The Use of Politeness for Manipulation in *The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* Movie

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Abstract:

The aims of this study is to analyze the used of politeness strategies by the main character in the *The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* movie, which released in 2023, that is Coriolanus Snow. This study shows that how politeness strategies are used to reflect manipulation and control in his interactions with other characters through his utterances. This study used a descriptive qualitative approach to get the explanation in depth. The data were collected from downloaded script that has 252 of Snow's utterances, and then the researcher analyzed using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, that has four strategies such as bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. The findings reveal that the most frequently used strategies are bald on record (132 utterances) and positive politeness (78 utterances), followed by negative politeness (27 utterances) and off-record (15 utterances). However, the two strategies used to manipulate other characters are bald-on-record and positive politeness. The analysis reveals that Snow employs bald on record to assert hierarchy and dominance in critical situations. At the same time, positive politeness is manipulated to foster a false sense of intimacy and create emotional dependence.

Keywords: Politeness Strategy; Coriolanus Snow; *The Hunger Games*; Manipulation

Abstrak:

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui strategi kesopanan yang digunakan oleh karakter utama dalam film *The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* yang dirilis pada tahun 2023, yaitu Coriolanus Snow. Hasil dari penelitian ini dapat menunjukkan bagaimana strategi kesopanan digunakan untuk memanipulasi karakter lain melalui ucapan-ucapannya. Pendekatan yang digunakan untuk analisis ini adalah kualitatif deskriptif yang diharapkan untuk mendapatkan penjelasan yang mendalam. Data dikumpulkan dari 252 ucapan Snow, yang kemudian dianalisis menggunakan teori kesopanan oleh Brown dan Levinson (1987), yang menjelaskan empat strategi seperti: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, dan off-record. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi yang paling sering digunakan dalam ucapannya adalah bald on record (132 data) dan positive politeness (78 data), diikuti oleh negative politeness (27 data) dan off-record (15 data). Namun, dua strategi yang digunakan untuk memanipulasi karakter lain adalah bald on record dan positive politeness. Analisis menunjukkan bahwa Snow menggunakan bald on record untuk menegaskan hierarki dan dominasi dalam situasi kritis. Pada saat yang sama, positive politeness dimanipulasi untuk menciptakan kesan kedekatan palsu dan menimbulkan ketergantungan emosional.

Kata kunci: Strategi Kesantunan; Coriolanus Snow; The Hunger Games; Manipulasi.

INTRODUCTION

Language has long been recognized as a part of human interaction, serving both communicative and social functions. Humans cannot live alone, that is why every human needs language for interactions, even though blind and deaf people also had their own language to communication. Language is a tool for transmitting information, shapes relationships with others, establishes hierarchies, and influences perceptions. Parikh (2001) believes that "Communication is only the primary type of use and the use of language is itself one type of information flow." Therefore, language cannot be seen as simply as a neutral tool, but also as an important instrument that can build social meaning and power. We can interact with each other by exchanging information through communication.

Among the many linguistic tools available to speakers, politeness has received significant attention in pragmatic studies. In pragmatic studies, politeness is one of the crucial aspects that explain how speakers manage interactions to maintain social harmony with other people, to minimize conflict, and protect the face of their interlocutors. Yule (1996) argues that, "Politeness, in an interaction, can then be defined as the means employed to show awareness of another person's face." It can be concluded that politeness strategies are the most crucial aspect of communication, reflecting how individuals maintain their social relationships and face-to-face interactions use language as a tool to communicate.

In cinematic narratives, characters' dialogue choices often reveal deeper aspects of their motives and relationships with other characters. By employing specific politeness strategies, characters can appear respectful or considerate while, in reality, pursuing hidden objectives. Politeness strategies are crucial in analyzing how individuals, particularly those who have positions to control others, utilize their communication to achieve their goals. This study focuses on Coriolanus Snow's utterances as the main character in the movie *"The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes"* (2023), which is interesting to analyze because Snow is a character with complex social roles and holds authoritative positions as a mentor.

The researchers chose this movie with the title *"The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes"* as the object of research because in this movie there are various social situations and interactions between characters that can affect the use of politeness strategies. Additionally, there has been a recent high interest in the movie industry, with

an increasing number of new films emerging from both Indonesia and abroad. *"The Hunger Games: The Ballad of songbirds & Snakes"* movie is produced by LIONSGATE and directed by Francis Lawrence. Wijayanti (2019) explained that, "The hunger games were one of the games used by the Capitol to oppress the district people. The Capitol people used the hunger games to threat the district people. They would not violate applicable rules and systems." Thus, this movie can be a very relevant as a research object in the analysis of politeness strategies.

According to the most popular theory of politeness was come from Brown and Levinson's theory that explains there are four main strategies used by speakers in communication, namely: Bald on Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, and Off-record. Politeness strategies emphasize to how speakers use language to avoid conflict, maintain social harmony, or strategically achieve personal goals. Politeness strategies are not only concerned with good manners, but they can also serve as a tool of manipulation when used intentionally to influence others.

Some previous studies already highlighted the use of politeness strategies in various contexts or films, such as the study by Leihitu and Triprihatmini (2021) In the movie *Freedom Writers*, which found positive politeness to be the most natural strategy, driven by payoff factors and sociological variables, the study by Fitria et al. (2020) In the movie *Bridge to Terabithia*, which also confirms the dominance of positive politeness with similar influencing factors. Yuniarti et al. (2020) study revealed that the main character in the movie *Catwoman* consistently employed various positive politeness strategies as a tool to gain relationships with other characters. Fitri (2022) analyzed the movie *Mulan*, which again showed a high frequency of positive politeness and its connection to culture and social context, and Aspitasari et al. (2022) reveal findings of various politeness strategies in the movie *Every Walking Breath*, which has ninevariations of positive politeness strategies and five different forms of negative politeness strategies.

While many studies on politeness strategies focus on its role in maintaining social harmony, building interpersonal relationships, or describing cultural norms in everyday communication, studies that highlight politeness strategies as a means of manipulation in communication are still rare, especially for antagonistic characters such as Coriolanus Snow. Therefore, this study seeks to fill the gap by analyzing the politeness strategies used by Snow to answer the question of which strategies are most dominant and how their use reflects manipulation and control in his interactions with other characters in

The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes movie.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study, the researcher analyzes the interaction between the main character and other characters in the movie *The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes (2023)* using Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory through language and the politeness to manipulate. This study classified the politeness strategies into four categories: Bald on Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, and Off-Record.

Pragmatics

According to Yule (1996), "Pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader). It has, consequently, more to do with the analysis of what people mean by their utterances than what the words or phrases in those utterances might mean by themselves. Pragmatics is the study of speaker meaning." Therefore, Pragmatics is the study of what a speaker means in communication, and it plays a crucial role in understanding the context of their message. In contrast to semantics, which emphasizes lexical and grammatical meaning, pragmatics focuses on how speakers and listeners understand the meaning of an utterance in relation to the situation, social context, and purpose of communication.

Politeness Strategies

Politeness strategies refer to techniques designed to preserve the dignity and reputation of the listener (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In other words, to put it differently, politeness strategies can be seen as methods to fulfil the needs of the listener's positive or negative self-image. Consequently, being polite involves making efforts to protect the listener's self-image. Brown and Levinson explained that there are four types of politeness strategies: Bald on-Record (a communication strategy that involves direct communication without the use of politeness or mitigation), Positive Politeness (is an attempt to fulfill a person's basic desire to be appreciated and have their wishes or values approved). Negative Politeness (negative politeness is a strategy designed to preserve the interlocutor's negative face, emphasizing their preference to act freely without interference or distraction), and Off-Record (this strategy can be seen as an indirect strategy, where the speaker deliberately states something less specific or even different from the intended message, relying on the hearer's interpretation to grasp the true meaning.)

RESEARCH METHODS

Descriptive qualitative method is chosen in this study to describe and interpret in depth the politeness strategies used by Coriolanus Snow as the main character in the movie *The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes (2023).* "Qualitative descriptive studies tend to draw from naturalistic inquiry, which purports a commitment to studying something in its natural state to the extent that is possible within the context." (Lambert, 2012). First, the researcher herself served as the primary instrument, collecting data from all of Snow's utterances in the movie by downloading the script and watching it through the Catchplay+. The data then categorized based on Brown and Levinson's theoretical framework through a marking system for the four politeness strategies such as, bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness and off-record to calculate the frequency of the most dominant strategies. This analysis focused on how these strategies functioned as tools to reflect Snow's manipulation and control in his interactions with other characters, before the results were interpreted to answer the research questions and linked to theoretical discussions on politeness and manipulation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The aims of this study is to analyze the politeness strategies used by the main character, Coriolanus Snow, in *The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* movie. This analysis focuses on the politeness strategies used by Snow to manipulate and control in his interactions with other characters in the movie. Based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) Theoretical classification, the result show that Snow used all the strategies, such as Bald on Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, and Off Record.

Table 1. Table Frequency of the Use of Politeness Strategies

No	Politeness Strategies	Freq
1	Bald-On-Record	132
2	Positive Politeness	78
3	Negative Politeness	27
4	Off-Record	15

As we can see from the table above, we can know that from the analysis, the researcher found that 252 utterances of the Coriolanus Snow were using politeness strategies that some of the utterances are consistent with his manipulative character. The results show that the most dominant strategy is the Bald on Record strategy, followed by positive politeness as long as negative politeness and Off-Record. Among all the

politeness strategies used by Snow, the strategies used to manipulate other characters can be found only in the Bald on Record and Positive Politeness. These findings are in line with Snow's character, which is directive and influential in his communication, using language either as a direct means of control (Bald on Record) or as an emotional hook (Positive Politeness) to manipulate his social environment.

Bald on Record

The use of the Bald on Record strategy in Snow's utterances is explicitly to emphasize his dominance, especially for those who are considered of a lower class in status or in critical situations. This pattern is consistent with the theory that politeness correlates with power, where powerful actors can ignore the face needs of others.

Data 1

Context: Snow meets Lucy Gray, who is still in the cage, but suddenly, his classmates get attacked by another person from another district in the cage because of her stupidity.

> Lucy: "Your friend over there sure knows it."
> Snow: "**She is not my friend.** She is poison with perfect teeth. Are you gonna share everything that I give you with Jessup?"

Snow's statement above is an example of the application of the Bald on Record strategy, which has functioned as an instrument of social and political control. By openly rejecting solidarity with Arachne (his classmate), Snow is not merely expressing personal dislike, he is also confirming the hierarchy of power and redefining social reality in accordance with his interests. The use of the metaphor *"poison with perfect teeth"* is intended that he wants to portray Arachne as a dangerous woman who hides behind a beautiful appearance. Snow implicitly reinforces status boundaries and asserts that his loyalty is instrumental, not personal. Therefore, this statement not only reflects a sarcastic attitude towards a particular individual, but also an ideological discipline mechanism in which Snow uses language to consolidate his position as a powerful subject.

Data 2

Context: This conversation between Snow and Sejanus at a hidden room in a café, shortly after they involved in an incident that resulted in the death of a someone.

> Snow: "For once, shut up." Sejanus: "It's all my fault!"
> Snow: "**All of this is your fault**. It's only gonna get worse if you don't pull yourself together."

It is an application of the Bald on Record strategy, which has a function as a psychological disciplinary tool in crises. By explicitly labeling Sejanus as the only one who

is guilty *"your fault,"* Snow not only delegates responsibility, but more importantly, he constructs a manipulative narrative of causality in which the complexity of events is reduced to individual error alone. A prospective threat follows this statement, *"it's only gonna get worse,"* which operates as a mechanism for creating fear. Thus, this statement is not merely a statement of fact, but a micro-governance strategy that utilizes guilt and fear as capital to secure compliance and perpetuate control in power relations between individuals.

Positive Politeness

Positive Politeness strategies in Snow utterances is used such as for compliments and promises of protection to create false intimacy and build trust. He shared sad stories about his past, and he creates an illusion of emotional closeness that makes others easier to control. In other words, behind the smooth and empathetic words, Snow is hiding her intention to dominate and take advantage of others. For example:

Data 3

Context: This conversation between Snow and Lucy Gray at the lake in district 12, where they sharing their trauma and lost.

> Lucy: "Wearing my mama's dress is the only thing keeping me together here. It's like she's wrapping her arms around me."
> Snow**: "My mother, she used to smell like roses. She died in childbirth.**
> I was going to have a little sister."
> Lucy: "Both your parents gone? So, you're an orphan, like me."

Snow's statement above represents the application of the Positive Politeness strategy through the mechanism of psychologically calculated self-disclosure. By sharing remains of his personal trauma, the loss of his mother, and the unfulfilled dream of having a younger sister, Snow is not merely sharing a sad story but actively engineering emotional intimacy by establishing common ground based on shared suffering. This utterance is seemingly natural in a line with the scene where Lucy Gray and Snow talk about past to built believe in each other but it is actually a narrative construction designed to create the illusion of shared fate between himself. Snow wants to build empathy from Lucy Gray, to make it easier for her to had trust-building, which ultimately makes the subject more approachable and easier to manipulate and control.

Data 4

Context: Snow calming Sejanus in a critical situation following an incident that resulted in the death of a someone. They are in a hidden room, where Sejanus is experiencing panic attack.

Snow: *"Hey. Hey, look at me. You have to pull yourself together. You have to pull it together. You came here for me, right?* **We're brothers?"**

Sejanus: "Brothers."

Snow: **"So whatever you've done, I swear I will keep you safe."**

Snow's statement above is another example of positive politeness strategy used as a linguistic manipulation. By using the group identity marker such as *"brothers"* in the form of rhetorical question, Snow not only claims solidarity but he also creates a bond that enforces expectations of loyalty without authentic mutuality. The promises of protection *"I swear I will keep you save"* that follows as a function for psychological instrument to secure Sejanus compliance in a crisis, where the promise is skeptically built on the foundation of Snow's betrayal that he was planned. By declaring his willingness to guarantee of Sejanus's safety, besides of any mistakes of what Sejanus's do, Snow frames himself as a hero to protect him while placing Sejanus in a position of thankfulness, thereby smoothing his control over him.

The findings show different results compared to previous studies that already shows above on politeness strategies in movies, which consistently found positive politeness to be dominant strategy used to build and maintain social relationships. In contrast, this study reveals that bald on record was the most dominant strategy used by Coriolanus Snow in every conversation also in the way to manipulate or control over other characters followed by positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. This can be seen that Snow is very straightforward person.

CONCLUSION(S)

In conclusion, this research proves that the politeness strategies used in dialogue from the movie *The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* (2023) were used as a power to manipulate other characters, and mostly is used by Bald on Record strategy and Positive politeness. After conducting the analysis, the researcher found that the main character, or Coriolanus Snow, from the movie used all the politeness strategies classified by Brown and Levinson (1987), with the most dominant strategy is Bald on Record. It indicates that Snow's utterances had a tendency to communicate in a straightforward, firm, and direct manner. Especially in the situations that urgent and require assertiveness. The suggestion for the future studies is a needed contrastive analysis with another dystopian movie or another antagonist character to understand more about the relationships between politeness strategies and manipulation and how linguistic

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manipulation strategies can be interpreted differently. Therefore, this study not only reveals the complexity of Snow's character but also offer new insight into how domination can be established through politeness strategies.

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