

# POLITENESS STRATEGIES ANALYSIS IN *TWO DISTANT STRANGERS*

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## Abstract

The effort to satisfy someone else's face or public self-image refers to as a politeness strategy in linguistics (Brown & Levinson, 1987). These strategies are used in everyday communication. Aside from using politeness strategies in daily life dialogues, politeness strategies can also be seen in films. The object of this study is the script of a short film on Netflix entitled *Two Distant Strangers*. There are three key characters in the film, Carter, Merk, and Perri. This research aims to discover the types of politeness strategies utilized by the characters in *Two Distant Strangers* and the sociological factors that influence the use of politeness strategies in the short film. This research employs the pragmatic approach and qualitative methodology. The analysis result shows that all characters in *Two Distant Strangers* implemented four types of politeness strategies. The characters' utterances demonstrated a relationship between politeness strategies and related sociological factors. Bald on-record is the most frequently used strategy as Merk, the character who acts as a police officer, believes he is more powerful than the other characters. The sociological factor of high to low power plays a part in why Merk is not hesitant to ignore other characters' faces and command them as he likes.

**Keywords:** *politeness strategies, sociological factors, utterance*

## I INTRODUCTION

Politeness strategies are necessary for achieving healthy interpersonal relationships that adhere to societal norms. Politeness is most likely a prerequisite for human cooperation in general (Brown, 2015, p. 326). It is essential for humans' social life. One of the social norms in society is being kind to everyone. People who follow that social norm will attempt to make their interlocutors feel appreciated or respected. As a result, when speaking with other individuals, people will try to be more polite and considerate. They will need to apply politeness strategies to make that attempt. In pragmatics, politeness does not denote to how people act in public. It refers to how a person arrange its language use and linguistic expressions so that it is able to give space and depict a friendly attitude to the interlocutors (Cutting, 2002, p. 45).

According to linguistic theory, being courteous involves trying to satisfy someone else's face or public self-image. The dangers to a person's self-image are lessened using politeness strategies. Humans view the wants on each other faces as fundamental desires that all members of society are aware of and that, generally speaking, it is in everyone's best interests to partially satisfy (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 62). Brown and Levinson (1987) identified the four categories of politeness strategies: bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record.

Brown and Levinson (1987) also mentioned that sociological factors may be considered in all cultures when determining how serious a face-threatening act is. Sociological factors are the underlying variables that affect how one uses politeness strategies. This theory is utilized to see if the characters' sociological factors influenced the character's use of politeness strategies.

Politeness strategies are utilized in many facets of human communication. The politeness strategies' utilizations in daily life are essential because if humans did not learn strategies to defuse conflict and confrontation, social connections would be challenging to establish and maintain (Yule, 1996, p. 106). How people express politeness will constantly evolve over the years; for example, the usage of respectfully polite titles like Miss, Mrs., and Mr. is declining, while the use of given names, particularly familiarized forms of given names like Sam, Sue, and Bill is increasing (Leech, 2014, p. 297). Leech observed that phenomenon from real-life events. In addition to paying attention to politeness strategies in casual conversation, people can also analyze politeness strategies in films. Films usually depict conversations that occurred in the real world accurately. In light of this, it is essential to study films because they can be used as a tool to enhance people's knowledge about politeness strategies.

People can stream films online right now through the internet. One of the most well-known over-the-top (OTT) streaming services is Netflix. People can watch television shows, films, series, and much more on Netflix. *Two Distant Strangers* is one of the short films available on Netflix. The dialogue in this movie depicts how one's characteristics affect the words chosen in the conversation. This phenomenon is the reason why *Two Distant Strangers* was chosen as the object of the study. Carter,

Merk, and Perri are its three primary characters. The narrative's protagonist is an African-American man called Carter. He repeatedly wakes up in Perri's apartment in the same scene, in which a white police officer named Merk kills him.

Numerous instances of politeness strategies in *Two Distant Strangers* demonstrates the influence of human characteristics on language use. For example, when speaking to Merk, Carter used the word "sir," whereas Merk often addressed Carter with command words like "Get down!" The use of various tones in the characters' utterances is intriguing to examine. The aim of this paper is to observe how the characters' utterances preserve or jeopardize each other's positive or negative faces.

This research focuses on the politeness strategies all characters apply in *Two Distant Strangers*. It has two objectives. The first is to discover the politeness strategies used by the characters in the short film, and the second is to identify the sociological factors that influence the type of politeness strategies utilized by the characters. In every utterance that contains the kind of politeness strategies, the sociological factors always entail. Those factors are the primary motivations behind people's utilization of politeness strategies. Therefore, this research will also look at how the types of politeness strategies relate to the sociological factors evident in the dialogue of the characters in the short film.

Numerous researches about politeness strategies have been conducted. Maros and Rosli (2017, pp. 132–149) investigated the politeness strategies applied in selected tweets on Twitter posted by Malaysian females who studied the English language. The findings stated that negative politeness strategy is the least common and positive politeness strategy is the most common. Their observation demonstrates how female Twitter users are conscious of the damage they could do on an online platform. Hence, they employ politeness strategies to decrease their threat to other users. In addition, Jeanyfer and Tanto (2018, pp. 137–145) discussed politeness strategies in text messages. The findings suggested that when people text someone with more power, they frequently employ negative politeness to avoid making a threat or imposing their will on the listener. If a higher-ranking sender is texting with a lower-ranking receiver, the sender will employ a bald on-record to accomplish the communication's goals. They also discovered that when people are texting with someone on an equal level, they frequently mix up the types of politeness strategies.

The application of Brown and Levinson's concept (1987) of politeness strategies is what links the previous articles to this one. As a result, the data analysis performed by Jeanyfer and Tanto (2018) and the analysis of the first research objective in this article are the same. Both Maros and Rosli's article (2017) and this article use similar data classification systems. The object is what distinguishes this research from the other two research. Maros and Rosli (2017) chose the data from Twitter updates, whereas Jeanyfer and Tanto's research (2018) focused on the requests made in apps like WhatsApp and Line. Social media is the source of the data for both publications. On the other hand, this research draws its data from the utterances made by the characters in a short film streamed online. Another difference is that the data from Maros and Rosli (2017) are from non-native English speakers, and Jeanyfer and Tanto's data (2018) is in Indonesian, while the data in this article is in English and from native English speakers.

To sum up, this article is different from the ones that have been described previously. It uses the same theory and adapts the data analysis approaches used in the two related journal articles. Nevertheless, this article can still deliver new information since no other articles have examined the politeness strategies applied in *Two Distant Strangers*. Hence, when other researchers want to conduct further research, they can use the results of this study as a comparison to other articles. Lastly, this research can comprehensively help to understand politeness strategies by implementing the theories in dialogues in a short film.

## II RESEARCH METHOD

This journal article used utterances in *Two Distant Strangers* as its data. This study used qualitative method because the datum dealt with words and their contextual meaning and would be analyzed descriptively. Furthermore, the context of the utterances that could affect the meaning of what the characters stated had to be considered to understand the politeness strategies employed by the characters in that short film. Because pragmatics is the study of contextual meaning (Yule, 1996, p. 3), the pragmatic approach is ideal for this research.

To comprehend the plot, the data was gathered by listening and watching *Two Distant Strangers*. The next step is transcribing the short film's script. Then, the following step is observing and selecting the utterances that applied politeness strategies. To address the first research objective, the initial step of the analysis was to examine and categorize the characters' utterances into four different politeness

strategies according to Brown and Levinson's theory (1987). The final step was to analyze the sociological factors to address the second research objective and to assess the connection between politeness strategies and sociological factors.

### III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ninety-four data were identified from the characters' utterances in the short film. This section consists of analyzing and explaining some of the data.

#### 3.1 THE TYPES AND THE SOCIOLOGICAL FACTORS OF THE CHARACTERS' POLITENESS STRATEGIES

The table below shows the distributions of the types of politeness strategies utilized by Two Distant Strangers' characters.

*Table 1. The Findings' Summary of the Types of Politeness Strategies*

| No . | Types of Politeness Strategies | Frequency |
|------|--------------------------------|-----------|
| 1.   | Bald on-record                 | 37        |
| 2.   | Positive politeness            | 35        |
| 3.   | Negative politeness            | 12        |
| 4.   | Off-record                     | 10        |
|      | Total                          | 94        |

The findings on the various politeness strategies identified in the characters of the short film entitled *Two Distant Strangers* are summarized in the previous table with a total of 94 utterances. The table shows 37 utterances were categorized into bald on-record, 35 utterances into negative politeness, 12 utterances into negative politeness, and 10 into the off-record strategy.

The characters in *Two Distant Strangers* applied all four types of politeness strategies without any exception. The analysis of the data for each type can be seen in the following section:

##### 3.1.1 BALD ON-RECORD

37 utterances applied bald on-record strategy with several sub-strategies. There are task-oriented, have great urgency/desperation, sympathetic advice/warning, farewell, and invitation. The examples are as follows:

###### Dialogue 1

Perri: **Hey, uh, you wanna go out and get some food or something?** There's this new Jamaican brunch spot that just opened up down the block.

Carter: Did you wash your hands?

(P/BOR/02:23)

In this dialogue, Perri applies a bald on-record strategy in the form of invitations. Here, Perry as the speaker, requested the hearer, Carter, to do something, which is to eat together with her in a Jamaican brunch spot. Despite the unrelated response she got from Carter, Perry invites Carter using a direct and clear expression.

Despite only having met the previous evening, the social distance between Perry and Carter gets smaller due to Perry's ability to command Carter to do something. Because Perry views Carter as her lover, she considers that she has an equal level of power to Carter. This dialogue has a high rank of imposition because the invitation could threaten Carter's negative face as the hearer. Perri imposes the need for service by asking Carter to go with her.

###### Dialogue 2

Perri: **Go home, boy.**

Carter: I'll, uh, call you?

(P/BOR/03:47)

The above conversation shows that Perri utilizes a bald on-record strategy in the form of farewells. Carter and Perri had a brief discussion before Perri bid Carter farewell by stating, "Go home, boy." Here, Perri insisted that it was okay for Carter to leave her. There is minimal chance for Carter to threaten Perri's positive face by being allowed to depart. This is the implementation of a bald on-record strategy in a case of a non-minimization face threat.

In this dialogue, it can be seen that Perri uses an informal way to say goodbye. There is a close social distance between the speaker and the hearer. Perri sees Carter as someone that is on the same level as her. Therefore, the power is equal in dialogue 2. The rank of imposition is low because her utterance requires Carter to give neither service nor goods.

Dialogue 3

Carter: **You know, uh, you got a nice place. You should get this fixed, though.**

Perri: Mmm-hmm.

(C/BOR/03:58)

Carter's utterance here is applying bald on-record strategy in the form of sympathetic advice. As the speaker, Carter conveys that he cares about Perri as the hearer. He is advising Perri to fix the display on her apartment door. He softens the advice by complimenting her place first, but he still says the advice in a direct and clear expression.

At this point in the short film, Carter and Perri are more comfortable. Thus, the social distance in this dialogue is close. The power is equal since Carter dares to give Perri a piece of advice in a non-forcing way. The rank of imposition here is high since it may impose Perri's negative face, and it requires a service, which is fixing the display on her apartment door that almost falls off.

Dialogue 4

Merk: **Put the bag down and step against the wall for me.**

Carter: What? I'm good actually, man.

Merk: I'm not good.

Carter: Listen, man.

Merk: **Give me the bag, get against the wall.**

(M/BOR/06:44)

Merk applies a bald on-record strategy in this conversation in the form of a task-oriented. Here, Merk is threatening Carter's face with his request and command. Since commanding Carter to do certain things is his primary concern, he ignores Carter's face wants. Merk is also confident that Carter will not object, so there is no need to reduce the face-threatening act.

Viewed from their race, the social distance in this conversation is far. Merk, a white man, believes he has more power than Carter, an African-American man. The speaker and the listener have a high to low power ratio. Merk has higher and stronger authority because he is a police officer. His line of work gives him the power to command and control others. The level of imposition is high because Merk's comments endanger Carter's negative face.

Dialogue 5

Perri: **My hands! You can see my hands! What do you want me to do?**

Merk: Knife!

(P/BOR/13:00)

The statement made by Perri in this instance exhibited great desperation and applied the bald on-record strategy. She was stunned and startled when the police rushed into her apartment. This situation makes her anxious. She spoke straightforwardly due to her anxiousness since she knew that if she were to change her tone. It would lessen the impression of her desperation. She instantly displays her conformity by employing a bald on-record strategy since she is frightened of being shot.

In this dialogue, Perri indicates that she considers Merk someone with higher power than her. Thus, this dialogue has low to high power. Estimated by their race and occupation, their social distance is far because they have different social statuses. Merk is a white police officer, while Perri is an African-American civilian. The rank of imposition is low because Perri's utterance does not threaten Merk's negative face.

Dialogue 6

Merk: **Get down!**

Perri: Breathe! Oh, my God.

(M/BOR/13:11)

Merk's command in dialogue 6 employs a bald on-record strategy in the form of great urgency. Merk knows that maximum efficiency is critical to ensure that Perri and Carter follow the command to "get down" directly. There is no need to redress his utterance because adding the word "please", for example, will decrease the communicated urgency.

The relative power in this dialogue is from high to low since Perri cannot impose Merk's plan. She does not have any other choice other than to comply. The social distance is far because of the different social statuses. The rank of imposition is high because Merk's utterance threatens Perri's negative face, which is the freedom of action. She does not have freedom because she must follow Merk's command.

### 3.1.2 POSITIVE POLITENESS

35 utterances applied positive politeness strategy with several sub-strategies. There are jokes, notice to a hearer, in-group marker, seek agreement, promise, intensify interest to a hearer, and avoid disagreement. The examples are as follows:

Dialogue 7

Carter: I was not gonna just leave.

Perri: I know. **Just fucking with you. Breathe.**

Carter: You got jokes.

(P/PP/01:58)

Perry uses humor to demonstrate a positive politeness strategy in dialogue 7. The most straightforward strategy to reduce face-threatening behavior is to make jokes. Her quips let Carter feel a lot more at ease because he was previously worried that he could offend Perry. Perry's humor strictly blocked any possible face-threatening act in this conversation.

The social distance in this dialogue is close because Perry tries to lessen the social distance by making jokes so that the conversation will flow effortlessly even though they had just met the night before. The rank of imposition is low because Perry's utterances do not threaten Carter's negative face. Perry puts herself in equal power to Carter because she jokes just like how people would talk to their friends.

Dialogue 8

Merk: **Everything all right here, fellas?**

Carter: Yes, sir. Everything is just fine. I almost bumped--

(M/PP/10:28)

In dialogue 8, Merk applied the positive politeness strategy in the form of in-group identity markers. The marker here is the address form "fellas". The use of that address form can claim solidarity between Merk and Carter. It will automatically satisfy Carter's positive face, which is to be accepted by other people.

The rank of imposition is low in this dialogue because Merk only asks a question that does not threaten Carter's negative face. Here, Merk intentionally puts himself on an equal level with Carter to ease the circumstance. Merk also lessens the distance between them by showing solidarity. Thus, the relative power is equal, and the social distance is close.

## Dialogue 9

Merk: That's enough circus tricks. Give me the bag, step against the wall.

Carter: **Look, dude. I'm about to fuck your head up right now.** You see the corner? Cute couple about to kiss. Boom! Yoga girl about to take a selfie. Voilà. Skater kid right there, watch him eat shit in three, two...

(C/PP/17:41)

In this dialogue, Carter employs a positive politeness strategy by intensifying interest in a hearer. Here, Merk is going to lose interest in hearing Carter's tale. Then, Carter deftly persuades Merk to rejoin the conversation by telling "a good story" to convince him.

Seeing the circumstance, the relative power in the dialogue is equal because, currently, Carter does not consider Merk someone with a higher power. It can be seen by the word "dude" in his utterance. The rank of imposition is low because Carter's utterance does not require Merk to give either service or goods. The social distance is close because Carter used "dude" instead of "sir".

## Dialogue 10

Merk: So, what do you want?

Carter: **Why don't you just take me home, man?**

(C/PP/20:01)

Carter's utterance in dialogue 10 here utilizes a positive politeness strategy by giving reasons. Carter implies that Merk can help him return to his home. It is his way of showing Merk what help is needed. This strategy will make Merk feel included in the situation and satisfy his positive face.

The social distance in this dialogue is close because the speaker and the hearer are cooperating. However, the rank of imposition is high since the utterance requires Merk to give a service, which is taking Carter to his home. The power here is equal since Carter dares to impose Merk's plan by asking for help.

### 3.1.3 NEGATIVE POLITENESS

12 utterances applied negative politeness strategy with a few sub-strategies. There are apologies and give deference. The examples are as follows:

## Dialogue 11

Merk: Is that a cigarette?

Carter: Yes, it is.

Merk: But, it don't smell like no cigarette.

Carter: **With all due respect, the inaccuracy of your sense of smell is not my problem, sir.**

(C/NP/10:31)

Carter employs a negative politeness strategy, which is giving deference, in dialogue 11. Carter masks the offensiveness of the sentence's underlying meaning by expressing deference. "With all due respect" and "sir" are the words of deference. Carter boosts Merk's self-esteem and meets his desire to be considered as superior.

The dialogue between Merk and Carter above reveals a significant social distance. Carter distances Merk further by highlighting the formality of his statement. The rank of imposition is low because it does not harm Merk's negative face want. It also does not call for any services or goods from Merk. Carter thinks Merk has more power than he does. He believes that formal language is required. Hence, the relative power is low to high.

## Dialogue 12

Merk: What?

Carter: **I am sorry, I...** What's the real reason you became a cop, man? Not that brochure bullshit.

(C/NP/22:00)

Carter applies a negative politeness strategy in this utterance by apologizing. Carter is sorry for laughing at Merk's answer to his questions earlier. By saying, "I'm sorry", he is expressing his unwillingness to impose on Merk's negative face want and somewhat redressing the impingement that jeopardizes Merk's face wants.

The relative power in this conversation is equal because Carter speaks to Merk like how friends communicate with each other. The social distance has shrunk because they have been talking several times. Thus, the distance between them becomes close. The rank of imposition is high because Carter imposed Merk's negative face by forcing him to answer his question honestly.

### 3.1.4 OFF-RECORD

This strategy is the most infrequent. 10 utterances applied the off-record strategy. The examples are as follows:

Dialogue 13

Carter: Listen. Some people do commit crime. **But what choice do they have, when white people are born on the third base and niggas outside the stadium?**

Merk: Boo-hoo.

(C/OR/22:51)

Carter applies the off-record strategy as a rhetorical question in dialogue 13. Carter's query has an implied response that can be utilized to commit a face-threatening act. Carter does not expect an answer to the question that he uttered. It only functions as Carter's way to refute Merk's racial bias theory and highlight the disparity between white and African-American people.

Due to Carter's acknowledgment of their disparate racial backgrounds, there is a significant far social distance in this conversation between Merk and Carter. Carter does not show any sign of deference. Thus, the relative power is equal. Because Carter's statement may impose Merk's negative face want, the rank of imposition is high.

Based on the discussion, the results suggested that the characters in *Two Distant Strangers* apply all four categories of politeness strategies. Merk typically employs a bald on-record strategy to give people his orders in a straightforward manner. Carter dominates both the positive and negative politeness strategies. When he speaks to Perri, he often utilizes positive politeness to hasten intimacy. When speaking with Merk, Carter employs negative politeness to show respect. All characters apply the off-record strategy. It demonstrates how the off-record strategy may be involved in any circumstance to give speakers a way out if they mistakenly or purposely do anything that puts their face wants in danger.

The findings also showed that various things influence the three sociological factors. The characters' race has a significant impact on social distance. Carter, an African-American man, constantly tries to fulfill Merk's demands because he feels inferior to Merk. He makes an effort to stay out of trouble by being courteous. To Perri, because they have the same race, he sees himself as equal to her. The occupation and the ability to impose on each other's plans impact relative power. Merk has a distinct advantage over the other characters because he is a police officer, whereas the rest are just mere civilians. The degree of interference on the hearer's face determines the ranking of imposition. The utterances said by the characters, such as what they demand, ask, and order from the interlocutors, influence the rank of the imposition.

## IV CONCLUSION

From the analysis above, it can be seen that all characters in *Two Distant Strangers* implemented different politeness strategies. The most commonly utilized strategy is bald on-record and the least utilized is the off-record strategy. The characters' utterances also demonstrated a relationship between politeness strategies and related sociological factors. It has been established that every time a character applies a politeness strategy, the three sociological factors are always present. The most common social factors in bald on-record strategy are high to low power, far distance, and high rank of imposition. It is evident in the conversations between Carter and Merk since Carter has lower power.

The sociological factors that most strongly influence the positive politeness strategy are close social distance, equal power, and low rank of imposition. They are commonly exemplified in the conversation between Carter and Perri. It suggests that the characters use positive politeness as a strategy when speaking to someone who shares their social traits. Therefore, they are not concerned

about the interlocutor's power. Negative politeness is often applied when Carter talks with Merk, who is more powerful. It demonstrates how the characters use this strategy when they feel inadequate or must take great care to avoid offending the interlocutor. Off-record, the final one, is the most adaptable because the characters employ it when conversing with people who are either close or far in social distance.

Finally, it is suggested that other researchers look at various linguistic phenomena depicted in *Two Distant Strangers*. The other researchers might examine how the characters' violations of maxims caused the short film's conflicts. Researching this short film from various linguistic standpoints will undoubtedly strengthen one's comprehension of linguistic topics.

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