POLITENESS STRATEGIES USAGE IN ACCOMPANYING ASSERTIVE ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS ON BARACK OBAMA’S SPEECH AND INTERVIEW TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF ISLAMIC CENTER NEAR GROUND ZERO

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ABSTRACT

Politeness strategies have some roles in communication: to redress some rude utterances, to succeed the speakers speaking goals, to make the utterances acceptable by the hearers, etc. Some studies have dealt with politeness strategies concept by Brown and Levinson (1987), but rarely does the present writer find the politeness concept dealing with assertive illocutionary acts concept (Leech, 1983) and Levinson (1983). This study is about to find what types of politeness strategies on Barack Obama’s assertive illocutionary acts utterances. In communication, assertive illocutionary acts have a role to assure the hearers about what the speakers believe. The data are taken from Barack Obama’s speech and interview towards the development of Islamic Center near Ground Zero. This descriptive qualitative study suggests that three kinds of assertive illocutionary acts are found on Obama’s utterances, i.e: statement; assertion; report. While politeness strategies are found on his utterances, i.e: positive politeness strategy; negative politeness strategy; off record politeness strategy. Moreover, statement and negative politeness strategy are the most frequently used on his utterances.

Key words: Politeness Strategies, Assertive illocutionary acts, Barack Obama.

I Introduction

Barack Obama is the United Stated of America President. Some issues such as ending the Iraq’s war, providing the universal health and increasing the world peace become his essential purposes known through his speech while campaign until chosen as the America first man.

One of Barack Obama’s popular speeches and interviews is about the development of Islamic Center near Ground Zero. This speech triggering the controversion within America society even arround the world. Barack Obama is regarded as someone who has not the same opinion with American.

The controversion of Barack Obama’s speech and interview can be investigated by means of linguistics; politeness strategies and assertive illocutionary acts. The communication process can be considered as one of the factors in triggering the controversion. To gain a purpose in communicating with others, it is important for the hearer to understand the meaning given by the speaker. It can help the interlocutors from the misunderstanding in interpreting the utterances. In this case, it can lead the situation to the controversion.

To know the real meaning and purpose on Obama’s utterances, the hearer should understand Obama’s intended meaning from its context. It relates with pragmatic, one of the linguistic branches concerns with the speaker’s meaning that interpreted by the hearer.
It also relates with Obama’s speech and interview towards the development of Islamic Center near Ground Zero that can be seen by its politeness strategies and assertive illocutionary acts. By implementing his assertive illocutionary acts, we will know his belief through his utterances. While by implementing his politeness strategies, we will know his effort in keeping his belief to be known by others politely.

This study is conducted to find out the types of politeness strategies and assertive illocutionary acts on Obama’s utterances towards the development of Islamic Center near Ground Zero. There are some studies dealing with politeness strategies but a little are known that politeness strategies could also help the hearer in interpreting the speaker’s belief by also investigating its assertive illocutionary acts.

II. Literary Review

Brown and Levinson seminal work about politeness strategy (1987) is created in order to Goffman’s notion of ‘face’. Goffman (1967:75) says about ‘face’: “positive social value a person effectively claims for himself”. From Goffman’s definition of ‘face’, then Brown and Levinson make two distinction of ‘face’: negative and positive. Negative face deals with the desire not to be imposed while positive face deals with the desire to be claimed, liked and affirmed.

In dealing with ‘face’, especially others face (the hearer), speakers should play their technique in delivering their belief in order to assure hearers. By means of politeness strategies, the speaker’s belief will be delivered and understood easily. It can help the hearer in understanding the speaker belief and purpose. Brown and Levinson five strategies of politeness are provided to maintain others face while communicating. Begin with bald-on record politeness strategy that indicates the speaker use efficiency of redressive action. Positive politeness strategy indicates speaker’s effort to get more intimacy with the hearer while delivering the face threatening acts. Negative politeness strategy indicates: the speaker’s understanding of hearer’s face not to be imposed or disturbed. Off-record politeness strategy indicates speaker’s effort in facing the highest rank of face-threatening acts. The fifth strategy of politeness is not doing FTA at all that indicates a big probabilities of the effect caused by face-threatening acts. In this study, the present writer uses four strategies dealing with face-threatening acts. It means, the fifth of Brown and Levinson politeness concept will not be applied on this study.

Although the speaker uses politeness strategy in order to deliver his/ her assertive utterances, still, ‘face’ of the speaker is unpredictable. Besides, the politeness strategies concepts itself are received differently by each person. It is in line with what Coulmas says (2005:86) that “the notion of ‘politeness’ is a broad and complicated one with numerous theories and approaches, and it is socially determined. It is linked with social differentiations, with making appropriate choices which are not the same for all interlocutors”. It means, by using politeness strategies in order to have the same goals between speaker and hearer, sometimes it is found some difficulties. By combining our understanding of politeness strategies with our understanding of assertive illocutionary acts, the present writer is sure it will help both speaker and hearer in making a good communication.

Although Coulmas says that sometimes politeness strategies are difficult in order to help in building the good communication, still, both speaker and hearer will understand the meaning of communication by understanding deeply politeness usage combining with its assertive illocutionary acts.

Before going to know deeply about the assertive illocutionary act, the present writer will
give the definition of illocutionary act. According to Austin (quoted in Levinson, 1983:236), illocutionary acts mean “the making of a statement, offer, promise, etc in uttering a sentence, by virtue of conventional force associated with it (or with its explicit performative paraphrase)”. Yule (1996:48) also argues about illocutionary acts that “an utterance with some kind of function in mind”. It can be inferred from those definition that illocutionary acts are about to influence the hearer in the communication. Illocutionary acts can be: order, report, promise, bargain, etc. By illocutionary acts, besides speaking about something, we also give a function to our words as an action. For instance, “I could not come to your party last night”. This sentence is being saying by someone to his/her friend, in which she/he cannot come to the party means that besides saying the information of her/his cannot coming, also showing her/his act: apologize.

Searle in Leech (1969) divides illocutionary acts into five: assertive (commit speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition), directives (intend to produce some effects through action by the hearer), commissives (commit the speaker (to a greater or lesser degree) to some future action), expresses (expressing or making known the speaker’s psychological attitude towards a state of affairs which the illocution presuppose), and declaration (are illocutions whose successful performance...brings about the correspondence between the propositional content and reality). This study will concern with assertive illocutionary acts containing speaker beliefs through his/her utterances.

The present writer uses Searle’s definition of assertive illocutionary act, which is the act containing speaker’s belief in order to assure the hearer. Although Searle does not mention kind of assertive illocutionary acts, the later researchers find and mention kind of it. Finegan (1992) states that assertive illocutionary acts can be: assertion, description, claim, hypothese and suggestion. Finegan gives an example of ‘statement’ assertive illocutionary act “It is very windy today”. While Levinson (1983) states kind of assertive illocutionary acts such as asserting and concluding. He also gives examples: “I state John’s at Sue’s house because his car is outside” or can be implicitly “I know John’s at Sue’s house because his car’s outside”. Leech (1983) classifies assertive illocutionary acts into reporting, announce, prediction, affirm, complaining, boasting and insist. He gives examples: “She told us to arrive early”, “Jim reported that no one had arrived”, “Jim believed that no one had arrived”, “Bill assured Pat that he will telephone her”.

Based on those explanation and examples of assertive illocutionary acts, the present writer is sure that assertive illocutionary acts have an important role on Barack Obama’s utterances. Furthermore, the politeness strategies that accompanying the assertive illocutionary acts will also help both of them in understanding comprehensively the intended meaning on the utterances.

Pamela Hobbs (2003), in her article “The medium is the message: politeness strategies in men’s and women’s voice mail messages” investigates the politeness strategies relate to men’s and women’s voice mail messages, focusing on lawyer’s informal speech. The function of voice mail messages as a mainstay of both personal and professional communication in a technology is used effectively for creating a good communication with the absence of hearer. Positive and negative politeness are found in her research, i.e: compliments, joking, and claiming reciprocity, thanking, taking blame and apologizing. Moreover, the positive politeness strategies (compliments, joking and reciprocity) are used almost exclusively by male speakers.

Aminudin (2012), in his article “Pragmatik Lintas Budaya” investigates the misunderstanding in communication. It could happen within someone’s asking or request.
Thus, the speaker often avoids the face threatening acts within their asking or request. In daily conversation, both with the presence of hearer and absence, politeness strategies always follow their utterances.

Damopolii, Mahdi & Sujatna in their work “The strategies of conveying speaker and hearer as cooperators in conversation class: Sociopragmatic Analysis” focus on Brown and Levinson’s strategies to convey that the speaker and hearer are cooperators. Three kinds of strategies are found: asserting or presupposing speaker’s knowledge of and concern for hearer’s wants, the strategy of including both speaker and hearer in the activity, and the strategy of giving (or asking) reasons. By using those strategies, the native speakers (American teachers as speakers meant by the writers) have goals to motivate the students in speaking English, to share the students’ experiences, to correct their grammar, and to make the students confident. While the effects for the students are: agreeing the teacher to speak English, feeling accepted, being motivated and being enthusiastic to find out something new from the others.

Many studies about politeness strategies in communication, but a little are known that politeness strategies could also be usefull if it is combined with assertive illocutionary acts in order to make a good communication.

III. Research Questions

The present study is undertaken to examine utterances by the speakers on the speech and interview of Barack Obama towards the development of Islamic Center near Ground Zero. The present study, therefore, seeks to answer the following questions:
1. What types of politeness strategies on Barack Obama’s utterances?
2. What types of assertive illocutionary acts on Barack Obama’s utterances?

IV. Methodology

The descriptive qualitative method is used in this study. This method focuses on words and description rather than numbers (Maxwell, 2000).

The data are taken from the utterances on Barack Obama’s speech and interview towards the development of Islamic Center near Ground Zero. The speech occurs on August, 15 2010 while the interview occurs in NBC Nightly News on August, 29 2010. Both of them concern with Obama’s support in developing the Islamic Center near Ground Zero.

The focus of this study is on finding the utterances containing assertive illocutionary acts then followed by the use of politeness strategies. The present writer uses assertive illocutionary acts concept by Leech (1983) and Levinson (1983). Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness strategies will also be applied on this study to examine Obama’s politeness strategies.

V. Result and Discussion

After doing the analysis, the seventy-three utterances selected. The present writer presents the result in table 1 and table 2. Table 1 shows the types of assertive illocutionary acts on Obama’s utterances. Table 2 shows the types of politeness strategies on Obama’s utterances.

Table 1
Assertive illocutionary acts’ percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Types of assertive illocutionary acts</th>
<th>Barack Obama’s utterances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

55
Table 2
Politeness strategies’ percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Types of politeness strategies</th>
<th>Barack Obama’s utterances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Negative politeness</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Off-record politeness</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Positive politeness</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Bald-on record politeness</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Σ</td>
<td></td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The present writer will explain the result of the analysis. The results: the assertive illocutionary acts ‘statements’ use positive politeness, negative politeness and off-record politeness; the assertive illocutionary act ‘assertion’ uses negative politeness; the assertive illocutionary acts ‘reports’ use positive politeness, negative politeness and off-record politeness.

5.1 Assertive illocutionary act ‘statement’

The illocutionary acts can be appeared from the utterances contain ‘statement’. Performative verb that used in ‘statement’ are ‘think’, ‘believe’, ‘feel’, ‘state’. It could be seen from its preposition or implicitly stated.

5.1.1 Assertive illocutionary act ‘statement’ used with positive politeness strategy

Utterances 1: “I mean, think about it – I – at this Iftar dinner I had – Muslim Americans who had been in uniform fighting in Iraq. Some of whom have served over 20 years. How- how can you say them that somehow their religious faith is less worthy of respect under our Constitution and our system of government? You know, that’s – something I feel very strongly about. I respect the feelings on the other side”.

In (1), the situation: Obama states his feeling about the reason why he supports the Islamic Center development. It relates with American Muslims who are fighting in Iraq have the same right of religion. The present writer focuses on the utterances: “You know, that’s – something that I feel very strongly about”. This utterances belong to assertive illocutionary act ‘statement’. It can be seen from its performative verb ‘feel’ that constructs: I+VERB+YOU that X.

The politeness strategy used in this utterances is positive politeness strategy. It can be seen by the use of you know. In Brown and Levinson politeness concept, it becomes part of sub strategy: intensify interest to hearer. It shows the speaker’s effort in persuading the hearer to has the same view with the speaker.

5.1.2 Assertive illocutionary act ‘statement’ used with negative politeness strategy

Utterances 2: “The 9/11 attacks were a deeply traumatic event for our
country. And the pain and the experience of suffering by those who lost loved ones is just unimaginable. So, I understand the emotions that this issue engenders. And Ground Zero, is indeed, hallowed ground. But let me be clear. As a citizen, and as President, I believe that Muslims have the same right to practise their religion as everyone else in this country.

In (2), the situation: Obama realized that the 9/11 attacks are traumatic incident for American, especially for the victims. He also realized that Ground Zero is a sacred place that has special meaning for American. But Obama also states that the worship can be owned by everyone in America including Muslims America. The present writer focuses on the utterances “As a citizen, and as President, I believe that Muslims have the same right to practise their religion as everyone else in this country”. The assertive illocutionary act ‘statement’ can be seen from performative verb ‘believe’. It constructs: I+VERB+YOU that X.

The politeness strategy used in (2) utterances is negative politeness. It can be seen from the use of believe. In politeness strategy’s concept, the use of ‘believe’ shows that the speaker does not take the full responsibility of the truth of his/her utterances. The speaker gives the hearer freedom to make their own interpretation or opinion towards the issue delivered by the speaker.

5.2.3 Assertive illocutionary act ‘statement’ used with off-record politeness strategy

Utterances (3): “If you can build a synagogue on that site or a Hindu Temple on that site, then we can’t treat people of the Islamic faith differently, who are Americans, who are Americans citizens. That is central to who we are. That is a core value of our upholding Constitution. And my job as President is to make sure in part that we’re upholding our Constitution”.

In (3), the situation: Obama states that if America can build the place for worship for Jews, Hindu that stand around Ground Zero, why they should make a different treatment for Muslims America? It becomes his job to give the same treatment for every American as principal of America. The present writer focuses on the utterances “That is central to who we are”. This utterances containing assertive illocutionary act ‘statement’ seen from the implicit performative verb:

“That is central to who we are”.
“I state that is central to who we are”.
So it constructs: I+VERB+YOU that X.

The politeness strategy used in (3) is off-record politeness strategy. It can be seen from the use of who we are. In politeness concept, it refers to sub strategy of off-record politeness: be vague. It means, because the face-threatening acts on Obama’s utterances are in high level rank, so the sub strategy ‘be vague’ is chosen. The speaker considers that the hearer will understand what he/she speaks by making it unclear. ‘Who we are’ itself means American which are American citizens, American leader, that have a good principal in treating everyone same in America.

5.2 Assertive illocutionary act ‘assertion’

When the speaker tries to assure the hearer, it can be delivered firmly. Assertive illocutionary act can be seen by the use of performative verb such as ‘affirm’, ‘ensure’, ‘assure’, and so on. It can also put implicitly.
5.2.1 Assertive illocutionary act ‘assertion’ used with negative politeness strategy

Utterances (4): “Here at the White House, we have a tradition of hosting iftars that goes back several years, just as we host Christmas parties and seders Diwali celebrations. And these events celebrate the role of faith in the lives of the American people. They remind us to the basic truth that we are all children of God, and we all draw strength and a sense of purpose from our beliefs. These events are also an affirmation of who we are as Americans”.

In (4), the situation: Obama tells everyone in the event that it has become a tradition in celebrating iftar dinner. Same as celebrating Christmas and Diwali which also hold in White House. The present writer focuses on the utterances “These events are also an affirmation of who we are as Americans”. This utterances can be categorized as assertive illocutionary act ‘assertion’ by seeing its meaning and the use of implicit performative verb:

“These events are also an affirmation of who we are as Americans”.
“\textit{I assure that these events are also shows who we are as Americans}”. So, it constructs $I+\text{VERB}+YOU$ that $X$.

The utterances (4) use negative politeness strategy by using exclusive we. The use of we has the purpose to make ‘plural’ the subject meant by the speaker. The real subject meant by the speaker is the speaker itself. In order to respect others, the speaker chooses the subject ‘plural’ we rather than $I$.

5.3 Assertive illocutionary act ‘report’

In delivering the belief to the hearer, the speaker can use assertive illocutionary act ‘report’. It is used to improve the hearer certainty about what the speaker says.

5.3.1 Assertive illocutionary act ‘report’ used with positive politeness strategy

Utterances (5): “At next week’s iftar at the Pentagon, tribute will be paid to three soldiers who gave their lives in Iraq and now rest among the heroes of Arlington National cemetery. These Muslim Americans died for security that we depend on, and the freedoms that we cherish. They are part of unbroken line of Americans that stretches back to our founding...”

In (5), the situation: Obama tells that the honour will be paid for Muslims American who died in order to keep America safe. Muslims have become part of America that cannot be separated. The present writer focuses on the utterances “These Muslim Americans died for security that we depend on, and the freedoms that we cherish”. This utterances can be categorized as assertive illocutionary act ‘report’ by seeing its implicit performative verb and the tense (past tense):

“These Muslim Americans died for security that we depend on and the freedoms that we cherish”. “\textit{I reported that these Muslim Americans died for security that we depend on and the freedoms that we cherish}”. So, it constructs $I+\text{VERB}+YOU$ that $X$.

In utterances (5), the positive politeness strategy is used. It can be seen from the use of sub strategy inclusive we. It means, the choice of we describes that the speaker wants the hearer
participating in the conversation. The real subject meant by the speaker is the hearer. To minimize the face-threatening act, the speaker use ‘we’ in order to soften the real subject.

5.3.2 Assertive illocutionary act ‘report’ used with negative politeness strategy

Utterances (6): “We dealt with this when I was first running for the U.S. Senate. We dealt with it when we were first running for the Presidency. There were those who said I couldn’t win as U.S. Senator because I had a funny name. And people would be unfamiliar with it”.

In (6), the situation: This and it refer to the issue of approaching fairly the Muslims and those who have different faith. This issue has been running since the campaign both for the seat of senator and the seat of President. It is revealed because there are some assumptions saying Obama will not succeed in gaining the seat of senator because of his unfamiliar name in America: Barack Husein Obama. The present writer focuses on the utterances “There were those who said I couldn’t win as U.S. Senator because I had a funny name. And people would be unfamiliar with it”.

The negative politeness strategy is used in utterances (6). It can be seen from the use of those. According to politeness concept, it refers to deictic. The deictic used in this utterances shows emotional deictic. There is an emotional distance between the speaker and the intended-subject meant by the speaker.

5.3.3 Assertive illocutionary act ‘report’ used with off-record politeness strategy

Utterances (7): “Like so many immigrants, generations of Muslims came to forge their future here. They became farmers and merchants, worked in mills and factories. They helped lay the railroads. They helped to build America. They founded the first Islamic Center in New York City in the 1980s”.

In (7), Obama tells that Muslims coming to America with the purpose to build their bright future. They work as farmers, factories labours and so on. They are also participating in making the public infrastructure. They have a good role in building America. The present writer focuses on the utterances “They helped to build America”. It can be categorized as assertive illocutionary act ‘report’ by seeing its implicit performative verb and its tense: “I reported that they helped to build America”

So, it constructs: I+VERB+YOU that X.

Off-record politeness strategy is used in this (7) utterances. It can be seen from the use of America. Based on Brown and Levinson concept of politeness, it can be categorized as off-record politeness with sub strategy: over-generalize. Obama’s stating America is over-generalize form. The speaker does not tell specifically in what extent Muslims America have participated.

VI. Conclusion

The aims of this study is to find out the types of Barack Obama assertive illocutionary acts used with its politeness strategies. The findings show that three kinds of assertive
illocutionary acts found in the data: statement, assertion and report. Those illocutionary acts are used with three politeness strategies found in the data: positive politeness, negative politeness and off-record politeness.

This study suggests that by null usage of bald-on record politeness showing that Barack Obama just give the statement about his support in developing of Islamic Center near Ground Zero, not for doing the changing. The politeness strategies that become the most frequently used by Barack Obama on his utterances are negative politeness strategies. While ‘statements’ are the most frequently used by Barack Obama on his utterances. Obama uses this kind of assertive illocutionary act. By stating his belief, Obama has purpose to assure the hearer. As the U.S. President, it is important in making statement, because if the statement delivered by the first man in U.S., it is expected can be followed and trusted by others.

References