Politeness strategies in motivational storytelling by American commencement speakers

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Abstract

Politeness strategy is a technique used by people to communicate more appropriately. Politeness is evident in different forms of everyday communication regardless of the location at which people communicate. One of these forms is delivering motivational storytelling. The purpose of this paper is to describe the politeness strategies used by commencement speakers while presenting their motivational storytelling within commencement speeches at American universities. To this end, the researchers selected ten commencement speeches delivered at top three American universities from 2010 to 2019 based on the QS world universities ranking system. The researchers adopted Brown and Levinson's (1978) framework who classify the politeness strategies that can be used to reduce or prevent threatening the public image of others into four super-strategies: positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record, and bald-on record. The findings have revealed that American commencement speakers resort to these strategies variously, but rely mostly on positive politeness to create a sense of solidarity with the graduates while motivating them. Within each super-strategy of politeness, there is a preference of particular sub-strategies that helped the commencement speakers to deliver their motivational storytelling. Furthermore, the findings have also shown that the original professions of commencement speakers have no significant influence on choosing particular politeness strategies.

Keywords: Commencement speeches; storytelling; motivation; pragmatics; politeness strategies; QS ranking system.

1. Introduction

Since prehistoric times, humans have used storytelling to communicate and transmit experiences and information. Storytelling can be defined as a kind of descriptive portrayal of concepts, morals, and experiences of particular people directed towards particular audience for particular purposes (See Labov, 1972: 359; Ricoeur, 1983: 150). It refers to a set of acts taken by specific individuals (real or imagined) in order to initiate or react to change, eliciting new thoughts and/or behaviours on the part of the audience. Additionally, it incorporates the storyteller's assessments of such changes in light of the audience's current environment (Feldman et al., 2004: 150).

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Storytelling plays a great role in evoking ideals that provide audience with sufficient confidence to make sound decisions in the face of difficult circumstances in their daily lives (Ganz, 2011: 274). In this sense, Storytelling encourages people to perform their own autonomous actions, rather than prompting them to voice counter-arguments. There are numerous instances of storytelling in many forms of communication, one of which being commencement speeches which take place at universities' or institutions' graduations.

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 Motivational functions of storytelling

The concept of motivation has been generally defined as the favourable attitude or disposition that enables us to carry out a given task or responsibility (See Kırkağaç & Öz, 2017: 96). Besides other functions, storytelling provides humans with an enthusiastic and motivational power to perform actions at moments of uncertainty (Goffman, 1974: 301). Humans have the disposition to adopt successful strategies and solutions tried by others to fix their own problems. They take advantage of others' experiences that are usually told in the form of stories. Accordingly, storytellers concentrate on how to negotiate the "scenes" of the story with their audience, which, in turn, create "sparked emotions" (Tannen ,1989:135). The social and contextual environment that storytelling makes Rowe et al. (2007: 49) among many others to view storytelling as "a promising vehicle for promoting … motivation". In this sense, storytelling is considered as a source of motivation and self-development mechanism that may guide people to approach their desired goals.

In environments of education, motivation serves as a powerful tool that enables students to perform their missions successfully (Lustyantie and Aprilia, 2020:153). Moreover, those who receive good motivation are empowered to be more responsive to challenges, among many other advantages (ibid) as they the importance of their future regarding their current conditions (Naderi et al., 2021:109-110). Good universities and institutions make use of all the motivational factors the enable their students to best possible outcomes from the beginning of their study until graduation. On graduation days, such universities and intuitions invite public and successful icons to share their experiences with the graduates in a hope to motivate them while they are entering a new section of their life which is outside the educational environments.

1.1.2 The Structure of storytelling

The structure of storytelling is made up of six stages: (a) Abstract, (b) Orientation, (c) Complication, (d) Evaluation, (e) Resolution, and (f) Coda, as delineated by Labov (1972: 363 ff). In (a), storytellers offer a general summary of their stories or draw the audience's attention to some concepts before starting the stories. In (b), the audience are informed of the timeframe and location at which events of a story took place. After that, storytellers present the intense events of the story, which include the sequence of acts and events that take place in the story up to the climax. The final outcome of the story is presented in (d). When the story ends, storytellers typically express their opinions and interpretations of the story's events and actions in (e) and return with the audience to the point at which storytelling has begun in (f). Although the structure of storytelling has been explored by many other researchers but Labov's framework remains one of the greatest frameworks in this context as its formulation based on analysing actual stories (Alenizi, 2020: 2060).

1.1.3   The Pragmatics of storytelling

Pragmatics has been defined by Leech (1983: x–xi) as "the study of how utterances have meanings in situations" where meanings and the aims of speakers are linked to principles of producing good communication. Thomas (1995: 22) presents a more complementary definition of pragmatics as

"meaning in interaction". To understand the speaker's meaning, a negotiation between the interlocutors is required besides knowing the context and the potential meaning of the utterances that are uttered by the speaker.

As far as storytelling is concerned, Labov (1972: 364) states that understanding the intentions of the storyteller requires a full exploration of the underlaying actions embedded in the story and their relation to the structure of the story. Pratt (1978: 136) proposes that a teller, in a storytelling event, reports not only past events but also portrays a state of affairs to influence the audience in a particular way. The audience are encouraged to join the storyteller in looking at these events, evaluating them and responding to them in their social life. In similar sense, Tannen (1989: 92) describes the storytelling process as a mindful act into which both teller and audience are fully involved in communicating.

According to Rober et al. (2010: 29), storytelling involves a kind of selection process which can only be appreciated if the dialogical context in which the stories are told is taken in consideration. This process implies the centrality of the otherness in the mind of storytellers and their audience (ibid.: 37). Thus, storytellers have to deliver their messages in ways that make their audience feel satisfied. To ensure that their audience receive the intended messages of storytelling, storytellers resort to politeness strategies to present them in effective and polite ways.

1.1.4. *Politeness Strategies*

In the literature of pragmatics, there are various frameworks regarding the politeness strategies. However, the current study adopts Brown and Levinson's (1978) framework for its coverage to the politeness strategies employed by commencement speakers (henceforth CSs) in their motivational storytelling. Brown and Levinson (ibid.) view politeness strategies as means to soften the potential actions that may damage the public *face* of those to whom a speech is addressed.

Brown and Levinson (1978: 66) adopt the concept of *face* which is defined as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself." Any attempt to violate or damage others' public face will result in face-threatening acts (henceforth FTAs). They (ibid.: 73-75) point out that speakers can prevent or recover the damages that might cause by doing FTA by employing one or more of four universal super-strategies: bald on-record politeness (henceforth BOP), on-record positive politeness (henceforth PP), on-record negative politeness (henceforth NP), and off-record politeness (henceforth OFP). The universality of this framework has maintained its supremacy decades after its appearance (See Esfahlan & Boroumand, 2020: 1803). Hence, it has been explored extensively over the years in various contexts. However, the politeness strategies used by commencement speakers in delivering their motivational storytelling, according to the best knowledge of the researchers, receive little or not attention. Therefore, this paper is motivated to investigate these strategies in this type of discourse.

1.1.4.1. *On-record positive politeness*

Speakers resort to PP when they want to show their considerations to the desires of their addressees (Brown and Levinson, 1978: 101). Speakers can satisfy that by showing their addressees that they both share similar views or opinions in regard to a particular state of affairs (ibid). Huang (2007:117) stresses that PP minimises the potential FTA by emphasising a type of solidarity between the speaker and the addressee. According to Brown and Levinson (1978: 103-29), speaker can fulfil the positive face of their addressee through adopting one or more of the following strategies:

1. Notice, attend, to H (his interests, wants, needs, goods)
2. Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)

3. Intensify interest to H
4. Use in –group identity markers
5. Seek agreement
6. Avoid disagreement
7. Presuppose / raise / assert common ground
8. Joke
9. Assert or presuppose S knowledge of and concern for the H's wants
10. Offer, Promise
11. Be optimistic
12. Include both S and H in the activity
13. Give (or ask for) reasons
14. Assume or assert reciprocity
15. Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding cooperation)

1.1.4.2. On-record negative politeness

Brown and Levinson (1978: 129) state that speakers use NP when they want to show their addressees that their negative face wants are preserved in an attempt to reduce a potential FTA. More particularly, this type of politeness is utilised when a speaker intends to imply to an addressee that "his want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded." Furthermore, they (ibid.: 132-210) go over ten possible strategies that can be employed to save the negative face of an addressee:

1. Be conventionally indirect
2. Hedges
3. Be pessimistic
4. Minimize the imposition, Rx
5. Give deference
6. Apologize
7. Impersonalize S and H
8. State the FTA as a general rule
9. Nominalize
10. Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H

1.1.4.3. Off- record politeness

Speakers appeal to OFP when they intend to initiate a particular FTA without being directly responsible for its production (Brown and Levinson, 1978: 211). In other words, a speaker can express his intention in a manner that can implicate different interpretations to an addressee who must infer what is intended. Brown and Levinson (ibid.: 213-27) enlist a number of various strategies that speakers might make use of when they go off-record:

1. Give hints
2. Give association clues
3. Presuppose.
4. Understate
5. Overstate.
6. Use tautologies.
7. Use contradictions.
8. Be ironic.
9. Use metaphors.
10. Use rhetorical questions
11. Be ambiguous
12. Be vague.

13. Over-generalize
14. Displace H
15. Be incomplete, use ellipsis

1.1.4.4. Bald on-record politeness

BOP is used by speakers when they present their views directly without showing any redressive action to reduce the potential FTA (ibid.: 69). In this sense, speakers decide to deliver their message in a most direct and straightforward manner. According to Brown and Levinson (ibid.: 95), this PS has two different usages: (1) to ignore the addressee' face or (2) to minimise a potential FTA. The former can be utilised when the a "maximum efficiency" to say something is more important than satisfying the addressee's face. The later can be found in close relationships where a speaker shows his awareness of others' face by speaking without any redressive. As far this study is concerned only the first use will be investigated as the relationship between the CSs and the graduates is official.

1.2. Research questions

The purpose of this paper is to describe the politeness strategies used by commencement speakers while presenting their motivational storytelling within commencement speeches at American universities. Below are the research questions:

1. Which super-strategies of politeness are considerably utilised by commencement speakers while delivering the motivational storytelling?
2. Is there any significant relationship between the original professions of the commencement speakers and their utilisation the super-strategies of politeness?
3. What are the sub-strategies that CSs mostly rely on to implement each super-strategy of politeness while delivering the motivational storytelling?

2. Method

2.1. Data collection

This study is motivated to investigate the structure of motivational storytelling delivered within commencement speeches, and to do this it has selected ten commencement speeches delivered by American CSs at the top three American universities from 2010 to 2019. The QS ranking system is followed as it considers 10 % of the universities assessment to the employers' assessment of the graduates' working performance (QS World University Rankings, 2020). It regards how the universities and institutions prepare and empower their graduates for the employment market is as an essential indicator of the ranking. Thus, it is expected that QS top universities pay more efforts to maintain their graduates' employment experience and reputation when choosing an appropriate CS. More specifically, one speech is selected per year (See Appendix I).

The variety of the CSs' professions is also considered in the selection process; namely, the selected speeches are delivered by speakers of various professions, each two representing a particular profession. For a just comparison between the speakers of these professions, one motivational storytelling is selected per each speech. The selected commencement speeches are selected to represent five different professions of commencement speakers, namely business leaders (henceforth BCSs), judges (henceforth JuCSs), actors (henceforth ACSs), politicians (henceforth PCSs), and journalists (henceforth JoCSs).

The selected speeches are all available in the oral form on the YouTube channels of the selected universities (See Appendix A). However, the written forms of some of the speeches are not available

on their official websites and the contents of the two forms are found nonidentical in some other speeches. Thus, the oral forms were used and transcribed by the researchers themselves.

2.2. Data analysis

We extracted one motivational storytelling from each selected commencement speech in accordance with Labov's (1972) structure of storytelling which consists of six stages (See 1.1.2). After delimiting the structure of each storytelling discourse, we searched for the super-strategies of politeness employed by CSs in total and by each group, based on Brown and Levinson's (1978) framework (See 1.1.4). Moreover, the sub-strategies for each super-stage are also investigated to discover the most dominant ones. Then, we tested whether the original professions of the CSs have a significant effect on the CSs in utilising their politeness strategies while delivering their motivational storytelling.

3. Results and Discussion

This section is concerned with the results and discussion of the selected data in accordance with Brown and Levinson's (1978) framework.

3.1 Overall analysis

In regard to the first question, an overall analysis of super- strategies of politeness is conducted. Table 1 asserts that all the CSs adopt PP as their first PS while delivering the motivational storytelling except BCSs who use PP and OFP with an equal percentage of (34.78%). However, other CSs show some difference of frequency in using the second PS after PP. Whereas ACSs and JuCSs rely on OFP with the precentages of (26.32%), and (25.00%), respectively, PCSs and JoCSs resort to NP with the percentages (25.00%) and (22.58%), respectively. The high reliance on PP to show closeness and soldarity with the graduates can be atrributed to the central aim of the CSs which is to park the emotions of the graudates to perform particular actions (See 1.1.1).

Table 1. The Use of super-strategies of Politeness among the Commencement Speakers

Super-strategies of Politeness	CSs											
	BCSs		JuCSs		ACSs		PCSs		JoCSs		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
PP	8	38.09	13	52.00	10	45.45	14	50.00	14	40.00	59	45.04
NP	3	14.29	2	8.00	3	13.64	7	25.00	7	20.00	22	16.79
OFP	6	28.57	7	28.00	8	36.36	4	14.29	9	25.71	34	25.96
BOP	4	19.05	3	12.00	1	4.55	3	10.71	5	14.29	16	12.21
Total	21	100.00	25	100.00	22	100.00	28	100.00	35	100.00	131	100.00

Concerning the second question, a Chi-square analysis was the most appropriate test to employ due to the nominal variable and frequency data being used. It was conducted to find out whether its value (x^2) is larger or smaller than the critical value. It was also used to assess whether the original professions of CSs have a significant influence ($\rho < 0.05$) on the use of super-strategies of politeness. These statistics are as follows:

CSs	Observed frequencies					Expected frequencies					Chi Square	Crit. Value	P-Value
	BCSs	JuCSs	ACSs	PCSs	JoCSs	BCSs	JuCSs	ACSs	PCSs	JoCSs			
PSs													
PP	8	13	10	14	14	9	11	10	13	16	0.84		
NP	3	2	3	7	7	4	4	4	6	6	1.79		
OFP	6	7	8	4	9	5	6	6	7	9	2.48	21.02	0.84
BOP	4	3	1	3	5	3	3	3	3	4	2.04		
Total	21	25	22	28	35	21	25	22	28	35	7.16		

Figure 2. One-way Chi-square: The relationship between the professions of CSs and their utilisation of super-strategies of politeness

As Table 2 displays, the Chi-square value for using the super-strategies of politeness is (7.16) which is lower than the critical value of x^2 (21.02). Moreover, the table shows the ρ-value is (0.84) which is also bigger than the standard level of significance (0.05). Therefore, the relationship between the professions of CSs and using the super-strategies of politeness is not significant in the case of delivering the motivational storytelling. This difference can be attributed to the universality of politeness of these strategies as suggested by Brown and Levenson (See 1.1.4).

3.1.1. Local analysis

In this section the researchers present the results and examples of conducting a local analysis for each super-strategy of politesses to answer the third question which is to find out the most dominant sub-strategies used by the CSs.

3.1.2 Positive politeness

As Table (1) above indicates that CSs exploit PP more than other super-strategies of politeness with a percentage of (45.04%) to state or assert particular principles or values to the graduates claiming or presupposing a kind of familiarity with the asserted ideas. This use of this super-strategy extends over six sub-strategies as shown in Table (3) below.

Table 3. The use of sub-strategies of positive politeness among the commencement speakers

Positive politeness	CSs											
	BCSs		JuCSs		ACSs		PCSs		JoCSs		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Including both S and H	1	12.50	8	61.54	0	0.00	9	64.29	7	50.00	25	42.37
Presupposing Common Ground	4	50.00	3	23.08	8	80.00	3	21.43	4	28.58	22	37.29
Noticing H's interests	3	37.50	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	7.14	1	7.14	5	8.48
Giving reasons	0	0.00	2	15.38	0	0.00	1	7.14	0	0	3	5.08
Being optimistic	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	20.00	0	0.00	1	7.14	3	5.08
Avoiding disagreement	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	7.14	1	1.70
Total	8	100.00	13	100.00	10	100.00	14	100.00	14	100.00	59	100.00

3.1.3 Including both speaker and hearer

This sub-strategy receives the highest percentage of occurrence by CSs while delivering their messages to the graduates with a percentage of (42.37%) among other sub-strategies of PP used by CSs. The CSs' inclusion of themselves with the graduates as the most used sub-strategy of positive politeness is meant to make the graduates more positive about success in their future since CSs once belonged to this group and the same can happen to the graduates. In terms of the professions of CSs,

it is mostly used by PCSs and JuCSs with the percentages of (64.29%) and (61.54%), respectively. The following examples illustrate how CSs include themselves with the audience to redress FTAs that might result as they express their messages.

> (1) "They understood that the most difficult problems and the greatest opportunities **we** have are not technical". (Speech 9)

In (1), Sheryl Sandberg incorporates the inclusive form of the first-person pronoun "we" to include herself with the graduates as she encourages the graduates to explore the humanitarian side for great opportunities of success. She gives them the implication that she also needs to consider this kind of exploration to reduce any FTA that they might receive within this advice.

> (2) "The story is about a case that many of **us** here remember". (Speech 1)

In (2), David Souter uses the inclusive first-person pronoun "us" to include himself with the graduates, achieving solidarity and saving their positive face as he reminds them of particular story about the American constitution.

3.1.4   *Presupposing, raising, and asserting common ground*

The statistical analysis reveals that the CSs employ this sub-strategy with a percentage of (37.29%) to be the second most frequent among other sub-strategies of PP. In terms of their professions, ACSs and BCSs use this sub-strategy more than other CSs with the percentages of (80.00%) and (50.00%), respectively. Other percentages of its use are distributed among JoCSs, PCSs, and JuCSs amounting to (28.58%), (23.08%), and (21.43%), respectively. The following examples show the employment of this sub-strategy by CSs while delivering their motivational storytelling.

> (3) "It was argued before the Supreme Court of the United States on June 26, 1971, and we all know it is the Pentagon Papers". (Speech 1)

In example (3), David Souter tries to save the positive face of graduates by using the definite description "the Pentagon Papers" to presuppose that the graduates' knowledge of this referent.

> (4) "You see some tough things out there. But you also see life- changing joy. And it all changes you". (Speech 7)

In (4), Matt Damon presupposes a common ground with the graduates by presupposing their knowledge of the existence of troubles and joy the human life in (a), (b), and (c) to save their positive face.

3.1.5   *Noticing hearer's interests*

By noticing the audience's interests, speakers indicate that the audience's aspects and conditions are known and appreciated (Brown and Levinson, 1978: 103). In the selected data, the CSs uses this sub-strategy with a percentage of (8.48%) among other sub-strategies of PP. Regarding their professions, it is only used by BCSs, with a percentage of (37.50%) and by JoCSs, and ACSs with an equal percentage of (7.14%). The examples below indicate the use of this sub-strategy by CSs to implement PP.

> (5) "Things won't always end up as you think, but you will gain valuable lessons along life's uncertain path". (Speech 9)

In (5), Sheryl Sandberg expresses her consideration of the graduates' positive face by noticing their interests, wants, needs, and conditions in an attempt to reduce the FTA they might experience as a result of her upcoming advice and remarks.

> (6) "Because now and forever more when you Google yourself your search results will read "Harvard, 2013". (Speech 4)

In (6), Oprah Winfrey actualises the PP in her noticing to the graduates' possession of great degrees from Harvard University.

3.1.6   Giving reasons

Including the audience in activity can also be actualized by expressing the reasons behind what the speaker wants from them (Brown and Levinson, 1978: 128). This sub-strategy of PP is utilised by the CSs with a percentage of (5.08%). Among the CSs, only JuCSs and PCSs use it with the percentages of (15.38%) and (7.14%), respectively, among their employment of other sub-strategies of PP. The following examples manifest the use of this sub-strategy by the CSs.

> (7) "Now, when I do may offend you, you may find my actions immoral or unjust, but attempting to restrict my freedoms, in ways that you would not restrict your own leads only to injustice". (Speech 5)

In (7), Michael Bloomberg gives the graduates overwhelmingly good reasons to imply that he wouldn't want to infringe on their positive face when he explains to them that asking for freedom rights and rejecting those of others are unjust demands.

> (8) "To show you what I'm getting at, I've picked two examples of what can really happen, two stories of two great cases". (Speech 1)

In (8), David Souter states the reasons behind his intention to tell them some stories. By explaining his purpose to the graduates, the speaker tries to save the positive face of the graduates in making them feel appreciated.

3.1.7.   Being optimistic

In this sub-strategy, speakers save the positive face of their audience by assuming that they share the same wants (Brown and Levinson, 1978: 126). The statistical analysis shows that the CSs use this sub-strategy with a percentage of (5.08%) among other sub-strategies of PP. in terms of the CSs' professions, we found that only ACSs and JoCSs employ it with the percentages of (20.00%) and (7.14%) among their employments of other sub-strategies of PP. The following example shows that Matt Damon refers to the optimistic aspect of working in the humanitarian side of life.

> (9) "But there's a lot of beauty, too. I hope you see both". (Speech 7)

3.1.8   Avoiding disagreement

Table (3) reveals that this sub-strategy is the least employed one by the CSs with a percentage of (1.70%) of all other sub-strategies of PP. In terms of professions, the analysis indicates that this sub-strategy is used only by JoCSs with a percentage of (7.14%) among other sub-strategies they utilize to implement PP while presenting their motivational storytelling within commencement speeches.

Example (10) below shows how Oprah Winfrey avoids disagreeing with graduates by displaying token agreement after saying that "I even prouder to share a fundamental truth that you might have learned, even as a graduate of Harvard". As she expresses her pride in telling the truth of her story and turning around her show again, she uses the "unless" clause to explain to the graduates that they may have a similar level of her knowledge if they have attended Professor Nagy's classes.

(10) "I'm even prouder to share a fundamental truth that you might not have
learned even as graduates of Harvard unless you studied the ancient Greek
hero with Professor Nagy". (Speech 4)

3.1.9   Negative politeness

The statistical analysis in Table (1) above indicates that CSs utilize NP with a percentage of (16.79%) other super-strategies of politeness with a percentage of to show some consideration to the negative face of the graduates. Such considerations are important to ensure that personal identity of the graduates is respected and evaluated by the CSs, so that the CSs' messages transfer smoothly. However, their employment of NP as PS extends over four sub-strategies at the micro level as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4. The Use of sub-strategies of Negative Politeness Among the Commencement Speakers

Negative Politeness	CSs											
	BCSs		JuCSs		ACSs		PCSs		JoCSs		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Impersonate S and H	2	66.67	2	100.00	1	33.33	1	14.29	5	83.33	11	50.00
Hedging	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	5	71.42	2	16.67	7	31.82
Stating general rule	1	33.33	0	0.00	1	33.33	1	14.29	0	0.00	3	13.64
Being Pessimistic	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	33.33	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	4.55
Total	3	100.00	2	100.00	3	100.00	7	100.00	7	16.67	22	100.00

3.1.10   Impersonate S and H

Table 4 shows that the CSs employ this sub-strategy with a percentage of (50.00%) as the highest among other sub-strategies of NP. The CSs avoid mentioning agents as the first sub-strategy used in achieving negative politeness to remove the boundaries between them and the graduates to make the graduates more comfortable and thus more motivated. In terms of their professions, CSs vary in their reliance on this sub-strategy while showing their consideration to the graduates' negative face. For JuCSs, it is the only sub-strategy of NP amounting to (100%). As JoCSs come in the second rank in using it with a percentage of (83.33%), BCSs take the third rank with a percentage of (66.67%). ACSs who come in the last rank in using the sub-strategy of impersonating the speaker or the audience use employ it equally with other two sub-strategies, namely stating general rules and being pessimistic with the percentage (33.33%). The following examples display how CSs utilise this sub-strategy while delivering their motivational storytelling. The following examples explicate the use of this sub-strategy by the CSs.

(11) "As a consequence, a choice may have to be made, not because language
is vague but because the Constitution embodies the desire of the American
people, like most people, to have things both ways". (Speech 1)

In (11), David Souter tries to save the negative face of the graduates by using the word *"people"* rather than the second-person pronoun (you) when he criticizes the double choices that they like in same way it is found in the constitution.

(12) "You see some tough things out there". (Speech 7)

In (12), Matt Damon shows his concerns for the negative face in using the distal deictic expression "*there"* as he refers to the hard conditions of life.

3.2   Hedging

The statistical analysis in Table 4 reveals that CSs utilise hedging with a percentage of (31.82%) among other sub-strategies of NP. In reference to the professions of the CSs, the analysis also shows that it is only used by PCSs and JoCSs with the percentages of (71.42%), and (16.67%), respectively. Their employment of this sub-strategy of Np is shown the example below.

(13) "And unfortunately, New York City, I think, several years ago has been witnesses to this trend". (Speech 5)

In (13), Michael Bloomberg uses the expression *"I think"* as a hedging to maxim of quality to save the negative face of those members of the graduates who may do not know about the *New York*'s accident he is referring to.

(14) "I believe that your actions will have consequences". (Speech 3)

In (14), Fareed Zakaria hedges the maxim of quality through employing the phrase *"I believe"* to free the graduates' negative face from the potential imposition while giving them instructions on how to deal with common challenges.

3.3   Stating general rule

The statistical analysis shows that the CSs appeal to this sub-strategy of NP with a percentage of (13.64%) to be the third sub-strategy in terms of frequency. When it comes to the professions of the CSs, Table (3) indicates that BCSs and ACSs use it with an equal percentage of (33.33%), and PCSs use it with a percentage of (14.29%), respectively. The following examples depict how the CSs show their considerations of the graduates' negative face through this sub-strategy.

(15) "You see some tough things out there. But you also see life- changing joy. And it all changes you". (Speech 7)

In (15), Matt Damon saves the negative face of the graduates by state a fact that people, in general, might face the good and evil in their life which, in turn, all leave an imprint on the individuals who experience them.

(16) "Time and again in public service, you're handed reminders of how institutions depend on our acts or omissions". (Speech 8)

In (16), Mariano-Florentino states his asserting in the form of a general rule to save the graduates' negative face that might be threatened when he asks them to look at the history to understand *"how institutions depend on our acts or omissions."*

3.4   Being Pessimistic

This sub-strategy of NP is used the least by the CSs with a percentage of (4.55%). More specifically, in terms of professions, only ACSs among other CSs use this sub-strategy mounting to (33.33%) among their utilization of other sub-strategies of NP.

3.5   Off-record politeness

The statistical analysis in Table (1) above reveals that CSs employ OFP with a percentage of (25.96%) other super-strategies of politeness with a percentage of to highlight the importance of the things they discuss so the graduates perceive the implied message (s) while their face is preserved. CSs resort to this type of politeness when delivering their motivational storytelling through employing one or more of its strategies to motivate the graduates indirectly to (not) do a particular state of affairs they refer to. However, their employment of OPF as PS extends over four sub-strategies at the micro level as shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5. The Use of sub-strategies of Off-record Politeness Among the Commencement Speakers

Off-record Politeness	CSs											
	BCSs		JuCSs		ACSs		PCSs		JoCSs		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Hinting	2	33.33	2	28.57	3	37.50	2	50.00	2	22.22	11	32.35
Tautology	1	16.67	2	28.57	1	12.50	1	25.00	1	11.11	6	17.65
Overstatement	1	16.67	0	0.00	2	25.00	1	25.00	3	33.34	7	20.59
Metaphor	2	33.33	0	0.00	1	12.50	0	0.00	1	11.11	4	11.77
Rhetorical Q	0	0.00	2	28.57	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	11.11	3	8.82
Understatement	0	0.00	1	14.29	1	12.50	0	0.00	1	11.11	3	8.82
Total	6	100.00	7	100.00	8	100.00	4	100.00	9	100.00	34	100.00

3.6   Hinting

The CSs employ this sub-strategy with a percentage of (32.35%) as the highest among other sub-strategies of OFP. The CSs' avoidance of being direct as the highly exploited sub-strategy of off-record politeness to make the graduates more comfortable in working out inspiring stories. In terms of their professions, CSs vary in their reliance on this sub-strategy while expressing their messages indirectly. PCSs use it the most amounting to (50.00%) among other strategies. As ACSs come in the second rank in using it with a percentage of (37.50%) among other sub-strategies of OFP, BCSs and JuCSs take the third and fourth ranks with the percentages of (33.33%) and (28.57%), respectively. The least use of this sub-strategy is by JoCSs with the percentage of (22.22%), as shown in the examples below.

(17) "It takes too much mental effort – effort that should be dedicated to
      creating and building". (Speech 10)

The OFP is realised in (17) as Tim Cook utilises indirect hinting to warn the graduates of wasting their time thinking of others' lives. More particularly, he avoids taking responsibility of threatening his audience's face while he warns them indirectly that mimic mimicking or mimicking or competing with those who had started before them because that will only consume their thinking and time, which must be directed to building their owns businesses.

(18) "The reward isn't fame or personal gain". (Speech 8)

Mariano-Florentino employs the OFP in (18) by giving hints to the graduates to avoid personal affairs when dealing with public commitments. People should never think about personal benefits to get out of their commitments to the public services. They should use their experience and knowledge to achieve their mission as perfect as they can.

3.7 Tautology

The analysis shows that the CSs employ tautologies as a sub-strategy of OFP with a percentage of (17.65%). JuCSs and PCSs use this sub-strategy the most with the percentages of (28.57%) and (25.00%), respectively. Then, BCSs and JoCSs use it with an equal percentage of (11.11%) and ACSs use it the least with the percentage of (12.50%), as shown in the examples below.

(19) "So, what was true then is true now". (Speech 10)

Tim Cook employs OFP in (19) in using the tautological form of the word *"true"* in *"what was true then is true now"* to warn the graduates in directly of giving others to control their time

(20) "When I tell you that we live in an age of progress, I am not urging complacency — far from it". (Speech 3)

Fareed Zakaria appeals to the OFP in (20) by using the tautological phrase "*I am not urging complacency — far from it"* to indirectly urge the graduates to do their best to continue the progress.

3.8 Overstatement

The CSs utilise this sub-strategy with a percentage of (20.59%) among other sub-strategies of OFP. Speaking in terms of professions, Both ACSs and PCSs utilize it with an equal percentage of (25.00%) and JoCSs and BCSs use it with the percentages of (33.34%) and (16.67%), respectively, among other sub-strategies of OFP they rely on while delivering their motivational storytelling, as show in the examples below.

(21) "They will teach you a lot... but you have to engage". (Speech 7)

In (21), Matt Damon realises OFP by overstating the teaching role of engaging with others. He asserts to the graduates the advantages of being engaged with other people as they represent a great source of knowledge and experience that the graduates need.

(22) "The idea that government would single out a particular religion and block its believers, and only its believers, from building a house of worship in a particular area is diametrically opposed to the moral principles that gave rise to our great nation, and the constitutional protections that have sustained it." (Speech 5)

The OFP strategy can be noticed in (22) as Michael Bloomberg overstates the impact American people might experience when oppressing believers of a particular religion.

3.9 Metaphor

The statistical analysis shows that the CSs use this sub-strategy with a percentage of (11.77%) among other sub-strategies of OFP. Among CSs, BCSs resort to this sub-strategy the most with a

percentage of (33.33%) among other use of the other sub-strategies of OFP. The other CSs that the analysis reveals their use of metaphor as a sub-strategy of OFP are JoCSs and ACSs with the

percentages of (11.11%) and (12.50%), respectively. The following examples indicate the use of this sub-strategy by CSs as they present their motivational storytelling.

(23) "It's about making peace with the fact that you won't be here for the end
of the story". (Speech 10)

OFP is mixed with NP in (23) as Tim Cook employs the metaphorical expression "the story" to assert the fact that they *"won't be there"* to observe the end of human life. He wants to tell them that that they will die one day before being ready to meet that moment.

(24) "Human beings will take your breath away". (Speech 7)

Matt Damon uses OFP in (24) through using the metaphorical phrase "*take your breath away*" as a benefit of engaging with others and giving hints to the graduates to exploit such engagement.

3.10 Rhetorical Questions

The use of rhetorical questions is not to get an answer from the questionee (s), but to get the them provide the questioner with a particular answer. Results show that the total employment of rhetorical question as a sub-strategy of OFP in the selected data reaches a percentage of (8.82%) among other sub-strategies. With reference to the CSs, the results reveal that only JuCSs and JoCSs use it with the percentages of (28.57%) and (11.11%), respectively, as shown the examples below.

(25) "Sound familiar to anybody here?" (Speech 4)

In (25), Oprah Winfrey's resort to OFP is manifested in her rhetorical question to the graduates about their understanding of her hard effort that made her successful. She asserts the difficulty for the graduates to understand her personal efforts that have led to her success.

(26) "Should the choice and its explanation be called illegitimate law making?
Can it be an act beyond the judicial power when a choice must be made and
the Constitution has not made it in advance in so many words?" (Speech 1).

In (26), David Souter appeals to OFP by asking rhetorical questions to avoid the potential imposition that might threaten the graduates' face because he has asked them to state their opinions as he asserts his stance towards legitimacy of choices made by courts concerning the contrasted rights and the necessity of such work for the society.

3.11 Understatement

The total employment of understatement in the selected data is (8.82%). Referring to the professions of CS, the results reveal that JoCSs rely on understating with a percentage of (11.11%) among other sub-strategies of OFP whereas JuCSs and ACSs use it with the percentages of (14.29%) and (12.50%), respectively, as shown below.

(27) "In a democracy, no leader's as important as the civic architecture he or
she swears to protect and support". (Speech 8)

Mariano-Florentino in (27) understates the role of leadership comparing it with the public service to indirectly urging them to avoid preferring the personal interest over the service they do.

> (28) "For I take that fear to be fear in large-scale". (Speech 2)

In (28), Tom Hanks understates the role of fear by comparing it with the faith that people have to motivate the graduates to be fearless.

3.12 Bald-on record

The statistical analysis in Table (1) reveals that CSs employ BOP with a percentage of (12.21%) among other macro- strategies of politeness while they advise, encourage, and warn the graduates to do or avoid particular actions or thoughts. In such case, the CSs exercise their advisory and motivational role to consider the maximum efficiency of what they present, as critical guidelines, over the graduates' face. The following examples explain how the CSs use this strategy.

> (29) "Please, seek out these opportunities to share your good fortune. Listen for clues about how to reconcile our aspirations and our always-messier realities." (Speech 8)

Mariano-Florentino uses BOP in (29) to express the maximum efficiency of this advice to the graduates. Exercising his motivational role as a CS, he shows little or no efforts to minimize the FTA that graduates might have.

> (30) "Give yourself time to mourn what you think you may have lost but then here's the key." (Speech 4)

BOP is used in (30) by Opera Winfrey to exercise her motivational role as a CS whose primary purpose is to deliver direct advice to the graduates. As such, she uses the imperative form to motivate direct the graduates to continue their hard work even if they fail at some point because all failure can do is change the directions of their mission.

4. Conclusions

Based on the results obtained through the analysis of the data in this paper, several conclusions can be presented here as follows. First, politeness serves a critical role in creating a sense of motivation on the part on the graduates while receiving the information presented in the storytelling. Secondly, positive politeness is the major super-strategy of politeness that CSs rely on to show their considerations of the graduates' face demands while delivering the motivational storytelling. It is used to create to sense of solidarity and familiarity between the commencement speakers and the graduates so the motivation process can be conducted smoothly. As such, the graduates receive the motivational messages as common and mutual interests. Off-record politeness comes after positive politeness in frequency to engage the graduates effectively with the storytelling since the use of such rhetorical devices as metaphor, overstatement, understatement, etc. call the hearers' cognitive skills to infer the implied meaning. Thirdly, the insignificant influence of the original professions of the CSs on the utilisation of the super-strategies of politeness indicates the universality of these strategies in this context. Moreover, the findings also revealed that the structure of the motivational storytelling in American commencement speeches comply with Labovian' framework of storytelling. It can be used as to add a proof to the universality of this framework.

This study contributes to enhance our understanding of the employment of the politeness strategies of motivational storytelling in terms of Brown and Levenson's approach. It may help all those who are interested in motivating their students and graduates to adopt politeness strategies as used by the commencement speakers. However, the findings of this study were limited to American commencement speeches and should not overgeneralized to all motivational storytelling. The findings of this study were drawn from motivational narratives given in American English; hence, it would be better for future work to conduct an investigation of the politeness strategies in other varieties of English.

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Appendix A. The Selected Universities and the Commencement Speakers

Serial No.	Year	University/ institute	QS annual rankings	Names of CSs	Original professions of CSs	Hyperlinks
1	2010	Harvard University	1	David H. Souter	Judge	https://youtu.be/eCxaDwOCXD8
2	2011	Yale University	3	Tom Hanks	Actor	https://youtu.be/baIlinqoExQ
3	2012	Harvard University	2	Fareed Zakaria	Journalist	https://youtu.be/CD6CW4fPQfs
4	2013	Harvard University	2	Oprah Winfrey	Journalist	https://youtu.be/GMWFieBGR7c
5	2014	Harvard University	2	Michael Bloomberg	Politician	https://youtu.be/Zhfn2zgFFJ8
6	2015	Harvard University	2	Deval Patrick	Politician	https://youtu.be/-flgIKTSIas
7	2016	MIT	1	Matt Damon	Actor	https://youtu.be/DFNgoZ5-qAM
8	2017	Stanford university	2	Mariano Florentina	judge	https://youtu.be/BP2ItX1XxOM
9	2018	MIT	1	Sheryl Sandberg	Business leader	https://youtu.be/8w1d1TWxwec
10	2019	Stanford University	2	Tim Cook	Business leader	https://youtu.be/2C2VJwGBRRw