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Research Article

Positive Politeness Strategies in Health-Related Podcast Discourse: A Pragmatic Analysis of Billie Eilish's Discussion on Tourette Syndrome

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ABSTRACT
While previous studies have explored politeness strategies in digital communication and podcast interactions, relatively little attention has been paid to how positive politeness functions in health-related podcast discourse, particularly when discussing sensitive personal experiences. Addressing this gap, this study investigates the realization and communicative functions of positive politeness strategies in Billie Eilish's podcast interview discussing Tourette syndrome. Guided by Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, the study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach. The data were collected from a publicly available podcast interview and analyzed through the identification and contextual interpretation of utterances reflecting positive politeness strategies. The analysis identified six dominant strategies: noticing and attending to the hearer, seeking agreement, using in-group identity markers, giving reasons, expressing optimism, and minimizing potential discomfort. These strategies were employed to foster empathy, establish interpersonal solidarity, encourage openness, reduce potential face threats, and maintain conversational comfort when addressing sensitive health-related experiences. The findings demonstrate that positive politeness serves as an important interpersonal resource in facilitating supportive and empathetic communication within digital health discourse. By illustrating how politeness strategies contribute to meaningful interaction in podcast-based health communication, this study extends pragmatic research on digital discourse and offers empirical insights into the role of positive politeness in constructing rapport and promoting audience engagement in discussions of personal health experiences.
Keywords: *positive politeness, pragmatics, podcast discourse, health communication, Billie Eilish*

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INTRODUCTION

Digital communication has changed the way people communicate and share information (Hafner, 2019). Today, many public figures use digital platforms to discuss various topics, including personal experiences, social issues, and health conditions. One popular form of digital communication is interview discourse, which allows speakers to communicate in a more natural and conversational way. Unlike formal speeches or scripted television programs, interviews encourage spontaneous interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee (Khoshsima et al., 2016). This interaction enables speakers to express their thoughts, emotions, and experiences openly while building a closer relationship with both the interviewer and the audience. Therefore, interview discourse provides a meaningful context for examining how language is used to maintain interpersonal relationships during communication.

"Positive politeness strategies foster empathy, solidarity, and supportive communication in health-related podcast discourse"

In interview discourse, successful communication is influenced not only by the information being shared but also by the way speakers interact with one another. When discussing personal or sensitive topics, speakers need to choose appropriate language to avoid misunderstanding, reduce discomfort, and create a supportive atmosphere. This is closely related to the concept of politeness in pragmatics (Holliday, 2012; Hyland & Jiang, 2021; Johns, 2013). Brown and Levinson (1987) explain that politeness refers to the linguistic strategies speakers use to maintain harmonious relationships and minimize threats to the hearer's face. Similarly, (Haugh, 2020) argues that politeness plays an important role in creating mutual understanding and maintaining positive social interaction. Consequently, politeness becomes an essential aspect of communication, particularly in discussions involving personal experiences and health-related issues.

The concept of politeness is closely connected to Goffman's (1967) notion of *face*, which refers to an individual's public self-image that people expect others to respect during interaction. Based on this concept, Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed four politeness strategies: bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. Among these strategies, positive politeness is particularly relevant because it aims to reduce social distance, express solidarity, and strengthen interpersonal relationships between speakers. Positive politeness can be realized through various strategies, such as noticing the hearer's needs, seeking agreement, using in-group identity markers, giving reasons, expressing optimism, and emphasizing shared experiences. These strategies help speakers create a friendly and comfortable atmosphere, especially when discussing sensitive topics.

Recent studies have shown that positive politeness remains highly relevant in digital communication. (Dynel, (2021) states that positive politeness contributes to maintaining interpersonal relationships and encouraging audience engagement in online communication. Likewise, Tagg (2023) explains that relational language strategies are important for building rapport between communicators and their audiences. (Sifianou,

(2019) also argues that positive politeness frequently appears in informal communication because it promotes empathy, emotional support, and solidarity among participants. In addition, politeness strategies improve communication by reducing misunderstanding and encouraging cooperation (Taguchi, 2019). These studies indicate that positive politeness continues to play an important role in contemporary digital interaction.

Although many previous studies have investigated politeness in digital communication (Cheng et al., 2024; Goudarzi et al., 2015; Mulyono et al., 2019; Pratiwi & Anindyarini, 2021; Yuliawati et al., 2020), several research gaps still exist. Most previous studies focused on classroom interaction, social media communication, online comments, or general online discourse. Comparatively, limited attention has been given to interview discourse discussing personal health experiences. Moreover, only a few studies have examined how positive politeness strategies help speakers create empathy, reduce social distance, and maintain conversational comfort when discussing sensitive health conditions in public digital media. This gap highlights the need for further research on positive politeness in health-related interview discourse.

One example of such communication can be found in Billie Eilish's interview discussing her experiences with Tourette Syndrome. Tourette syndrome is a neurological disorder characterized by involuntary motor and vocal tics that are often misunderstood by the public. During the interview, Billie Eilish openly shares her personal experiences and responds to the interviewer's questions in a relaxed and supportive manner. The interaction provides authentic data for examining how positive politeness strategies are employed when discussing a sensitive health-related topic. Unlike previous studies that mainly focused on educational settings or social media interactions (Gurjar, 2020), this study investigates positive politeness in health-related interview discourse. Therefore, it offers a different perspective on how interpersonal communication is constructed in contemporary digital media.

Based on the research gap identified above, this study addresses the following question:

(1) What positive politeness strategies are employed by Ellen DeGeneres and Billie Eilish in their interview discussing Tourette Syndrome based on Brown and Levinson's framework?
(2) How are the identified positive politeness strategies realized and used in the interaction between Ellen DeGeneres and Billie Eilish?
(3) What communicative functions do the positive politeness strategies serve in facilitating empathy, rapport, solidarity, mutual understanding, and conversational comfort when discussing Tourette Syndrome?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Positive Politeness Theory

Positive is one of the central concepts in pragmatics because it explains how language is used to maintain interpersonal relationships and achieve communicative goals. The concept of politeness is closely associated with (Goffman, 1967) notion of face, which refers to an

individual's public self-image that he or she seeks to maintain during social interaction. Face can be threatened during communication when speakers' express disagreement, criticism, requests, or other potentially sensitive acts and maintain harmonious interaction.

Building on Goffman's concept of face, Brown & Levinson, (1987) developed one of the most influential theories of politeness. They proposed four major politeness strategies: bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. Among these categories, positive politeness focuses on satisfying the hearer's positive face, namely the desire to be appreciated, accepted, and understood by others. Positive politeness seeks to minimize social distance and emphasize solidarity between interlocutors.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), positive politeness can be realized through various linguistic strategies, including noticing and attending to the hearer, exaggerating interest or approval, seeking agreement, avoiding disagreement, using in-group identity markers, giving reasons, expressing optimism, and including both speaker and hearer in the activity. These strategies help create a friendly and cooperative atmosphere that facilitates successful communication. Positive politeness is particularly important in discussions involving personal experiences or sensitive topics because it encourages openness a mutual understanding.

Although Brown and Levinson's framework remain widely used, contemporary scholars argue that politeness should not be viewed solely as a fixed set of linguistic strategies. (Haugh, 2020) emphasizes that politeness is a socially constructed practice that emerges through interaction and is shaped by participants' interpretations. Similarly,(Kádár & Haugh, 2023) argue that politeness should be understood within broader social and cultural contexts because communicative expectations may vary across situations and communities. These perspectives suggest that politeness is dynamic and context-dependent rather than universally applied in the same way.

Despite these developments, Brown and Levinson's theory remains highly relevant for discourse analysis because it provides a systematic framework for identifying and interpreting politeness strategies in authentic communication. Therefore, the present study employs Brown and Levinson's (1987) positive politeness framework as the primary analytical tool for examining interpersonal communication in podcast discourse.

Positive Politeness in Digital Communication

The emergence of digital communication has significantly transformed the ways individuals interact and establish relationships. Online platforms, social media, video-sharing websites, and podcast have created new communication environments where speakers and audiences interact despite physical separation. In such context, politeness remains an important communicative resource because it helps maintain engagement, reduce misunderstandings, and foster positive relationships among participants.

Research has shown that positive politeness continues to play a significant role in digital discourse. (Dynel, 2021) found that politeness strategies contribute to maintaining social harmony and managing interpersonal relationships in online communication. Similarly,

(Tagg, 2023)argues that digital communication relies heavily on relational language strategies that help users create rapport and negotiate social identities. These findings indicate that politeness remains relevant despite changes in communication technologies.

Positive politeness is particularly prominent in informal digital communication because it encourages empathy, emotional connection, and audience engagement. (Sifianou, 2019) notes that positive politeness frequently appears in interactions where speakers seek to establish closeness and solidarity. Likewise, Taguchi (2019) explains that positive politeness contributes to communication effectiveness by promoting mutual understanding and reducing the possibility of misinterpretation. Through expressions of agreement, encouragement, and support, speakers are able to create a more comfortable communication environment.

Recent studies have also demonstrated the importance of positive politeness in media-based communication. (Georgakopoulou, 2022)argues that digital narratives often rely on interpersonal language strategies to establish authenticity and audience connection. In contemporary media discourse, communicators frequently employ positive politeness to present personal experiences in ways that are relatable and engaging. Such findings suggest that positive politeness serves not only interpersonal purposes but also broader communicative functions related to audience participation and public engagement.

Although existing studies provide valuable insights into politeness in digital communication, much of the research has focused on social media interactions, online discussions, and general internet communication. Comparatively less attention has been given to spoken digital discourse, particularly podcast interactions involving sensitive personal experiences. Consequently, further research is needed to understand how positive politeness operates in podcast communication and how it contributes to the construction of supportive interpersonal relationships.

Podcast Discourse and Health Communication

Podcasting has emerged as a prominent form of digital media that combines elements of conversation, storytelling, public communication. According to (Spinelli & Dann, 2019), podcasts create a unique communicative environment in which speakers engage in relatively informal and spontaneous interaction while simultaneously addressing a broader audience. This combination of intimacy and publicity distinguishes podcast discourse from many other forms of digital communication.

The conversational nature of podcasts encourages speakers to share personal experiences, opinions, and emotions. (Bonini, 2020)argues that podcasts often foster a sense of authenticity because listeners perceive conversations as natural and unscripted. Similarly, (Llinares & Espinar, 2023) emphasize that podcast communication allows audiences to develop stronger emotional connections with speakers due to its interactive and narrative-driven characteristics. As a result, interpersonal language strategies become essential for maintaining audience engagement and creating meaningful communication.

Health-related podcast discourse represents a particularly important area for communication research. Discussions concerning health conditions frequently involve personal narratives, emotional experiences, and potentially sensitive information. Effective communication in such contexts requires empathy, trust, and mutual understanding. (Street, 2022) highlights that supportive communication can improve public understanding of health issues and encourage positive attitudes toward individuals experiencing medical conditions. Likewise, (Davis, 2021) emphasizes that empathy and trust are crucial components of successful health communication because they influence how audiences interpret and respond to information.

Several studies have investigated communication strategies in digital media and podcast interactions. However, most previous research has focused on entertainment content, educational podcasts, or general conversational discourse. Limited attention has been given to the role of positive politeness strategies in health-related podcast communication, particularly discussions involving personal medical experiences. Furthermore, little research has examined how positive politeness contributes to reducing stigma, encouraging openness, and maintaining conversational comfort when sensitive health issues are discussed publicly.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a pragmatic discourse analysis to examine the use of positive politeness strategies in Billie Eilish's interview about Tourette syndrome. This approach was chosen because the study focuses on how language is used in real communication to build good relationships between speakers. Pragmatic discourse analysis is appropriate because it helps explain not only what the speakers say but also why they use particular expressions in specific situations.

The study used Brown and Levinson's (1987) Positive Politeness Theory as the main analytical framework. This theory explains how speakers use language to make others feel respected, appreciated, and comfortable during communication. It was selected because it provides clear categories for identifying positive politeness strategies and helps explain how these strategies function in conversations about sensitive topics. Therefore, this approach is appropriate for answering the research questions regarding **(**1) the types of positive politeness strategies used in the interview and (2) the communicative functions of those strategies.

Data Source

The data for this study were taken from a publicly available YouTube interview featuring Billie Eilish and Ellen DeGeneres discussing Tourette syndrome. The interview was chosen because it contains a natural conversation in which Billie openly shares her personal experiences with a sensitive health condition. This type of interaction provides rich data for analyzing positive politeness strategies in authentic communication.

The interview was selected using purposive sampling. The researcher selected this interview because it met the objectives of the study. First, the interview focuses on Billie Eilish's personal experiences with Tourette syndrome. Second, it presents a natural interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee instead of a scripted performance. Third, the conversation contains many supportive expressions that are relevant to Brown and Levinson's (1987) positive politeness theory. Finally, the interview has been viewed by a large public audience, making it relevant to the study of digital health communication.

The entire interview was analyzed. The unit of analysis in this study was utterances, which are defined as complete spoken expressions produced by one speaker before the other speaker begins speaking. Each utterance was examined to identify the positive politeness strategies used during the interaction.

Table 1
Data source

Video title	Description	Link	Duration	Utterances	Published date
Billie Eilish Gets Candid About Tourette Syndrome	YouTube Interview	https://youtu.be/k4vRFodAqWo?si=UY9oWnt3I--RIpP	3 minutes 52 seconds	67	September 27, 2019

Data Collection

The data were collected from a publicly available YouTube interview featuring Billie Eilish and Ellen DeGeneres discussing Tourette syndrome. The interview was selected because it focuses on Billie Eilish's personal experiences with Tourette syndrome and provides a naturally occurring conversation in which a sensitive health-related topic is discussed openly. This context offers rich data for examining the use of positive politeness strategies in authentic communication.

The data collection process consisted of four steps. First, the researcher selected the interview based on its relevance to the objectives of the study. Second, the researcher watched the entire interview several times to gain a clear understanding of the conversation, the context, and the interaction between the two speakers. Third, the interview was transcribed verbatim into written form. The transcript was then compared repeatedly with the original video to ensure that the transcription accurately reflected the speakers' utterances.

Finally, the transcript was divided into utterances based on speaker turns. In this study, an utterance is defined as a complete spoken expression produced by one speaker before the conversational turn shifts to the other speaker. This process resulted in a corpus of 67 utterances, which served as the primary data for the study. The completed transcript was then prepared for the coding process conducted during the data analysis stage.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis within a pragmatic discourse analysis approach. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to identify positive politeness strategies and explain how they function in the conversation. The analysis focused on understanding how the speakers used language to express empathy, build rapport, and maintain a comfortable interaction while discussing Tourette syndrome. The analysis followed the interactive model proposed by (Miles et al., 2014) which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing.

In the first stage, data condensation, the researcher read the transcript several times to become familiar with the data. The researcher then identified utterances containing positive politeness strategies based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory. Each utterance was carefully coded according to the type of strategy it represented.

In the second stage, data display, the coded data were organized into tables according to the identified positive politeness strategies. The researcher then grouped utterances that showed similar characteristics and selected representative excerpts for each strategy. This process made it easier to compare the data and identify patterns in the interaction.

In the final stage, conclusion drawing and verification, the researcher interpreted each identified strategy by considering the context of the conversation. The analysis focused on explaining how each strategy helped the speakers express empathy, show agreement, build solidarity, provide explanations, encourage positive communication, and maintain harmonious interaction. The findings revealed six positive politeness strategies: Notice and Attend to the Hearer, Seek Agreement, Use In-group Identity Markers, Give (or Ask for) Reasons, Be Optimistic, and Avoid Disagreement.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the researcher repeatedly compared the transcript with the original video during the coding process. The coding results were also reviewed using Brown and Levinson's (1987) Positive Politeness Theory to ensure that each utterance was classified consistently and interpreted accurately.

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings on the use of positive politeness strategies in Billie Eilish's interview discussing Tourette Syndrome. The analysis revealed that positive politeness strategies were consistently employed throughout the interaction to establish rapport, express empathy, maintain conversational comfort, and facilitate mutual understanding between the interviewer and the interviewee. The findings also demonstrate that positive politeness played an important role in supporting discussion of a sensitive health-related topic.

Six positive politeness strategies were identified in the interview. These strategies include Notice and Attend to the Hearer, Seek Agreement, Use In-group Identity Markers, Give Reasons, Be Optimistic, and Minimize Potential Discomfort. Each strategy performed

a different communicative function that contributed to creating a supportive and empathetic interaction.

Table 2
Positive Politeness Strategies Identified in the Interview

No	Positive Politeness Strategy	Function in Interaction
1	Notice and attend to the hearer	Expressing empathy and concern
2	Seek agreement	Building shared understanding
3	Use in-group identity markers	Creating closeness and solidarity
4	Give reasons	Clarifying information and reducing misunderstanding
5	Be optimistic	Creating positive interaction
6	Minimize potential discomfort	Maintaining conversational comfort

Notice and Attend to the Hearer

One of the most prominent positive politeness strategies identified in the interview was Notice and Attend to the Hearer. This strategy appeared when Ellen DeGeneres demonstrated personal concern, appreciation, and emotional support toward Billie Eilish. Rather than focusing only on factual information about Tourette syndrome, Ellen acknowledged Billie's experiences and encouraged her to speak openly about her condition.

Table 3
Examples of Notice and Attend to the Hearer

Excerpt	Strategy	Function
”But I think that’s amazing that you spoke about it because you kind of take away the scariness of it.’’	Notice and Attend to Hearer	Expressing appreciation and empathy
“I think it's a good thing... look at where you are, and look at what you have accomplished."	Notice and Attend to the Hearer	Encouraging and appreciating the hearer
“Because it’s not. It’s just part of who you are.”	Notice and Attend to the Hearer	Reassuring the hearer

The first excerpt illustrates Ellen's appreciation of Billie's willingness to discuss Tourette syndrome publicly. Instead of emphasizing the medical condition itself, Ellen focused on Billie's courage in sharing her experience. This expression reduced the potential sensitivity of the topic while acknowledging Billie's positive contribution to public awareness.

The second excerpt further demonstrates this strategy through Ellen's encouragement and recognition of Billie's achievements despite living with Tourette syndrome. By highlighting Billie's accomplishments, Ellen reinforced Billie's positive self-image and expressed

admiration rather than sympathy. This interaction reflects Brown and Levinson's notion of attending to the hearer's interests and maintaining the hearer's positive face.

The final excerpt shows Ellen reassuring Billie by emphasizing that Tourette syndrome is simply one aspect of her identity rather than something that defines her. Such reassurance contributes to reducing emotional discomfort and strengthens interpersonal solidarity between the speakers. It also encourages audiences to view Tourette syndrome from a more accepting perspective. The analysis indicates that Notice and Attend to the Hearer functions as an important interpersonal strategy for expressing empathy, appreciating personal experiences, and creating a supportive conversational environment. In discussions involving sensitive health-related issues, this strategy helps strengthen rapport between speakers while encouraging openness and mutual respect.

Seek Agreement

Another positive politeness strategy identified in the interview was seek agreement. This strategy was employed when the speakers expressed agreement or confirmed each other's statements to maintain conversational harmony and demonstrate mutual understanding. Throughout the interview, Ellen frequently used confirmation and supportive responses that encouraged Billie to continue sharing her experiences.

Table 4
Examples of Seek Agreement

Excerpt	Strategy	Function
”Right.”	Seek Agreement	Confirming the speaker’s statement
“Yeah."	Seek Agreement	Expressing agreement and active listening
“Well, no. I think it’s a good thing…”	Seek Agreement	Reinforcing shared understanding

The first excerpt occurs when Billie explains her experiences with Tourette syndrome and Ellen responds with "Right." This short response functions as a signal of agreement, indicating that Ellen understands Billie's explanation and encourages her to continue speaking. Rather than interrupting or questioning Billie's experience, Ellen acknowledges her statement and maintains the flow of the conversation.

The second excerpt is reflected through Ellen's repeated use of "Yeah" during Billie's explanations. Although brief, this expression serves as an important conversational device that demonstrates active listening and confirms the speaker's message. Such responses reduce interactional distance and create a cooperative conversational atmosphere.

The third excerpt appears when Ellen says, "Well, no. I think it's a good thing..." before explaining that many people may relate to Billie's experiences. Rather than simply agreeing, Ellen develops Billie's previous statement by emphasizing its positive impact on others. This

response strengthens mutual understanding and reinforces the supportive nature of the interaction. The findings indicate that Seek Agreement functions to maintain conversational continuity, encourage openness, and reinforce shared understanding between the interviewer and the interviewee. By consistently acknowledging Billie's experiences, Ellen creates an interaction in which the discussion remains collaborative and supportive despite addressing a sensitive health-related topic.

Use In-Group Identity Markers

The analysis also identified the use of In-Group Identity Markers, although this strategy appeared less frequently than the previous strategies. This strategy is realized through informal language, shared expressions, or linguistic markers that emphasize familiarity and solidarity between speakers.

Table 5
Examples of Use In-Group Identity Markers

Excerpt	Strategy	Function
”You know…’’	Use In-Group Identity Markers	Creating shared understanding
“Like…"	Use In-Group Identity Markers	Establishing an informal conversational style
“Yeah.”	Use In-Group Identity Markers	Reinforcing interpersonal closeness

The first excerpt is represented by Ellen’s repeated use of "You know…", which invites Billie to share common understanding during the conversation. This expression reduces formality and encourages a more relaxed interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee.

The second excerpt involves the frequent use of "Like…" by both speakers. Rather than functioning merely as a filler, the expression contributes to a conversational style that resembles everyday interaction. This informal language reduces social distance and makes the discussion feel more natural and personal.

The third excerpt is reflected through repeated responses such as "Yeah." Besides expressing agreement, these responses also function as informal conversational markers that strengthen rapport between the speakers. Their repeated use throughout the interview creates a friendly atmosphere and supports the development of interpersonal solidarity. Overall, Use In-Group Identity Markers contributes to creating a relaxed conversational environment by emphasizing familiarity, reducing social distance, and strengthening solidarity between the interviewer and the interviewee.

Give Reasons

Another positive politeness strategy identified in the interview was Give (or Ask for) Reasons. This strategy is employed when speakers provide explanations or justifications to help the hearer understand a particular action, opinion, or situation. In the interview, Billie

frequently explained the reasons behind her decision to speak publicly about Tourette syndrome and described how the condition affects her daily life.

Table 6
Examples of Give (or Ask for) Reasons

Excerpt	Strategy	Function
”I just never said anything because I didn’t want that to define who I was’’	Give (or Ask for) Reasons	Explaining a personal decision
“I have ways of kind of making them go away"	Give (or Ask for) Reasons	Explaining personal coping strategies
“Normally, if it’s like a pretaped thing, they cut out the questions. Right. And that’s when I let them out.”	Give (or Ask for) Reasons	Clarifying why her tics are not always visible

The first excerpt illustrates how Billie explains her reason for not publicly discussing Tourette syndrome in the past. Rather than simply stating that she kept her condition private, she explains that she did not want the condition to become the defining aspect of her identity. This explanation helps the interviewer and the audience understand her perspective while reducing the possibility of misunderstanding. The second excerpt demonstrates Billie's explanation of how she manages her tics during public appearances. By providing additional information about her coping strategies, she enables listeners to better understand that her condition can be managed in different situations.

The third excerpt further illustrates this strategy when Billie explains that pretaped interviews usually allow editors to remove moments when her tics appear. This explanation provides contextual information that helps listeners understand why many people may not notice her condition during public interviews. Ellen's brief response, "Right," also indicates that the explanation has been understood and accepted. This strategy contributes to clearer communication by providing reasons and contextual information that help the audience understand Billie's experiences with Tourette syndrome.

Being Optimistic

The strategy of Be Optimistic was also identified in the interview. Brown and Levinson (1987) explain that this strategy is used when speakers’ express confidence or positive expectations that encourage cooperation and reduce interpersonal distance. In the interview, optimism is reflected not through unrealistic claims but through encouraging statements that frame Tourette syndrome in a positive and hopeful way.

Table 7
Examples of Be Optimistic

Excerpt	Strategy	Function
”I think it’s a good thing that you…’’	Be Optimistic	Encouraging a positive perspective
“Look at where you are, and look at what you have accomplished"	Be Optimistic	Highlighting success despite challenges
“I think a lot of people watching now… will be like, ‘Well, I have it, too.’ And that’s great.”	Be Optimistic	Expressing positive expectations for the audience

The first excerpt shows Ellen expressing confidence that Billie's openness about Tourette syndrome has a positive impact. Instead of treating the condition as something embarrassing, Ellen frames Billie's willingness to discuss it as a valuable contribution to public understanding. The second excerpt reinforces this optimistic perspective by emphasizing Billie's achievements. Ellen highlights that Tourette syndrome has not prevented Billie from becoming successful, thereby encouraging both Billie and the audience to view the condition positively.

The final excerpt demonstrates optimism directed toward the audience. Ellen suggests that viewers with Tourette syndrome may feel encouraged after hearing Billie's story and may realize that they are not alone. This optimistic expectation strengthens the supportive atmosphere of the interview and promotes a more positive public understanding of the condition. The findings indicate that "being optimistic" functions to encourage confidence, inspire hope, and create a positive communicative environment when discussing a sensitive health-related topic.

Avoid Disagreement

The final positive politeness strategy identified in the interview was avoid disagreement. Speakers often maintain interpersonal harmony by minimizing disagreement and emphasizing shared viewpoints. Throughout the interview, Ellen consistently responded to Billie's explanations with supportive comments rather than criticism or contradiction.

Table 8
Examples of Avoid Disagreement

Excerpt	Strategy	Function
"Right."	Avoid Disagreement	Accepting the speaker's explanation
"Yeah."	Avoid Disagreement	Supporting the speaker's perspective
"Because it's not. It's just part of who you are."	Avoid Disagreement	Reframing the issue to maintain agreement

The repeated responses "Right" and "Yeah" function as signals of acceptance rather than disagreement. These responses acknowledge Billie's experiences without questioning or challenging her statements, allowing the conversation to proceed smoothly.

The final excerpt demonstrates this strategy more explicitly. Ellen reassures Billie that Tourette syndrome is simply one aspect of her identity rather than something that defines her. Instead of focusing on possible negative perceptions, Ellen reframes the discussion in a way that maintains agreement and supports Billie's positive self-image. Avoid Disagreement contributes to maintaining interpersonal harmony throughout the interview. By minimizing potential conflict and consistently supporting Billie's perspective, Ellen creates a conversational environment that encourages openness, empathy, and mutual understanding.

DISCUSSION

The findings show that positive politeness strategies played an important role in creating a supportive and empathetic interaction between Billie Eilish and Ellen DeGeneres. Six positive politeness strategies were identified in the interview: Notice and Attend to the Hearer, Seek Agreement, Use In-group Identity Markers, Give (or Ask for) Reasons, Be Optimistic, and Avoid Disagreement. These strategies helped the speakers discuss Tourette syndrome in a respectful, comfortable, and encouraging way. The findings indicate that positive politeness is not only used to maintain interpersonal relationships but also to support communication when discussing sensitive health-related issues.

The findings support Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory that positive politeness aims to satisfy the hearer's positive face by expressing appreciation, solidarity, and concern. Throughout the interview, Ellen consistently acknowledged Billie's experiences, responded supportively to her explanations, and encouraged her to speak openly about Tourette syndrome. Instead of treating the condition as something unusual or embarrassing, Ellen emphasized Billie's achievements, reassured her, and maintained a positive atmosphere. These interactional practices reduced social distance between the speakers and allowed the conversation to develop naturally despite addressing a sensitive topic.

Among the identified strategies, and Levinson's (1987) theory that positive politeness aims to satisfy the hearer's positive face by expressing appreciation, solidarity, and concern. Throughout the interview, Ellen consistently acknowledged Billie's experiences, responded supportively to her explanations, and encouraged her to speak openly about Tourette syndrome. Instead of treating the condition as something unusual or embarrassing, Ellen emphasized Billie's achievements, reassured her, and maintained a positive atmosphere. These interactional practices reduced social distance between the speakers and allowed the conversation to develop naturally despite addressing a sensitive topic.

Among the identified strategies, Notice and Attend to the Hearer was particularly important because it reflected Ellen's concern for Billie's feelings and experiences rather than focusing only on factual information about Tourette syndrome. This finding is consistent with Brown and Levinson's (1987) view that attending to the hearer's interests strengthens interpersonal relationships and protects the hearer's positive face. It also supports Sifianou (2019), who argues that positive politeness encourages empathy and emotional connection, especially in informal communication. By appreciating Billie's openness and reassuring her throughout the interview, Ellen created an interaction that encouraged trust and mutual respect.

The findings also highlight the importance of Seek Agreement and Avoid Disagreement in maintaining conversational harmony. Ellen frequently responded with expressions such as *right* and *yeah* to acknowledge Billie's explanations without challenging her perspective. These responses signaled active listening and demonstrated that the interviewer accepted Billie's experiences. This finding is in line with (Haugh, 2020), who explains that politeness is constructed through interaction and mutual understanding between participants. Rather than functioning as simple conversational fillers, these

expressions helped create a collaborative discussion in which Billie felt comfortable sharing her personal experiences.

Another important finding is the use of Give (or Ask for) Reasons, which enabled Billie to explain why she had previously chosen not to speak publicly about Tourette syndrome and how she managed her condition during interviews. Providing explanations helped the audience better understand her experiences and reduced possible misunderstandings. This finding supports (Taguchi, 2019), who argues that positive politeness contributes to effective communication by promoting clarity and mutual understanding. In this interview, explanations not only clarified information but also encouraged audiences to view Tourette syndrome from Billie's perspective.

The strategies of use in-group identity markers and be optimistic also contributed to creating an informal and supportive communication environment. Informal expressions such as *you know*, *like*, and *yeah* reduced social distance and made the conversation feel more natural. At the same time, optimistic statements about Billie's achievements and the positive influence of sharing her story encouraged audiences to see Tourette syndrome in a more hopeful way. These findings support previous studies by Dynel, (2021) and Tagg, (2023), which emphasize that positive politeness remains an important resource for building rapport, maintaining audience engagement, and strengthening interpersonal relationships in digital communication.

The findings also contribute to research on digital interview and podcast-like discourse. Previous studies have mainly examined positive politeness in classroom interaction, social media communication, or online discussions. Comparatively fewer studies have investigated how positive politeness operates in public interviews discussing sensitive health-related experiences. This study extends previous research by demonstrating that positive politeness strategies help reduce stigma, encourage openness, and create supportive communication when personal health issues are discussed in digital media. Therefore, the study broadens the application of Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory to health-related interview discourse.

These findings also have practical implications for communication in digital media. Interviewers, podcast hosts, journalists, educators, and public figures may use positive politeness strategies to encourage respectful and empathetic discussions of sensitive topics. Expressions of appreciation, agreement, reassurance, and supportive explanations can help speakers feel more comfortable sharing personal experiences while improving audience understanding and engagement.

Although this study provides valuable insights into the use of positive politeness in a health-related interview, it has several limitations. The analysis was limited to a single interview involving one interviewer and one interviewee. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalized to all forms of digital communication. Future studies may examine positive politeness strategies in different podcasts, interviews, or health communication contexts involving a larger corpus and a wider range of speakers to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of interpersonal communication in digital media.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the use of positive politeness strategies in Billie Eilish's interview discussing Tourette syndrome by applying Positive Politeness Theory. The analysis identified six positive politeness strategies: Notice and Attend to the Hearer, Seek Agreement, Use In-group Identity Markers, Give (or Ask for) Reasons, Be Optimistic, and Avoid Disagreement. These strategies were used to express empathy, build rapport, encourage openness, and maintain a supportive interaction while discussing a sensitive health-related topic. The findings demonstrate that positive politeness plays an important role in digital interview discourse by helping speakers reduce social distance and create a respectful and comfortable communication environment. The study also confirms that Brown and Levinson's framework remain relevant for analyzing interpersonal communication in contemporary digital media, particularly discussions involving personal health experiences. This study contributes to pragmatics by extending previous research on positive politeness to health-related interview discourse. It also provides practical insights for interviewers, podcast hosts, media professionals, educators, and health communicators who seek to create empathetic and supportive communication when discussing sensitive issues. This study is limited to a single YouTube interview and therefore cannot represent all forms of digital communication. Future research is recommended to investigate larger datasets from different interview or podcast contexts and explore additional politeness strategies to provide a broader understanding of interpersonal communication in digital media.

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