



Banter Beyond the Stars: Politeness Strategies in The Alien and The Kid's Adventure

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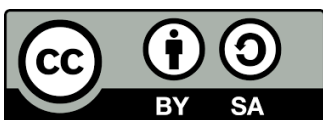
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Abstract

Politeness strategies has gained prominence in pragmatics, especially in how these strategies create and shape relationships in both written or spoken text. Politeness in communication provides insight into Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, emphasizing four primary strategies: bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. The study aims to explore politeness strategies within the narrative story entitled "Nanoodle Snagglebottom," where interactions between an alien, Nanoo, and a young child Geez Louise highlight humorous cultural misunderstandings and politeness strategies. Using a qualitative approach, this research analyzes dialogue excerpts between Alien and the Kid. Data collection focuses on dialogues where politeness strategies create interactions. Results indicate that bald-on-record statements convey directness and humor, while positive politeness fosters connection, negative politeness shows mutual respect, and off-record strategies introduce ambiguity, adding playful layers to their interactions. This study reveals how the careful use of politeness strategies contributes to character development, suggesting implications for narrative-driven communication research.



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INTRODUCTION

The study of politeness strategies has gained prominence in pragmatics, especially in how these strategies create and shape relationships in various contexts, from everyday communication to literary interactions. Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1978) has long served as a foundation for analyzing these interpersonal dynamics through strategies such as bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record approaches (Sitinjak & Gintings, 2023). The portrayal of politeness strategies in literature, particularly in children's literature, provides a fascinating glimpse into the ways characters build relationships and manage conflicts, often with humor and subtle power dynamics (Leech, 2014). In the narrative "Nanoodle Snagglebottom" by McFarlane (2017) the exchanges between an alien and a young child reveal a mix of politeness strategies that reflect both cultural misinterpretation and the playful nature of their interaction, which is central to understanding how politeness functions within imaginative contexts.

Politeness theory, as introduced by Brown and Levinson (1987), has been fundamental in exploring how speakers manage face-threatening acts (FTAs) through strategies that mitigate potential social friction. The framework divides politeness strategies into four main categories—bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record—each serving to protect either the speaker's or the listener's face needs (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Positive politeness seeks to establish rapport and convey friendliness, while negative politeness shows respect for personal boundaries. Off-record strategies, on the other hand, use indirect communication to avoid direct FTAs, and bald-on-record interactions convey messages bluntly, often in familiar settings. This theory has found wide application across disciplines, from interpersonal communication to sociolinguistics, offering insight into the social functions of language in maintaining harmony and addressing potential conflicts (Schmitt, 2010).

While politeness theory has traditionally focused on real-world interactions, its application to fictional contexts, particularly in children's literature, is increasingly being explored. Scholars have analyzed how politeness strategies in literature provide young readers with implicit lessons on social norms, helping to model appropriate behavior through character interactions (Leech, 2014).

Despite the existing research on politeness in various contexts, studies specifically analyzing politeness strategies in interspecies or cross-cultural fictional interactions remain scarce. The field would benefit from a closer examination of how these strategies are adapted in children's literature to depict humor, cross-cultural differences, and playful misunderstandings. While traditional politeness research has explored cultural variations in speech acts and the role of politeness in intercultural communication (Terkourafi, 2015).

Additionally, the role of politeness strategies in constructing power dynamics within fictional texts remains an under-explored area. Previous research on politeness strategies has examined a variety of communication contexts, ranging from interactions between characters in novels and films to conversations in academic settings and talk show programs. Supatmiwati et al. (2023) explored politeness strategies in the novel *It Starts with Us* by Colleen Hoover, finding that the main character often uses positive politeness to maintain social relationships despite refusing requests. Research by Soegiarto et al. (2023) on *SpongeBob Movie: Sponge on the Run* revealed that SpongeBob uses various politeness strategies to create a positive atmosphere among his friends, reflecting a simple but effective politeness for children's audiences. Meanwhile, Al-Natour et al. (2024) studied how English professors use positive politeness to encourage familiar interactions with undergraduate students in academic contexts, creating an inclusive learning environment. On the other hand, Maula et al. (2023) examined the flexibility of positive politeness strategies in *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* program, where Ellen adjusts politeness style depending on the age of the guest to keep the interaction friendly (Culpeper, 1996; Locher & Watts, 2005). However, these studies have not explored politeness strategies in the context of interspecies interactions featuring cultural differences, such as those found in *The Alien* and *the Kid's Adventure*, thus

providing opportunities for further research in unique politeness contexts and imaginative interactions (Culpeper, 2011; Kádár & Haugh, 2013; Watts, 2003).

By focusing on these unexplored aspects, this research aims to bridge the gap between traditional politeness studies and the creative adaptations found in children's literature. This study will examine how authors use politeness strategies to create meaningful, cross-species communication that reflects broader social norms, and how this portrayal can influence young readers' comprehension of politeness. Ultimately, this analysis seeks to demonstrate that politeness strategies are not only integral to real-life interactions but also a versatile tool in literature for modeling social relationships and promoting empathy among readers.

The unique setting of interspecies dialogue in "Nanoodle Snagglebottom" provides an unusual but valuable lens through which to analyze the deployment of politeness strategies in a fictional context. Given these dynamics, the research problem lies in understanding how politeness strategies are used to convey humor, establish rapport, and manage conflicts in the interaction between Nanoo and the Kid. Furthermore, by examining politeness strategies within a fictional context, this study aims to highlight the ways authors use politeness as a tool to develop character relationships and convey social norms (Andayani et al., 2024). This research also addresses the gap in the literature concerning how politeness strategies are interpreted in dialogues between human and non-human characters, offering a new perspective on pragmatics in literature.

To achieve these objectives, this research seeks to answer the following questions: (1) What politeness strategies are predominantly used by the Alien and the Kid in their exchanges? (2) How do politeness strategies facilitate cross-cultural understanding and humor in the story?

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach to examine how politeness strategies are depicted in the dialogue between the characters in the Nanoodle Snagglebottom. Qualitative research is appropriate for analyzing narrative and conversational content, as it allows for an in-depth understanding of the social interactions and underlying meanings within the text (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By focusing on the qualitative aspects of language use, this approach facilitates a nuanced exploration of how politeness strategies are applied, and their role in portraying cross-cultural or interspecies exchanges in a fictional setting.

The data source for this research is a seven pages short story entitled Nanoodle Snagglebottom by McFarlane (2017), focusing on the dialogue exchanges between the characters. To gather data, relevant dialogue segments were identified and extracted from the text, specifically targeting interactions that exemplify various politeness strategies, such as bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

The data collection technique involved a thematic content analysis to categorize instances of politeness strategies within the text. Key phrases, sentences, or exchanges

where politeness strategies are and categorized according to Brown and Levinson's theory.

Data analysis was conducted using discourse analysis, with a specific focus on politeness strategies as outlined by Brown and Levinson (1987). The extracted dialogue was analyzed for instances where the characters employ bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, or off-record strategies. Each instance was then examined to determine its role in shaping the characters' relationship, establishing humor, and illustrating cross-cultural misunderstandings.

In addition to categorizing politeness strategies, this discourse analysis involved interpreting how these strategies influenced the narrative flow and how they contributed to the humor and empathy-building aspects of the story.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Politeness Strategies Stated by The Characters

Politeness Strategy	Dialogue	Description
Bald-on-Record	Nanoo: "I'm not a dog," / "I'm an alien. Grrrr."	Nanoo directly corrects the Kid, emphasizing his identity in a straightforward way. The "Grrrr" adds humor, making the directness playful.
	Kid: "That information is also top secret, and I ain't gonna tell ya."	The Kid mirrors Nanoo's direct withholding of information, establishing equal footing with humorous defiance.
	Kid overhears: "There are no horrible, dangerous, nasty mungles on Planet Earth, and it is perfectly safe to invade."	Nanoo unknowingly reveals the invasion plan, adding dramatic irony to the plot.
	Nanoo: "Hey! You've been listening to my private conversations. That's top secret information."	Nanoo accuses the Kid of eavesdropping, expressing his frustration openly.
	Nanoo: "The humans have mungles! Horrible, nasty, dangerous mungles! Cancel the invasion!"	Nanoo's command to cancel the invasion is urgent, showing his fear and shock.
	Nanoo: "Go and explore ... don't forget to wear a space suit."	Nanoo gives indirect advice, showing concern for the Kid's safety in a gentle, humorous way.
Positive Politeness	Nanoo: "I'm observing your planet." / "Why?"	Nanoo shares his purpose to foster rapport, though he withholds some specifics to maintain curiosity.
	Nanoo: "I'll give you a ride in my flying saucer if you agree to tell me why you climbed that big tree."	Nanoo offers a reward to encourage cooperation, highlighting goodwill.
	Kid: "Wow! A ride in a flying saucer! It's a deal!"	The Kid enthusiastically accepts, showing trust and admiration, enhancing their bond.

Politeness Strategy	Dialogue	Description
	Nanoo: "My name is Nanoodle Snagglebottom by the way, but you can call me Nanoo for short."	Nanoo reveals his name, offering a nickname, promoting comfort and openness.
	Kid: "Before you go, Nanoo, I want to give you these. They're doggy treats. I bought them for you."	The Kid's gift as a gesture of gratitude reinforces their bond in a playful way.
	Nanoo's Reaction: "Geez Louise, what an annoying kid." / "But then when you opened the packet ... 'Yum yum!' he said ... 'Thanks, kid.'"	Despite initial protest, Nanoo accepts the treats happily, showing softened affection.
	Kid: "Hey, Nanoo. Could you do me a favour? Before you take me home, could we stop at the shop so I can buy some potatoes? If I go home now without any potatoes, I think everyone will be really disappointed. Pleeceeeeeease?"	The Kid is trying to appeal to Nanoo's positive face by emphasizing a shared concern for others' feelings and using please word.
Negative Politeness	Kid: "What's a mungle?"	The Kid's indirect question shows respect for Nanoo's privacy, avoiding confrontation.
	Nanoo: "But don't forget to wear a space suit. There's no air here. No atmosphere at all"	Nanoo's indirect approach, particularly in advising the Kid to wear a space suit.
	Kid : "I'm sorry I called you stupid. "	The Kid apologize to Nanoo for being annoying
Off-Record Politeness	Kid: "You look like a dog," / "You mean to say on your planet you keep children as pets?"	The Kid indirectly challenges Nanoo's identity through humor and sarcasm, expressing curiosity.
	Nanoo: "There's a bar on the dark side where they have live music on the weekend. That place has plenty of atmosphere."	Nanoo humorously refers to a bar's "atmosphere" rather than air, adding whimsy and otherworldliness.

To better understand the use of politeness strategies in the narrative, it is essential to analyze their frequency and distribution quantitatively. This approach provides insight into the dominant strategies employed by the characters, Nanoo and the Kid, and how these contribute to their interactions and character dynamics. The bar chart below visualizes the frequency of each strategy, highlighting the emphasis placed on specific forms of politeness in the story.

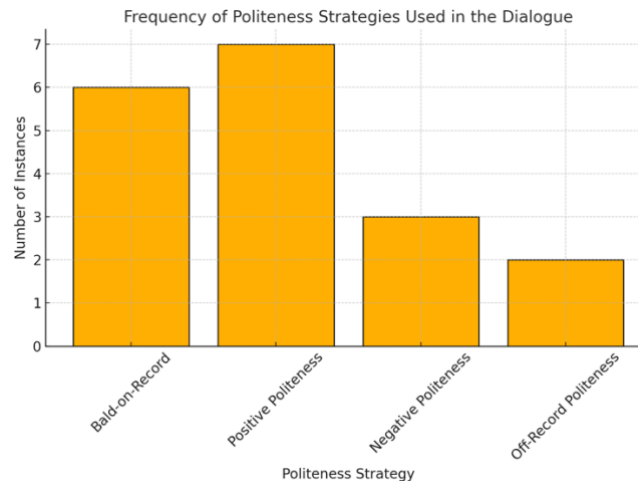


Figure 1. Frequency of Politeness In The Text

Figure 1 illustrates the frequency of politeness strategies observed in the dialogue. Here are the results:

- 1) Bald-on-Record: Observed 6 times, often used for direct statements and humor.
- 2) Positive Politeness: The most frequently used strategy, with 7 instances, emphasizing rapport and connection.
- 3) Negative Politeness: Appears 3 times, reflecting respect and boundary maintenance.
- 4) Off-Record Politeness: The least frequent, with 2 instances, focusing on indirectness and humor.

1. Power Dynamics and Mutual Respect Through Bald-on-Record Statements

Bald-on-record strategies are often used by Nanoo to assert authority, revealing a humorous power dynamic. For example, when Nanoo dismissively calls the Kid annoying.

"You don't know what a potato is? Wow, you're quite stupid for an alien."

"Don't call me stupid," growled Nanoo. "Geez Louise, what an annoying kid. You don't even know what a mungle is".

Here the lack of mitigation highlights Nanoo's authority as an alien and positions him in a dominant role. This dynamic is balanced when the Kid uses bald-on-record strategies to assert equality, like directly refusing to share his name, which introduces humor and challenges Nanoo's superiority.

The power play through bald-on-record strategies creates a humorous tension that reflects their growing rapport. Both characters alternate between dominance and submission, which adds depth to their interaction and demonstrates how politeness strategies can be adapted to express power or build relationships (Yule, 2010).

2. Positive Politeness and Bond Formation

Positive politeness serves as a key tool in building rapport between Nanoo and the Kid. When Nanoo offers the Kid a ride in his spaceship, he uses positive politeness to foster goodwill, presenting the ride as a friendly exchange rather than an obligation.

“Oh, very well. I’ll give you a ride in my flying saucer if you agree to tell me why you climbed that big tree.”

“Wow! A ride in a flying saucer! It’s a deal!”

This act strengthens their bond and sets the tone for subsequent interactions, where Nanoo and the Kid openly share their thoughts, interests, and even food items.

The Kid’s act of giving Nanoo “doggy treats” enhances their connection, using positive politeness to express gratitude and admiration. Nanoo’s reaction of enthusiasm—despite his denial of being a dog—demonstrates the effectiveness of positive politeness in transforming Nanoo’s initially aloof behavior into one of warmth and acceptance. This bonding ultimately enables the Kid to influence Nanoo’s view on humans, leading to the resolution of the plot where Nanoo decides against an invasion due to his newfound respect for the Kid.

3. Negative Politeness in Establishing Social Boundaries

In analyzing the interactions between Nanoo and the Kid, negative politeness emerges as a significant strategy for maintaining respect and managing social boundaries. Nanoo’s indirect approach, particularly in advising the Kid to wear a space suit, serves as a way to show concern without asserting control.

“Wow. I’m actually on the Moon.”

“That’s right, kid,” Nanoo said. “Why don’t you go and explore? But don’t forget to wear a space suit. There’s no air here. No atmosphere at all. There’s a bar over on the dark side where they have live music on the weekend. That place has plenty of atmosphere. But here there’s none at all.”

By phrasing his advice indirectly, Nanoo softens the face-threatening nature of his suggestion, emphasizing care rather than command. This aligns with previous research by Brown and Levinson (1987) on the function of negative politeness as a strategy to respect autonomy and avoid direct imposition.

Nanoo and the Kid’s interactions also illustrate how negative politeness aids in bridging cultural and hierarchical divides, an aspect often noted in studies on cross-cultural communication. For instance, Terkourafi (2015) emphasizes that politeness strategies often reflect cultural nuances in respecting boundaries, a dynamic also observable in this fictional narrative. Nanoo, being an alien, employs polite, indirect advice to communicate with the Kid, which may be interpreted as his attempt to adjust to the cultural expectations and interactional norms he perceives from the Kid.

4. Humorous Misunderstandings and Off-Record Politeness

Off-record politeness strategies are used effectively to introduce humor through misunderstandings. When Nanoo jokes about the Moon's "atmosphere," he employs wordplay to indirectly explain the absence of air, adding humor to a potentially serious interaction.

"There's no air here. No atmosphere at all. There's a bar over on the dark side where they have live music on the weekend. That place has plenty of atmosphere. But here there's none at all."

This off-record strategy allows the Kid to enjoy Nanoo's humor without directly challenging his authority, maintaining the lighthearted tone of the story.

Similarly, the Kid's use of sarcasm—such as questioning Nanoo's intelligence by calling him "stupid for an alien"—shows off-record politeness by indirectly conveying skepticism in a playful manner. These misunderstandings illustrate how off-record strategies contribute to a sense of friendship and soften the impact of critical remarks, as seen in Nanoo's relaxed reaction,

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study highlights the crucial role of politeness strategies in character development, humor creation, and driving the storyline in Nanoodle Snagglebottom. Based on the analysis of interactions between Nanoo and the Kid, the study demonstrates how a mix of positive politeness, negative politeness, bald-on-record, and off-record strategies enhances the dynamic and charm between the two characters. Nanoo, who often employs bald-on-record strategies directly and unapologetically, presents a firm yet humorous personality. In contrast, the Kid frequently uses off-record strategies with humor and sarcasm, portraying a curious yet innocent character. This interaction pattern creates a warm and complementary relationship, demonstrating how politeness not only maintains social harmony but also adds depth to character interactions in a children's story context.

The findings of this research emphasize that varied politeness strategies can strengthen the story's progression. From amusing misunderstandings to the ironic resolution at the story's end, Nanoo and the Kid illustrate how politeness strategies contribute to narrative development. The study highlights that humor and politeness in children's stories can offer both entertainment and valuable lessons, with politeness demonstrating its flexibility as a powerful narrative tool.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that this research was conducted in the absence of any commercial, financial, or other relationships that could be construed as potential conflicts of interest.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

Aisyah Nurjanah contributed to the conceptualization of the study, development of the research framework, analysis of politeness strategies based on Brown and Levinson's theory, and preparation of the original manuscript. Ginna Novarianti Dwi Putri Pramesti contributed to data analysis, interpretation of the findings, relevant literature review, and manuscript review and editing. Both authors contributed to the refinement of the manuscript and approved the final version for publication.

GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USAGE STATEMENT

The author state that generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used to assist with language refinement and improve the clarity and readability of the manuscript. All AI-assisted content was reviewed and verified by the authors, who remain fully responsible for the accuracy, originality, integrity, and final content of the published article.

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