Politeness and Expressive Acts in Diplomatic Discourse: A Pragmatic Analysis of Marape's 2024 Address to the Australian Parliament

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Abstract
This study examines the pragmatic strategies of politeness and expressive acts in Prime Minister James Marape's historic 2024 address to the Australian Parliament. It focuses on how language is used to perform diplomacy, assert postcolonial identity, and reaffirm regional presence. The research aims to explore how speech acts, particularly those expressing gratitude, acknowledgment, and storytelling, serve not only interpersonal but also symbolic and ideological functions in high-level diplomatic discourse. The study employed a qualitative descriptive approach, grounded in Brown and Levinson's politeness theory and informed by postcolonial pragmatics. Selected excerpts from the speech were analyzed for their pragmatic density and thematic relevance. The findings showed that Marape employs positive politeness to foster solidarity and shared authority, negative politeness to express humility while affirming legitimacy, and off-record strategies, especially narrative storytelling, to reclaim historical voice. Expressive acts such as environmental imagery and geographic reframing reinforce Papua New Guinea's national identity and geopolitical stance while maintaining diplomatic decorum. The analysis reveals

that politeness in postcolonial diplomatic settings functions as a complex communicative strategy that negotiates power, history, and cultural dignity. This study contributes to the expanding field of postcolonial pragmatics by offering a Pacific perspective and illustrating how diplomatic speeches can serve as performative acts of historical redress and regional engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Politeness in speech is central to maintaining social harmony and managing face the speakers' and hearers' public self-image within both everyday and institutional interactions. Two linguists known for their influential work on politeness theory are Brown & Levinson (1987, as cited in Sadeghoghli & Niroomand, 2016). Politeness theory is categorized into four broad types. Bald on-Record is where the speaker makes a statement without imposition; it is designed to emphasize determination (e.g., "*We want to grow the economy of Papua New Guinea*"). The second strategy is positive politeness, which builds solidarity through friendliness and shared values (e.g., "*I bring warm greetings*") the third strategy is negative politeness, which shows deference and respects the hearer's autonomy (e.g., "*I may be wrong*"); and the off-record strategies, which communicate indirectly to avoid imposing directly (e.g., metaphor or storytelling). In political and diplomatic contexts, these strategies are vital for addressing historical sensitivities, managing asymmetrical power relations, and sustaining respectful engagement (Rajik, 2025; Mühlenbernd et al., 2021).

In addition to politeness strategies, the study also examines expressive speech acts, as outlined by Searle (1979, as cited in Gurevich, 2022), They play an important role in conveying the speaker's emotional or psychological state. Acts such as thanking, acknowledging, apologizing, or congratulating, while seemingly interpersonal, often carry symbolic and ideological significance in diplomatic settings. For instance, the phrase "It has never been easy" signals both vulnerability

and resilience, while performing a broader rhetorical function of aligning shared historical experiences.

Political discourse encompasses speeches, debates, media statements, and official communications, and functions as a means of persuasion, ideology transmission, and power negotiation. It is shaped by context and is often strategically crafted to influence public opinion and international relations. Studies on political discourse have analyzed a range of contexts, from presidential elections. For instance, a study by Muhassin (2021) discussing rhetorical strategies in political memes (Anwar et al., 2024) and hate speech (Rabab'ah et al., 2024) reveals how language shapes socio-political realities. However, much of this research focuses on Western political actors, leaving postcolonial and Pacific perspectives underexplored.

Previous research related to this study includes the analysis of Edi Rama's 2013 post-election victory speech in Albania, which focused on categorizing speech acts in political discourse (Dylgjeri, 2017). Similarly, Kumorová (2019) examined political communication in the Slovak Republic, demonstrating that expressive acts can evoke both positive and negative emotions to capture attention and promote ideological alignment. Sarah and Oladayo (2018) further explored expressive and politeness strategies in Western political contexts, such as Donald Trump's inaugural speech. However, these studies predominantly concentrate on European and American political discourse. Research on political pragmatics in the Pacific region, especially in Papua New Guinea, remains limited. Addressing this gap, the present study analyzes Prime Minister James Marape's 2024 address to the Australian Parliament, focusing on how his use of positive expressive acts, such as gratitude and acknowledgment, strategically frames Papua New Guinea's national narrative in a diplomatically resonant and culturally rooted manner. This paper thus contributes to postcolonial pragmatics by offering a Pacific-centered analysis

of diplomatic language and the performative role of expressive acts in asserting historical voice and regional identity.

This paper investigates the pragmatic dimensions of diplomatic discourse through the lens of politeness and expressive acts, focusing on Prime Minister James Marape's 2024 address to the Australian Parliament. As the first Papua New Guinean leader to deliver a formal speech in the Australian legislature, Marape's address marks a significant moment of postcolonial dialogue and regional diplomacy. Delivered in English, the language of the former colonial power, the speech simultaneously expresses formal gratitude and asserts national identity, making it a rich site for pragmatic and ideological analysis.

Guided by Brown and Levinson's politeness framework and informed by postcolonial pragmatics (Levisen & Sippola, 2020), this paper explores how expressive speech acts, especially those involving gratitude, acknowledgment of colonial history, and narrative storytelling, serve both interpersonal and symbolic functions in the speech. These acts are not merely polite; they are performative gestures of historical redress, national dignity, and regional alignment. This perspective aligns with emerging scholarship in socio-pragmatics that emphasizes how speech acts function ideologically in postcolonial and culturally embedded contexts (Al-Hamzi et al., 2024).

By analyzing selected excerpts from Marape's address, this paper aims to show how diplomatic politeness operates not only as a strategy of face-saving but also as a means of reclaiming voice, constructing identity, and reframing geopolitical narratives. The study contributes a Pacific-centered case to the expanding field of postcolonial pragmatics and invites comparative inquiry into how politeness and expressive acts function across Southeast Asia and the Pacific in formal political discourse.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach grounded in pragmatic and postcolonial inquiry to analyze the linguistic strategies used in a landmark diplomatic address by the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, James Marape, to the Australian Parliament. The research investigates how politeness and expressive acts in the speech function not only as interpersonal decorum but also as performative acts that construct identity, communicate historical memory, and negotiate postcolonial power relations.

The primary data for this study consist of a publicly available video recording of Prime Minister James Marape's 2024 speech to the Australian Parliament, published by *Sky News Australia* on YouTube. To collect the data, the researcher manually played, paused, and replayed the first fifteen minutes of the video, focusing on the opening remarks in order to capture and transcribe them with close attention to detail. This section was selected because it contains key expressions of gratitude, narrative storytelling, and references to colonial history and national identity, which are central to the study's focus on politeness and expressive acts.

The transcription process combined Google's voice-to-text tool with manual correction using an audio loop method. Each excerpt was replayed multiple times to ensure semantic accuracy, proper punctuation, and fidelity to the speaker's intended meaning. Rather than analyzing the full 30-minute speech, a purposive sampling strategy was used to select only the most thematically and pragmatically rich segments. These excerpts were chosen for their density of politeness strategies and expressive acts relevant to postcolonial and diplomatic discourse, enabling a focused and contextually grounded analysis.

The analytical framework draws on Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, which categorizes politeness into four main strategies: The Bald-On Record, Positive politeness, Negative politeness, and Off-record strategies, indirect expressions that leave interpretation open. These categories were used as

sensitizing concepts in an inductive coding process to identify and interpret speech acts relevant to diplomatic and ideological positioning. To extend the analysis, the study incorporates insights from postcolonial pragmatics, particularly theories that examine language use in asymmetrical power settings. This lens enables an interpretation of politeness not simply as a mechanism for face management but as a discursive strategy for asserting cultural legitimacy, reclaiming voice, and reshaping geopolitical narratives.

Analytical rigor was enhanced through theoretical triangulation. Findings were not interpreted solely through politeness theory; however, cross-referenced with perspectives from postcolonial linguistics and intercultural political communication. These triangulated readings allowed for a multidimensional understanding of how language operates in high-level diplomatic settings, particularly for formerly colonized states engaging with former colonial powers.

The analysis followed qualitative thematic procedures. Selected excerpts were subjected to close reading, with attention to pragmatic markers (e.g., hedging, metaphor, and pronouns) and expressive acts (e.g., gratitude, acknowledgment, and storytelling). These features were then interpreted in light of the broader historical and geopolitical context. The results presented in the following section demonstrate how Prime Minister Marape's language performs complex diplomatic work, balancing respect with resistance, deference with pride, and formality with national assertion.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents the findings of the pragmatic analysis of Prime Minister James Marape's 2024 address to the Australian Parliament. Drawing on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework and interpreted through the lens of postcolonial pragmatics, the analysis illustrates how the speech operates as a strategic act of diplomacy, historical reflection, and national identity construction.

The findings were organized thematically according to the core politeness strategies identified: positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record strategies, and expressive acts. These categories were examined with attention to their symbolic, ideological, and geopolitical functions in the context of postcolonial diplomacy.

Bald On Record

The analysis identified direct, unmitigated statements that fall under the Bald On-Record strategy. For instance, the phrase "*We want to grow the economy of Papua New Guinea*" represents a straightforward declaration of national intent. The use of the inclusive pronoun "we" was consistent throughout these utterances, suggesting collective responsibility and leadership.

Positive Politeness

The analysis identified multiple instances of positive politeness, characterized by strategies that attend to the hearer's positive face the desire to be liked, appreciated, and included. These were evident through the use of inclusive pronouns, in-group markers, and expressions of emotional warmth.

For example, Marape stated, "I bring to you warm greetings from my people," and "our thankfulness to the good people who have been so kind and wonderful to my people." These expressions signal solidarity and affiliation, and function to reduce social distance between speaker and audience.

Further, environmental references such as "*We have swamps… valleys… snow-capped mountains… rivers…*" were also categorized as positive politeness strategies. The use of vivid imagery and plural possessives ("*we*," "*our*") reflects shared identity and group membership, aligning with Brown and Levinson's category of in-group identity markers and expressions of appreciation.

Negative Politeness

There were instances of negative politeness that appeared through deferential statements and hedging. For example, "*Mr. Speaker, again, thank you for graciously allowing me into your house*" reflects respect for institutional hierarchy. Another example is, "*I run the risk of being appraised by you academians… I may be wrong*," which softens the speaker's claims and shows humility toward the audience.

Off-Record Strategies

Marape employed indirect language and storytelling as off-record strategies. A key example is the anecdote: "*He said, 'Today I come to you and speak in my language and you laugh at me. One day my son will come to you and speak in your language, and you will certainly listen.'*" This story indirectly references colonial injustice while avoiding direct confrontation.

Expressive Acts

Expressive acts were found throughout the speech. Utterances like "*It has never been easy… we started off from a very awkward place*" acknowledge national hardship. Another example, "*I may be wrong*," blends modesty with rhetorical humility. These acts reflected emotional transparency, historical acknowledgment, and relational openness.

Geographic Reframing

Marape rejected common perceptions of Papua New Guinea as a "*small island state*" by comparing it with larger nations. He emphasized, "*Our landmass… bigger than the UK, bigger than Japan, bigger than New Zealand,*" and added, "*600 islands… much bigger than the entire Pacific Island group… we are not a small island state.*"

Geopolitical Repositioning

Statements like "*We straddle in the middle of the Pacific and the Indo-Asia region… If you want to go to Asia, you pass through PNG*" highlight PNG's regional significance. The metaphor "*We're stuck with you… on the Australasian continental plate*" emphasized strategic location and partnership with Australia.

Summary of Findings

Excerpt	Politeness Strategy	Expressive Act	Postcolonial Function
"We want to grow the economy…"	Bald on record	Assertive	Assertion of Sovereignty
"I bring to you warm greetings…"	Positive politeness	Gratitude	Reframing asymmetry through sentiment
"Mr. Speaker… graciously allowing me…"	Negative politeness	Acknowledge	Deference and institutional respect
"Today I come to you… you will certainly listen"	Off-record	Storytelling	Reversal of colonial marginalization
"It has never been easy"	Off-record	Acknowledgement	Resilience and historical reflection
"I may be wrong"	Negative politeness	Humility	Collegiality and epistemic diplomacy
"Bigger than UK… not a small island…"	Assertive reframing	National pride	Challenging geopolitical minimization
"We have swamps… mountains…"	Positive politeness	Identity celebration	Affirming cultural and ecological complexity
"You pass through PNG…"	Deictic emphasis	Strategic assertion	Centrality in regional diplomacy
"Continental plate…"	Metaphor (off-record)	Solidarity	Framing geographic proximity as partnership

Source: Author's analysis of Marape's 2024 speech

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that Prime Minister James Marape's 2024 address to the Australian Parliament employed a complex interplay of politeness strategies and expressive acts that function beyond interpersonal facework. They

served as symbolic, ideological, and postcolonial purposes, aligning with the study's objective of exploring how diplomatic language in postcolonial settings is used to construct national identity and assert historical voice.

Politeness Strategies as Performative Diplomacy

The use of bald on-record statements, such as *"We want to grow the economy of Papua New Guinea,"* illustrates assertiveness and national self-determination. While this strategy typically conveys clarity and urgency (Brown & Levinson, 1987), in a postcolonial context, it also signals a refusal to remain passive in international relations. This usage mirrors previous findings in political discourse studies, such as those by Gufron et al. (2023), where direct language was employed to assert leadership. It also reflects Kyle et al., (2019) study of performative understanding in politeness.

In contrast, positive politeness strategies such as greetings and expressions of gratitude were used to build rapport and reduce social distance with the Australian audience. These strategies extend beyond fostering interpersonal harmony; they also serve to reframe historical asymmetry by positioning Papua New Guinea as a respectful yet equal diplomatic partner. This interpretation aligns with (Prayitno et al., 2019), who observed that politeness in Southeast Asian political discourse often blends emotional sentiment with institutional positioning. Similarly, the use of positive politeness and face-enhancement strategies by U.S. presidents during public addresses further illustrates the performative function of politeness in political leadership.

Additionally, negative politeness as demonstrated by Marape's deference to institutional norms (e.g., *"thank you for graciously allowing me into your house"*) reflects humility while simultaneously asserting his legitimate presence within the legislative space of a former colonial power. Contrary to that impoliteness act can be normalized in some context as in Trump's impolite speech without apology in a press conference (Wodak et al., 2021). This finding extends Brown and Levinson's

framework by illustrating how negative politeness can function both as a cultural gesture of respect and as a strategic assertion of postcolonial voice.

Off-Record Strategies and the Power of Storytelling

Marape's use of off-record strategies, particularly anecdotal storytelling, reveals how politeness functions as a tool for reclaiming historical narratives. The story of the highlands leader from the 1950s operates as an indirect critique of colonial-era marginalization. This supports the argument by Levisen & Sippola (2020) that storytelling in postcolonial discourse is not merely rhetorical; it is a form of epistemological resistance and identity assertion. Such narrative framing also resonates with Brammer, (2006) observation that political leaders use story to humanize their role and reposition historical trajectories. Similarly, Nasir & Munir (2024) analyzed the off-record speech used by Pakistani former Prime Minister Imran Khan, "*forces were at play behind the scene influencing the vote against me". Most of the speech used by Marape is of off-record strategies".*

Expressive Acts and Emotional Diplomacy

The expressive acts identified in the speech, particularly those reflecting gratitude, acknowledgment of hardship, and epistemic humility, serve as more than emotional disclosures. In postcolonial diplomacy, such acts are performative: they construct an image of a dignified, resilient nation. Marape's expressions like "It has never been easy" function as symbolic acknowledgments of shared Pacific struggles. This supports Gurevich, (2022) analysis of expressive acts as tools for relationship building in political communication and reinforces Kumorová, (2019) claim that expressive language can elicit empathy and moral alignment from the audience.

Spatial Reframing and Regional Positioning

Marape used geographic reframing, in which he challenges perceptions of PNG as a "*small island state*," reflecting a strategic use of politeness to assert

national scale and agency. By referencing landmass and island count, he corrects reductive narratives and affirms PNG's significance within the Indo-Pacific region. This supports Valdeón & Li, (2024) and Mcentee-atalianis & Vessey (2025)claim that spatial metaphors and positioning in political discourse are often employed to reconstruct geopolitical identity. Additionally, Marape's use of metaphors like "*We're stuck with you... on the Australasian continental plate*" subtly frames PNG-Australia relations as interdependent, echoing postcolonial theories that stress relational diplomacy over confrontation.

Contribution to Postcolonial Pragmatics

Overall, the findings confirm that politeness in this diplomatic speech is not solely concerned with saving face but also serves as a means of asserting cultural legitimacy, diplomatic equality, and historical awareness. Marape's address exemplifies how pragmatic strategies can be fused with postcolonial discourse to reshape how formerly colonized nations are perceived in international arenas. This case extends politeness theory into a non-Western, culturally specific context, supporting critiques of its claimed universality (Brown, 2015) and contributing to the expanding field of postcolonial pragmatics.

Whereas prior studies (e.g., Sarah & Oladayo, 2018; Dylgjeri, 2017) have primarily examined expressive and politeness acts in Euro-American political speeches, the present study introduces a Pacific perspective into the literature. It illustrates how a national leader from a postcolonial state employs language not only as a tool of diplomatic etiquette but also as a symbolic act of reclaiming geopolitical voice and reasserting national identity.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how politeness strategies and expressive acts function in Prime Minister James Marape's 2024 address to the Australian Parliament, with the broader aim of understanding how diplomatic language

reflects postcolonial identity, historical memory, and power negotiation. Using a qualitative descriptive method grounded in Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and postcolonial pragmatics, the analysis revealed that Marape's speech blends various pragmatic strategies, including positive, negative, and off-record politeness with expressive acts such as gratitude, acknowledgment, and national affirmation.

The findings show that these strategies serve not only interpersonal functions but also symbolic and ideological purposes. Positive politeness was used to establish solidarity and reframe asymmetrical relations; negative politeness conveyed humility while reinforcing institutional legitimacy; and off-record strategies, especially through storytelling and metaphor, enabled Marape to address sensitive historical themes without direct confrontation. Expressive acts, particularly those reflecting national hardship, pride, and geopolitical positioning, played a vital role in reclaiming narrative space and projecting Papua New Guinea's resilience and regional importance.

Importantly, the study illustrates that politeness in postcolonial diplomatic contexts operates beyond conventional face management. It functions as a performative tool to negotiate historical power imbalances, affirm cultural dignity, and reposition formerly colonized nations within contemporary geopolitical discourse. In this light, Marape's address is not merely ceremonial; it is a strategic act of linguistic diplomacy, carefully crafted to assert Papua New Guinea's voice in the Indo-Pacific region.

The key contribution of this paper lies in its synthesis of politeness theory with postcolonial pragmatics, offering a Pacific-centered perspective that broadens the scope of pragmatic analysis beyond Euro-American political contexts. It invites further research into how leaders across Southeast Asia and the Pacific use pragmatic strategies in diplomatic speech, particularly in postcolonial settings.

Future studies could expand on this work by analyzing full speech transcripts, conducting comparative studies with other postcolonial leaders, or incorporating audience reception data. Such research would deepen our understanding of how politeness functions not only as a linguistic strategy but also as a powerful medium for diplomacy, identity negotiation, and regional engagement.

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