QJOL

Politeness in Political Discourse: Bridging Brown-Levinson's Theory and Adab Values in the Qur'an

Dwi Santoso
Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Indonesia

Email: dwi@pbi.uad.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Politeness in political discourse plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion, maintaining social harmony, and enhancing the credibility of political figures. This article aims to connect Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, a fundamental framework in Western pragmatics, with the values of adab derived from the Qur'an. Using a critical discourse analysis approach, this study examines ten statements by Indonesian politicians that reflect the use of positive, negative, and implicit (off-the-record) politeness strategies aligned with Qur'anic communication principles, such as qaulan layyina, qaulan karima, and qaulan baligha, qaulan ma'rufa. The analysis shows that the combination of these two approaches produces a communication strategy that is not only pragmatically effective but also spiritually ethical. This article recommends the development of a political communication model based on religious values and pragmatic awareness for a multicultural society like Indonesia.

Keywords: politeness, political discourse, Brown and Levinson, etiquette, Al-Quran, pragmatics

INTRODUCTION

In a pluralistic and democratic society like Indonesia, political discourse is not only a forum for expressing one's aspirations but also a testing ground for communication ethics. Political communication is often vulnerable to hate speech, rhetorical manipulation, and the loss of moral meaning (Rofiq, 2023). This is where the importance of a polite approach lies, both in the context of Western pragmatic theories such as Brown and Levinson (1987) and in Islamic teachings that emphasize the values of adab (Latif, 2020; Fauziah, 2021).

When political communication loses its ethical dimension, public trust in political institutions and figures weakens. In such situations, polite, honest, and responsible rhetoric can serve as a bridge between political elites and the broader public. Politeness is not a weakness, but rather a deliberative strategy capable of creating healthy dialogue, building consensus, and encouraging peaceful problem resolution. Wahid (2021) emphasized that civil political communication reflects the maturity of democracy and the moral example of a leader. Meanwhile, Nurdin (2023) added that integrating pragmatic principles and religious values into political communication can be an effective model for building social harmony in a pluralistic society. Therefore, designing political communication that integrates pragmatic principles with spiritual values is a strategic step towards strengthening the foundations of democracy and social harmony in a diverse nation. Santoso (2023) has also emphasized the importance of a pragmatic

47

approach in analyzing political discourse in Indonesia, where linguistic strategies are analyzed not only in terms of their structure but also in terms of their social and ideological functions in influencing public opinion. Therefore, designing political communication that integrates pragmatic principles with spiritual values is a strategic step towards strengthening the foundations of democracy and social harmony within the context of the nation's diversity.

Brown and Levinson's theory distinguishes three main types of strategies: (1) positive politeness, aimed at demonstrating closeness, (2) negative politeness, aimed at respecting the interlocutor's freedom of action, and (3) implicit and indirect, informal strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987). These three strategies are based on the assumption that every communicative act has the potential to threaten the interlocutor's image, which requires a linguistic approach capable of mitigating this potential.

The Quran, on the other hand, emphasizes polite communication through expressions such as qaulan layyina (kind words), qaulan karima (noble words), qaulan baligha (touching words), and qaulan ma'rufa (appropriate words) (Syihab, 2020; Latif, 2020). These four terms not only describe ideal forms of speech but also emphasize the importance of morality, empathy, and usefulness in communication. These principles constitute the ethical framework upon which social interactions in Islam are based.

Several previous studies have examined politeness in political debates (Sari & Pratama, 2021; Diani, 2021), the use of adab in da'wah (Islamic preaching) (Latif, 2020), and a comparison between Western and Islamic communication ethics (Yusof & Kadir, 2022; Hanum & Basri, 2020). These studies demonstrate that ethical communication has a positive impact on strengthening the communicator's credibility and maintaining social stability in a pluralistic society. However, few have explicitly integrated Brown-Levinson theory with Qur'anic values in the context of Indonesian politics (Mahendra, 2024). Nonetheless, an intertextual approach between pragmatics and Islamic teachings has the potential to shape a new paradigm in the study of political communication, more relevant and contextualized to the characteristics of Indonesian society.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with critical discourse analysis. Data were collected from videos, transcripts, and newspaper reports of speeches by Indonesian political figures between 2020 and 2024. These were analyzed based on the Brown-Levinson classification of politeness strategies and contextualized with the adab (ethical) values in the Qur'an (Nugroho, 2022; Azizah, 2022). This approach was chosen because it can explore the deeper meanings of political discourse, often imbued with ideological and strategic interests.

The analysis focuses not only on linguistic structure but also considers the social context, communicative objectives, and its impact on the audience. The analytical steps include identifying the types of politeness strategies used in the speech, categorizing them according to positive, negative, or implicit dimensions, and aligning them with relevant Qur'anic adab values. With this approach, the research reveals how linguistic strategies and spiritual values combine to form a persuasive and ethical political narrative. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation and in-depth discussions among researchers to achieve accurate and contextualized interpretations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The followings are ten examples of expressions from Indonesian political figures that demonstrate politeness strategies that are relevant to Qur'anic values.

No	Political Expressions	Brown-Levinson's Strategies	Qur'anic Values	Sources
1	"Assalamu'alaikum warahmatullah, semoga Allah memberkahi kita semua." (Indonesian) "Assalamu'alaikum warahmatullah, may Allah bless us all." (English)	Negative Politeness	Qaulan layyina	Anies Baswedan, Kampanye 2024 (YouTube)
2	"Saya mohon maaf atas kekurangan kami selama ini." (Indonesian) "I apologize for our shortcomings so far."(English)	Negative Politeness	Qaulan ma'rufa	Ridwan Kamil, IG Live 2023
3	"Terima kasih para petani yang terus menjaga ketahanan pangan." (Indonesian) "Thank you to the farmers who continue to maintain food security."(English)	Positive Politeness	Qaulan karima	Ganjar Pranowo, Media Center 2022
4	"Mari kita saling bantu, tidak ada yang bisa jalan sendiri." (Indonesian) "Let's help each other, no one can walk alone." (English)	Positive Politeness	Qaulan layyina	Khofifah Indar Parawansa, Kompas.com 2021
5	"Mungkin kita bisa pikirkan kembali arah kebijakan ini." (Indonesian) "Maybe we can rethink the direction of this policy." (English)	Off-record	Qaulan baligha	Dedi Mulyadi, TikTok 2024
6	"Silakan beri masukan, kami ingin mendengar langsung dari masyarakat." (Indonesian) "Please provide input, we want to hear directly from the public." (English)	Negative Politeness	Qaulan ma'rufa	Erick Thohir, Detik.com 2023
7	"Alhamdulillah, ekonomi kita mulai pulih berkat kerja bersama." (Indonesian) "Thank God, our economy is starting to recover thanks to our collective efforts." (English)	Positive Politeness	Qaulan karima	Presiden Jokowi, Sekretariat Kabinet 2022
8	"Saya percaya Anda semua punya niat baik untuk bangsa ini." (English) "I believe you all have good intentions for this nation."(Indonesian)	Positive Politeness	Qaulan karima	Prabowo Subianto, MetroTV 2020
9	"Saya tidak akan menanggapi fitnah. Mari kita fokus pada solusi." (English) "I will not respond to slander. Let's focus on solutions." (English)	Off-record	Qaulan baligha	Ganjar Pranowo, Kompas TV 2023
10	"Semoga Allah memudahkan ikhtiar kita." (Indonesian) "May Allah make our endeavors easier." (English)	Negative Politeness	Qaulan layyina	Gibran Rakabuming, Pidato Resmi 2023

Per-Phrase Analysis:

Anies Baswedan opened his speech with the greeting "Assalamu'alaikum warahmatullah" (peace be upon him) accompanied by the prayer "May Allah bless us all." In the context of Brown and Levinson's theory, this is a form of negative politeness because it avoids potential threats to the audience's face by approaching politely, respecting social distance, and explicitly demonstrating respect. This utterance does not demand an immediate response, but invites a respectful and spiritual atmosphere of communication.

From a Qur'anic perspective, this expression reflects the practice of gentle and calming words, as mentioned in Surah Thaha: 44: "Speak to him with gentle words." In practice, greetings are an opening to interactions that are not merely ritualistic but also fraught with social and spiritual functions. Greetings imply good intentions, maintain peace, and lay the foundation for ethical communication based on Islamic values.

In the context of political campaigns, these greetings and prayers serve to strengthen emotional bonds with Muslim audiences, demonstrate cultural closeness, and establish a leader's moral credibility. This also emphasizes Anies' position as a politician who is not only rational in his political messages, but also religious and civilized in his communication style.

Ridwan Kamil apologized to the public with the phrase "Saya mohon maaf atas kekurangan kami selama ini." "I apologize for our shortcomings so far." From the perspective of Brown and Levinson's theory (1987), this statement reflects a negative politeness strategy, namely a strategy used to show respect for the audience's negative freedom—the freedom not to be blamed or blamed. By explicitly acknowledging shortcomings, Ridwan Kamil avoided direct confrontation and took responsibility as a form of communication ethics.

This statement is also consistent with the Quran's concept of *qaulan ma'rufa* (good and appropriate speech), meaning kind and appropriate speech. Surah An-Nisa:5 advises "speaking to them with kind words (qaulan ma'rufa)," especially in conflict-prone sociopolitical contexts. In other words, an apology in public communication reflects kindness, honesty, and a commitment to preserving the dignity of both parties.

Rhetorically, this statement reinforces the image of a humble, responsible, and non-defensive leader. In an Indonesian political culture still prone to reprimand, this approach demonstrates more productive and constructive communication, both socially and spiritually. Furthermore, offering an apology demonstrates negative courtesy, in the form of an admission of error, which reduces the threat of being faced, in line with the principle of *qaulan ma'rufa*.

Ganjar Pranowo expressed his appreciation to the farmers by saying, "Terima kasih para petani yang terus menjaga ketahanan pangan." "Thank you, farmers, for continuing to ensure food security." According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, this expression embodies positive politeness, a politeness strategy aimed at creating familiarity, solidarity, and recognition of the interlocutor's positive contributions. By explicitly praising them, Ganjar reinforces his image as a leader who appreciates the hard work of his people.

This statement is also in line with the Qur'anic principle of *qaulan karima* (good manners), which refers to noble and respectful language. Surah Al-Isra': 23 states: "And be humble towards them with compassion and speak noble words to them." Although this verse addresses the relationship between children and parents, the values of respect and kindness it embodies are also relevant in socio-political communication between leaders and the people. In a political context, appreciating farmers demonstrates

recognition of an often-overlooked agricultural sector. Pragmatically, this strategy strengthens social cohesion and conveys the impression that Ganjar is close to the grassroots. This strategy also demonstrates political awareness of the importance of building two-way communication rich in empathy and moral reinforcement. He also addressed farmers with positive courtesy, praising them and strengthening social relations, in line with *qaulan karima* (Surah Al-Isra': 23).

Khofifah Indar Parawansa invites the audience to help one another with the phrase, "Mari kita saling bantu, tidak ada yang bisa jalan sendiri." "Let's help each other; no one can do it alone." This expression uses a positive politeness strategy because it emphasizes the spirit of unity, solidarity, and social inclusion. According to Brown and Levinson, this strategy aims to strengthen interpersonal relationships by emphasizing collective values and creating closeness between speaker and listener.

The Quranic value reflected in this statement is *qaulan layyina,* which refers to kind language that fosters loving relationships. Surah Thaha: 44 emphasizes the importance of speaking kindly so that the message is conveyed wisely and does not provoke resistance. Khofifah not only conveys an invitation but formulates it in a collaborative and persuasive manner. Rhetorically, this statement is effective in building a narrative of collective leadership, which is not based on personal power, but on a spirit of mutual cooperation. This strategy also strengthens Khofifah's image as an inclusive leader who empathizes with all levels of society. This statement demonstrates that political communication that addresses emotional and spiritual aspects can generate a positive public response, a strategy of positive civility with social inclusion, and the value of *qaulan layyina* because it fosters solidarity and empathy.

Dedi Mulyadi uses a subtle approach to presenting policy ideas by saying, "Mungkin kita bisa pikirkan kembali arah kebijakan ini." "Perhaps we can reconsider this policy direction." From the perspective of Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, this falls under the off-the-record communication strategy, a strategy of implicit and indirect politeness that avoids open confrontation. Dedi uses the words "perhaps" and "we" to politely defuse criticism and avoid holding either party accountable.

This statement reflects *qaulan baligha* (understandable text), or moving and meaningful words. Surah An-Nisa: 63 explains that the prophets were commanded to speak with moving words (qaulan baligha) so that people would reflect deeply and not take offense. In other words, critical messages can be conveyed in an elegant and constructive manner.

Pragmatically, this strategy creates a space for reflection for the listener and allows for open dialogue. In a political context, this approach is crucial for building non-divisive communication that remains critical and solution-oriented. Dedi Mulyadi demonstrates that criticism does not always have to be explicit and direct; diplomatic language can be more effective in maintaining political ethics. The policy of non-blame, an informal strategy due to its indirect and diplomatic nature, represents *qaulan baligha* (understandable text) (Surah An-Nisa: 63).

Erick Thohir invited the public to actively participate in the government process by stating, "Silakan beri masukan, kami ingin mendengar langsung dari masyarakat." "Please provide your input; we want to hear the public's views directly." In Brown and Levinson's theory, this falls within the strategy of negative politeness, as it demonstrates respect for the public's autonomy. He did not force or impose, but instead conveyed the invitation in a polite and inclusive manner.

This expression aligns with the Quran's principle of good conduct, which refers to speaking with kind, appropriate, and constructive words (QS An-Nisa: 5). In a political context, inviting people to openly express their opinions, while also indicating a

willingness to listen, is an essential element of democratic and participatory governance. Rhetorically, Erick Thohir uses the polite imperative form "please" and the statement "we want to hear," reinforcing the image of an open government that views citizens as partners. This strategy is highly effective in building public credibility and creating a healthy space for two-way communication. Speaking to the public with polite and open expressions falls under negative politeness and is consistent with good conduct because it respects public opinion.

Jokowi stated, "Alhamdulillah, ekonomi kita mulai pulih berkat kerja bersama." "Thank God, our economy is starting to recover thanks to our collective effort." This statement reflects a strategy of positive comity, as it emphasizes success as a collective achievement, not just the central governments. By mentioning "collective effort," Jokowi acknowledged the inclusive contributions of all parties.Jokowi mengapresiasi kontribusi semua pihak secara inklusif.

This expression also demonstrates *qaulan karima*, or noble and grateful speech. Surah Al-Isra: 23 teaches the importance of speaking with respect and honoring the role of others, which in this context refers to the community as a partner in development. Jokowi's rhetorical strategy strengthens national cohesion, demonstrates a collaborative leadership style, and avoids the impression of arrogance. Furthermore, the use of the word "Alhamdulillah" strengthens emotional closeness with the Muslim community, creating a strong cultural and spiritual identification. He uses positive courtesy to demonstrate harmonious relationships, where the meaning of *qaulan karima* is recognition of people's contributions.

Presiden Prabowo Subianto expressed confidence in the integrity of the people by stating, "Saya percaya Anda semua punya niat baik untuk bangsa ini." "I believe you all have good intentions for this nation." This is a strategy of positive politeness, as it contains elements of praise and reassurance for the audience, strengthening social and emotional bonds.

This statement also illustrates *qaulan karima*, or noble and dignified speech. In the context of political communication, this statement not only inspires encouragement, but also demonstrates respect for national values and the community's contributions.

From a pragmatic perspective, this phrase demonstrates the speaker's desire to build strong social bonds while strengthening voter loyalty. In a competitive political environment, such a statement can defuse tensions and broaden support in an empathetic and dignified manner. Speaking to the people, building positive relationships and mutual trust, is a fitting example of positive politeness and *qaulan karima.*

Ganjar Pranowo avoided responding to provocations and opted for a solution, stating, "Saya tidak akan menanggapi fitnah. Mari kita fokus pada solusi." "I will not respond to slander. Let's focus on solutions." In Brown and Levinson's theory, this is an example of an off-the-record strategy, as he did not explicitly respond to the accusations but instead shifted the focus of the conversation with a diplomatic and solution-oriented approach. This strategy reduces the potential for conflict and demonstrates maturity in political communication.

This statement is consistent with the concept of *qaulan baligha* (guidance that prompts) in the Qur'an (QS An-Nisa: 63), which refers to firm yet poignant speech that invites people to the truth without directly offending. In a political context, this strategy demonstrates an attitude that is not reactive to personal attacks and prioritizes productive dialogue, reflecting ethical and thoughtful leadership.

Gibran Rakabuming expresses his hope with the phrase, "Semoga Allah memudahkan ikhtiar kita." "May Allah make our efforts easy." This phrase falls into the category of negative politeness because it uses an indirect form of supplication to God as

a form of humility. There are no demands on the audience, but there is a spiritual element that creates an emotional connection.

This expression reflects the *qaulan layyina*, as it is spoken with kindness, courtesy, and is full of the value of humility. In Surah Thaha:44, humanity is taught to speak with kind words so as not to incite resistance, and Gibran's phrase fulfills this principle. In the context of political discourse, the use of non-paternalistic religious language actually strengthens the emotional bond between leaders and the people.

Analysis of the expressions of these 10 figures shows that the use of politeness strategies is not only pragmatically beneficial (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 2021), but is also consistent with Qur'anic communication principles that prioritize politeness, nobility, and effectiveness in conveying messages (Marzuki, 2020; Yusof & Kadir, 2022). This demonstrates that politeness strategies play a strategic role in maintaining harmonious relations between leaders and the people, preventing destructive conflicts, and strengthening the moral foundations of political discourse. The combination of pragmatic approaches and spiritual values produces a form of communication that is not only linguistically persuasive, but also emotionally and ethically stimulating. This approach is highly relevant in the culturally and religiously diverse context of Indonesia, where social harmony is a primary prerequisite for democratic stability and sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

The integration of Brown and Levinson's theory with Qur'anic values of etiquette contributes significantly to the development of ethical political communication in Indonesia. This research supports the need to develop an interdisciplinary approach between pragmatics and Islamic studies, as well as its concrete application in political campaigns, government communications, and public dialogue (Mahendra, 2024; Wahid, 2021; Ramadhan & Fitriani, 2023). Furthermore, this synthesis of modern linguistic values and religious principles demonstrates the potential for creating an adaptive and moral communication model in the context of evolving social dynamics. In practice, polite and civil political communication can strengthen public trust, reduce polarization, and create a healthy and productive public space. Therefore, it is crucial that political actors, academics, and policymakers make politeness an integral part of the national political communication strategy.

REFERENCES

Al-Attas, S. M. N. (2020). *Islam and the Philosophy of Science*. ISTAC Press.

Anies Baswedan. (2024). Kampanye Politik. Diakses dari: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AniesCampaign

Azizah, H. (2022). Perilaku Komunikasi Tokoh Politik Muslim di Media Sosial. *Jurnal Politik Islam, 7*(1), 90–110.

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge University Press.

Dedi Mulyadi. (2024). TikTok. Diakses dari: https://www.tiktok.com/@dedimulyadi

Diani, N. (2021). Kesantunan dalam Debat Capres 2019. *Jurnal Bahasa dan Politik, 12*(1), 35–50.

Erick Thohir. (2023). Detik News. Diakses dari: https://www.detik.com

Fauziah, N. (2021). Kesantunan Berbahasa dalam Wacana Politik Indonesia. *Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra, 9*(2), 123–138.

Ganjar Pranowo. (2022). Media Center Jawa Tengah. Diakses dari: https://jatengprov.go.id

Ganjar Pranowo. (2023). Kompas TV. Diakses dari: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GanjarDebat

Gibran Rakabuming. (2023). Pidato Resmi. Diakses dari: https://www.solopos.com

Hanum, R., & Basri, T. (2020). Kontekstualisasi Adab dalam Ruang Publik Politik. *Jurnal Hukum dan Etika, 6*(2), 78–91.

Khofifah Indar Parawansa. (2021). Kompas.com. Diakses dari: https://www.kompas.com

Latif, H. (2020). Adab dan Peradaban dalam Komunikasi Islam. *Ulumul Qur'an, 31*(1), 70–89.

Leech, G. (2021). *Principles of Pragmatics Revisited*. Routledge.

Mahendra, D. (2024). Strategi Komunikasi Berbasis Etika Qur'ani di Kalangan Elite Politik Muslim. *Komunikasi Islam, 10*(1), 21–37.

Marzuki, A. (2020). Tafsir Kesantunan dalam Al-Qur'an: Telaah Linguistik Islam. *Jurnal Al-Bayan, 16*(2), 210–225.

MetroTV. (2020). Prabowo Subianto. Diakses dari: https://www.metrotvnews.com

Nugroho, R. (2022). Diskursus Politik Indonesia di Era Digital. *Komunika, 14*(1), 102–117.

Nurdin, M. (2023). Politik Etis dalam Perspektif Al-Qur'an. *Jurnal Dakwah Politik, 8*(1), 33–48.

Prabowo Subianto. (2020). MetroTV. Diakses dari: https://www.metrotvnews.com

Presiden RI. (2022). Sekretariat Kabinet. Diakses dari: https://setkab.go.id

Rahim, F., & Ibrahim, L. (2023). Cultural Pragmatics and Politeness in Muslim Societies. *Language & Religion, 4*(2), 151–170.

Ramadhan, H., & Fitriani, D. (2023). Integrating Islamic Values in Political Communication. *Indonesian Journal of Communication, 11*(1), 45–62.

Ridwan Kamil. (2023). Instagram Live. Diakses dari: https://www.instagram.com/ridwankamil

Rofiq, A. (2023). Relasi Bahasa, Kuasa, dan Agama dalam Komunikasi Politik. *Discourse & Power Journal, 5*(2), 60–75.

Saleh, N. (2022). Language, Religion, and Identity. *Linguistics and Society, 4*(3), 143–158.

Santoso, D. (2023). Analisis Pragmatik dalam Wacana Politik: Pendekatan Kontekstual terhadap Strategi Linguistik. *Jurnal Linguistik Forensik, 5*(1), 25–40

Sari, I., & Pratama, A. (2021). Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory in Political Speeches. *Journal of Pragmatic Discourse, 6*(1), 88–101.

Syihab, Q. (2020). *Wawasan Al-Qur'an*. Lentera Hati.

Wahid, A. (2021). Maqasid Al-Shariah dan Etika Komunikasi Politik. *Islamika, 20*(2), 55–73.

Yusof, N., & Kadir, N. A. (2022). Qur'anic Communication Ethics: A Framework. *Journal of Islamic Communication, 5*(3), 202–219.