

## Politeness Strategies: Open Letter to President Uhuru Kenyatta Prior to Sagana 3 Mt Kenya Consultative Meeting

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### ABSTRACT

Succinctly speaking, politics is an intricate affair that culminates in the likelihood of ugly scenarios popping out following the language that politicians employ. In line with the aforesaid, politicians attempt to employ assorted politeness strategies to exhibit decorum of some sort while addressing their seniors, more so when the addressee is at the apex of the purported leadership. The study intends to unravel the nature of politeness strategies that a section of Members of Parliament from Mount Kenya region relied on while reaching out to the president of Kenya Uhuru Kenyatta. To this end, the data was collected from an open letter to President Uhuru Kenyatta whose term of leadership was scheduled to end in 2022. The analysis on the data took into account the frequency of use on the said strategies namely, bald on record, off record, positive politeness and negative politeness; hence, anchoring the study on Politeness. The study sought to analyze the strategies used by the authors of the open letter and find out how the said authors navigated between the said strategies in line with FTAs bearing in mind that there was an asymmetric power relation and social distance between them. Results of qualitative and quantitative data analysis showed a significant difference in the manner authors of the said open letter navigated between the said strategies; thus, teasing out an implication in politeness research.

### 1. Introduction

An open letter to President Uhuru Kenyatta in the wake to the infamous Sagana 3 Consultative Meeting by a section of the segregated politicians from the region was by default having failed to receive invitation for a second time in a row. The meeting was a strategy by the president with his allies to whip Central Kenya population to back president's policy change in the Kenyan Constitution 2010, hitherto, Building Bridges Initiative BBI. Politicians who failed to receive invitation tweaked an open letter to the president and the people in the region, hoping to squeeze their political demands prior to the quickly approaching infamous political meeting. In essence, open letters are published in newspapers or magazines to particular people but intended for the general reader, usually in order to protest or give an opinion about something.

In view of the aforementioned, leaders from the region who appeared to go against president's political grain were not invited with earlier invitation during Sagana 2 muting their opportunity to speak, coupled with the president's inaccessibility to the said leaders (Sagana- state house lodge located in the hinterland of Mount Kenya region). That notwithstanding, an open letter pointing some pertinent issues regarding the region and the country was desired. Subsequently, according to the leaders, the meeting was taking place at a time when serious disquiet in the minds and the hearts of the residents of the Mount Kenya region was at its height. One crucial observation occasioned that the outcomes of previous engagements with regional leadership had not led to productive follow-up and implementation. The leaders opined that serious problems were still facing their people for they remained unresolved despite the investment of time and efforts in their deliberations.

As quoted by Eshghinejad et al (2016), (Ling & Pedersen, 2006); Communication through the media, particularly a cell phone, has developed its social, technical, and communicative functions in people's everyday lives. We depart from this observation and opine that, as a media of communication, open letters account for crucial aspects of people's lives such as, daily conversation, dissemination of information, and as such; use of open letters in this era has been precipitated by communication possibilities more so, when the addressee is inaccessible, as highlighted by the authors of the open letter under study. The open letters as a written form of communication are expected to confine themselves to written language standards. A letter of such cadre written in line with the prevailing situation may be seasoned with varied linguistics features depicting the disconnect between the said political players. It is worth noting that the language used in such letters need to be appropriate in style and tone. It is expected that communication between such varying leadership statuses need to satisfy their needs become paramount and as such, the main function on the choice of language sets in. In order to realize the intended response, different strategies should be seen to be polite, more importantly where face - threatening acts play out which is clearly an imposition to the addressee, in this case president of the republic of Kenya (Uhuru Kenyatta).

## 2. Literature Review

In his paper titled Political Language and Textual Vagueness, Gruber (1993) observed that, avoiding – face threatening acts against other politicians' face – saving activities are commonly viewed as basic aspects for all human interaction. While confining himself to peculiar situational factors in regard to speech genre in line with Brown and Levinson, he cited that, the concept of face had to be expounded to encompass the idea that every politician has public positive face (PPF) which claims the consistent image of himself as being a rational, trustworthy person whose political ideas and actions that squarely fit to the wants and demands of the general public than those of his opponents. He goes on to say that every politician undertakes a move to threaten his opponent's PPF to the maximum while at the same time maintaining his own PPF as much as possible. With such observations, he meant that politicians in their public dealings with one another will, on the other hand, observe the basic principles of courtesy of a particular culture (FTA avoidance concerning positive and negative face of the opponent) but simultaneously attempt to damage their opponent's PPF in front of a not directly present general public. He concludes his observation by saying that speaker strategies which end up being used in such situations eventually turn out to be off-record FTAs. Following the prevailing condition that was ostensibly unraveled in the earlier remarks by the authors of the open letter to President Uhuru Kenyatta, politicians' likelihood to use politeness strategies may have played out owing to the fact that the various topics that the addressee was put to task to highlight during the meeting were conspicuous. With this observation there is likelihood that, the open letter to the president was an affront against his leadership shortcomings; hence, possibilities of varying politeness strategies coming on the fore.

Johnston (2008) posits that politeness in its technical term refers to the ways in which speakers adapt (or fail to adapt) to the fact that their interlocutors actual or imagined, have social needs like their own. He goes on to say that that is the reason behind people being indirect, not saying precisely what they mean but implying it. To this end, it is expected that politeness strategies should be relied upon by authors of the said open letter to their addressee since politeness in this sense is much more pervasive and more necessary than the formal etiquette involved in making introductions correctly. Johnstone (*ibid*) quoted Lakoff (1973, 1974b), who pointed out that humans seem to operate under a set of very basic constraints in their behavior towards one another, in view of this, there is always a high expectation that interlocutors will act cooperatively in meaning – making, making their intentions as clear as possible. The authors of the letter needed to distinguish the nature of politeness strategies as well as having optimal knowledge regarding the contents in the letter, which in turn was to motivate them to tailor suitable strategies to fit the occasion and intention beforehand owing to the situation then, since audiences shape discourse. Since the social distance between the authors and the addressee was imminent, there was a prior need for the authors to analyze the contents in the open letter to give way to the audience to identify with their intention; hence, face saving acts.

Kariithi (2016) observed that in line with proponents of Politeness Theory, Brown and Levinson (1987), youth employ varying politeness strategies in their language while communicating depending on their audiences' status. According to his findings, politeness strategies are tailored in response to discourse topics, prevailing context and the nature of one's audience set up. Brown and Levinson sum up human politeness behavior in four strategies: bald on record, negative politeness, positive politeness, and off-record-indirect strategy. It is worth to note that the open letter to President Uhuru Kenyatta had several sub topics which may have ended up attracting varying different politeness strategies. In his study on Politeness a Critical Aspect in Bukusu Traditional Circumcision Songs; Kariithi (2020) observed that, Bukusu (a community in Kenya) have rich diction of politeness that is always exhibited in their circumcision songs which normally take place during circumcision periods. To this end, Kariithi (*ibid*) goes on to say that various politeness strategies during the occasion are meant to mitigate face threatening acts such as positive and negative politeness. Mitigating measures in this context are done in reference to the members of the community being targeted, bearing in mind that, there are always chances of a section of the audience face being threatened. In yet another study on Aspects of Impoliteness During 2007 and 2013 Presidential Campaigns in Kenya; Francis (2020), relied on Culpeper's (2011) Model of Impoliteness Formulae who postulated that impoliteness was a communicative strategy designed to

attack face to cause social conflict and disharmony. The open letter to President Uhuru Kenyatta was undeniably meant to politely cause discomfort of some sort when the president failed to tackle earlier political issues within Mount Kenya region. Accordingly, Francis (*ibid*), found out that under Culpeper's (2011) model, there were a number of impoliteness strategies that played out in the study such as, Insults, Pointed Criticism/Complaints, Message Enforcers, Dismissals and Silencers. Following the prevailing condition before The Sagana 3 meeting, authors of the said open letter were known to have engaged members allied to the president in a protracted political intercalation, the reason behind their being sidelined. Owing to such occurrence, there was a likelihood of impoliteness to find its way in the nature of language that was used in the open letter.

Yule (2003), observation on the face means the public self-image of a person exhibiting the emotional and social sense of self that everyone has and expects other persons to recognize. With this observation, he cites that politeness in interaction is defined as the means employed to show awareness of another person's face; accordingly, politeness is therefore accomplished in social distance or closeness situations. Reasons for writing an open letter as earlier observed showed that, authors of such letters might be motivated by a number of factors, but the most critical reason is because; accessibility of the addressee may have posed a challenge.

Yulindar (2017) happened to have undertaken a study with the sole reason to unravel Impoliteness Strategies used in the Daily Mail's comments targeting to describe types of impoliteness strategies found dominantly and the conversational form of impoliteness in Daily mail's comments. The steps employed were reading and understanding the comments below the article, writing the data of impoliteness found in the comments and coding. The study finally found out that not all impoliteness strategies were employed, in which case; bald on record impoliteness, positive impoliteness, negative impoliteness and off record impoliteness or sarcasm/mock impoliteness and pragmalinguistic of impoliteness strategies were expressed with some other forms, such as assessing figurative language, rhetorical question, telling the truth, giving advice, etc. the study in question interests this study in the sense that, a number of its observation can as well be said with open letters in that; such letters objectives may be to advice, telling the truth, sarcasm among others.

Eshghinejad, et al., (2016) did a study on Politeness Strategies used in Text Messaging: Pragmatic Competence in an Asymmetrical Power Relation of Teacher–Student where an attempt to analyze positive and negative politeness strategies in Iranian EFL learners' L1 and L2 text messaging with their professors at the University of Kashan, Iran was done. Based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, it was found out that, participants applied those politeness strategies which were appropriate to academic contexts. This study put emphasis on the relationship between gender and text messages with respect to using positive and negative politeness strategies. It is worth noting that the study had female participants whose finding showed that they preferred to use negative strategies more than male participants. The obtained results revealed that; there was no significant difference between gender and the use of politeness strategies. In other words, there was no significant difference in the use of positive and negative politeness strategies in males' and females' text messages. Hence, this research study refuted their hypothesis.

Wambugu (2018) analyzed the nature of politeness strategies used by teachers in school staffrooms in Kirinyaga County (Kenya) with an aim to determine strategies of politeness that teachers employed in their interactions and how sociological factors such as age, gender, power, rank and social distance influenced choice of politeness strategies they used. The study was both descriptive and qualitative in nature where sampling was done randomly with all teachers in the sampled schools being respondents. The findings were that teachers' positive politeness strategies included notice, attending to hearer, optimism and seeking agreement. Negative politeness strategies used were minimization of imposition, apology, and speaker and hearer's impersonalizing. The teachers also realized that bald-on-record and off-record strategies were also used. Social distance between the teachers and principals of the said schools was evident with positive politeness playing out in their interactions, with words such as 'sir' being frequent. Social distance between teachers themselves helped them to interact with each other freely. However, social distance between the speaker and hearer was varied among participants of the same gender, age, and rank among different schools. This study observed that politeness plays a critical role in the social interaction among teachers. The findings correctly predicted how politeness could be used in face-to-face conversations.

### 3. Methodology

Being a qualitative and quantitative study, it endeavoured to probe politeness strategies employed by the authors of the open letter to the president of Kenya Uhuru Kenyatta prior to Sagana 3 Consultative Meeting, which saw half of the members of parliament from Mount Kenya region failing to receive invitations with respect to the tenets of Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory. This research was guided by politeness strategies namely, bald on record, off record, positive politeness and negative politeness where various discourse features in the open letter were dissected. Since the letter had several sub-titles, the study confined itself to one specific sub-title by reading and re-reading and finally aligning the said discourses to their presumed politeness strategy. In order to have a rigor analysis, the study relied on a table where codification and interpretation was heavily used. Inferential statistics was employed to help the researcher find out how counts in relation to the strategies played out. To

this end, bar graph was utilized. According to Kastellec and Leoni (2007), graphs are superior at displaying confidence interval for parameter estimates and for making comparison across models. They opined that, scholars who integrate their advice are likely to better understand their data, which allows their empirical results to be well presented to the audience, thus improving their research's value and impact. In view of the above, this study interacted with a graph whose intention was to wrap up findings in line with individual politeness strategy as outlined below:

### **3.1 On record**

Here one can directly address the other express their needs. These direct address forms are technically described as being on record; hitherto, bald on record. The other person is directly asked for something:

- i. Give me a pen.
- ii. Lend me your pen

The bald on record forms may be followed by expressions like 'please' and 'would you' which serve to soften the demand and are called mitigating devices. It is tempting to equate the bald on record approach with all direct command forms (i.e imperatives). This would be misleading because close familiars often use imperative forms without being interpreted as commands. Example would be a friend offering something to eat, as in (i) or trying to help you as in (ii).

- i. Have some more cake.
- ii. *Gimme* that wet umbrella.

Emergency occasions also occasion the use of direct commands, regardless of who is being addressed, as when danger prompts use of expressions such as:

- i. Don't touch that!
- ii. Get out of here!

Consequently, some social circumstances where using a direct command as a bald on record expression are considered appropriate among social equals.

However, generally speaking, bald on record expressions are associated with speech events where the speaker assumes that he or she has power over the other (for example, in a military context) and can control the other's behavior with words. In everyday interaction between social equals, such bald on record behavior would potentially represent a threat to the other's face and would generally be avoided. Avoiding a face-threatening act is accomplished by face saving acts that use positive or negative politeness strategies.

### **3.2 Off record**

Here one may say something, but he or she doesn't actually have to ask for anything. One can (perhaps after he or she search through their bag) simply produce a statement of the type in (i) or (ii).

- i. Uh, I forgot my pen.
- ii. Hmm, I wonder where I put my pen.

These and other similar types of statement are not directly addressed to other. The other can act as if the statements have not even been heard. These are technically described as being off record. In casual terms they may be referred to as 'hints'. Off record statements may or may not succeed (as a means of getting a pen), but if it does, it will be because more has been communicated than was said.

### **3.3 Positive politeness**

A positive politeness strategy leads the requester to appeal to a common goal, and even friendship, via expressions such as:

- i. How about letting me use your pen?
- ii. Hey buddy, I'd appreciate it if you'd let me use your pen.

These on record expressions do represent a greater risk for the speaker of suffering a refusal and may be preceded by some 'getting to know you' talk of the kind presented below, which is designed to establish the necessary common ground for this strategy.

- i. Hi. How's is going? Okay if I sit here? We must be interested in the same crazy stuff. You take a lot of notes too, huh? Say, do me a big favor and let me use one of your pens.

### 3.4 Negative politeness

In most English-speaking contexts, face saving act is more commonly performed via a negative politeness strategy. The most typical form used is a question containing a modal verb such as:

- i. Could you lend me a pen?
- ii. I'm sorry to bother you, but can I ask you for a pen or something?
- iii. I know you're busy, but might I ask you if – em – if you happen to have an extra pen that I could, you know – eh – maybe borrow?

The strategy also results in forms that contain expressions of apology for the imposition of the type shown in (ii). More elaborate negative politeness work can be sometimes be heard in extended talk, often with hesitations, similar to that shown in (iii). It is worth noting that negative politeness is typically expressed via questions, even questions that seem to ask for permission to ask question (for example, 'Might I ask...?') as in (iii).

Adopted from Yule (2003:63-65)

Politeness Strategies Counts:

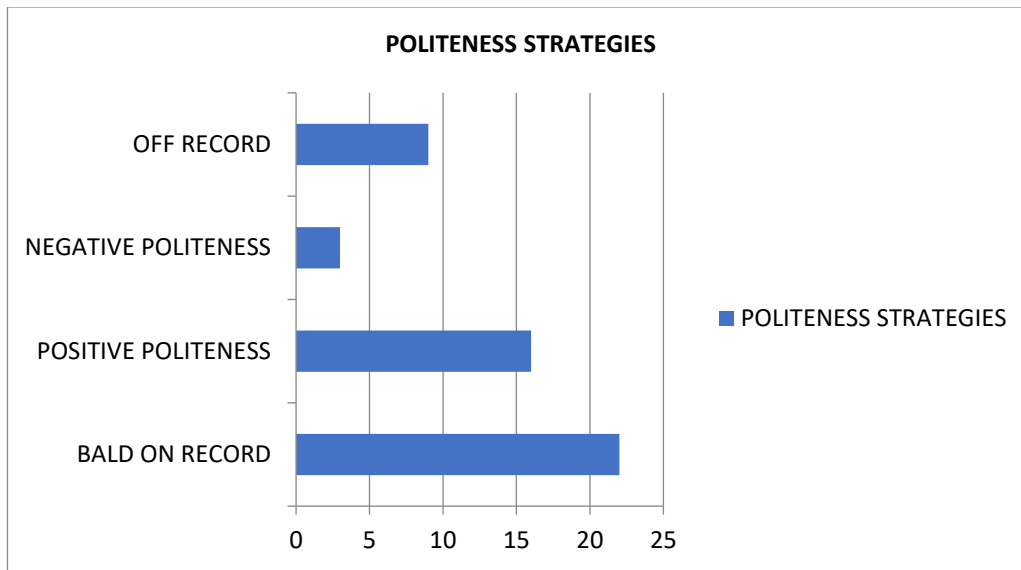
STRATEGY	FREQUENCY
BALD ON RECORD	22
OFF RECORD	09
POSITIVE POLITENESS	16
NEGATIVE POLITENESS	03

The study adopted purposive sampling which happens to be a non- probability sampling. This design was used since researcher's focuses on its in-depth information (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999). Subsequently, it allows the researcher to use cases that can adequately satisfy the required information with respect to the objective of the study at hand. Since the data's target was an open letter to President Uhuru Kenyatta, the researcher had to be thorough and focused on picking discourse that could clearly be aligned to the said politeness strategies. After aligning these strategies to their rightful categories, frequency was considered with bald on record having 22 counts, positive politeness 16, off the record 09 and negative politeness 03. Strategies under Bald on Record were Great urgency or Desperation 3, speaking as if great efficiency is necessary in attention-getter 11, Sympathetic advice or Warning 7, Positive Politeness counts were Exaggerating interest, approval, and sympathy with the hearer 7, Intensifying to the hearer, making good story, draw hearer as a participant into the conversation 3, Using in-group identity markers 3, Avoiding disagreement 3, Seeking agreement 2 and Claiming common ground 1, Off Record counts were Giving association clues 5, Presupposing a prior event 4, Use Tautologies 2, Being ambiguous 2, use metaphors 2, Being ironic 1 and Overstating 1 and Negative politeness counts were Stating the FTA as a general rule 1, Giving Difference 1 and Be direct 1.

### 4. Findings and Discussion

As the analysis demonstrates, politeness strategies characterized in the theoretical part lays bare how these strategies played out in the open letter. It is worth observing that the open letter was political in nature. It was not only targeting the president with his allies, but also targeted Mount Kenya people (dominantly Kikuyu speakers). The letter outlined salient issues that came out in the form of sub-topics touching on the region and Kenya as a country at large. The authors of the letter were simply speaking to the president they as saw being the impediment towards attaining their political desires and aspirations. In a nutshell, the open letter was simply a pinnacle of Mount Kenya politics at its best.

Being a political letter, it was politically tailored to assume the role of a messenger for political *persona non grata* whose invitations to the much-hyped Sagana 3 Consultative Meeting was a mirage. The graph below gives an in-depth of how politeness strategies played out.



Researcher's graph 2021

The open letter was addressed to the President Uhuru Kenyatta, but politically another elaborate audience was also being targeted, Mount Kenya electorate. Salutation is one of the features that, needless to state relied on politeness strategy bearing in mind that this was an initial stage of the letter. They postulated to having welcomed the convening of the Sagana 3 consultative meeting although some of them who had unfailingly supported him had been denied invitation. The discourse that featured here was hinged on positive politeness if some of occurring linguistics features is dissected.

#### 4.1 Data 1: Positive Politeness

It is imperative to observe that, positive politeness strategies boost the positive face wants of the interlocutor, where in such situations by attending to the hearer, stressing reciprocity, displaying a common point of observation and showing optimism. The statement, *"...unfailingly supported you to the last person. We commend you very highly for this effort"*. This was a deliberate attempt to minimize attack on the face of the hearer, in this case, the recipient of the letter who from the periphery of the discourse that was playing out was Uhuru Kenyatta. Quoted by Natalia (2017), Holtgraves (2002) observes that positive politeness is an approach-based strategy where awareness of the hearer's needs that includes such aspects as compliments and friendly forms of address play out. *"...unfailingly supported you"* falls under the category of, Using in-group identity markers; here, the authors attempted to underscore that they belong to the same person and they share the same political aspirations. The phrase *'We commend you very highly'* was an exhibition of what this paper terms as a soft lie and falls under the category of Exaggerating interest, approval, and sympathy with the hearer.

During their earlier meeting prior to the Sagan 2, (an earlier one preceding the one that precipitated the writing of the open letter), these leaders were not allowed to speak, and in their open letter culminating to Sagana 3 they were both historically and politically correct to remind President Uhuru Kenyatta why they felt let down by the same leadership that they partook in its creation. In the opening stages of this letter, these leaders attempted to employ positive politeness strategy in the following phrase, *"...denied an opportunity to speak at the last meeting"* is well tucked in the open letter where these leaders were simply trying to avoid disagreement by stating false agreement which in a real sense this was a form of a white lie, it is well to state that, those who ostensibly denied them a chance to speak were decoys of the president. The strategy falls under the category of avoiding disagreement.

In drawing the attention of the president they agreed with him, reminding him of his awareness of serious disquiet in the minds and hearts of the residents of the Mt Kenya region. The president was cognizant that the outcomes of an earlier engagement with the regional leadership had not led to productive follow-up and implementation. Due to that, serious problems that were facing their people remained unresolved despite the investment of time and effort into deliberations. *'... you must be aware that this meeting takes place at a time of serious disquiet...'* It is undoubtedly a phrase with a deliberate agenda; to avoid any disagreement with the president. These leaders also attempted to seek agreement with the president by tactfully exonerating the president from the underperformance of the regional leadership for not living to their promises to the leadership, *'...regional leadership has not led to productive follow-up and implementation'*. The authors of the letter also owned up the mess that Uhuru Kenyatta leadership had dragged the region into.

Under sub-topic on Politics of Deceit and Betrayal, authors of the letter appeared to have been irked by then, the conduct and practice of politics which had left them disappointed and outraged. They reminded the president that their people were honorable, whose lives and livelihoods were based on honesty and trust. They underpinned that many were devoted Christians. And as entrepreneurs and business people, their people's lives depended on trust and honesty. Subsequently, they said that the new political agenda which had been propounded by a faction publicly allied to him (president), which was seeking to normalize treachery, dishonesty, deceit and betrayal as defining traits of their region and people was tragic, dangerous and unacceptable. They were of the opinion that, they were honorable people, and they wanted it to be known always, in word and deed that, they stood for honor, honesty, integrity and trust in all of their dealings. Here, politeness strategy played out and by using in-group identity markers; the authors were categorical that him (Uhuru Kenyatta) and the entire Mount Kenya people thrived in all areas for clinging on truth and as such, that was reflective politically. In essence, **'...our people are honourable'** was an attempt to underscore that they belong to the same person and they share same political aspirations.

At one point the president was on record to demeaning those underrating him as an astute leader referring to himself as a lion. This was a political metaphor employed by the president to allude that he was roaring and roaring his political business. Although that was political sarcasm, the authors were simply claiming common ground in that; he was made a lion by members of their community and Kenya at large. As a way to fomenting his observation, they referred to him as a courageous defender of their nation's territory and of its people's lives, property, freedoms and rights. This teases out application of Positive Politeness under claiming common ground category. Another politeness strategy that found it way here was Off Record with categories of overstating, being ironic and use of metaphors coming in the fore. **'...roar the economy back into life, and take it to Kibaki-era levels of growth'** was a form of positive politeness with the authors exaggerating interests, approval and sympathy with the hearer. **'... you will set your powerful claws to catch the Covid-19, NYS and Ruaraka land scandal billionaires...'** was also falling squarely under the aforesaid politeness category – use of metaphor. **'We want you to roar until you redeem a proud legacy growth'**. Here the authors of the letter were simply stressing their observation in line with the said category of positive politeness strategy.

#### 4.2 Data 2: Bald on Record

This was the most used politeness strategy that the authors of the letter relied on. Bearing in mind that the letter in essence, was a remote act of intercalation with the president, these authors intended to send a strong message to the head of state over his suspect leadership flanked by his insincere political friends. Bald-on-record strategy is speaking without spurious, i.e. speaking the truth or being sincere. Here a speaker should avoid ambiguity or obscurity and remain relevant. Going on-record provides pressure towards directness and forthrightness. Because the letter was intended for president and public readership, the authors must have seen the need to be candid; politically speaking – political candidness.

Historically, under Development Agenda, the authors of the said letter compared the two leaders juxtapose and took the head of state head on by observing that during retired president Mwai Kibaki tenure, there was robust economic growth in that, Kenyans had money in their pockets and that economic activities were a reality. They reminded the head of state that all that was being experienced despite serious changes that the country went through, including post-elections violence culminating from 2007 presidential election. Here, the authors spoke through their letter as if great efficiency was necessary in attention-getting. In line with Brown and Levinson (1987) theoretical framework, the authors were speaking as if maximum efficiency were extremely critical. All they provided here was metaphorical urgency for emphasis. In a nutshell, by comparing the two, they were simply telling; look, here you are a failure; you cannot march your predecessor. Statement, **'...economically speaking, Mt. Kenya is limping and groaning. People are crying bitter tears'** historically; to them this was in reference to undoing of Uhuru Kenyatta's administration. This category under bald and record was simply in line with Great Urgency or Desperation, Brown and Levinson (1987). This strategy is applied when the speaker is in need of attention very soon especially before anything else, because of its importance. The authors were only reminding the head of state to shelve Building Bridges Initiative (BBI), which precipitated Sagana 3 Consultative Meeting. **'This personal and communal suffering is a direct result of the policies of Your Excellency's administration,'** this is one of the statements that the authors categorically attributed the crumbling of their personal and community economic strength due to his policies which were suffocating economic growth in the country and subsequently saw businesses closing since besieged traders were relocating to the rural areas to dress their economical wounds.

Under this strategy there is also another category which, according to Brown and Levinson (1987:98) as cited by Natalia (2018), states that in doing the FTA, the speaker conveys that they do care about the recipient, thus putting aside any redress strategies. Here sympathetic advice or warning becomes the option, hitherto, being bald on record. Uhuru Kenyatta was being warned that his policies were inherently annihilating the larger community from where he (Uhuru Kenyatta) hailed. **'Another policy of Your Excellency's administration that has caused profound anguish and destitution was the aggressive demolition of structures housing families and businesses of many people'**. The president was being referred to as someone who lacked an

iota of humanity since even with these kinds of destructions, he never came out to censor that unprecedented turn of event on the people whose effort to have him as president resulted in them being abused economically. Historically, the president and his political brigade in the Jubilee Alliance had mooted a strategy that was to spur economic growth under the Big Four agenda platform. According to the authors of the letter, they acted as the political conduit in debriefing the president concerning that behavior. In the letter they observed that, **'Big Four agenda was abandoned in favor of the Small Two Agenda of the Handshake and BBI, (Jeshi ti ngenu,** a Kikuyu statement meaning, your adherents are unhappy). They reminded him during his tenure their people (Kikuyu community) were leaving the city in droves. By inserting a code switched phrase ' *jeshi ti ngenu*' (meaning his soldiers-adherents were unhappy) Kikuyu dialect or local terminology as in- group code, the authors were simply candid that, members of his community had nothing to celebrate even with him being the president. Brown and Levinson (1987) assert that when a speaker uses in- group codes, they assume that the hearer understands and shares the associations of that code, creating common ground between the participants. In conclusion, they told him that it was shocking to note that businesses that had survived the hardest of times in their country's history were then closing shop under his administration.

While addressing sub-title on Politics of Deceit the authors relied on bald on record strategies and employed category three of the strategy by tactfully offering sympathetic advice or warnings that they did not mind about the hearer and as such, there was no redress that was desired. They reminded him that, **'The new political agenda propounded by a faction publicly allied to you, which seeks to normalize treachery, dishonesty, deceit and betrayal as defining traits of our region and people is tragic, dangerous and unacceptable.'** That is, as a community they were not ready to be christened another name, under political liars' narrative which had started shaping up; having averred to back William Ruto's presidential bid after his tenure.

According to the letter, historically; Uhuru Kenyatta was on record several times, having thrown unprintable political aspersions against Raila Odinga for approximately eight years as his political nemesis. The letter reminded him how he consistently and persistently cautioned them against him attributing Raila to all Kenya's foremost problems and pleaded with Mt Kenya community to send him home if the country was to move forward. The letter was emphatic and took Raila Odinga's history as one politician who used violence and ethnic divisions to achieve political power. Following that observation, a section of the letter candidly paints a bald on record strategy employed by the authors thus, **'... we must be direct and truthful with you: We cannot sell Raila Odinga in our region or, indeed, any other imposed presidential candidate'.** These politicians were not mincing their words over what they had for the audience (mostly Uhuru Kenyatta) and as such according to Brown and Levinson (1987), in doing the FTA, the speaker conveys that he or she doesn't care about the hearer, and as such about the hearer's positive face, no redress is desired. This was a sympathetic advice or a warning, hence being bald on record. The authors wanted to warn Uhuru Kenyatta to be careful because to them, Raila was still that dangerous man he had warned them against. They castigated him for his continued blame on the leaders and people for showing reluctance to accepting the Handshake and the BBI. They reminded him that the resolve he made to persuade the people and render Raila Odinga unacceptable in Mt. Kenya region could not be undone during his lifetime.

Under the presidential succession factor, the authors appeared dismayed by Uhuru Kenyatta unprecedented presidential succession narrative, where he observed that time was ripe for other communities to take up the country's mantle of leadership. The authors of the letter observed that they watched in disbelief as he declared that inclusivity was to be achieved by barring two communities (Kikuyu and Kalenjin) from fielding presidential aspirants since previous leaders, including him then, had hailed from those communities.

They believed that Kenya offered an equal-opportunity to all and that; any person had a possibility to rise to the pinnacle of their ambition lawfully through hard work. They could not buy into his insinuations that Kikuyus could not aspire for the Presidency, because others had had a stab at the Presidency. The statement, **'...it is unfortunate, insulting and selfish. We call on you to use this meeting to reflect and withdraw these unfortunate and ill-considered utterances'** was an act of resentment against his action; hence being bald on record by speaking as if great efficiency was necessary in attention getting, thus recanting his observation. According to Brown and Levinson (1987) the authors were speaking as if maximum efficiency was very important, this was an apt metaphorical urgency in emphasizing their observation. They wanted to get the attention of the head of state that in this case was the target, the phrase, **it is unfortunate, insulting and selfish was undoubtedly** used by the authors of the letter to direct the president who in this case was the recipient to see his statement from a different political angle. Historically, Uhuru was quoted one time during 2007 general election where he was dismissing his community political opponents, so to speak, when they were of a similar opinion; Kariithi (2015), quoting Daily Nation on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2007, **'Kenya is not anyone's firm and the Presidency is not a clan affair. It is Kenyans to decide'**. Accordingly, if Uhuru Kenyatta's infuriation over his community ascension to presidency was not in tandem with his community political standpoint then, was it warranted when he made his suspect remarks in seemingly a polite effort to rescind on his promise to support William Ruto for the presidency in 2022 Kenya's presidential elections.



### 4.3 Data 3: Off Record

Gruber (1993) in his paper outlined earlier, highlights Concepts of vagueness and political communication where he says that, politicians in the media lack direct contact to their audience so is who exactly their audience at a special speech event may be (i.e. who watches a certain political speech, debate etc.). Thus, they can only minimally rely on situational cues, which might help the audience to unravel indirect meanings. Following this observation, being vague and providing as many people as possible with interpretative cues for one's communicative acts which fit into their world view as well as in one's own political program is a highly complex and demanding task for a politician which he can only solve by using form and content of his communicative acts in relation to a diffuse speech-situation. This scholar was undeniably underpinning one critical aspect; politeness as a strategy in some instances of political discourse.

To this end, the authors of the said letter were historically dismayed by President Uhuru Kenyatta earlier sentiments where he rubbished those politicians opposed to his policies claiming that he was charting his own political path since no one assisted him to convince members of the public in electing him both during 2013 and 2017 elections; with 2017 presidential election having been invalidated by The Supreme Court of Kenya culminating to a repeat. ***'We have also noted your sentiments, Your Excellency, that neither the leaders nor the residents of the Mt. Kenya region contributed to your electoral victories in 2013 and 2017'***. The authors were painting Uhuru Kenyatta as an insensitive politician who was not grateful for the support he was accorded these politicians when they themselves were not subjected to a repeat of the same. The authors were simply bringing to the fore political historical cues which were intended to fit well into President Uhuru Kenyatta occurrence, with the other audience getting a chance to unravel the presupposed meaning. The category of politeness strategy that fitted in the above statement was off record, where the authors were forcing the hearer to search for the relevance of a prior event. Since the open letter was also meant for the larger society, presupposing prior event was a strategy to disparage Uhuru Kenyatta and make him appear like a political liar.

Another political item that featured in President Uhuru Kenyatta's open letter had to do with Political Persecution of Leaders from the region who appeared to be pulling in different directions; subsequently, the authors of the said letter reminded the president that major factor in the disquiet in the Mt. Kenya region was a culmination of harassment and humiliation of political leaders who were on record to disagree with him where State agencies, including the Directorate of Criminal Investigations (DCI), Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC), Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) and Asset Recovery Agency trolled them. The letter was a political tirade since these authors reminded him that, with tailored intimidation failing to tame them they were removed from parliamentary leadership positions and committees with their positions being given to ODM (Orange Democratic Movement – a political party owned by Raila Odinga; a Kenyan opposition leader).

The authors imported a historical political observation, equating what they were experiencing with what Kenya's colonial masters did to their Mt Kenya kin when they were under their British colonial whims. The letter reminded him that people from the region were not new to abuses of State power. The author's statement, ***'The British colonialists brutalized the region by forceful seizure of land and property, detention and torture, assassination and terror through aircraft bombers, machine guns, rifles, grenades. They were not intimidated. Proudly, they took to the Aberdare and Mt Kenya forests armed with nothing more than pangas and a strong conviction, and prevailed. We are a proud, freedom-loving and freedom-winning people. Also, our people resisted the tyranny of the Nyayo regime'***, was highly political coded statement that in a nutshell meant to tell Uhuru Kenyatta to his face that, his political machination was to leave them stronger and steadfast to their resolve.

The statement outlined above fitted well in off record politeness strategy in giving association clues in which, the writers were giving Uhuru Kenyatta a related kind of implication triggered by relevance violation that is provided by mentioning something associated with the act of the hearer, either by precedent in the speaker-hearer's experience or by mutual knowledge irrespective of their interactional experience. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), off record is a communicative act that contains more than one particular intention but contains more; thus, the statement contained more than a single intention with the hearer being made to interpret the text. This was an indirect communication which unequivocally painted Uhuru Kenyatta as such. The authors reminded the head of state that people from Mt Kenya region could not buy fear, and that they were known to resist intimidation naturally and that they believed in the power of persuasion, discussion, consultation and consensus as opposed to coercion and intimidation.

### 4.4 Data 4: Negative Politeness

These types of politeness are geared towards satisfying the hearer's negative face, that is, his or her need for freedom from imposition (van Dijk 1997). Subsequently, he posits that these strategies are always realized by asking about (rather than assuming) cooperation: by giving the hearer the options not to do the act, by adopting a pessimistic attitude and various kinds of hedging. To this end, the open letter to the president Uhuru Kenyatta presented obvious linguistics features of negative politeness where the authors intended to employ need for freedom from being seen to be imposing on the head of state.

Accordingly, it is worth noting that, van Dijk (*ibid*) cites that the degree of politeness (face saving) will be encoded in any linguistics act depends on the 'weightiness' of the face loss involved.

This strategy was thinly used bearing in mind that there was a protracted political intercalation between a section of the Mount Kenya law makers and the president. In the open letter, the politicians did put the president to task to try and peruse newspapers and see for himself advertisements posted by auctioneers for unpaid pending bills by his administration for years. The properties of his kin men were to be auctioned. The statement, **'...even after your repeated verbal interventions... We are concerned that neither your directive on that occasion nor subsequent orders have gone utterly unheeded'**. Here, the authors of the letter were making an indirect appeal to the president by not attacking him directly but by making members of his cabinet become beasts of political burden. Here, they wanted to pass their message through the FTA and redress the president's face. There is some form of hedging in the preceding statement which was ironical to the president himself; **'...our worry is that your Cabinet does not heed your directives or worse: That all along, you were engaging in public relations with no intention to keep your word'**. The authors were pessimistic about the president earlier position regarding his directive. They appeared not to coerce the head of state in that they were not trying to persuade him to act on his earlier promise. If the statement by the authors may be decoded differently, it may be taken to mean that, the addressee did not want to act on what he had directed his Cabinet; in short, they insinuated disguisedly that the president was a political liar dramatizing in order to delay acting on his political mandate. At one point, the authors of the letter reminded him that other meetings held thereafter never made reference to the issues raised or even to the memoranda themselves.

The authors of the letter also took a political swipe at the president when they brought to his attention on how he was not astutely advised by his closes allies, going further to questioning the level of his personnel intelligence. They were sceptical that, unlike during retired president Kibaki's tenure, his was not involving political advisors resonating with the political situation on the ground. The statement, **'...fact that you are not receiving reliable briefing on the actual situation on the ground'**, was meant to demean his political advisors overtly since they were failing to furnish him on real political situation on the ground with clarity and honesty. Under the negative politeness strategy, the said authors employed giving difference which precisely appears to be humbling in an effort that was striving to fulfill the addressee's want of respect. Indeed, the form of address here regarded the seniority bestowed on the president.

## 5. Conclusion

Based upon the politeness theory, the paper attempted to investigate politeness strategies employed by the authors of the open letter to President Uhuru Kenyatta in the wake of the Sagana 3 Consultative Meeting where Uhuru Kenyatta was the chief guest. The meeting culminated in a protracted political intercalation between two distinct sections of Mount Kenya law makers; between pro and anti-president's political stand points. With the letter being addressed to the head of state, politeness linguistics features came to the fore, with face-threatening acts (FTAs) playing out at some point. The study identified and discussed linguistics politeness features in the infamous letter. The study established that all politeness strategies were used; namely bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness and off record. The findings from this sample were subjected to numerical counts where a graph was used to enhance understandability on the manner of how these politeness strategies featured in the open letter. Based on the theory, it was found out that bald on record and politeness strategies were most frequent in the said letter.

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