



## An Analysis of Politeness Strategies Used by the Main Character in Military Environment

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### Abstract:

This study analyzed the types of politeness strategies based on Brown and Levinson's (1988) theory used by the main character, Ender Wiggin. The researcher interprets and identifies utterances containing politeness to find out how these strategies can be used in a military environment with high authority using qualitative descriptive methods. The results of this study indicate that there are four types of politeness strategies such as bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record used by Ender Wiggin in the film. The bald on record strategy appears most dominantly, depicting clear and firm communication in a military environment. Positive and negative politeness strategies are used to maintain harmony between characters so they can work together, foster empathy and to show respect for the highest authority, especially when Ender develops his leadership skills. Meanwhile, off record strategies appear less frequently but can reflect the emotional state of the characters in the film indirectly. Overall, this study in analyzing politeness strategies can show that these strategies not only function as linguistic tools, but can also be used to develop leadership character, respect, power relations, and communication in leadership.

**Keywords:** politeness strategies; Ender's game; leadership

### Abstrak:

Penelitian ini menganalisis jenis-jenis strategi kesantunan berdasarkan teori Brown dan Levinson (1988) yang digunakan oleh karakter utama Ender Wiggin. Peneliti menafsirkan dan mengidentifikasi ujaran yang mengandung kesantunan untuk dapat mengetahui bagaimana strategi tersebut dapat digunakan dalam lingkungan militer dengan otoritas tinggi menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa terdapat empat jenis strategi kesantunan seperti bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, dan off record yang digunakan oleh Ender Wiggin dalam film. Strategi bald on record paling dominan muncul, menggambarkan komunikasi secara jelas dan tegas dalam lingkungan militer. Strategi positive dan negative politeness digunakan untuk menjaga keharmonisan antar karakter agar bisa bekerja sama, menumbuhkan rasa empati dan untuk menunjukkan rasa hormat kepada otoritas tertinggi, terutama saat Ender mengembangkan kemampuan dalam kepemimpinannya. Sementara itu, strategi off record lebih sedikit muncul tetapi dapat mencerminkan kondisi emosional karakter dalam film secara tidak langsung. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini dalam menganalisis strategi kesantunan dapat menunjukkan bahwa strategi ini tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai alat linguistik, namun juga dapat digunakan untuk mengembangkan karakter kepemimpinan, rasa hormat, relasi kekuasaan, dan komunikasi dalam kepemimpinan.

**Kata kunci:** strategi kesantunan; Ender's game; kepemimpinan



## INTRODUCTION

People express ideas and share their emotions through language. According to (Yule, 2010), language not only for basic communication but also for establishing and maintaining social order in relationships. As part of pragmatics, politeness reflects the social dimension of language use, because language not only conveys information but also social intentions and cultural norms. Brown & Levinson (1988) explain that politeness is closely related to the concept of face, which refers to a person's social self-image and sense of respect in interactions. People naturally seek to protect their own face while avoiding actions that could threaten the face of others in communication. Relationships can be damaged by face-threatening actions (FTAs) such as giving orders, making requests, or criticising, if these are not expressed carefully. Through politeness, speakers can maintain social harmony and demonstrate awareness of how their words may affect others.

The researcher wants to analyse the *Ender's Game* movie in a military environment because it reflects real-life scenarios through its characters and interactions. The movie tells the story of Ender Wiggin, a genius boy who the elite international fleet recruits into its ranks. The fleet is preparing to wage war against an alien species called the Formics. It highlights the complex interactions between authority figures and young cadets, often showing conflicts and misunderstandings, and the difficulty of building respect and cooperation within a strict hierarchical system. The film portrays the authority of a leader and highlights the roles of the main characters. Ender is trained at a combat school under the command of Colonel Graff and other commanders. They push him to become a team leader and fight the Formics. This analysis examines the politeness strategies employed by Ender Wiggin, the main character in the film *Ender's Game*, and explains how these strategies relate to leadership communication. As (Silva, 2016) notes, Effective leadership occurs when leaders are selected based on the situation, and demonstrate the skill, courage and qualities of the commander and cadets in the film when facing challenges. (Lenneberg & Cherry, 1957) state that social relationships can be enhanced by communicating using hand gestures or small signs. This means that speaking and writing are no longer the only means of communication. This relates to the gestures used by the characters in this film to give commands.

This study focuses on the use of politeness strategies to maintain power and control, in order to achieve leadership goals such as motivation, persuasion, discipline and obedience, in military environments. This research explains how language is used for



leadership and communication. Previous research has analysed politeness in everyday conversation, family interactions and social relationships. Therefore, politeness in a military environment is the focus of this study, where communication involves authority and power. The findings are expected to improve our understanding of how politeness strategies are employed when giving orders and leading others. This research could also be helpful for linguistics students and researchers interested in studying language use in leadership and communication.

Although several previous studies have discussed politeness strategies, they have focused on different contexts. Fitria et al. (2020) analyzed politeness strategies in *Bridge to Terabithia*, focusing on communication in the context of friendship. Hasmi (2013) studied *Nanny McPhee*, discussing politeness in family interactions. Aditiawarman Maac (2018) studied *The Chronicles of Narnia*, focusing on social cooperation between characters. Musyafa'ah et al. (2022) analyzed *Pride and Prejudice*, highlighting the connection between politeness and social class. Rosari (2016) studied politeness in *The Great Debaters*, focusing on communication in debates. There is a study by Nugroho & Ariatmi (2017) that uses *Ender's Game* (2017), but it only analyzes complaining strategies and does not focus on politeness or leadership. None of these studies have examined politeness strategies in a military setting or related them to leadership communication, which this researcher needs to develop.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Pragmatic

Pragmatics is the study of how people use language in real-life situations, examining how meaning is shaped by context. Rather than focusing on the literal meaning of words, it examines what speakers want to convey and how listeners interpret this. (Yule, 2010) explains that pragmatics is about understanding meaning in context, and how the meaning of a sentence can change depending on who says it, when, and where. It studies how language reflects shared knowledge, social relationships and unspoken rules of interaction. Similarly, (Kroeger, 2022) defines pragmatics as the study of meaning that emerges from language use. This contrasts with semantics, which examines meaning within language itself. Studying pragmatics teaches us how people use words to convey information, express intentions, build relationships and manage social situations effectively.



## *Politeness Strategies*

Politeness strategies are ways of using language that help people maintain respect, harmony, and positive relationships in communication. Brown and Levinson (1987) describe politeness as a universal aspect of communication which helps speakers to maintain their social image and avoid unnecessary conflict with one another. They argue that people use different strategies depending on the context, and they classify politeness as consisting of four types: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record. As (Meiratnasari et al., 2019) explain, politeness strategies help speakers express their ideas clearly while showing respect and sensitivity towards others. (Ryabova, 2015) states that politeness reflects cultural norms and social ethics, determining how people behave and communicate within their communities. Overall, these studies show that politeness strategies involve not only language use, but also social and cultural values that influence human interactions.

### *Bald on Record*

Bald on Record strategy is used when a speaker delivers a message directly and clearly. It is employed when the social distance between speaker and listener is minimal. (Brown & Levinson, 1988) describe this strategy as one that focuses on clarity and naturalness, and is often used in urgent situations. For example, someone might say, “close the door” in a situation requiring immediate action.

### *Positive Politeness*

Positive politeness is a way of reducing social distance, expressed through friendly and supportive language that builds a sense of solidarity between speaker and listener. (Brown & Levinson, 1988) state that this strategy involves showing interest, offering praise and highlighting similarities. For example, saying, “you are really good at this” can strengthen the social bond between the two parties.

### *Negative Politeness*

Negative politeness means respecting the listener's desire for independence. It also means respecting the listener's desire for freedom from coercion. This strategy is characterized by indirectness, as explained by Brown and Levinson (1987) is designed to minimize coercion and give the listener the option to refuse. An example is saying, "sorry to bother you" then ask, "but could you pass the salt?" This demonstrates politeness and acknowledges the coercion.



### *Off Record*

Off-the-record strategies provide a way for speakers to communicate indirectly, leaving their messages open to various interpretations. Brown and Levinson (1987) explain that this strategy helps avoid direct responsibility. It also gives the listener the freedom to interpret or ignore the suggestion. For example, saying "it's cold in here" can indirectly imply a request to close the window without directly requesting it.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a qualitative descriptive method to explore how Ender Wiggin expresses politeness strategies in the film *Ender's Game* (2013). The researcher used a qualitative approach because it focuses on understanding meaning and social interactions rather than numbers or statistics. According to (Crowther & Lauesen, 2017), qualitative research helps us to understand how people use language and behavior in specific contexts to express relationships and intentions. In this study, dialogue from the movie was observed, transcribed, and analyzed to identify various forms of politeness strategies based on Brown & Levinson's (1988) framework, which includes bald on record strategies, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record strategies. Each utterance is analyzed to reveal how it reflects authority, respect and obedience. This provides deeper insights into how communication shapes leadership and social hierarchy within the story.

## FINDINGS

Based on an analysis of the film *Ender's Game*, researcher identified four types of politeness strategies using the theory of politeness developed by (Brown & Levinson, 1988). There are bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record with the total 195 data of politeness strategies used by the main character, Ender Wiggin that found in this movie. The researcher found 107 utterances of bald on record, 36 utterances of positive politeness, 38 utterances of negative politeness, and 14 utterances of off record. The following is an example of data politeness analysis.

### **Bald on record**

The types of bald on record were most frequently used in this movie. The use of this type reflects the military environment and the hierarchical communication style that shapes interactions, especially between the main character and other characters. The clear context in bald on record is how speakers choose direct and straightforward expressions to

ensure clarity, compliance, and efficiency, so that there is no ambiguity in understanding the conversation.

Data 1

Ender : **Shoot me in the leg.**  
Bean : We shoot each other. Same time.

Based on the data, the utterance *shoot me in the leg* is representation of bald on record. In this case, they were students at a combat school undergoing their first simulation. They need to learn how the weapons on their uniforms work. Ender spontaneously asks Bean to shoot him then they wanted to try shooting each other, discovered that the gunshot would freeze the shooter by temporarily binding the muscles of that part of the body that making the person unable to move. This shows the power relationship that occurs when a leader orders one of his teammates.

Data 2

Ender : **I told them I w on ' t cooperate.**  
Valentine : I don't think you're hiding here just because you care about Bonzo. I think you're hiding because you're afraid.

The context of the utterance *I told them I won't cooperate* means that his sister wants him to go back to the battle school, but Ender doesn't want to go back there. His sister says that Ender can't hide just because he cares about Bonzo because he almost killed him, but actually Ender has fear. His sister convinced him that he had to save everyone.

### **Positive politeness**

In contrast to Bald on Record, positive politeness strategies is used when the character aims to maintain cooperation and solidarity, especially in building team harmony. This strategy is often found in Ender's interactions with his friends as he develops his leadership in the Battle School to fight the Formics. According to (Brown & Levinson, 1988), positive politeness is used to demonstrate friendliness while strengthening relationships and building trust with others. This is what Ender learns as his character develops from team member to leader.

Data 1

Petra : Now go to sleep.  
Ender : **Goodnight, Petra.**

Ender's utterance of goodnight, Petra were in the context of them being in the middle of the night. Ender discusses his concerns about war then Petra reminded him that they would be doing a graduation simulation tomorrow so they had to sleep. This includes

positive politeness because Ender wants to build harmony, so when the conversation ends it doesn't feel awkward.

Data 2

Rackham : Good luck, commander.

Ender : **Thankyou, sir.**

The context of this utterance is Ender will lead his team in a graduation simulation against the Formic. If he passes the test, he will be promoted, which is why he thanks to Mazer Rackham.

### Negative politeness

Negative politeness strategies are used in situations that require respect, especially in conversations involving subordinates and high-ranking commanders such as Colonel Graff. This strategy is often found when Ender's character in the film has not yet developed, it happened when he was a student and became a member of the team under Bonzo's command.

Data 1

Professor : Ender, get down here and explain.

Ender : **Ma'a m, I thi n k B ean or Alai h ave a b ette r h an d le on th is th an I d o.**

In the class, there are three students with the highest grades, Ender, Bean, and Alai. However, the professor asks Ender to explain the material. Ender's utterance to the professor is a form of respect and politely refuse the request, so this is part of negative politeness. This demonstrates his leadership character as he gives in to her friends. He realizes that he doesn't always have to be the center of attention. Therefore, giving others the opportunity to gain new experiences shows a deep sense of support.

Data 2

Bonzo : In fact, you don't practice at all.

Ender : **May I speak to you privately, sir?**

Bonzo refuses to let Ender train with Petra. They initially agreed that Bonzo would not disturb Ender in his free time, but Bonzo scolds Ender when he uses his free time to train with Petra, so he asks Bonzo to speak with him privately. This shows Ender's respect for his superiors.

### Off record

The off-record strategy is the least frequently used strategy because in the military, communication must be clear. This strategy involves ambiguity conveyed indirectly,

allowing the listener to understand the intended meaning. However, this strategy often demonstrates emotional manipulation when it occurs.

Data 1

Ender : **What if they could talk to us?**

Petra : They can't.

Ender still doesn't know who the enemy is, so he thought that maybe they could communicate with humans, then Petra said that they couldn't. This raises the question of what kind of enemy they are that made Ender think that. This shows how Ender as a leader builds communication in leadership to discuss with his teammates.

Data 2

Petra : What are you doing, Ender?

Ender : **I know what she wants!**

Ender wakes up and ran outside, followed by Petra. Petra doesn't know what Ender is going to do, and Ender says, "I know what she wants," which makes people wonder who "she" is and what "she wants" means because ender doesn't explain the context. These moments reveal aspects that are not always easy to express through direct speech, but also demonstrate powerful empathy.

## DISCUSSIONS

Based on (Brown & Levinson, 1988) theory, politeness strategies can be applied in conversations regarding leadership elements, especially in the *Ender Game* movie. The strategies used each have their own function in providing context in the dialogue that shows Ender's character development from an ordinary student to a leader. In a military environment that has a hierarchical structure, bald on record often appears because communication is used clearly and firmly. In respecting the commander's authority, Ender uses negative politeness which makes him appear to have respect, while in developing himself to build trust and increase empathy in becoming a leader, he uses positive politeness. The emotional tension and implied meaning created by off record are rare, but they are still present. This allows us to understand that something remains ambiguous if we only look at the basic context without understanding the overall storyline of the movie.

The results of the study show that four politeness strategies according to (Brown & Levinson, 1988) are used by Ender Wiggin in the film *Ender's Game*. The most common strategy bald on record, because the military environment demands firm, direct, and unambiguous communication. This shows that the conversations in the film are focused



on instructions, commands, and quick responses required in training. Positive and negative politeness strategies are demonstrated in different contexts. Positive politeness and negative politeness are used as Ender builds relationships and trust with his friends, especially as he begins to develop as a leader and must maintain team solidarity. On the other hand, negative politeness appears when Ender is dealing with superiors or figures who have high authority such as Colonel Graff. Meanwhile, the off-record strategy is the least used strategy because military communication demands clarity. But when this strategy emerges, Ender's emotions are seen in facing the pressure of being a leader. Ender's way of adjusting communication strategies based on the appearance of the situation shows that leadership in a military environment in this film is built through the ability to communicate wisely.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that in the analysis of the film *Ender's Game*, researcher found four types of politeness strategies: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record, as proposed by (Brown & Levinson, 1988). Each strategy used depends on the context of the conversation in the film, which can be related to leadership and authority in a military context or maybe can also be applied in daily life. The interactions used by Ender Wiggin show that politeness is not only for harmony, but is also used to build trust between people, good cooperation, persuading and leading. Ender's utterance variations illustrate that in his character development from an ordinary student to a commander, he is able to regulate the words he speaks, how to act and understand what problems he faces in order to solve them. These research show that politeness strategies not only function as linguistic tools but also reflect a character that develops in a social environment and hierarchical structure. Therefore, further research can analyze how politeness is reflected in leadership among social structures in an organization that can connect linguistic language studies in the leadership authority that exists in the surrounding environment.

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