Politeness Strategies Used by Teenage Characters in *Stranger Things* Movie Series: A Pragmatics Study

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify any kinds of politeness strategies used by teenagers in Stranger Things movie and also to describe the factors influencing the teenage characters' choice of politeness strategies in Stranger Things movie. The writer uses a descriptive qualitative method to explain the data and follows the theory of Brown and Levinson (1987) to answer the statement of the problem. This study found 38 data in total consisting of 6 bald on record, 25 positive politeness, 4 negative politeness, and 3 off-record. Other than that, there are also 22 data that are influenced by social distance, 4 data that are influenced by relative power, and 12 data that are influenced by rank of imposition. The result of this study shows that teenage characters tend to use positive politeness strategies when they communicate with other people. Moreover, social distance is the most the factor that influences teenage characters to use politeness strategies. It can be concluded that the typical teenagers in Stranger Things movie are easy to get along with because they try to make themselves close with the interlocutor when they have a conversation, and they know how to socialize well by understanding and appreciating people's opinions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The daily activity that people often do is socialize by communicating with others. When communicating, the messages are not always successfully received, but sometimes it gets miscommunication. The miscommunication probably occurs because the speaker and the listener are not having the same thoughts, and the messages are not received well by the listener. Besides, this miscommunication can cause conflict by misinterpreting the words. Therefore, pragmatics can be used to know the context first, so it will be easy to understand the reason why miscommunication happens. Pragmatics is the study of the relationship between language and context. Yule (2010) defines pragmatics as a study of invisible meaning (p.128). The invisible meaning surely can be interpreted by the listener either it brings a good result or even bad. The result comes from the speaker's behavior and it can be seen by how the speaker talks. The way the speaker talks would show how polite or impolite the speaker is. The more polite the utterances, the more messages are received well. At this time, politeness can be used since politeness is an act to deliver the words politely. Politeness is the way people carefully to say anything in order to protect people's feelings. Brown (2015) states "Politeness is essentially a matter of taking into account the feelings of others as to how they should be interactionally treated, including behaving in a manner that demonstrates appropriate concern for interactors' social status and their social relationship." (p. 326). Moreover, the use of politeness in conversation is to create a comfortable discussion between the speaker and the listener. In addition, in using politeness, there is a strategy called politeness strategies. Politeness strategy is a strategy to be polite when delivering a message. Moreover, the politeness strategy is used to create a concord.

Watts (2003) clarifies "The avoidance of conflict is represented as a conscious effort on the part of the person being polite since it is 'strategic'." (p. 50). The person who is polite when uttering the message can avoid a conflict because they use the strategy to make themselves and the interlocutor create good interaction.

Good interaction usually appears in the movie that comes from the good characters, those good characters can be an example of how people communicate politely. Therefore, movie is chosen as the object of this study because by the movie, people usually learn so many things, and learning from the movie probably makes people interested because a movie is not only entertaining but also for learning. The reason is in line with Sentana et al. (2022) state movie can be as a learning media (p. 91). Moreover, in the pragmatics study, movies can be chosen as the object of the study because it contains many conversations that can be analyzed. Netflix movie series entitled *Stranger Things* as the object of this study because *Stranger Things* is a movie that presents life in the 1980s which brings nostalgia for how people usually communicate at that time. This movie is able to make people nostalgic because it shows how things were done in the 1980s era. Landrum (2017) defines *Stranger Things* brings as nostalgia for the 1980s by providing old things such as analog technology, and it differs from the 21st century where it is already in digital era (p. 138). Although the 1980s has technology to communicate, teenagers in this movie rarely use it. They choose to meet to communicate directly and work together rather than talk on the phone. Therefore, the way teenagers communicate to other people, it can be observed either they use the most politeness or the least politeness.

Thus, this study aims to observe teenagers' utterances in the *Stranger Things* movie to know whether they use politeness or not when communicating with other people. If those teenagers use politeness in the conversation, the writers want to observe which type they mostly use and what influencing factors they use the politeness strategy. Moreover, this study follows the theory of Brown and Levinson (1987).

1.1 Pragmatics

Conversation surely contains many utterances when people communicate with others. Every utterance spoken depends on the context itself. These utterances can be analyzed in pragmatics study because pragmatics is one of the branches of linguistics that learns about utterance meaning. Griffiths (2006, p. 6) states "Pragmatics is the study of utterance meaning". Therefore, pragmatics can be used as a tool to analyze any utterances. Further, Levinson (1983) states "the study of pragmatics focuses on the relations between language and context that are grammaticalized or encoded in a language's structure" (p. 9). It means pragmatics contains the relationship between language and context that structured in grammar.

1.2 Politeness

Politeness is used to create harmony in social life. In general, being polite entails promoting social harmony and preventing social strife (Holmes, 2013, p. 285). Using politeness can avoid the offensive and keep people's feelings. Other than that, in the concept of Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, there are two self-images namely positive face and negative face. A positive face is the want of every member to be appreciated and liked. Positive face is the want of every member that his wants to be desirable to at least some others (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 62). Whereas a negative face is the want of every member to be respected, not to be bothered. A negative face is the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 62). In addition, when people interact, it has the potential to threat the face. People have an obligation to keep their face because any words that have been delivered by the speaker have the potential to threaten others' face. This threat is called as Face Threatening Act (FTA) in Brown and Levinson (1987) theory. FTA is an act to make people feel embarrassed. Ocampo (2022) states "People who can keep their stature amidst their faces being challenged can conceal the tendency to become shamefaced in any heated encounters." (p. 57). Thus, to keep face and minimize the FTA, it needs the strategies which is politeness strategy.

1.3 Politeness Strategies

Politeness strategy is a strategy used to avoid and reduce the destruction of self-image that comes from face-threatening acts conducted by the speaker. Politeness strategy concerns saving the hearer's face and making it less threatening (Brown and Levinson, 1987, p. 68). It means politeness strategies are used to avoid and minimize the FTA in communication. Brown and Levinson (1987) define there are four highest-level strategies: Bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record (p. 92).

a. Bald On Record

In the bald-on-record strategy, a speaker does not do anything to minimize a threat toward the addressee. This situation occurs when the speaker speaks directly and clearly. As stated in Brown and Levinson (1987):
"The prime reason for bald on-record usage may be stated simply: in general, whenever speaker wants to do the FTA with maximum efficiency more than he wants to satisfy hearer's face, even to any degree, he will choose the bald on-record strategy" (p. 95).

It can be concluded that in using this strategy, the want of the speaker to maximize the efficiency of the speech act in any conditions is bigger than the want of the speaker to respect the self-image of an addressee. Furthermore, there are two sub-strategies in bald on record strategy, the first is cases of non-minimization of the face threat, and the second is cases of FTA-oriented bald-on-record usage.

b. Positive Politeness

In a positive politeness strategy, the speaker gives a positive self-image to the addressee. Brown and Levinson (1987) explain positive politeness occurs in a group or an environment in which the participants have a purpose, desire, or the same background of knowledge (p.70). This strategy appears because the speaker wants to show a good impression towards the addressee, it indicates the speaker wants to strengthen the social relation with the addressee through the desire and the same view between the speaker and the addressee. In Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, positive politeness consists of 15 strategies, those are: Notice, attend to the hearer (his interest, wants, needs, goods), Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with hearer), Intensify interest to H's, Use in-group identity markers, Seek agreement, Avoid disagreement, Presuppose/raise/assert common ground, Joke, Assert or presuppose S' knowledge of and concern for H's wants, Offer, promise, Be optimistic, Include both S and H in the activity, Give (or ask for) reasons, and Give gifts to hearer (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation).

c. Negative Politeness

In negative politeness, it gives attention to the negative face and it has a space between the speaker and the interlocutor. Brown and Levinson (1987) explain "Negative politeness is redressive action addressed to the addressee's negative face: his want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded" (p.129). It shows that negative politeness is an action of preventing or minimizing the threat towards the addressee's negative face when the speaker wants something from the addressee, the freedom and the desire of an addressee will be burdened and disturbed. In negative politeness, Brown and Levinson (1987) classify ten strategies, those are: Be conventionally indirect, Question and hedge, Be pessimistic, Minimize the imposition, Give deference, Apologize, Impersonalize S and H, State the FTA as a general rule, Nominalize, and Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H.

d. Off Record

This strategy is the politest that can people do because it uses an indirect utterance to express something to the interlocutor. Brown and Levinson (1987) explain that off-record strategy is a strategy to do the FTA indirectly and let the addressee decide how to interpret the speaker's utterance (p. 211). The use of FTA is done off-record if need several ways to understand the meaning of communication. In Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, there are fifteen strategies of off-record strategy, those are: Give hints, Give association clues, Presuppose, Understate, Overstate, Use tautologies, Use contradictions, Be ironic, Use metaphors, Use rhetorical questions, Be ambiguous, Be vague, Over-generalize, Displace H, and Be incomplete, use ellipsis.

1.4 Factors Influencing the Choice of Politeness Strategies

People have a factor that affects them when they use politeness strategies. One of the factors that influence politeness strategies is sociological variables, sociological variables involve the distance between the speaker and the interlocutor, power, and rank. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), sociological variables consist of Social Distance, Relative Power, and Rank of Imposition (p. 74). Social distance is the relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor whether it is close or distant, power is who has the power in the conversation, and rank of imposition is the rank of threat such as requesting something or asking for doing something related to the situation.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study used the descriptive qualitative method from Creswell (2014). Creswell (2014) states "qualitative study are to develop descriptions and themes from the data, to present these descriptions and themes that convey multiple perspectives from participants and detailed descriptions of the setting or individuals" (p. 254). Qualitative method is used to analyze the data which describes in detail. Moreover, the data of this study was taken from the Netflix movie series entitled *Stranger Things*. This movie consists of 4 seasons but the writers only took season 4 because season 4 was just released on May 27, 2022, and this movie consists of 9 episodes, but the writers took 1 to 3 episodes to find the data. Moreover, the writers took the data focusing on 7 teenage characters in this study, which are El, Mike, Dustin, Will, Max, Lucas, and Angela in the *Stranger Things* movie related to politeness strategies. In collecting data, the writers first watching the movie and focused on the conversation, then transcribing each utterance of the teenage characters, then identifying the teenagers' utterances that contained politeness strategies in every conversation, and the last is classifying the data of the teenage utterances which contain politeness strategies. The writers followed the theory from Brown and Levinson (1987) to find the data.

3.   DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This section discusses the result of data that have been found in order to answer the statement of the problem. The data taken from *Stranger Things* movie season 4 episodes 1 to 3 will be explained in this section. The result data are presented in the table as follows:

Table 1. of frequency data that are found in *Stranger Things* movie season 4 from episodes 1 – 3

	Types	Strategies	Influencing Factors			Frequency
			Social Distance	Relative Power	Rank of Imposition	
1.	**Bald On Record**	FTA-oriented bald-on-record usage	1	-	-	6
		Non-minimization of the face threat	-	-	5	
2.	**Positive Politeness**	Notice, attend to H	1	-	-	25
		Intensify interest to H	4	-	-	
		Offer/promises	5	-	-	
		Give or ask for reason	-	1	3	
		Avoid disagreement	4	1	1	
		Seek agreement	2	-	-	
		Assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants	-	-	1	
		Use in group identity	1	-	-	
		Include both S & H in the activity	1	-	-	
3.	**Negative Politeness**	Be conventionally indirect	-	-	1	4
		Apologize	-	2	-	
		Minimize the imposition	-	-	1	
4.	**Off Record**	Give hints	1	-	-	3
		Give association clues	1	-	-	
		Use rhetorical question	1	-	-	
Total						**38**

Following the theory of Brown and Levinson (1987), the writers found 38 data in total consisting of 6 bald on record non-minimization of the face threat as the dominant data, 25 positive politeness with avoid disagreement as the dominant data, 4 negative politeness with apologize as the dominant data, and 3 off-record where it is found one in every three strategies, one in give hints, one in give association clues, and one in use rhetorical question. Based on the result data, teenagers in this movie tend to use positive politeness which avoid disagreement as the dominant strategy that is frequently used. It can be concluded that those teenagers do not want to make people who communicate with them feel rejected and uncomfortable by disagreeing with people's opinions or people's utterances. They try to accept people's utterances although they do not agree with what other people say because they want to keep and maintain people's feelings as much as they can by listening and digesting every speech. Moreover, avoiding disagreement can create peacefulness because it will make people feel appreciated and accepted.

Other than that, there are also 22 data that are influenced by social distance, 4 data that are influenced by relative power, and 12 data that are influenced by rank of imposition. The most factor influencing the teenage characters in *Stranger Things* movie to use politeness strategies is social distance. It can be concluded that they are the type of teenagers that want to make themselves look like they are not hard to approach, besides, they want to create closeness to the people they interact with because by creating closeness, they can talk more and deeper with the interlocutor. In addition, these are the relevant studies that also use politeness strategies as the topic of the study, the first is from Widiasari (2023), an undergraduate student of Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Mas Said Surakarta. The thesis entitled *Politeness Strategies Performed by The Characters in "The Lion King" Movie*, the study found 82 data from *Lion King* movie. The dominant data that was found is positive politeness which is 38 data, and factors that mostly found is relative power. The second is from journal Etnolingual entitled *Politeness Strategies Reflected by The Main Character in "Bridge to Terabithia" Movie* was written by Fitria et al. (2020), the study found four types of politeness strategies in the main character of the movie, the most types that used are bald on record strategy and positive politeness strategy. The third is from Wijayanti (2019), an undergraduate student of Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang. The thesis entitled *Politeness Strategies Used in "Beauty and The Beast" Movie*, the study found 32 data of positive politeness strategies, and based on Brown and Levinson's theory (1987), it has been found 12 out of 15 types of positive politeness strategies.
After knowing the frequency of data results, here are some data found that are elaborated as below:

1. **Bald On Record**
   12:05 – FTA-oriented bald-on-record- usage | Social Distance
   Jason: **If you're not up to this, you can go home. There's no judgment. You'll still be one of us, all right?**
   Lucas: No. I'm good. I wanna help.

   After Chrissy's death, Jason wants to find Eddie to take revenge because he thinks Eddie is the person that makes Chrissy die. When Jason prepares his stuff with his friends, Lucas seems anxious. Jason notices it and says "**If you're not up to this, you can go home. There's no judgment. You'll still be one of us, all right?**" Jason's utterance shows that he uses bald on record which is FTA-oriented bald-on-record usage because he knows Lucas is a doubt to join Jason to find Eddie whereas Eddie is also one of Lucas's friends. Jason says it directly to Lucas because he does not want Lucas getting more nervous, so he gives Lucas permission if Lucas does not want to join is really fine at all and Jason does not get mad about it. Social distance is the factor that influenced Jason using bald on record because the distance between him and Lucas is not so close. Thus, by his utterance, he tries to get closer and makes Lucas comfortable with him.

2. **Positive Politeness**
   05:59 – Notice, attend to H's | Social Distance
   Mike: It's a gift. I, uh... I handpicked those for you in Hawkins. **I know you like yellow, but now I'm realizing it's too much yellow. I know you also like purple, so I got purple as well**. So I kinda did, like, a 70/30 split kinda thing.
   El: They're perfect. Thank you.

   Mike and El have a relationship, but both of them are in a long-distance relationship since El moves away to a new place which makes them barely meet each other. Afterwards, when Mike visits El, Mike who has known El really well, gives a gift which is flowers. However, he gives a different color that is not the color that El usually likes. Thus, since he knows El not only like one color but also likes another color which is purple, Mike gives her a purple one. By saying "**I know you like yellow, but now I'm realizing it's too much yellow. I know you also like purple, so I got purple as well**." Mike's utterance shows that he notices what El's interest. Mike uses the positive politeness strategy which is notice, attend to H to satisfy El's positive face since El is his girlfriend, and he wants to make her happy by noticing the things that she likes. Moreover, social distance is the factor that influenced Mike to use positive politeness. By saying "**I know you**", Mike's utterance shows that they are close. Other than that, Mike notices El really well which makes their relationship getting closer.

3. **Negative Politeness**
   28:58 – Be conventionally indirect | Rank of Imposition
   Dustin: **Can you fill them in while I do this**?
   Robin: Fill us in on what?

Dustin and Max try to find out where Eddie is by visiting Robin and Steve's store to get help. However, Robin and Steve really do not care at first because they think it is not too important to be helped so they are still busy with their own business. Therefore, Dustin asks Max by saying "**Can you fill them in while I do this**?", Dustin's utterance shows that he uses negative politeness which is be conventionally indirect because he is not sure Max will do his request if he directly tells Max to do things for him, so he asks first to Max in order to maintain Max's negative face and Max not would feel disturbed. The rank of imposition is the factor that influenced Dustin to use negative politeness because he knows he cannot do anything alone. Dustin knows that he is against Max's negative face so he uses more polite utterance to Max. He expects that Max will do his request without feeling offended by Dustin's utterances.

4. Off Record
58:15 – Give Hints | Social Distance
Will: **It's been a year, Mike. Meanwhile, El has a book of letters from you**.
Mike: That's because she's my girlfriend, Will.

Mike and Will try to find El because El is disappearing. However, in the middle of Will and Mike's conversation, Will talks about things that Mike always gives to El. By saying "**It's been a year, Mike. Meanwhile, El has a book of letters from you**." it shows that Will's utterance uses off record strategy which is to give hints. Will does not want to say it explicitly because he wants to keep Mike's positive face. Therefore, Will only said it indirectly to expect that Mike would understand and know what he meant. Moreover, social distance is the factor that influenced Will to use off-record because Will knows the distance between him and Mike and is really close, so he expects that both of them have special background knowledge. Thus, by saying implicitly, Will puts expectations on Mike to know that Will also wants a letter that Mike usually gives to El without mentioning it.

The conclusion of this study is: it was found all the types of politeness strategies used by teenage characters in *Stranger Things* movie season 4 episodes 1 to 3 with following Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory. The result shows that there are 38 data in total and the most type that is used by teenage characters is positive politeness with avoid disagreement strategy. It means that the teenagers in the *Stranger Things* movie are the type of people who always appreciate others because they try to keep people's feelings by creating comfortable discussions whenever they communicate to make people feel accepted. Moreover, the dominant data of factor that influences teenage characters to use politeness strategies is social distance. It means that the typical teenagers in *Stranger Things* movie are easy to get close to anyone else because they frequently communicate with other people as if they want to make themselves close to the people. Thus, they can create closeness with that, also they can talk more to the people they interact with. In addition, in Widiasari's (2023) thesis entitled "*Politeness Strategies Performed By The Characters in "The Lion King" Movie",* she found 38 positive politeness with seek agreement strategy as the dominant data, and she found factor influencing which is relative power as the dominant data. Compared to this study which found positive politeness with avoid disagreement as dominant data, and social distance is the factor that most influenced the use of politeness strategies. Both *Lion King* and *Stranger Things* movie have the same genre which is drama. Thus, it can be concluded that the same genre does not mean it will use the same type and have the same factors influencing the use of politeness strategies. Furthermore, this study was created to increase the knowledge of pragmatics, especially politeness in the movie entitled *Stranger Things*, and it gives an academic contribution by expanding Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory about types of politeness and the factors influencing the use of politeness strategies.

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