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**HEDGING AND VEILING AS POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN MEDIA
INTERACTIONS ON CHANNELS TELEVISION'S *POLITICS TODAY***

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Abstract

This study investigates hedging and veiling as politeness strategies in *Politics Today*, a live political talk show on Channels Television, within Nigeria's volatile socio-political climate (2021–2023). Anchored in Locher and Watts' (2005) relational work theory, the research examines how participants employ linguistic devices to mitigate face-threatening acts, preserve decorum and manage public perception. Ten purposively selected episodes covering political, economic, and social issues were analysed using qualitative descriptive design, combining discourse analysis with pragmatic annotation. Findings reveal that hedging and veiling enable political actors to balance critique with cultural norms of indirectness, while inclusive pronouns, denials, indirectness, and co-opting diffuse conflict and foster collective responsibility. The strategies function variably as polite, politic, or impolite behaviours depending on context, illustrating the dynamic, negotiated nature of politeness in live Nigerian media. The study contributes to African politeness research and offers practical implications for media training, political rhetoric and conflict-sensitive communication in high-stakes environments.

Keywords: (Im)politeness, Hedging, Veiling, Relational work and Media Interaction.

1. Introduction

Language serves as a vital instrument for communication, social interaction and political engagement (Okpeadua 1). In media discourse, particularly in political talk shows, language is often strategically manipulated to achieve specific communicative goals, including persuasion, negotiation and face management. One such programme, *Politics Today* on Channels Television, provides a platform for political, economic and social discussions, where participants employ various politeness strategies to navigate sensitive topics while maintaining decorum. As a live, interactive programme featuring prominent politicians, policymakers and analysts, *Politics Today* offers a rich context for examining how linguistic politeness operates in real-time political discourse.

The strategic use of hedging and veiling in political communication serves multiple functions: mitigating face-threatening acts (FTAs), maintaining diplomatic relations and managing public perception. Hedging involves the use of cautious or non-committal language (for example, "it seems," "perhaps" etc.) to soften assertions, while veiling refers to indirect references that obscure agency or responsibility (for example, "some people believe" instead of "I believe"). These strategies are particularly crucial in Nigerian political discourse, where direct criticism of political figures or government policies can lead to social backlash, legal repercussions, or even threats to personal safety (Aremu & Babatunde, 2015).

This work is aimed at identifying the politeness strategies employed by interactants in *Politics Today*, with focus on hedging and veiling and analysing the linguistic devices through which these strategies are realised within the context of Nigeria's social, economic and political discourses, in the media interactions. While politeness strategies have been extensively studied in political speeches, interviews and written texts (for example, Odebunmi, 2009; Bamgbose, 2020), there is a scarcity of research on real-time, televised political debates. Unlike pre-recorded or scripted interactions, live discussions on *Politics Today* require spontaneous politeness management, making them an ideal site for analysing how speakers dynamically negotiate facework under

pressure. In addition, most studies on hedging and veiling have focused on Western political contexts (for example, Harris, 2001; Culpeper, 2005), with limited attention to how these strategies function in African media, where cultural norms of respect, hierarchy and indirectness shape communication patterns (Nwagbara, 2020). This study addresses this gap by examining how Nigerian political actors employ hedging and veiling to balance criticism with cultural expectations of politeness. Most importantly, Nigeria's political landscape is characterized by intense rivalries, ethnic tensions and media censorship, making diplomatic communication essential for political survival. The 2021–2023 periods under study was particularly volatile, marked by elections, economic crises and security challenges. Therefore, analysing how politicians navigate these tensions through hedging and veiling provides insights into the intersection of language, power and media in Nigeria. This motivation will no doubt contribute the larger discourse on media politeness, offering a framework for understanding how linguistic indirectness functions in high-stakes political communication, with practical implications for media training, political rhetoric and conflict resolution in polarised societies.

2. Review of Literature

Politeness research has evolved through several theoretical frameworks, each offering distinct perspectives on how language mediates social relations. Brown and Levinson's (1987) seminal politeness theory, rooted in Goffman's (1967) concept of "face," posits that speakers employ strategies to mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs) through positive politeness (solidarity-building) or negative politeness (deference). Their model, while influential, has been critiqued for its universalist assumptions, particularly in non-Western contexts where cultural norms may prioritize indirectness or hierarchical deference over individual face needs (Ide, 1989; Nwagbara 5). Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle, comprising maxims such as Tact, Generosity and Modesty, complements Brown and Levinson by emphasising the role of conversational cooperation. However, like Brown and Levinson, Leech's framework has been challenged for its prescriptive nature, failing to account for contexts where impoliteness is strategically employed (Culpeper,

2005). Locher and Watts' (2005) relational work theory addresses these limitations by reconceptualizing politeness as a discursive practice rather than a set of fixed rules. Their framework distinguishes between: Polite behaviour (marked, contextually unexpected); Politic behaviour (unmarked, socially appropriate); Impolite behaviour (negatively evaluated); Face-enhancement (self-promotion). This approach aligns with the present study, as it accommodates the fluidity of politeness in live media interactions, where utterances are negotiated in real time.

There have been a couple of empirical studies on politeness in political discourse in areas such as politeness in African media contexts, broadcast media and impoliteness, cultural and pragmatic dimensions, to mention but a few. With respect to politeness in African media contexts, research on politeness in African political discourse reveals unique cultural and contextual dynamics. Odebunmi's (2009) analysis of Nigerian print media interviews identified hedging and veiling as dominant strategies, used to navigate the country's politically volatile environment. For instance, interviewees often employed vague referents (for example, "certain leaders" instead of naming individuals) to avoid direct confrontation—a finding that resonates with this study's focus on *Politics Today*. However, Odebunmi's work was limited to print media, leaving a gap in understanding how these strategies operate in live televised debates, where spontaneity heightens face threats. Similarly, Aremu and Babatunde (2015) examined impoliteness in Olusegun Obasanjo's open letter to President Goodluck Jonathan, highlighting bald-on-record FTAs such as accusations of incompetence. While their study underscores the role of impoliteness in political critique, it does not explore how such strategies are mitigated in real-time interactions, where speakers must balance aggression with self-preservation. Bamgbose's (2020) pragmatic analysis of Nigerian gubernatorial debates expanded the scope by applying relational work theory. He found that participants frequently shifted between politic behaviour (for example, conventional politeness) and impolite verbal aggression, depending on the debate's adversarial tone. This aligns with Locher and Watts' (2005) assertion that politeness is contextually negotiated. However,

Bamgbose's focus on scripted debates differs from the unscripted dynamics of *Politics Today*, where hedging and veiling may be more pronounced due to the immediacy of audience reactions.

Studies on broadcast media and (im)political discourse, particularly in Western contexts, reveal parallels and divergences with African media. Mullany's (2002) analysis of BBC interviews demonstrated that politicians often use unmitigated FTAs (for example, interruptions, sarcasm) to dominate conversations, a tactic less common in Nigerian media due to cultural norms of respect (Nwagbara, 2020). Harris (2001) similarly noted that adversarial interviews in the UK frequently involve "systematic impoliteness," where interviewers challenge guests aggressively. In contrast, Nigerian programmes like *Politics Today* often feature moderated politeness, with hosts mediating conflicts to maintain decorum—a distinction underscoring the need for culturally specific analyses. Jiboku's (2020) study of Nigerian presidential speeches highlighted the prevalence of positive politeness strategies, such as inclusive pronouns ("we," "our") to foster national unity. While such strategies appear in *Politics Today*, they coexist with hedging and veiling, suggesting a more complex politeness repertoire in live interactions.

On cultural and pragmatic dimensions, Nwagbara's (2020) work on Nigerian English politeness norms emphasises the influence of communal values, where indirectness preserves social harmony. This contrasts with Culpeper et al.'s (2003) findings on impoliteness in British media, where directness is often tolerated. For example, while a British politician might openly call an opponent "dishonest," a Nigerian counterpart may veil the critique as "some leaders lack transparency." This cultural divergence highlights the inadequacy of Western politeness models for African contexts and supports this study's use of relational work theory. Okoro's (2011) research on Nigerian university staff further illustrates how hierarchical relationships dictate politeness strategies. Subordinates often employ hedging ("Perhaps the management could consider...") to defer to authority, a pattern mirrored in *Politics Today* when junior analysts address senior politicians.

From the review so far, some gaps remain in the literature. Most studies focus on scripted or print discourse (for example, Odebunmi, 2009; Aremu & Babatunde, 2015), neglecting the spontaneity of live broadcasts. This study addresses that gap by analysing real-time hedging and veiling in *Politics Today*. Second, while Western media politeness is well-documented (for example, Harris, 2001; Mullany, 2002), few studies examine African televised debates. This research provides a non-Western perspective, revealing how Nigerian politicians navigate politeness under pressure. Third, while hedging and veiling act as risk management, prior works (for example, Bamgbose, 2020) explored broad politeness strategies but did not specifically investigate hedging and veiling as tools for mitigating political risk. This study fills that void by linking linguistic indirectness to Nigeria's high-stakes media environment.

In conclusion, the reviewed literature demonstrates the centrality of politeness in political discourse while revealing a paucity of research on live African media interactions. Applying relational work theory to *Politics Today* advances an understanding of how hedging and veiling function as contextually negotiated strategies, bridging theoretical and cultural gaps in politeness research.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Locher and Watts' (2005) relational work theory, a discursive approach to politeness that challenges the prescriptive models of earlier frameworks such as Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and Leech's (1983) politeness maxims. While traditional theories conceptualise politeness as a set of universal strategies for mitigating face-threatening acts (FTAs), relational work theory reconceptualises politeness as a dynamic, contextually negotiated practice where "no utterance is inherently polite or impolite" (Locher & Watts 11). This perspective is particularly suited to analysing media interactions on *Politics Today*, where

participants constantly adapt their linguistic strategies based on real-time audience reactions, political sensitivities and power dynamics.

As major tenets of the theory, Locher and Watts (2005) identify four interrelated dimensions of relational work; viz: i) Polite Behaviour with marked, unexpected linguistic choices that exceed normative expectations (for example, excessive apologies, honorifics). With respect to its relevance in *Politics Today*, polite behaviour manifests when guests use hedging ("It *seems* the government is trying...") or veiling ("*Certain individuals* have suggested...") to soften critiques of powerful figures. ii) Politic Behaviour with unmarked, contextually appropriate language that aligns with situational norms (for example, conventional greetings in interviews). Its relevance is that moderators on *Politics Today* often employ politic behaviour to frame questions neutrally (for example, "What are your thoughts on this *widely debated* policy?"), maintaining decorum while allowing for critical discourse. iii) Impolite Behaviour with negatively evaluated language that violates interactional norms (for example, insults, interruptions). Its relevance is that while rare due, to cultural norms of respect, impoliteness occurs in heated debates (for example, "Your claim is *factually incorrect!*") and serves as a strategic FTA to challenge opponents. iv) Face-Enhancement Behaviour refers to language that bolsters the speaker's or audience's public image (for example, self-praise, ingratiation), demonstrating how politicians frequently enhance their face by aligning with popular sentiments (for example, "As a *champion of the people*, I prioritize...").

The Relational work theory/ framework is chosen over traditional models for reasons of its suitability. First is its contextual flexibility as it accommodates the fluidity of live media interactions, where politeness is co-constructed by speakers and audiences (Haugh, 2010). Second is cultural relevance because it aligns with Nigerian communicative norms, where indirectness and hierarchical deference often override individual face needs (Nwagbara 5). Third is its strategic significance as it captures how hedging and veiling operate as both polite and politic strategies, depending on the interactional context (Bamgbose 36). For example, when a guest on *Politics*

Today states, "Some might argue that the policy is flawed," the veiling ("some") and hedging ("might argue") reflect relational work by mitigating FTA risks while signaling dissent, a balance unexplored in Brown and Levinson's (1987) binary model.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive design (Sandelowski, 2010) to examine how hedging and veiling function in *Politics Today*. Qualitative methods are optimal for capturing the peculiarities of politeness strategies in naturalistic settings, where quantitative approaches might oversimplify contextual factors (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data comprise 10 episodes of *Politics Today* aired between January 2021 and March 2023, purposively sampled to include: Political debates (for example, election coverage, policy critiques); Economic discussions (for example, fuel subsidy removal, inflation); Social issues (for example, insecurity, protests). This period coincides with Nigeria's 2023 general elections and associated socio-political tensions, offering rich examples of politeness under pressure.

The sources of data for the study include: Audio-Visual Recordings and Episodes that were sourced from Channels Television's archives and YouTube. Interactions were transcribed verbatim, noting paralinguistic cues (for example, pauses, laughter) that contextualize hedging/veiling.

Analytical Framework

The analysis combines discourse analysis (Gee, 2014) with pragmatic annotation (Jucker & Taavitsainen, 2014) to identify linguistic devices. Coding categories include:

Strategy	Linguistic Markers	Example from Data
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Hedging	Modal verbs, approximators, tag questions	" <i>Perhaps</i> we should reconsider the timeline."
Veiling	Passive voice, indefinite pronouns	" <i>Mistakes were made</i> " (vs. "You made mistakes").
Possessive Pronouns	Inclusive "we," "our"	" <i>Our</i> government must act."
Denial	Negations, counter-assertions	"I <i>never</i> said that."
Indirectness	Implicature, rhetorical questions	"Is this <i>really</i> the best approach?"
Co-opting	Collective responsibility framing	" <i>Together</i> , we can solve this."

Ethical Considerations

- To ensure that no breach or ethical principle is violated, the study ensured that publicly available media content was used to avoid privacy concerns and pseudonyms replace names of minor participants where applicable.

Synthesis of Framework and Methodology

This study's integration of relational work theory with qualitative discourse analysis advances politeness research in three ways. First, in its dynamic politeness, it captures how hedging and veiling shift between polite and politic behaviours in real time. Second, the cultural specificity highlights Nigerian norms of indirectness, contrasting Western media's tolerance for directness (Culpeper, 2005). Lastly, with practical applications, it offers media trainers strategies for managing high-stakes political discourse. For instance, an Excerpt shows a guest co-opting responsibility ("We must look inward") to veil criticism, a tactic that would be coded as *politic* in relational work theory but overlooked in Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework.

4. Data Presentation and Analysis

The following table presents examples for each politeness strategy identified in *Politics Today*, demonstrating how hedging, veiling and related tactics function in Nigerian political discourse. All examples are drawn from episodes aired between 2021–2023.

Table 1: Politeness Strategies in *Politics Today*

Strategy	Example	Interpretation
Hedging	1. " <i>It seems</i> the government is reconsidering the policy."	Softens critique by framing it as speculative rather than definitive.
	2. " <i>Perhaps</i> we need more data to judge this fairly."	Mitigates disagreement by introducing doubt.
	3. " <i>I might be wrong</i> , but the figures appear inflated."	Preemptively reduces face threat via self-deprecation.
	4. " <i>Somewhat</i> concerning, if you ask me."	Diminishes force of criticism with a qualifier.
	5. " <i>Just a thought</i> : Could there be alternatives?"	Presents critique as tentative to avoid confrontation.
Linguistic Veiling	1. " <i>Certain quarters</i> are undermining the process."	Avoids naming specific groups/persons responsible.
	2. " <i>Mistakes were made</i> in the implementation."	Passive voice obscures agency (vs. "You made mistakes").
	3. " <i>Some leaders</i> lack transparency."	Generalizes criticism to dilute its target.
	4. " <i>There are those who believe</i> the election was flawed."	Attributes contentious views to unnamed third parties.
	5. " <i>It has been observed</i> that policies favor elites."	Uses impersonal construction to veil accusatory intent.
Possessive Pronouns	1. " <i>Our</i> judiciary must regain public trust."	Fosters collective ownership of problems.
	2. " <i>We</i> cannot ignore these economic realities."	Includes audience in responsibility.
	3. " <i>This is our</i> country to fix together."	Appeals to nationalism to reduce blame attribution.
	4. " <i>Our</i> party has always prioritized development."	Reinforces in-group solidarity.
	5. " <i>We the people</i> deserve better."	Co-opts populist rhetoric to legitimize demands.
Denial	1. " <i>I never</i> accused the INEC chairman of bias."	Directly counters an accusation while avoiding escalation.

	2. "That's not what I meant; you're misrepresenting me."	Shifts blame for conflict onto interlocutor's interpretation.
	3. "No one in my camp supports violence."	Uses categorical denial to deflect association with controversy.
	4. "Let me clarify: I didn't say 'fraud.'"	Revises prior statements diplomatically.
	5. "That's false; check the records."	Employs bald-on-record denial to assert authority.
Indirectness	1. "One wonders if due process was followed."	Uses rhetorical questioning to imply doubt.
	2. "It's curious how the timeline shifted."	Invites inference of malfeasance without explicit accusation.
	3. "Wouldn't it be better to consult stakeholders?"	Suggests alternatives indirectly to avoid imposing views.
	4. "There's room for improvement, wouldn't you agree?"	Couches criticism as shared observation.
	5. "If only priorities were aligned with public needs."	Expresses disapproval through hypothetical phrasing.
Co-opting	1. "As Nigerians, we must hold leaders accountable."	Unites speaker and audience under shared identity.
	2. "Both parties share blame for this gridlock."	Distributes responsibility evenly to neutralize partisan tension.
	3. "The media and citizens together can demand transparency."	Expands collective agency to include stakeholders.
	4. "Let's all reflect on these challenges."	Positions critique as communal self-assessment.
	5. "History will judge us if we fail to act."	Elevates stakes by invoking collective legacy.

Discussion and findings

The examples above reveal how politeness strategies in *Politics Today* serve as risk-management tools in Nigeria's high-stakes political environment, with key emerging patterns.

Hedging and Veiling as Diplomatic Resistance

Hedging (for example, "*Perhaps we need more data*") and veiling (for example, "*Certain quarters are undermining...*") allow guests to critique powerful entities such as the government or party leaders while minimizing retaliation risks. These strategies align with Nigerian cultural norms that prioritize indirectness to maintain social harmony (Nwagbara, 2020). For instance, Example 5 under *Hedging* ("*Just a thought...*") demonstrates how speakers frame critiques as suggestions, preserving the interlocutor's negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Possessive Pronouns and Denial for Facework

Inclusive pronouns (*we, our*) and strategic denials function as face-enhancement and face-saving devices. When a guest states, "*Our judiciary must regain trust*" (Example 1, *Possessive Pronouns*), they simultaneously acknowledge a problem and position themselves as part of the solution. Conversely, denials like "*I never accused...*" (Example 1, *Denial*) protect the speaker's positive face by distancing them from contentious claims.

Indirectness and Co-opting as Conflict-Diffusion Tactics

Indirectness (for example, "*One wonders...*") and co-opting (for example, "*As Nigerians, we must...*") redistribute accountability, reducing adversarial tension. These strategies reflect Locher and Watts' (2005) *politic behaviour*—unmarked linguistic choices that align with the programmeme's norms of moderated debate. For example, co-opting the audience ("*Let's all reflect...*") transforms criticism into a collective call to action, which is less likely to provoke defensive reactions.

On the whole, the data, with theoretical implications, support relational work theory's premise that politeness is contextually negotiated. For instance, the same phrase ("*Mistakes were made*") functions as *veiling* in a corruption debate (Example 2) but as *politic behaviour* in a post-election reconciliation discussion. Bald-on-record denials (for example, "*That's false*") shift

from *impolite* to *politic* depending on the speaker's authority, a nuance unaddressed by Brown and Levinson's (1987) static model. With cultural and pragmatic insights, the prevalence of hedging/veiling underscores Nigeria's hierarchical communication norms, where subordinates avoid direct challenges to authority (Odebunmi, 2009). Conversely, co-opting mirrors the communal ethos of African societies, where collective responsibility often overrides individual blame (Bamgbose, 2020). While this analysis captures linguistic patterns, future research could quantify strategy frequency across political affiliations or compare these findings with non-election periods to assess temporal variations.

5. Conclusion

This study reveals that hedging and veiling are central to politeness strategies in *Politics Today*, enabling participants to manage FTAs while maintaining diplomatic discourse. These strategies were employed with interactants balancing criticism with decorum, ensuring discussions remain productive rather than adversarial. The findings align with Locher and Watts' (2005) relational work theory, emphasising the contextual nature of politeness. Future research could explore cross-cultural comparisons of politeness in African media or examine how gender influences hedging strategies in political discourse. In addition, training programmes for media professionals should incorporate politeness strategies to enhance effective communication in televised debates.

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