



Politeness Strategies in the Dialogue of Dilan 1990: A Pragmatic Approach

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Abstract. *This study is motivated by the importance of politeness strategies in film discourse as a reflection of social interaction and cultural values. It aims to identify the types of politeness strategies used in the film Dilan 1990 and to determine the most dominant strategy along with its contextual use in interpersonal interactions, based on Brown and Levinson's framework. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, the data consist of 40 utterances containing potential face-threatening acts. The data were analyzed through identification, classification, and interpretation according to four politeness strategies: Bald on Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, and Off-Record. The findings reveal that all four strategies appear in the film dialogues, with Positive Politeness as the dominant strategy, indicating closeness, humor, and social solidarity, particularly between the main characters, Dilan and Milea. Bald on Record is mainly used in instructional and hierarchical relationships, while Negative Politeness and Off-Record occur in more sensitive situations or when indirect meanings are intended. These results imply that Dilan 1990 represents politeness values within Indonesia's collectivistic culture, especially in youth communication that emphasizes harmony and social cohesion.*

Keywords: *Adolescents; Dilan 1990; Indonesian Culture; Politeness Strategies; Pragmatics.*

Abstrak. Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh pentingnya kajian kesantunan berbahasa dalam wacana film sebagai representasi interaksi sosial dan nilai budaya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis jenis-jenis strategi kesantunan serta strategi yang paling dominan beserta konteks penggunaannya dalam dialog film Dilan 1990 berdasarkan teori Brown dan Levinson. Metode yang digunakan adalah deskriptif kualitatif dengan sumber data berupa 40 tuturan yang berpotensi mengancam muka (face-threatening acts). Data dianalisis melalui tahapan identifikasi, klasifikasi, dan interpretasi berdasarkan empat strategi kesantunan, yaitu bald on record, kesantunan positif, kesantunan negatif, dan off-record. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa seluruh jenis strategi kesantunan muncul dalam dialog film. Kesantunan positif menjadi strategi yang paling dominan, yang mencerminkan kedekatan, humor, dan solidaritas sosial antartokoh, khususnya antara Dilan dan Milea. Strategi bald on record umumnya digunakan dalam relasi yang bersifat instruktif dan hierarkis, sementara kesantunan negatif dan off-record muncul dalam situasi yang lebih sensitif atau ketika penutur ingin menyampaikan maksud secara tidak langsung. Temuan ini mengimplikasikan bahwa film Dilan 1990 merepresentasikan nilai-nilai kesantunan dalam budaya kolektivistik Indonesia, terutama dalam membangun keharmonisan dan hubungan sosial dalam komunikasi remaja.

Kata kunci: Budaya Indonesia; Dilan 1990; Pragmatik; Remaja; Strategi Kesantunan.

1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Language functions as the central medium through which humans communicate, allowing individuals to express ideas, emotions, and intentions within social interaction. Effective communication, however, is not determined solely by linguistic form or grammatical accuracy, but also by the speaker's ability to select appropriate speech strategies in relation to social context and interpersonal relationships (Wardhaugh, 1998; Yule, 1996). An essential component of social interaction is linguistic politeness, which plays a key role in maintaining social harmony and preserving the public image of both speakers and hearers.

Politeness is closely associated with the concept of face, as introduced by Goffman (1967), referring to the self-image individuals seek to uphold in social encounters. In this sense, every utterance carries the potential to threaten the hearer's face, commonly referred to as a Face Threatening Act (FTA). To mitigate such threats, speakers typically employ particular politeness strategies. Brown and Levinson (1987) categorize these strategies into four main types: Bald on Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, and Off-Record, which continue to serve as a foundational framework in pragmatic analysis.

Research on politeness strategies has been widely conducted across various communicative contexts, including film as a form of mediated discourse. Films are often regarded as reflections of everyday language use, as their dialogues represent social norms, interpersonal relationships, and culturally embedded values. Previous studies have demonstrated the frequent occurrence of politeness strategies in film dialogues across different genres, such as *The Princess Diaries* (Pratiwi et al., 2018), *Dead Poets Society* (Utami, 2019), *Green Book* (Mustofa et al., 2024), and *Frozen 2* (Kustianingsih & Firharmawan, 2025). These findings emphasize the role of politeness strategies in expressing respect, fostering intimacy, and sustaining harmonious interaction among characters.

Dilan 1990 is one of Indonesia's most well-known films and is notable for its distinctive dialogue style, particularly in portraying teenage communication. The interactions between the main characters, Dilan and Milea, frequently involve humor, familiarity, mild teasing, and indirect expressions, making the dialogue pragmatically rich for analysis. This linguistic pattern reflects the use of contextual and culturally specific politeness strategies within Indonesian youth communication. Nevertheless, studies that specifically examine politeness strategies in *Dilan 1990* using Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework remain relatively limited.

Therefore, this study seeks to address this research gap by analyzing the politeness strategies employed in the dialogue of *Dilan 1990*. The study aims to identify the types of politeness strategies used by the characters and to explain how these strategies reflect social relationships and the cultural characteristics of Indonesian youth communication.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts a pragmatic perspective, a branch of linguistics concerned with interpreting meaning in relation to the context of language use. Pragmatics emphasizes that meaning is shaped not only by linguistic forms, but also by situational factors, social relationships, and speakers' communicative intentions (Yule, 1996; Leech, 2016). Within this

framework, linguistic politeness constitutes a central area of inquiry, as it explains how speakers strategically manage interpersonal relations through language.

The notion of politeness is grounded in Goffman's (1967) concept of face, which refers to the social self-image individuals seek to maintain during interaction. Goffman highlights the importance of both preserving one's own image and showing respect for the image of others. From this perspective, every utterance carries the potential to threaten the interlocutor's face, making the use of mitigating strategies necessary to reduce such risks.

Building on this concept, Brown and Levinson (1987) formulated one of the most influential politeness theories in pragmatic studies. They distinguish between two types of face: positive face, which reflects an individual's desire to be approved of and appreciated, and negative face, which concerns the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition. To address potential face threats, Brown and Levinson propose four politeness strategies. Bald on Record involves direct and unmitigated speech, typically used in urgent situations or among closely related interlocutors. Positive Politeness focuses on strengthening social bonds through expressions of solidarity, such as compliments, humor, or shared concerns. Negative Politeness emphasizes restraint and respect by employing indirectness and minimizing imposition. Off-Record, in contrast, relies on indirect or ambiguous expressions, allowing meaning to be inferred by the hearer rather than stated explicitly.

Brown and Levinson's politeness framework has been extensively applied in the analysis of film dialogue, as films offer linguistically rich and contextually grounded data. Previous research indicates that politeness strategies in films often mirror the social norms and cultural values of the communities in which the films are produced (Pratiwi et al., 2018; Utami, 2019; Mustofa et al., 2024). In the Indonesian context, studies suggest that Positive Politeness tends to be predominant, reflecting a collectivist cultural orientation that prioritizes closeness, harmony, and social solidarity (Prayitno, 2011; Setyawan, 2018).

Accordingly, Brown and Levinson's (1987) pragmatic theory of politeness serves as the primary theoretical foundation for this study in analyzing the dialogue of the film *Dilan 1990*. This framework enables a systematic examination of how politeness strategies are employed by the characters to construct social relationships and to represent patterns of adolescent communication within the Indonesian cultural context.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design. This approach is selected because the study seeks to explore and provide an in-depth description of linguistic phenomena as they occur within their natural contexts of use. Descriptive qualitative research prioritizes the interpretation and understanding of meaning rather than numerical measurement or statistical testing (Creswell, 2014; Moleong, 2017). Accordingly, this study focuses on examining the politeness strategies employed by characters in the film *Dilan 1990*, drawing on the politeness theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987).

Research Population and Sample

The population of this study includes all dialogues presented in the film *Dilan 1990*. The research sample consists of selected utterances that contain politeness strategies, encompassing both positive and negative politeness, produced by the main and supporting characters in the film. The sampling technique employed in this study is purposive sampling, whereby data are deliberately selected based on their relevance to the research objectives.

Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

The data were collected using a documentation technique, with the film *Dilan 1990* serving as the primary data source. The data collection process was conducted through several systematic stages: (1) repeatedly watching the film to gain comprehensive familiarity with the dialogues, (2) transcribing the film's dialogues, (3) identifying utterances that contain politeness strategies, and (4) classifying the selected data according to the politeness strategy categories proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987).

In this study, the researcher functioned as the primary research instrument (human instrument), supported by a data classification sheet to facilitate the organization, categorization, and analysis of the utterances.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out using an interactive analysis model consisting of three principal stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The categorized data were then analyzed through a pragmatic approach, drawing on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory to elucidate the functions, meanings, and contextual uses of politeness strategies in interactions among the characters.

Data Validity and Reliability

Data validity was ensured through theoretical triangulation, which involved comparing the results of the analysis with established concepts and findings from relevant pragmatic and politeness theories. The results of this process indicated that the analyzed data were consistent with the theoretical framework employed. Therefore, the findings of this study can be considered qualitatively valid and reliable.

Research Model

The research model illustrates the analytical flow as follows: the film *Dilan 1990* as the data source → identification of relevant utterances → classification of politeness strategies → pragmatic analysis based on contextual factors → interpretation of the functions of politeness in constructing meaning and social relationships.

Within this model, film dialogues function as linguistic data, politeness strategies constitute the primary analytical focus, and the speech context serves as a determining element influencing the interpretation of meaning.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussion of the study concerning the politeness strategies employed by characters in the film *Dilan 1990*, analyzed through the framework of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987). The discussion is presented narratively by integrating the process of data collection, research context, analytical results, theoretical interpretation, comparison with previous studies, and the implications of the findings.

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, with the data source consisting of dialogues from the film *Dilan 1990* written by Pidi Baiq and directed by Pidi Baiq and Fajar Bustomi. Data were collected using a documentation technique, which involved repeatedly watching the film, transcribing the dialogues, and identifying utterances that contained potential Face Threatening Acts (FTAs). The selected utterances were then classified according to the four politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987): Bald on Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, and Off-Record. The data collection process was conducted from June to July 2025. This research is categorized as non-field research, as the data were obtained from audiovisual media in the form of a film.

The analysis of 40 utterances containing politeness strategies reveals that all four types of politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson are employed by the characters in *Dilan 1990*. The distribution of these strategies is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Politeness Strategies in the Film Dilan 1990.

No	Type of Politeness Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
1	Positive Politeness	5	37.5%
2	Bald on Record	10	25%
3	Off Record	8	20%
4	Negative Politeness	7	17.5%
Total		40	100%

As shown in Table 1, Positive Politeness is the most frequently employed strategy, accounting for 37.5% of the total data. This dominance indicates that interactions between characters particularly between Dilan and Milea are characterized by familiarity, solidarity, and emotional closeness. Positive Politeness is commonly realized through compliments, humor, informal language, and expressions of care.

An example of Positive Politeness can be observed in the following dialogue:

Dilan: *“Milea, you are beautiful.”*

Dilan: *“Milea, kamu cantik.”*

This utterance illustrates the use of Positive Politeness, as Dilan delivers a compliment that directly addresses Milea’s positive face. By praising her appearance, the speaker attempts to create intimacy and strengthen emotional closeness, thereby promoting social solidarity. As proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), compliments function as a positive politeness strategy because they allow the hearer to feel appreciated and socially accepted. Within the context of Dilan 1990, such expressions reflect an informal and affectionate communication style that is commonly found in adolescent interactions.

The Bald on Record strategy ranks second, with a frequency of 25%. This strategy is typically used in situations where clarity and efficiency are prioritized, particularly among speakers who share a close relationship or in contexts involving authority. In Dilan 1990, Bald on Record utterances are not necessarily interpreted as impolite but often function as expressions of concern or responsibility.

The following dialogue illustrates the use of Bald on Record:

Teacher: *“Dilan! Get out!”*

Guru: *“Dilan! Keluar!”*

This utterance exemplifies a Bald on Record politeness strategy, as the speaker issues a direct command without employing any mitigating devices. The teacher prioritizes clarity and authority, which is appropriate within a hierarchical relationship such as that between a teacher and a student. As explained by Brown and Levinson (1987), Bald on Record strategies are typically used when the speaker holds greater power over the hearer or when communicative efficiency is required. In this context, the directness of the command is socially acceptable and does not necessitate politeness markers, since institutional authority legitimizes the face-threatening act.

The Off-Record strategy accounts for 20% of the analyzed data. This strategy is characterized by indirect or implicit expressions that allow the speaker to convey meaning without explicitly stating their intention. Off-Record strategies are frequently used in emotionally sensitive situations to avoid direct confrontation.

An example of this strategy is shown below:

Dilan: *"It's late... your family must be worried."*

Dilan: *"Sudah malam... orang rumah pasti khawatir."*

This utterance demonstrates the use of an Off-Record politeness strategy, as the speaker communicates the intended meaning indirectly without explicitly making a request or giving a command. Instead of directly asking the hearer to go home, Dilan expresses concern for her well-being by referring to her family's possible worry. As proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), Off-Record strategies enable speakers to reduce face-threatening acts by allowing the hearer to infer the intended meaning. In the context of Indonesian communication, such indirectness reflects a cultural tendency to value subtlety and to avoid overt imposition, especially in emotionally sensitive situations.

Negative Politeness is the least frequently used strategy, occurring in 17.5% of the data. This strategy is commonly found in formal or hierarchical interactions, particularly between students and teachers. Negative Politeness is marked by indirect requests, polite markers, and expressions that minimize imposition on the hearer.

The following dialogue exemplifies Negative Politeness:

Milea: *"Excuse me, Sir, may I leave early?"*

Milea: *"Permisi, Pak, boleh saya pulang duluan?"*

This utterance illustrates a Negative Politeness strategy, as the speaker employs polite markers and an indirect request to reduce imposition on the interlocutor. By using expressions such as "excuse me" and "may I", Milea acknowledges the teacher's higher social status and shows respect for the hearer's autonomy. As stated by Brown and Levinson (1987), Negative

Politeness serves to protect the hearer's negative face by recognizing their right to freedom of action. In the context of *Dilan 1990*, this strategy reflects Indonesian cultural values that emphasize respect, deference, and formality in hierarchical relationships, particularly in educational settings.

Overall, the findings indicate that the use of politeness strategies in *Dilan 1990* is influenced not only by universal pragmatic principles but also by Indonesia's collectivist cultural orientation. The predominance of Positive Politeness aligns with previous studies suggesting that adolescent communication in Indonesia emphasizes warmth, familiarity, and social solidarity. Meanwhile, the presence of Bald on Record, Off-Record, and Negative Politeness strategies demonstrates the characters' pragmatic flexibility in adapting their language to different social contexts and relational dynamics.

From a theoretical perspective, this study reinforces the applicability of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory in analyzing Indonesian cinematic discourse. Practically, the findings contribute to the teaching of pragmatics and discourse analysis by providing authentic examples of politeness strategies as represented in popular media, particularly in the context of adolescent communication.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined the types of politeness strategies and their patterns of use in the dialogue of the film *Dilan 1990* by applying Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework. Based on the analysis of 40 utterances containing Face Threatening Acts (FTAs), the results show that all four politeness strategies Bald on Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, and Off-Record are present in the film. Positive Politeness appears most frequently, suggesting that interactions among the characters, especially in adolescent contexts, tend to focus on closeness, friendliness, humor, and social bonding. This pattern indicates that language use in *Dilan 1990* reflects Indonesian collectivist values, where maintaining harmony, warmth in relationships, and social connection is considered important. Meanwhile, Bald on Record, Negative Politeness, and Off-Record strategies are used depending on the situation, such as in hierarchical relationships, more formal settings, or sensitive moments, showing that the characters adjust their speech according to the communicative context. Despite these findings, this study is limited by its focus on a single film, which means the results cannot be broadly generalized to all forms of adolescent communication or Indonesian films. For this reason, future studies are encouraged to use more varied data, for example by comparing different films

or genres, or by combining linguistic analysis with multimodal and sociocultural perspectives to gain a deeper understanding of politeness strategies in popular media.

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