

An Analysis of Positive Politeness Strategy Used on Expressive Utterance in “The School for Good and Evil” Movie

Jazila Atsna¹, Santi Andriyani²

corresponce author: 211320000656@unisnu.ac.id

English Education Department,

Universitas Islam Nahdlatul Ulama, Jepara, Indonesia

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Abstract

This study investigated the use of positive politeness strategies in the movie *The School for Good and Evil*, utilizing Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987). The research analyzed expressive utterances and examined how characters conveyed emotions, maintained relationships, and enhanced interpersonal interactions within a fantasy setting. A qualitative descriptive method was employed, with data drawn from the movie and its script. The findings revealed that the characters employed various strategies such as noticing, exaggeration, using in-group identity markers, avoiding disagreements, and offering promises to navigate themes of identity, belonging, and moral dichotomy. These strategies fostered solidarity, resolved conflicts, and strengthened social bonds in the fantastical context of the story. However, the study's reliance on a single movie limited the generalizability of the findings, highlighting the need for further research across different genres and cultural contexts. This study contributed to linguistic research by showcasing how positive politeness strategies were adapted in unique narrative settings and provided insights for improving communication in real-world contexts, such as educational environments.

Keywords: Politeness, Positive politeness, Strategy, Expressive, Pragmatic, Brown and Levinson (1987)

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a technique of disclosing people's thoughts through language. The purpose of language, based on communication, is to transfer messages from sender to receiver, gain understanding, and build relationships. In addition, language may be employed to express happiness, anger, grief, and other emotions. Moreover, communication is not just about making interaction; it also requires comprehension so that the communication proceeds properly and without miscommunication. As cited by Warouw et al. (2023), language works as a tool for communication. While most languages have meanings, there are also languages that lack meaning or represent nothing. Language enables humans to convey their emotions and thoughts in everyday situations. Without language, individuals may struggle to communicate and interact with others. While interacting with others, people must pay attention to one another. This is crucial for understanding what is being talked about and figuring out the truth through body language. Mujahidah and Sumiati (2022) stated that to communicate appropriately, people use polite language and are aware of other people's expressions. People's expressions represent a person's public self-image as well as the emotional and social feelings they want others to recognize. Being

polite is the key to acknowledging other people's perspectives and respecting their feelings, thereby maintaining healthy relationships.

Politeness has been taught and practiced since people first learn to speak. It is an essential language-use principle observed universally across cultures (Kavita et al., 2019). Many people, however, find it difficult to use polite language in communication because they may not know how to do so. In communication, certain actions carried out by the speaker can threaten to be unacceptable if they are performed in a manner that is impolite or not in accordance with the listener's preferences. This indicates that the person receiving the action could interpret it negatively (Novita Sari & Sutopo, 2024). To avoid this, speakers can employ positive politeness strategies, which aim to protect the listener's "face" and foster smooth, peaceful interactions (Nurizka et al., 2023). These strategies are applied in both written and oral communication to maintain respectful interactions (Ulfa, 2019).

In addition to people's daily lives, positive politeness may be observed in various mediums, such as speeches, talk shows, and movies. Movies, as a form of literature, can serve as highly entertaining media (Saragih et al., 2019). By providing moral values, offering diverse genres, and featuring vibrant animation and spectacular effects, movies have become the most popular literary product, as they are simple and affordable to obtain (Fitri, 2022). This study utilized Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory to analyze politeness strategies in movies, specifically focusing on *The School for Good and Evil*.

The topic of "Positive Politeness Strategies" was chosen out of curiosity about how such strategies are used in the movie *The School for Good and Evil*. Directed by Paul Feig and released on October 19, 2022, the film was adapted from a novel by Soman Chainani, first published on May 14, 2013. With a runtime of 2 hours and 27 minutes, the story centers on the friendship between Sophie and Agatha, two girls from Gavaldon. Sophie, beautiful and vain, and Agatha, who lives in a cemetery with her cat, are transported to the School for Good and Evil, where Sophie is unexpectedly placed in the School for Evil, and Agatha in the School for Good. This study sought to analyze the movie pragmatically, focusing on the positive politeness strategies outlined by Brown and Levinson. The researcher was particularly interested in examining the politeness aspects within the movie, which remains under-researched.

In terms of analyzing politeness strategies, there are several related previous studies. For example, Thooyibah et al. (2021) examined politeness strategies in the movie *Up* (2010), using qualitative research and Brown and Levinson's theory. The study identified 15 positive politeness strategies, including noticing, exaggerating, using in-group identity markers, avoiding disagreement, and giving reasons. Similarly, Rayani et al. (2023) investigated positive politeness strategies in *The Perfect Date* and found that characters employed all 15 strategies. While these studies explored general politeness strategies, this research uniquely focuses on positive politeness strategies in expressive utterances in *The School for Good and Evil*.

Based on the previous studies, it is evident that positive politeness strategies play a crucial role in effective communication, benefiting both speakers and listeners. However, with the rise of social media, communication patterns have shifted, often becoming more direct or even rude. In such a context, positive politeness strategies are essential for maintaining friendly, respectful interactions and reducing conflict.

This study specifically examined how characters in *The School for Good and Evil* used positive politeness strategies to reduce rudeness and foster politeness in their interactions. Unlike previous studies, this research focused on expressive utterances and analyzed how these strategies helped express emotions, maintain relationships, and enhance interpersonal interactions. Positive politeness, as a concept in linguistics, explains how individuals show kindness, support, and respect to others to build relationships or create solidarity.

The findings of this study extend beyond fictional settings, offering valuable insights for real-life applications, particularly in schools. In educational environments, fostering positive communication among students and teachers is crucial for creating a supportive and respectful

atmosphere. By adopting positive politeness strategies—such as showing appreciation, acknowledging others' feelings, and maintaining respect—schools can enhance social interactions, reduce conflicts, and strengthen relationships. Educators, for instance, can encourage students to use polite language during discussions, recognize each other's contributions, and approach disagreements respectfully. These practices align with the principles of positive politeness demonstrated in *The School for Good and Evil*.

By investigating these strategies, this study contributes to understanding politeness in fictional contexts while offering practical implications for improving communication in real-life school settings. It bridges the gap between theoretical research and practical applications, enriching the field of linguistics and interpersonal communication.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method. Arthur Corpley (2023) stated that qualitative research explores individuals' understanding of real-life experiences, analyzing these insights within various behavioral sciences such as psychology, sociology, politics, education, health sciences, business, and innovation.

Data Sources and Data Collection

Data for this study were collected using the observation method and note-taking strategies. Information was obtained from a movie available on Netflix and a movie script downloaded from the *Scraps from the Loft* website. The steps for collecting the data included selecting the movie, watching it, and reading the script from the website. Relevant utterances classified as politeness strategies were noted, and those belonging to positive politeness strategies were listed based on the indicators provided by Brown and Levinson (1987). These indicators included noticing, attending, exaggerating, intensifying interest, using in-group identity markers, seeking agreement, avoiding disagreement, presuming common ground, joking, asserting knowledge, offering, promising, being optimistic, including both speakers and hearers, giving reasons, assuming reciprocity, and giving gifts.

Data Analysis

This study applied Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory to analyze positive politeness strategies and expressive speech acts within the movie *The School for Good and Evil*. By focusing on expressive utterances that conveyed emotions or attitudes, the analysis aimed to identify specific ways in which characters used positive politeness strategies to maintain social harmony and build relationships.

RESULTS

The following data shows the research findings about the fifteen positive politeness strategies. Additionally, those strategies have an expressive speech function that comes after the words. This research found 15 examples of positive politeness in the movie "The School for Good and Bad". These examples showed different ways of using positive politeness. By the 15 strategies suggested by Brown and Levinson (1987), the researchers identified 15 strategies in the movie. The result can be considered as follows:

1. Notice, attend to the hearer

"Rafal. I saw him again in the forest."

In the conversation between Agatha and Prof. Dovey, Agatha said she saw Rafal in the forest. This scene means that they believe that Rafal is the one who causes the chaos in the school for good and evil. The word "I **saw** him again in the forest" shows noticing presence, whereas notice is a kind of positive politeness strategy based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory. In this scene, Agatha conveyed that she might be expressing a sense of urgency, fear, or concern about seeing Rafal, but this is inferred rather than stated explicitly.

2. Exaggerate

"I think what's happening here is bigger than anyone realizes!"

The utterance above happened when Agatha sent Sophie a letter. Agatha realizes that the situation in the school for good and evil is getting serious. This utterance from Agatha clearly states that exaggeration is a positive politeness strategy. It shows her carefully what happened in the school. The word "bigger than anyone realizes" means Agatha's expression emphasizes the enormity and hidden depth of the situation and makes Sophie take the problem seriously and understand the potential consequences, thereby aligning Sophie's concern with Agatha's and encouraging a united front in dealing with the issue.

3. Intensify interest to the hearer

"You do know that no one's ever wanting to see us together."

This utterance shows that Sophie told Tedros to continue Sophie and Agatha's plan, namely to look for a first kiss to free them from this school. At this time, Sophie tries to convince Tedros not to be influenced by what other people say. This utterance produced by Sophie exhibited positive politeness because Sophie implicitly seeks to create or reinforce a bond with the hearer based on their circumstances, thereby making the hearer more invested in the conversation.

4. Use in-group identity markers

"It's true evil, and we have to stick together."

The conversation above happened when Agatha tried to convince Sophie that there was true evil made by Rafal. In this case, Rafal wants to brainwash Sophie into becoming evil. Rafal chose Sophie because Sophie is one of the students from the evil school who has amazing powers. So, Agatha tries her best to keep Sophie on her team. The utterance "It's true evil. We have to stick together" by Agatha to Sophie can be classified under the positive politeness strategy of using in-group identity markers because it employs inclusive language "we" and emphasizes their mutual dependence "stick together". Additionally, it is an expressive utterance, conveying Agatha's emotional state and her commitment to their solidarity in facing the challenges ahead.

5. Seek Agreement

"You think she's prettier than me? I'm just saying we need someone who's available now."

This utterance seeks Agatha's opinion on a sensitive matter, indicating a need for validation. This aligns with the seeking agreement strategy, as Sophie likely expects a response that will comfort her or at least engage in understanding her feelings. "You think she's prettier than me?" is the seeking agreement strategy of positive politeness because this expression reveals Sophie's feelings of insecurity or jealousy.

6. Avoid disagreement

"You're supposed to drop me at the Good school, not her!"

In this scene, Sophie finds a way to avoid dropping out of school for evil. She's avoiding it because it is not like what she imagined before. She always feels like a princess, wears a gown, and lives in a beautiful place. But the bird drops her off at school, contrasting with what she dreams about.

Dark, smelly, dirty, and the people so mean. This scene made her say, “You’re supposed to drop me off at the good school.” This is an expressive utterance that conveys frustration and disagreement with the situation, but it can be seen that Sophie used a positive politeness strategy to avoid disagreement. Instead of saying, “You made a mistake!” which directly accuses someone, Sophie focuses on the expectation, “You’re supposed to drop me at the good school,” thus asserting their understanding without directly accusing or disagreeing harshly with the person responsible for the mix-up.

7. Presuppose/raise/assert common ground

“I wish for home. All of us.”

The utterance above was spoken when Prof. Dovey gave the princess wishes in class. All the princesses ask to make a wish in a lake with many magic fish. When it’s Agatha’s turn, she wishes for home because she doesn’t want to live in this school longer. The utterance “I wish for home” expresses a wish or desire, which clearly indicates her emotional state. She wishes to go home and desires this for herself and everyone involved. “All of us” means a sense of togetherness and mutual understanding, crucial for maintaining positive relationships and solidarity, especially in challenging or uncertain situations.

8. Joke

“From a girl who used to make phlegm sculptures?”

In this scene, Sophie and Agatha are in a bad relationship because of miscommunication. Agatha is the one who helped Tedros, not Sophie. This makes Tedros disappointed with Sophie, and Sophie gets mad at Agatha for appearing between them. Sophie is likely using this comment in a light-hearted manner, which is characteristic of jokes in social interactions. By referencing something quirky or unexpected, like “making phlegm sculptures,” she introduces a humorous element into the conversation.

9. Assert or presuppose the speaker’s knowledge of and concern for the hearer

“You know nothing about her! I know she did one hell of a good job turning you into a raving lunatic.”

This utterance appears when Sophie has a crush on her friends in the school for evil. Based on what Sophie said, her concern or perspective on the other person’s actions: “She did one hell of a good job turning you into a raving lunatic”. This presupposes that Sophie cares about how the hearer has been affected or influenced by this other person’s actions.

10. Offer, promises

“Just please don’t go, promise?”

This utterance appears in the conversation between Agatha and Sophie when Sophie asks Agatha if she will leave Gavaldon. Agatha should avoid it and make a promise to Sophie. In this context, the use of “promise?” is not just a request but an expressive way to show trust and reliance on the hearer. It implies that Agatha values the hearer’s commitment and expects them to uphold it. Using this strategy, Agatha acknowledges the importance of the hearer’s compliance with her request while demonstrating her trust in their relationship.

11. Be optimistic

“Very soon, you’ll emerge more beautiful and more powerful than ever. You’ll not just be the fairest of them all, you’ll be the strongest.”

Agatha’s utterance to Sophie combines positive politeness strategies of being optimistic with expressive speech, which aims to raise Sophie’s spirits and strengthen her self-esteem. This reflects Agatha’s supportive role in encouraging Sophie, praising her, and inspiring confidence in her

abilities and future potential. Thus, it effectively utilizes optimism as a positive politeness strategy within the framework of Brown and Levinson's theory.

12. Include both the speaker and hearer in the activity

"We're good enough and strong enough to protect each other."

The phrase "to protect each other" suggests a mutually beneficial relationship in which both sides are dedicated to watching for each other's safety. This mutual support characterizes positive politeness since it encourages relationships, solidarity, and working together.

13. Give (ask for) the reason

"Do you know why Good always wins? Because we fight for each other, and we care for each other."

There are three positive politeness effects from this utterance. First, this utterance can help create a sense of unity and shared purpose among the characters (Student from Good School). It strengthens positive feelings and friendship by aligning the speaker and listener with the noble cause of Good winning over evil. By showing expressive utterance ("because we fight for each other"), The professor not only includes the listener in the action but also acknowledges shared values and goals.

14. Assume or assert reciprocity

"I am responsible for choosing Camelot's next queen."

In Brown and Levinson's theory, this utterance fits under assert or assume reciprocity because it suggests that Prof Dovey's decision-making role comes with an implied expectation of acknowledgment or support from others. This assertion can potentially maintain a sense of cooperation and respect, which are key aspects of positive politeness strategies.

15. Give gifts to the hearer (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)

"Hey, look. [laughing] Remember? Yeah, I found it in my attic last week."

By mentioning, "I found it in my attic last week," Agatha implicitly suggests that she found something for Sophie. This act of giving a gift or showing thoughtfulness (assuming Sophie will remember the context or significance of the gift) sets up a sense of reciprocity. Then, the phrase "Remember?" indicates a shared history or memory between Agatha and Sophie regarding the gift. This shared memory strengthens their relationship. By laughing and mentioning where she found the gift, Agatha asserts her thoughtfulness and effort in finding or choosing the gift for Sophie. This effort is a form of positive politeness, showing that Agatha values Sophie and their relationship. The friendly tone, laughter, and remembering of finding the gift helps to maintain positive feelings between Agatha and Sophie.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that positive politeness strategies, as proposed by Brown and Levinson, such as notice attend to the hearer, exaggeration, joking, showing optimism, and more, reflect how the characters in the story express affection, solidarity, and mutual respect while dealing with complex situations. These strategies also help build relationships in a narrative that revolves around themes of right and wrong, identity, and belonging.

This study's focus on expressive utterances within a fantasy setting offers unique insights that distinguish it from previous research, which primarily examines animated or dramatic films. While earlier studies Angel Isabella et al. (2022), Son (2023), and Wiyanto et al. (2023) have shown that Brown and Levinson's strategies express the speaker's feelings such as interest, approval, or sympathy. This study illustrates how these strategies are adapted to the distinctive features of the

fantasy genre. Characters use politeness strategies to connect emotionally within a world shaped by magic and moral dichotomies, which sets this research apart.

Furthermore, Damayanti and Mubarak (2021) identified universal factors influencing communication, such as setting, participants, purpose, and tone. While these factors are widely applicable, their manifestation in a fantasy context highlights the necessity of adapting communication styles to extraordinary settings. This study builds on such findings by demonstrating how characters modify their speech to navigate fantastical relationships, including unique hierarchical dynamics between magical beings and humans. These dynamics, distinct from real-world interactions, emphasize how characters adjust their language to accommodate the extraordinary.

Moreover, other strategies, such as “use in-group identity markers” (we have to stick together) and “include both speaker and hearer in activity” (we’re good enough and strong enough), focus on strengthening interpersonal relationships and reinforcing solidarity. These strategies, often marked by inclusive language, shared memories, and cooperative terms, foster unity and support. By creating a positive environment, these expressions build stronger bonds and reduce the likelihood of conflict. This finding aligns with research by Bintangtrichaya et al. (2023), which suggests that positive politeness strategies enhance interactions, particularly among individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Another significant finding involves strategies like “being optimistic” or “offering promises.” Expressions of concern, optimism, and reassurance, such as when Agatha promises Sophie she won’t leave or expresses hope about Sophie becoming more beautiful and powerful, help build trust, confidence, and emotional support. These results align with research by Iddris (2021) and Rohmatin (2019), which recognize expressive utterances, such as gratitude, apologies, and compliments, as essential to maintaining harmony and strengthening relationships.

Additionally, the characters demonstrate emotional sensitivity to each other’s feelings. For example, Sophie avoids disagreement with statements like, “You’re supposed to drop me at the good school,” highlighting how characters use politeness strategies to avoid conflict and maintain harmony, even in tense situations. Additionally, several strategies focus on promoting cooperation and unity. The characters employ strategies like “give reasons” (because we fight for each other) to bring their goals together and encourage teamwork. The frequent use of inclusive language and promises shows how much the characters rely on each other and work together toward common goals.

However, the reliance on a single movie limits the generalizability of the findings. While this study provides an in-depth analysis of positive politeness strategies in a fantasy context, the extent to which these findings apply to other genres remains unclear. For instance, in animated films like *Frozen* or dramatic movies like *The Fault in Our Stars*, positive politeness strategies might differ due to these genres’ distinctive narrative styles, character dynamics, and emotional tones. Animated films often rely on exaggerated expressions and humor, which might amplify certain politeness strategies like joking or seeking agreement. In contrast, dramatic films might focus more on subtle, context-driven strategies such as showing emotional sensitivity or avoiding disagreements.

Additionally, cultural contexts play a significant role in shaping how politeness is expressed. For example, in East Asian films, positive politeness might manifest more in deference and indirectness, reflecting cultural values of collectivism and hierarchy. In contrast, Western films might emphasize direct expressions of solidarity and optimism, as seen in *The School for Good and Evil*. Comparing the findings of this study to movies from other cultures or genres could uncover patterns and variations in the use of politeness strategies, providing a more comprehensive understanding of their application.

Future research could address these limitations by examining a wider range of genres, such as romantic comedies, historical dramas, or action films, and exploring cross-cultural differences in the use of positive politeness strategies. This approach would help identify whether certain

strategies are universal or context-specific, broadening the applicability of the findings. Such comparisons could also reveal how genre conventions and cultural norms influence the selection and adaptation of politeness strategies.

CONCLUSION

Analyzing the dialogues from "The School for Good and Evil," it became evident that positive politeness strategies, based on Brown and Levinson (1987), played an essential role in determining the storyline and character development. Strategies such as *noticing*, *attend*, *exaggerating*, *intensifying interest*, *using in-group identity markers*, *seeking agreement*, *avoiding disagreement*, *presuming common ground*, *joking*, *asserting knowledge*, *offering*, *promising*, *being optimistic*, *including both speakers and hearers*, *giving reasons*, *assuming reciprocity*, and *give gifts* help speakers in communicating their perspectives and avoids miscommunication, so it enhanced communication by making interactions clearer and more respectful. The expressive function of speech also cannot be separated in conversation because all speech expresses ideas or feelings to build and make relationships deeper, even when there are moral differences between good and bad schools. However, the study confines itself to analyzing a single movie, potentially underrepresenting the variety of expressive utterances in other films or contexts. Future research might inquire into the execution of positive politeness strategies in different genres or cultural contexts to better understand these communications. Furthermore, comparing these strategies through various media, such as books, podcasts, or television shows, could enhance the analysis.

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