, the researcher acquired 31 expressions, and off-record, got 10 expressions of politeness. The result of politeness expressed in the DT and HC presidential debate 2016 is 78. Previous studies only focused on politeness used in such as presidential debate, concession speech and victory speech. Each study used only one political discourse: one study analyzed only speeches during victory, and the other only analyzed speeches during defeat. No study analyzed and compared the use of politeness strategies in speeches during defeat and victory

simultaneously. While these works revealed how politicians use politeness strategies to mitigate face-threatening acts, there has been a limited analysis of concession and victory speeches in the 2024 United States Presidential election context.

This current study compared the post-election speeches of Donald Trump and Kamala Harris simultaneously, whereas other studies examine politeness strategies in a single post-election. Listening to their post-election speeches is an excellent way to understand how gender, power relations, and political personas influence how people use language to be polite. No prior study has investigated the politeness strategies employed when Harris had to deal with defeat and Trump declared his victory. This research aims to address this gap by examining the 2024 United States post-election speeches, which will offer novel perspectives on politeness during moments of democratic transition.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Pragmatics

Pragmatics is the study of contextual meaning (Yule, 1996). It is the relationships between language forms and their users and the interpretation of intended human behaviour. As Searle, Kiefer, and Bierwisch stated (Levinson, 1983, p. 6), "Pragmatics is one of those. Challenges in Teaching Speaking in Indonesia words (societal and cognitive are others) that give the impression that something quite specific and technical is being talked about when often in fact it has no clear meaning."

Politeness

Brown and Levinson (1987) provided a framework for politeness, starting with the concept of face. Face is the public self-image every member wants to claim. Politeness is a strategy used to prevent face-threatening activities or employ particular strategies to reduce threats. As Yule (1996) stated, politeness is a system of interpersonal relations designed to facilitate interaction by minimising the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange.

1. Positive face

The positive face refers to the consistent self-image, or "personality," individuals claim in interactions. Expressions of disapproval, criticism, contempt, ridicule, complaints,

reprimands, accusations, insults, contradictions, disagreements, and challenges are some of the acts that threaten the positive-face want.

2. Negative face

Negative face is the basic claim of personal and territorial boundaries and the right not to be harmed, which means freedom of action and protection from being forced to do something. Orders, requests, suggestions, advice, reminders, threats, warnings, and dares are some activities that threaten the negative face.

Bald on Record

The bald-on-record strategy is to state the truth with sincerity. According to Brown and Levinson (1987:94), the speaker uses the bald-on-record strategy to do the FTA with maximum efficiency, more than he wants to satisfy the hearer's face. Different types of bald on-record usage happen in various contexts, as the speaker may have distinct motives for seeking to achieve the FTA with maximum efficiency. These can be categorised into two classes: those in which the face threat is not minimised, where faces are ignored or considered irrelevant, and those in which the face-threatening act is performed obviously, allowing the speaker to minimise face threats by implication.

Positive Politeness

According to Brown and Levinson (1987:101), positive politeness refers to the strategies employed to show the addressee's positive face. This politeness involves their desire for their wants, which are associated with actions or values, to be perceived as favourable. The primary objective of a positive politeness strategy is to enhance the listener's self-esteem, interests, and belongings while at the same time acknowledging and respecting the hearer's positive face (Rahmani et al., 2023).

Negative Politeness

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), negative politeness refers to redressive action addressed to the receiver's negative face, which includes the desire to protect freedom of action and avoid interruptions to attention. Positive politeness is broad, whereas negative politeness is precise and targeted; it performs the function of minimising the particular

imposition that the FTA unavoidably effects. They will likely be applied when the speaker or hearer attempts to limit interaction development. (Sapitri et al., 2019).

Off Record

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), off-record utterances are indirect language uses, either more general or different from what one means. The hearer must conclude to determine intentions in the situation. In other words, the actor leaves himself an 'out' by providing some defensible interpretations; he cannot be held to have committed himself to just one particular interpretation of his act.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative approach with a content analysis design. The key idea behind qualitative research is to learn about the problem or issue from participants and to address the research to obtain that information (Creswell, 2018). According to Krippendorff (2004), Content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use. Qualitative Content Analysis can examine any communication material, including narrative responses, open-ended survey questions, interviews, focus group observations, or printed media. The research data consisted of Kamala Harris's concession speech and Donald Trump's victory speech from the 2024 United States presidential election. The data source is the downloaded videos from the YouTube platform. The chosen data are the speeches published after the voting results were announced. Both candidates, Kamala Harris and Donald Trump, delivered their post-election speeches on Wednesday, November 6th, 2024. The writer downloaded the chosen videos on YouTube to ease the analysis. After downloading the chosen videos, the writer saved the transcripts of the speeches delivered in the videos. Then, the data were collected by conducting several steps. First, watching both post-election speeches video. Second, obtaining the transcript of both post-election speeches from ABC7 and FOX 9 Minneapolis-St. Paul's YouTube caption. Third, Reading and understanding the context and checking data accuracy based on transcription. Fourth, Classifying the utterances of both post-election speeches.

The main data for this study were collected from YouTube videos, which are accessible digital materials. When using this material, the researcher followed the ethical rules about copyright and fair use. Copyright laws protect the videos, meaning they can only be used for academic reasons, like research-related analysis. The data is used in a way that doesn't replace or copy the original writing. It only uses limited phrases in the form of transcripts and related descriptions. The data has correctly listed the video description, channel name, and publication date.

For data analysis, the analytical method by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) involves three steps in conducting the data analysis process in qualitative research. The data are explained as follows: data condensation, data display, drawing the conclusion.

1. *Data Condensation*: Selecting Donald Trump's and Kamala Harris's remarks. Second, focusing data collected that is related to the two research questions. Third, simplifying the data into tables to make it easier to understand.
2. *Data Display*: The results in this study are shown in two ways: first, a sentence that showed each politeness strategy is shown; then, each sentence is explained. The analysis describes things with words; there are no codes or abbreviations for specific words. The analytic argument will be elaborated on more in the section.
3. *Drawing the conclusion*: These findings have to do with the different kinds of politeness strategies employed by both candidates and the meanings that are hidden in words that are considered as politeness strategies.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

According to the analysis, the writer found that the politeness strategies in Kamala Harris's and Donald Trump's post-election speeches consisted of various strategies. Therefore, the percentages of each main strategy of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory are presented in the following charts.

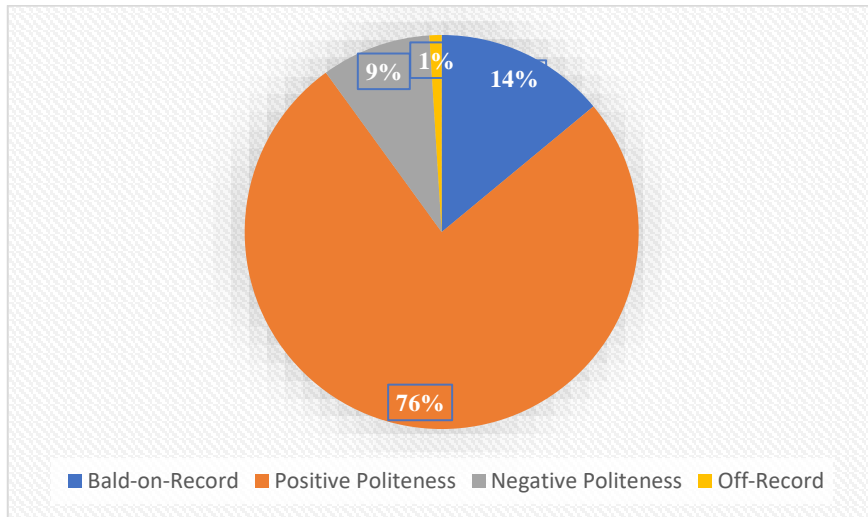


Figure 1. Politeness Strategies used by Kamala Harris

Based on the figures above, the writer found that Kamala Harris used politeness strategies in 93 utterances. The first dominant strategy used by Harris is positive politeness in 71 utterances (76%). Then, followed by the second dominant, bald-on record of Harris used in 13 utterances (14%). Lastly, negative politeness used by Harris in 8 utterances (9%) and off-record only used in 1 utterance. Harris employed all of the main strategies in her concession speech.

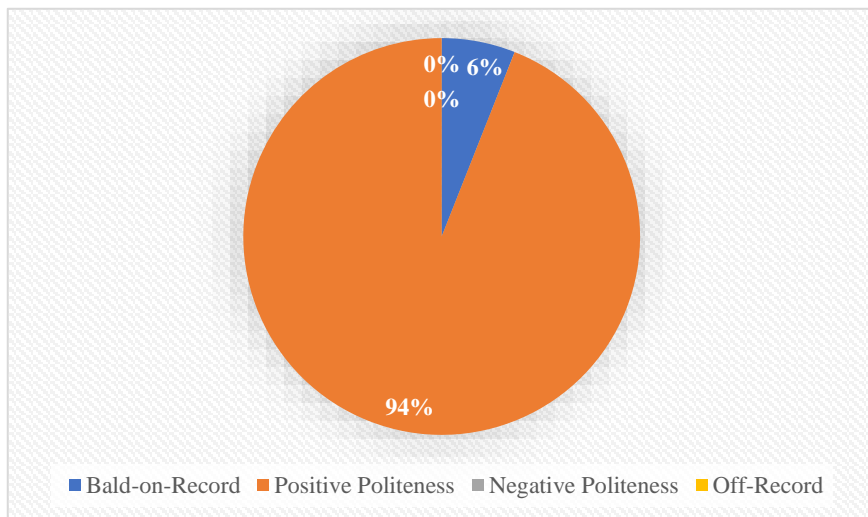


Figure 2. Politeness Strategies used by Donald Trump

Based on the figure 2, the writer found that Donald Trump used politeness strategies in 246 utterances. The first dominant strategy used by Trump is positive politeness in 231 utterances (94%). Then followed by the second strategy, bald on record of Trump used in 15 utterances (6%). Different from Harris, Trump only used bald-on-record and positive politeness in his victory speech.

Discussion

Kamala Harris's Politeness Strategies

In Kamala's 11.28-minute video, she used all the main strategies of politeness in her concession speech.

Table 1. Bald-on-Record strategies used by Kamala Harris

No	Sub-strategy	Utterance
1	Showing disagreement	"The outcome of this election is not what we wanted,"
2	Suggestions or advice	"We must accept the results of this election,"
3	Use imperative form	"Do not ever give up."

Table 2. Positive Politeness strategies used by Kamala Harris

No	Sub-strategy	Utterance
1	Notice, attend to the hearer	"I love you back."
2	Intensify interest to the hearer	"I am so proud of the race we ran,"
3	Presuppose/raise/ assert common ground	"We have been intentional about building community,"
4	Assert or presuppose the speaker's knowledge	"I know many people feel like we are entering a dark time."
5	Offer or promise	"To Governor Walls and the Walls family, I know your service to our nation will continue."
6	Be optimistic	"The light of America's promise will always burn bright, as long as we never give up and as long as we keep fighting."
7	Include speaker and the hearer in the activity	"When we fight, we win."

8	Give gifts to the hearer	“You have power.”
---	--------------------------	-------------------

Table 3. Negative Politeness strategies used by Kamala Harris

No	Sub-strategy	Utterance
1.	Be conventionally indirect	“We will engage in a peaceful transfer of power.”
2.	Be pessimistic	“I know many people feel like we are entering a dark time,
3.	Give deference	“I spoke with President-elect Trump,”
4.	State the FTA as a general rule	“A fundamental principle of American democracy is that when we lose an election, we accept the results.”

Table 4. Off-Record strategies used by Kamala Harris

No	Sub-strategy	Utterance
1.	Use metaphors	“Only when it is darkened enough can you see the stars.”

The researchers found in the concession speech of Kamala Harris that the most used strategies are positive politeness: includes both the speaker/hearer in the activity and be optimistic to seek cooperative assumptions and minimize FTAs. By employing the 'we' form as much as possible, she stated her defeat by ensuring the listener was the part of the defeat, so she did not consider it a personal defeat. So, by using these two dominant sub-strategies, Harris ensured a bond of strength with her supporters even if they are lost. Harris invited her supporters to know that this result is not the end of everything. Harris ensured that all series of election activities involved her supporters, and she showed her gratitude for the support she got, which is why the positive politeness: give gifts to the hearer strategy is the third most used.

Donald Trump’s Politeness Strategies

In Trump's 26.30-minute video, he only used 2 main strategies of politeness in his victory speech. He only used bald-on-record and positive politeness strategies.

Table 5. Bald-on-Record strategies used by Donald Trump

No	Sub-strategy	Utterance
1.	Showing disagreement	“There was no other path to victory.”
2.	Warning or threatening	“I'm not going to start a war.”

3.	Use imperative form	“They have to come in legally.”
----	---------------------	---------------------------------

Table 6. Positive Politeness strategies used by Donald Trump

No	Sub-strategy	Utterance
1.	Notice, attend to the hearer	“I will fight for you,”
2.	Exaggerate	“The greatest political movement of all time,”
3.	Intensify interest to the hearer	“Oh, let me tell you, we have a new star.”
4.	Use in-group identity markers	“We call it the Ice Baby.”
5..	Avoid disagreement	“I took a little heat at the beginning. But he was... uh... I knew. I knew. The brain was a good one... about as good as it gets.”
6.	Presuppose/raise/ assert common ground	“That was one of the truly important moments of my life, when I voted for this group of people,
7.	Offer or promise	“We're going to make you very proud of your vote,”
8.	Be optimistic	“We're going to just work very hard to get all of that back.”
9.	Include speaker and the hearer in the activity	“We have thousands of friends on this incredible movement.”
10.	Give gifts to the hearer	“Everybody up here is great,”

The strategy Trump employed for the first dominant was involving the hearer and the speaker in the activity. Like Harris did, Trump portrayed his win as president-elect as a collective success with the public, rather than just an individual victory. Following the second dominant strategy, which is to give the hearer presents, Trump expressed his delight by fulfilling the listener's desires. Specifically, he promises a better life to ensure all audiences feel heard, cared for, and understood. Therefore, the 3rd dominant strategy is the positive politeness: offer/promise. He attempted to present himself as a winning leader who must articulate his commitments or achievements for the future.

Similarities of the Politeness Strategies used by Kamala Harris and Donald Trump

The very first similarity between the two speakers is that they mostly employed the positive politeness strategy with including both the speaker and the listener in the activity sub strategy. Harris and Trump showed to their supporters that they are connected, share common objectives and missions. Both speakers made sure their supporters are well-cared for, regardless of whether they win or lose. The last similarity, bald-on-record: using the imperative is one of the strategies that are quite widely used by both speakers. The speakers shared different strategies, including the 2nd and 3rd most used ones, but this particular

strategy has the highest number in the main strategy section. Both of them gave the audience orders directly. Although Harris will not be the nation's leader, she commanded her supporters to keep fighting. Trump seemed enthusiastic about his promised period in office, as he offered the audience clear directives regarding the policies he would enforce while in office.

Dissimilarities of the Politeness Strategies used by Kamala Harris and Donald Trump

The significant contrasts between their speeches can recognize the two candidates' usage of language. First, Trump did not employ negative politeness strategies, whereas Harris did. Harris employed four sub-strategies of negative politeness: be conventionally indirect, be pessimistic, give deference, and state the FTA as a general rule. She wanted to be humble and didn't want her audience to feel attacked, furious, or under too much pressure, so Harris declared her defeat, dehumanised herself, and avoided FTA to her audience by employing the negative politeness Strategy. Trump did not employ any of the negative politeness strategies. After one identical dominant rank, the two speakers are now on different paths for the second, third, fourth, and so on. The second difference, Harris's second politeness strategy is positive politeness: optimistic to encourage her supporters admitting defeat. While Trump's second dominant strategy is politeness strategy: give gifts to satisfy the face of the audience and praised the audiences signifying victory and gratefulness. The third difference, Harris's third dominant politeness strategy is positive politeness: presuppose/raise/assert common ground to asserted shared values that builds solidarity between Harris and the audience. Meanwhile, Trump's third dominant strategy is politeness strategy: offer/promise to show his commitments during his term. The last difference is that Trump used the positive politeness: exaggerated strategy as his fourth dominant strategy, while Harris used positive politeness: give gifts to the hearer. Trump delivered his speech with higher intonation, stress, and modifiers because the results showing him as president-elect required him to show his seriousness and enthusiasm about serving as president again. Harris tried to fill her speech by expressing her happiness and gratitude for all the support she received and praise for everyone who had participated. She also encouraged her supporters to continue to fight to help build a better country.

CONCLUSION

This research found sixteen sub-strategies of the politeness strategy employed by Kamala Harris. Her first and second dominant strategies have the same frequency which include both the speaker/hearer strategy and optimistic strategy, and the third is the presuppose/raise/assert common ground strategy. Donald Trump applied thirteen sub-strategies of the politeness strategy. The first dominant strategy is to include both the speaker and the hearer in the activity strategy, the second is to give gifts to the hearer, and the third is to offer/promise. Kamala Harris tried to use all four main strategies in her concession speech, while Donald Trump only employed two, he did not employ negative politeness or off-record. This study found that Harris and Trump have similarities in using the positive politeness, including the speaker as the most used strategy. Then the differences found are Harris's attempt to minimize FTA by using negative politeness, in contrast to Trump, who did not show formality at all and prioritizes directness. Trump's largely direct style simply loses a certain audience in order to increase support, whereas Kamala Harris utilises off-the-record strategies to reach a large audience.

REFERENCES

- Abuya, E. J. (2012). A pragma-stylistic analysis of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan Inaugural speech. *English Language Teaching*, 5(11).
- Aperocho, M. D. B., & Lapiña, I. C. C. (2022). Face-Saving strategies in Leni Robredo's Post Election speech. *International Journal of Qualitative Research*, 2(2), 143–151.
- Batubara, M. H., Rahila, C. D. I., & Fitri, H. (2022). An analysis of politeness strategies used by Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton presidential debate 2016. *Journal of Linguistics Literature and Language Teaching*, 1(2), 51–58.
- Bull, P. & Fetzer, A. (2010). Face, facework and political discourse. *International Review of Social Psychology*, 23(2), 155–185.
- Chilton, P. (2004). *Analysing Political Discourse: Theory and Practice*. Routledge
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches Fifth Edition*. Sage Publication.

- Holmes, J. (2013). *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. Routledge.
- Hutahaean, D. T., Herman, & Girsang, A. F. F. (2021) An Analysis of The Politeness Strategies Utilized By Pesbukers In Their Variety Show. *Wanastra: Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra*, 13(1).
- Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content Analysis An Introduction to Its Methodology Second Edition*. SAGE Publications.
- Levinson, S. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, Johnny. (2014) *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. SAGE Publications.
- Purba, A. Nasution, T., Matondang, M. K., Zulkarnain, Z., & Purba, R. (2023). Application Of Brown And Levinson's Model On Joe Biden's Victory Speech: A Case On Politeness Strategy. *English Review Journal of English Education*, 11(1), 75–82.
- Rustandi, A., Febriani, R., & Sugiarto, B. (2025). Pragmatic and Grammatical Competence Interface in Second Language Acquisition: Conceptual Framework and Construction. *JALL (Journal of Applied Linguistics and Literacy)*, 9(1), 45-56. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.25157/jall.v9i1.17802>
- Sapitri, P. A., Chasanah, A., Putri, A. A., & Paulima, J. (2019). Exploring Brown and Levinson's Politeness Strategies: An explanation on the nature of the politeness phenomenon. *REiLA Journal of Research and Innovation in Language*, 1(3), 111–117.
- Yolanda, N. A. Y. Y. & Bram, B. (2022). Positive Politeness Strategies Used by Parents on Peppa Pig Official YouTube Channel. *ELS Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 5(4).
- Ytoc, S. T. (2024). Politeness strategies of commenters in online news portals. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, 8(7), 106–116.
- Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.