



## Politeness Strategies and Factors in the Animated Movie *Onward*

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**Abstract-** This research study analyzes the politeness strategies employed by the characters in the animated movie *Onward* and explores the factors that influence their choices. By utilizing the theories of politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson, the data obtained in this qualitative research is examined. The research employs observation and note-taking techniques, using video recordings of the movie, transcriptions of the characters' utterances, and tables or data sheets as the primary tools for data collection. The findings reveal that the characters utilize four main types of politeness strategies, including bald on-record, off-record, and negative politeness, with positive politeness emerging as the dominant approach. This means that the characters prioritize maintaining social harmony in their interactions. Additionally, the factors influencing the choice of politeness strategies relevance, circumstances, and payoff were identified, with payoff indicating the primary factors that the characters aim to maximize the benefits of their conversations. Furthermore, the characters' linguistic choices were found to be influenced by the socio-cultural aspects of their society.

**Keywords:** Politeness Strategies, Characters, Animation Movie, *Onward*

### 1. PENDAHULUAN

Language serves as a vital communication tool, enabling individuals to express thoughts, ideas, and emotions (Rabiah, 2018). Effective communication often requires politeness, which helps prevent misunderstandings and conflicts. Politeness strategies, as part of this, involve a speaker's consideration for others' feelings and maintaining social harmony, particularly in face-threatening acts (FTAs). Politeness focuses on addressing threats to self-esteem by affirming positive social values in interactions. People feel happy when given attention and angry when underestimated due to their self-esteem. Brown and Levinson (1987) outline five politeness strategies: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, off-record, and avoiding face-threatening acts (FTA).

.According to Leech (1983), politeness is a strategy to avoid conflict based on the effort involved. Sunra et al. (2022) describe politeness as behaving according to sociocultural norms in social interactions. This includes being friendly, respectful, and avoiding actions that may threaten others' feelings.

Politeness is evident in everyday interactions and in dialogues from animated movies. According to Safitri (2019), these films often reflect real-life communication styles, making them useful for teaching politeness strategies. The animated movie *Onward* offers rich examples of politeness in character interactions, providing insights into American cultural norms that can aid English language learners in understanding these differences, particularly in familial contexts.

Pragmatics, which studies language use in context, is closely connected to politeness strategies, as both deal with how meaning is communicated and understood in real-world interactions. Levinson (1983) highlights that pragmatics focuses on the relationship between language and context, which is crucial for understanding the use of politeness strategies. These strategies help speakers navigate social interactions by choosing language that fits the situation and respects the listener's self-esteem.

Furthermore, as Luo (2016) argues, context is responsible for the existence and development of language. It shapes how language is used, changed, and understood. Context provides a framework for interpreting communication, influencing the choice of politeness strategies based on factors like participants, setting, and socio-cultural norms. Understanding context ensures that speakers can effectively manage interactions and maintain social harmony by selecting appropriate politeness strategies.

This research examines *Onward* to explore how politeness strategies are employed in character interactions, linking American and Indonesian cultural norms. Understanding these differences enhances intercultural competence for Indonesian students studying English (Liu et al., 2023). For instance, Ian's request, "Uh ... um, would you mind not putting your feet on my chair today?" illustrates a negative politeness strategy by softening his request through indirect language, demonstrating respect for the other person's autonomy.

Several studies have explored politeness strategies. Utami (2018) found that characters in *The Fault in Our Stars* used bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. Sari et al. (2017) analyzed *Finding Neverland* and identified 58 utterances showing four politeness strategies: 14 bald on record, 27 positive politeness, 16 negative politeness, and 1 off record. Permadi (2020) identified 13 positive politeness strategies in *Midnight in Paris*, with the "Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy)" strategy being most frequent.

Inspired by these studies, this research focuses on *Onward*, examining not only the main characters but also supporting characters, while considering cultural and contextual factors. Unlike previous research, this study





investigates how Onward's American English and fantasy world setting impact politeness strategies. By analyzing the characters' utterances, this research aims to describe the types and influencing factors of politeness strategies, using Brown and Levinson's theory, focusing on four strategies: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record. The "don't do FTA" strategy is excluded, as it involves the speaker saying nothing.

## 2. METODOLOGI PENELITIAN

This research employed a qualitative design, as it focused on descriptive data in the form of spoken words and observed activities without involving numerical calculations. Qualitative research allows for an exploration of meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to social phenomena, making it suitable for this study, which sought to understand the types of politeness strategies and the factors influencing their choice in the movie Onward (Creswell, 2009). The primary subjects of the research were the characters in Onward, and the data consisted of 1,628 utterances from key and supporting characters, focusing on instances where politeness strategies were prominently used.

The data were collected through repeated viewings of the movie, transcription of dialogue, and observation of the characters' interactions, paying close attention to verbal and non-verbal cues like facial expressions, gestures, and the context of the utterances. Mackey and Gass (2015) state that observations are valuable for gathering detailed information on participants' behavior and actions in a specific setting.

Moreover, nonverbal communication, which conveys meaning through actions rather than words, significantly influences politeness strategies. It reflects emotional states and can express respect or friendliness. For instance, maintaining eye contact and using attentive gestures enhance positive politeness, while avoiding direct eye contact and maintaining distance support negative politeness by respecting personal space. As Krumrey (2022) notes, nonverbal cues such as gestures, facial expressions, and posture are vital for communication, shaping how politeness is perceived and ensuring that interactions align with social norms.

To ensure the accuracy of the findings, the researcher employed visual-verbal video analysis, a method suitable for analyzing various forms of video data (Fazeli et al., 2023). The analysis began with transcribing utterances, describing the context, and observing non-verbal communication, such as body language and facial expressions. Then, the utterances were categorized based on Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness strategies, including bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. Factors such as payoff, social distance, power, and rank of imposition were also analyzed. The data were systematically organized into tables, which helped identify patterns in the use of politeness strategies. This comprehensive process allowed the researcher to draw meaningful conclusions regarding the characters' communication styles and the factors influencing their choice of politeness strategies.

## 3. HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN

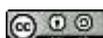
### 3.1 FINDINGS

This section analyzes the data collected from the table sheet to address the first research question: "What politeness strategies are implemented in the animated movie Onward?" Additionally, it explores the second research question: "What factors influence the characters' choice of politeness strategies in Onward?" By examining these aspects, the analysis aims to uncover the intricacies of politeness in character interactions and the contextual influences that shape their communication choices.

#### 3.1.1 The Type Of Politeness Strategies Implemented

In the analysis of the movie "Onward," a total of 72 utterances containing politeness strategies were identified among the characters. The distribution of these strategies is as follows:

1. **Positive Politeness:** This strategy had the highest frequency, with 32 occurrences. The frequent use of positive politeness indicates that the characters often aimed to reduce social distance, express friendliness, and build solidarity.
2. **Bald-On-Record:** This strategy was observed 17 times. It involves direct and straightforward communication, often used in situations where clarity and urgency are essential, or the relationship between speakers allows for directness.
3. **Negative Politeness:** This strategy was noted 12 times. It focuses on showing respect and deference, aiming to avoid imposition and acknowledge the listener's need for autonomy.
4. **Off-Record:** This strategy appeared the least frequently, with 11 occurrences. It involves indirect communication, allowing speakers to hint or suggest without making direct statements, thereby avoiding potential face-threatening acts.





### 3.1.2 Factors Influencing Politeness Strategies

The factors influencing the characters' choice of politeness strategies in "Onward" were identified as follows:

#### 1. Payoff

Seken (2015) states that payoffs are the benefits that the speaker receives in connection with the use of polite strategies. Refers to the benefit or advantage gained from using a particular politeness strategy. This factor influenced 18 utterances, indicating that characters often chose strategies based on the anticipated positive outcomes, such as maintaining harmony or achieving a specific goal.

#### 2. Relevant Circumstances: Encompasses the context of the conversation, including:

- a. **Social Distance:** The nature of the relationship between speakers, which influenced 15 utterances. This suggests that the closeness or familiarity between characters played a crucial role in determining their level of politeness.
- b. **Power:** The relative status or authority between speakers, which influenced 3 utterances. This indicates that power dynamics had a relatively minor impact on the choice of politeness strategies.
- c. **Rank of Imposition:** The level of burden or imposition the request or statement places on the listener, influencing 11 utterances. This highlights the significance of considering how much a request or statement imposes on the listener.

Additionally, 24 utterances were influenced by both payoff and relevant circumstances, showing that these factors often interact to shape the characters' communication strategies.

### 3.1.3 Examples of utterances categorized by politeness strategies according to each sub-strategy, along with factors influencing these utterance

#### 1. Positive Politeness Example:

Utterance:

Barley: **Oh, I got it. The disguise spell. You can disguise yourself to be anyone you want.**

The context is Barley confidently suggested to Ian to use the disguise spell as long as Ian did not lie because they are in trouble and have to face police. Barley offers a positive outlook on using the disguise spell, pointing out that the spell will work fine as long as Ian tells the truth. Payoff is a factor influencing the choice being made, as being optimistic in this context will comfort Ian, minimize potential face-threatening acts (FTA), and increase an atmosphere that is encouraging. Furthermore, the strategy helps Ian maintain a positive social distance by helping him constructively and optimistically.

#### 2. Bald-On-Record Example:

Utterance Colt: **I'm not letting you upset your mother anymore. Now you get in the vehicle, I'm escorting you home.**

The context is Officer Colt commanded Ian and Barley to return home and meet their mother. In this context, Officer Colt is giving a direct command to Ian and Barley, explicitly stating that he's escorting them home and preventing them from upsetting their mother further. It's a straightforward and assertive communication strategy, falling under the FTA-oriented Bald on Record category. The factor influencing the choice of the politeness strategy in Officer Colt's command is power. As a law enforcement officer, he wields authority and power in the interaction, and his direct and assertive command reflects this power dynamic

#### 3. Negative Politeness Example:

Utterance: A man: **You're kidding. I went to college with him.**  
 Ian: **Really?**  
 A man: **Yeah. Boy, I was so sorry to hear that he passed away.**  
 Ian: Yeah....Thanks.

The context Gaxton was very happy to know that Ian was Wilden's son, but because Wilden had died, Gaxton apologized to Ian for reminding Ian of his father's death. This utterance can be categorized as a negative politeness strategy because Gaxton is attempting to minimize the imposition of reminding Ian of his father's death. By apologizing, Gaxton acknowledges the potentially sensitive nature of the topic and expresses regret for any discomfort it may cause Ian. The factor influencing this choice is the anticipated payoff of offering comfort and showing respect for Ian's emotions during a difficult time.

#### 4. Off-Record Example:

Utterance:

Ian who disguise as officer Colt Bronco: **Uh... What am I doing out here? What are any of us doing out here?**

The context is Ian, who was disguised as Officer Colt, was confused about answering the questions from the police on duty. The use of tautologies in this context can be categorized as an off-record strategy. Tautologies are statements that repeat the same idea using different words, often used to





indirectly convey a message or prompt the listener to consider a deeper meaning. In this interaction, Ian, disguised as Officer Colt, uses the off-record sub-strategy of tautologies influenced by both payoff and social distance. Ian's questions, such as "What am I doing out here? What are any of us doing out here?" are a way to avoid directly lying and to confuse the police officers, thus avoiding potentially damaging interpretations that could lead to his true identity being revealed. This aligns with the payoff of avoiding detection and maintaining his deception. Additionally, Ian's use of tautologies may reflect his perception of social distance from the police officers, as he tries to maintain a professional and authoritative demeanor despite his deceptive intent.

### 3.2 Discussion

This section discusses the research findings related to the study's primary objectives: the implementation of politeness strategies in *Onward* and the factors influencing these strategies. Data were collected through video analysis, transcription of character utterances, and data sheets, focusing on expressions, nonverbal cues, and contextual interactions.

The analysis revealed that characters utilized four main politeness strategies based on Brown and Levinson's framework. Among the seventy-two utterances analyzed, positive politeness was the most prevalent (32 occurrences), followed by bald-on-record (17), negative politeness (12), and off-record strategies (11). Positive politeness, aimed at maintaining social harmony, was frequently employed; for instance, Laurel praises Ian for his sewing skills, reinforcing their familial bond.

Notably, not all sub-strategies from Brown and Levinson were present. Only select strategies, such as avoiding disagreement and giving reasons, were utilized, indicating contextual selectivity. This contrasts with Permadi's (2020) findings in *Midnight in Paris*, where exaggeration was predominantly used, highlighting differing manifestations of politeness across films.

Bald-on-record strategies were employed for explicit commands and warnings, particularly in familial contexts. Negative politeness mitigated face threats, with characters using indirect language and hedging to show respect for listeners' autonomy, reflecting American cultural norms around politeness.

Off-record strategies were the least utilized, indicating a preference for direct communication in most interactions, though they were employed in delicate situations, showcasing the characters' sensitivity to context.

The choice of politeness strategies was influenced by two key factors: "payoff," which refers to the benefits gained from using a specific strategy, and "relevant circumstances," encompassing social distance, power dynamics, and rank of imposition. Notably, twenty-four utterances were influenced by both factors, with payoff alone affecting eighteen utterances. Social distance emerged as the most significant factor, impacting politeness strategies in fifteen instances.

This aligns with Sari et al.'s (2017) study on *Finding Neverland*, which similarly identified contextual factors influencing politeness strategies. While both studies share similarities, *Onward* stands out for its focus on familial interactions and informal communication.

In conclusion, *Onward* offers a nuanced portrayal of politeness strategies, illustrating how cultural norms shape character interactions. The frequent use of positive politeness fosters familial bonds, while bald-on-record strategies facilitate clear communication. Overall, the analysis enhances our understanding of the complexity of politeness behaviors in cinematic narratives, showcasing how characters navigate interpersonal dynamics in a culturally resonant manner.

## 4. KESIMPULAN

In the animated movie *"Onward,"* a total of seventy-two utterances were analyzed to understand the use of politeness strategies among the characters. The analysis revealed that the most frequently used strategy was positive politeness, which appeared thirty-two times. This indicates that the main characters and others often employed friendliness and inclusivity in their interactions.

The bald-on-record strategy was the second most common, used seventeen times, showing that characters often chose directness and honesty in their speech. The negative politeness strategy, involving indirectness and a desire to avoid offense, was implemented twelve times. Lastly, the off-record strategy, which involves indirect and ambiguous communication, was the least used, appearing only eleven times.

The choice of politeness strategies in *"Onward"* was influenced by various factors, primarily payoff and relevant circumstances. "Payoff" refers to the benefits gained from using a specific strategy, while "relevant circumstances" include social distance (the relationship between speakers), power (the relative status or authority between speakers), and rank of imposition (the level of burden or imposition a request or statement places on the listener).

Notably, twenty-four utterances were influenced by both payoff and relevant circumstances. Payoff alone influenced eighteen utterances. Social distance had the most significant impact, influencing politeness strategies





fifteen times, indicating that the relationship between speakers was crucial in determining their level of politeness. Power influenced politeness strategies three times, showing a minor impact, while the rank of imposition influenced eleven times, underscoring the importance of the level of burden or imposition in communication.

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