



Positive Politeness Strategies Used by the Characters in *Elemental: Forces Of Nature* Movie

I Kadek Gio Bramanta¹, Ketut Santi Indriani²

Universitas Udayana

Abstrak

Received: 2 November 2025
Revised: 14 November 2025
Accepted: 29 November 2025

This study, titled Positive Politeness Strategies Used by the Characters in Elemental: Forces of Nature Movie, investigates the various forms of positive politeness strategies used by the characters and the underlying factors influencing their application within the movie script. The data were sourced from the official script of Elemental (2023), a film produced by Pixar Animation Studios. The research employs a qualitative method and is grounded in the politeness strategy framework developed by Brown and Levinson (1987). Findings reveal that the characters' dialogues reflect all fifteen types of positive politeness strategies. These include showing concern for the hearer, using exaggerated expressions, applying in-group markers, making promises, and encouraging shared involvement between speaker and hearer. The use of these strategies is shaped by three major factors: the intended payoff, the level of social distance, and the relative power between speakers.

Kata Kunci: *Politeness Strategies, Positive Politeness, Face Threatening Acts*

(*) Corresponding Author: giobramanta20@gmail.com

How to Cite: Bramanta, I., & Indriani, K. (2025). Positive Politeness Strategies Used by the Characters in *Elemental: Forces Of Nature* Movie. *Jurnal Ilmiah Wahana Pendidikan*, 11(12.C), 296-303. Retrieved from <https://jurnal.peneliti.net/index.php/JIWP/article/view/12085>.

INTRODUCTION

In the field of interpersonal communication, politeness plays a crucial role in fostering harmonious interactions and promoting social cohesion. Politeness can determine the success or failure of continued communication (Trimandala, 2016). While many people perceive politeness as simple gestures, such as bowing to show respect, offering greetings, or saying “excuse me,” the concept is in fact far more complex and culturally specific. Politeness in a country is largely influenced by its cultural values and norms (Wati & Puspani, 2020). What is considered polite behavior in one cultural context, such as Japan, may differ significantly from the norms in another, like the United States. These cultural differences illustrate the intricate nature of politeness and emphasize the importance of examining it within specific societal frameworks.

This study is grounded in pragmatics, particularly examining meaning as constructed and interpreted through context. According to Yule (1996), pragmatics is a field of study that explores how meaning is conveyed by speakers or writers and interpreted by listeners or readers through contextual understanding. In this regard, politeness is not merely a linguistic feature but a pragmatic strategy deeply intertwined with speaker intention and social interaction.

The core function of politeness is to foster a comfortable and non-threatening atmosphere during communication. Furthermore, it plays a critical role in preventing conflict, especially in peacebuilding efforts. Apologizing, for instance, is a clear form of politeness that functions as a conflict-avoidance strategy. Expressions such as “you’re right,” “please forgive me,” and “I was wrong” serve to reduce tension and create a more positive communicative environment. As noted by Watts (2007), politeness is not an innate human trait; rather, it is a

learned behavior acquired through socialization, often guided by manuals and societal norms that teach appropriate conduct and etiquette.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), there are four main strategies used to express politeness: direct or bald on-record, strategies that show respect for the listener's need for autonomy (negative politeness), approaches that emphasize friendliness or closeness (positive politeness), and indirect or off-record techniques. According to Septyaningsih, (2007), there are fifteen forms of positive politeness, including paying attention to the hearer's needs and desires, showing exaggerated interest or approval, increasing the hearer's involvement, using in-group markers, seeking agreement, avoiding disagreement, emphasizing shared knowledge or values, joking, and demonstrating awareness of and concern for the hearer's well-being (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation). This study focuses specifically on the use of positive politeness strategies by characters in the animated film *Elemental: Forces of Nature*. Through a content analysis of the film's dialogue, this research aims to identify and interpret the presence and function of positive politeness, revealing the subtle ways in which it contributes to character interaction and narrative development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Politeness

Politeness strategies reflect the speaker's care for the listener's "face," which refers to an individual's social self-image or sense of dignity in public encounters, rather than physical appearance. While the concept of politeness in communication is considered universal, its expression varies across different cultures and social groups, each having distinct standards and forms of polite behavior. Politeness strategies are essentially efforts made by speakers to minimize Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) that could potentially damage the hearer's self-image during communication.

Brown and Levinson's politeness theory focuses on the notion of "face," which represents a person's social self-image and emotional expectations during interactions. The theory suggests that individuals apply different strategies to lessen the impact of face-threatening acts, aiming to communicate effectively while also preserving respectful and harmonious relationships. Brown and Levinson identified five main strategies for achieving politeness, ranging from direct (bald-on-record) to highly indirect (off-record), with the choice of strategy influenced by factors such as social distance, power relations, and the perceived imposition of the act (Miller-Ott & Kelly, 2017).

2. Positive Politeness Strategy

The speaker uses this approach to protect the hearer's positive face by emphasizing a shared sense of belonging or group identity. It often creates or reinforces feelings of familiarity and mutual support between the speaker and listener. Positive politeness strategies are particularly popular in group interactions where people have common aims and interests. The speaker's goal in employing this method is to foster a sense of intimacy and strengthen social relationships with the hearer. Brown and Levinson (1987, p.102) define fifteen various types of positive politeness strategies, which include:

1. Notice, attend to the H (his interest, wants, needs, goods)

In general, this strategy implies that the speaker should show awareness of the listener's situation or feelings. When a speaker addresses the listener's needs during communication, it can lead to positive reactions such as happiness, contentment, and enthusiasm. Example: "You look sad. Can I help you?"

2. Exaggerate (interest, approval, or sympathy with the listener)

The speaker may use increased intonation or stress to convey a strong sense of worry, empathy, or praise for the listener. This “exaggeration” strategy often involves intensified tone, stress, or the use of amplifying words. For example: “Your garden is absolutely amazing!”

3. Intensify interest to the H

This strategy is employed when the speaker aims to convey attractive or relevant information to the hearer, thereby enhancing the listener’s attention and involvement in the conversation. Example: “You know, isn’t it?”

4. Use In-Group Identity Markers

This approach reflects a sense of intimacy or shared group identity between the speaker and the hearer. It is often marked by using familiar or affectionate terms of address like mate, honey, mom, darling, or sweetheart. Example: “Bring me your dirty clothes to wash, honey.”

5. Seek Agreement

This strategy reflects the speaker’s effort to establish a sense of equality with the listener. The speaker aims to create a positive and agreeable impression by expressing agreement with the listener’s opinions. One way this is achieved is by repeating parts or the entirety of the listener’s earlier statements. Example:

A: I’m really tired after that long meeting. B: Yes, that meeting was exhausting!

6. Avoid Disagreement

The strategy of avoiding disagreement is based on the idea that individuals tend to respond to others by steering clear of open conflict. It is commonly noted that people are generally more straightforward when agreeing than when disagreeing. In such situations, the speaker may soften their opposition by using phrases like “Yes, but...” to mask their disagreement. Example: “Yeah, I get it, but maybe we can do it this way.”

7. Presupposing, Raising, or Asserting Common Ground

This strategy may involve engaging in small talk or casual gossip. The speaker begins with an unrelated topic before transitioning to their main point. In doing so, the speaker creates the impression of shared knowledge or equal standing with the hearer. Example:

A: Ouch, this scrape really hurts, Mom. B: I know, sweetie, it must hurt a lot.

8. Joke

Incorporating a joke into a conversation can help put the listener at ease and create a more enjoyable interaction. Example: “Wow, that’s a whopper!”

9. Assume or Presuppose Speaker's Knowledge of and Concern for Listener's Wants

This strategy involves the speaker seeking the listener’s consent or validation. Example: “I know you’re going to ask, Mike.”

10. Offer, Promise

The speaker is committed to helping the listener achieve whatever they want. An example is: “If you pick up the groceries, I’ll cook dinner tonight.”

11. Be Optimistic

This strategy is employed when the speaker assumes that the listener understands and agrees with their intentions. Example: “We’ll meet tomorrow, if that works for you.”

12. Include Both Speaker and the Hearer in the Activity

This strategy involves the speaker using the inclusive pronoun “we” when they actually refer specifically to “you” or “me.” Example: “If we finish this project on time, it’ll benefit both of us.”

13. Give or Ask for the Reasons

The speaker uses this strategy to convey particular intentions or to criticise the listener Example: “Perhaps we should reconsider our approach to this task.”

14. Assume or Assert Reciprocity

This approach involves the speaker offering help or a favor to the listener in return for something the listener has done for them. Example: “I’ll proofread your report if you help me with my presentation.”

15. Give Hints to the Listener (sympathy, goods, understanding, or cooperation)

This approach aims to create a feeling of happiness for the hearer. Pleasing someone can involve giving physical gifts, but showing care and attention is also considered a valuable form of giving. Example: “Good luck today, Tony.”

METHOD

1. Research Design

This study uses a qualitative research methodology. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992), qualitative research has five key features. First, it relies on the natural setting as the primary data source, with the researcher serving as the main data collection instrument. Second, it emphasizes descriptive data. Third, qualitative research focuses more on the process than on outcomes or end products. Fourth, data analysis in qualitative research is generally conducted inductively. Fifth, the central focus is on uncovering the meaning behind the data. These characteristics align well with the goals of this study, as it seeks to explore the underlying meanings within the characters' utterances. Therefore, acting as the primary instrument, the researcher applies a descriptive method to examine the data.

This research uses a descriptive qualitative design to gather data. It aims to analyze the Elemental movie's positive politeness strategies.

2. Data and Source of Data

The data for this study are derived from the American animated film *Elemental: Forces of Nature*, directed by Peter Sohn. Released in 2023, the film is a 3D computer-animated romantic fantasy produced by Pixar Animation Studios. This film was selected due to its emotionally rich and nuanced dialogue, which offers a valuable representation of various politeness strategies within interpersonal communication.

3. Research Instrument

This study employs a qualitative approach, with the researcher acting as the main instrument of data collection and analysis. In qualitative research, the researcher is directly involved in gathering and interpreting data, making essential judgments throughout the process. As stated Bogdan & Biklen, (1992), the researcher functions as the key instrument, playing a central role in ensuring the credibility and depth of the findings.

4. Data Collection Technique

The data for this research were collected by directly observing the film *Elemental: Forces of Nature*. The data collection process involved locating and watching the movie via online platforms, reviewing the film’s script, analyzing the types of conversations, and taking detailed notes on relevant utterances. This approach allowed the researcher to examine dialogue and identify instances of positive politeness strategies closely.

5. Data Analysis

This study employed a qualitative method to analyze the data, as qualitative research is appropriate when exploring complex issues within a community, especially to uncover difficult-to-measure variables or marginalized perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The gathered data were identified, classified, and analyzed through applicable linguistic frameworks, focusing on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Positive Politeness Strategies Employed by Characters in the Movie Script *Elemental: Forces of Nature*

1.1. Analysis of Strategy 1: Notice, attend to the H (his interest, wants, needs, goods)

- Ember : Dad, I'll take care of it. You need to rest.
 Bernie : I still have much to prepare for the Red Dot Sale.
 Ember : Dad, I'll take care of it. You need to rest.

In the scene, Ember demonstrates attentiveness to her father Bernie's needs, particularly as he appears exhausted while preparing for the late-night Red Dot Sale. Aware of his physical fatigue, Ember gently urges him to rest, as reflected in her line, "You need to rest." This utterance indicates her genuine concern for his well-being and her willingness to ease his workload. This interaction shows Ember using a positive politeness strategy by paying attention to the hearer's needs and interests, particularly their physical health and comfort.

1.2. Analysis of Strategy 2: Exaggerate (interest, approval, or sympathy with the listener)

- Wade : We love you, Lutz!
 Crowd : We love you, Lutz! We love you, Lutz!
 Wade : Luuuuutz!

Wade demonstrates exaggerated emotional support for Lutz, an athlete experiencing difficulties during an Air Ball game. In an effort to encourage him, Wade initiates a loud, stadium-wide chant, repeatedly shouting, "We love you, Lutz!" His enthusiastic tone and repeated expressions of praise serve as a form of amplified approval, aimed at boosting Lutz's morale. This behavior reflects Wade's use of the positive politeness strategy of exaggeration, employed to convey strong interest, emotional alignment, and solidarity with the listener.

1.3. Analysis of Strategy 4: Use In-group Identity Markers

- Ember : Àshfá, customer.
 Bernie : How about... You take it today.
 Ember : For real?

While working together in the shop, Ember addresses Bernie using the term "Àshfá," a Firish word meaning "father." This use of an in-group linguistic expression highlights their cultural and familial bond. Rather than opting for the more general term "Dad," Ember's choice to use Firish reinforces their shared identity as members of the Fire community and as family. This instance exemplifies the positive politeness strategy of employing in-group identity markers to foster intimacy, solidarity, and a sense of belonging between speaker and listener.

1.4. Analysis of Strategy 6: Avoid Disagreement

- Ember : Yeah, so uh, Gale... my name is Ember Lumen. My family runs a Fire shop...
 Gale : Lumen? Fire shop with thirty citations?
 Ember : Yeah, bummer, aww yeah... okay, so the 30 citations—

Ember chooses not to directly disagree with Gale, who is emotionally charged and preoccupied with the ongoing game. Despite being interrupted and facing critical responses, Ember maintains a gentle tone and refrains from confronting Gale. By softening expressions such as “yeah, so uh” and “bummer, aww yeah,” she subtly steers the conversation while minimizing potential conflict. This interaction demonstrates Ember’s application strategy of positive politeness in avoiding disagreement, intended to maintain interpersonal harmony and promote a cooperative conversational atmosphere.

1.5. Analysis of Strategy 9: Assert or Presuppose Speaker’s Knowledge of Listener’s Needs

Wade : I know, I know. Just do what we practiced. You are so good at everything else.

Ember : You’re Right. I’ll get it.

Wade : You’ve got this.

Wade conveys empathy and emotional support by acknowledging Ember’s feelings and referring to their past experiences together. In doing so, he demonstrates an awareness of her current emotional needs, specifically reassurance and affirmation. His statement, “You are SO good at everything else,” presupposes her competence and serves as a form of positive reinforcement. This interaction illustrates the use of a positive politeness strategy, where the speaker shows awareness of the listener’s needs to build trust, emotional connection, and a sense of solidarity.

1.6. Analysis of Strategy 10: Offer, Promise

Ember : Nothing will happen to this shop or the flame again. I promise.

Bernie : Hmm. Good daughter.

Ember : I won’t let you down. You’ll see.

In a deeply emotional moment, Ember sincerely assures her father that she will safeguard their family’s shop and honor his legacy. Her heartfelt statements, such as “I promise” and “I won’t let you down,” serve to comfort Bernie and reinforce their familial bond. This explicit verbal commitment reflects the positive politeness strategy of offering or promising, used to express dependability and provide emotional support to the listener.

1.7. Analysis of Strategy 12: Include Both Speaker and Hearer in the Activity

Bernie : She’ll take over when she’s ready.

Ember : And I am ready!

Bernie : Hmm. Then we do it together.

Bernie employs inclusive language such as “we” when discussing the shop's transition of responsibility to Ember. Although Ember assumes greater responsibility, Bernie frames the shift as a collaborative effort rather than an individual burden. This inclusive framing alleviates pressure on Ember and reinforces their emotional connection. This expression reflects the use of a positive politeness strategy that includes both the speaker and the listener in a shared activity, emphasizing mutual support and commitment.

2. Factors Influencing Positive Politeness

2.1. Payoff

The concept of "payoff" describes the speaker’s aim to receive some form of benefit or reward from the listener by using particular politeness strategies. Usually, this reward takes the form of a stronger or improved relationship between the speaker and hearer. When the listener responds in a way that meets the speaker’s expectations, it indicates that the politeness strategy has been successful.

Ember : I won't let you down. I swear. You'll see.
Bernie : Hmm. Good daughter.

Ember uses a positive politeness strategy by making a strong promise to her father. She intends to reassure him and gain his trust, which may lead to her finally being allowed to take over the shop. The payoff she hopes to achieve is increased approval and confidence from her father. This shows that Ember's use of politeness is driven by the desire to strengthen their relationship and reach her personal goal.

2.2. Relative Power (P)

Relative power means that the speaker tends to be more polite when talking to someone with a higher social or work status. How polite the speaker is depends on their relationship with the hearer.

Ember : You can't! My dad put his WHOLE LIFE into that place!
Gale : Water was shut off there YEARS ago.
Ember : Please... just give us until Friday.

In this scene, Ember pleads with Gale, a high-ranking official, to delay closing down her father's shop. Although she is emotional, she still uses polite and deferential language, like "please" and "just give us." Gale's power over her family's fate makes Ember use a more cautious and respectful tone. This illustrates how relative power influences the use of positive politeness strategies.

2.3. Social Distance (D)

Social distance is a degree of closeness (Khan & Anwar, 2016). One key factor influencing the speaker's choice to employ a positive politeness strategy, especially when delivering criticism, is the degree of social distance (D) between the speaker and the hearer. A greater perceived distance may prompt the speaker to soften their message in order to maintain rapport and avoid face-threatening implications.

Ember : Excuse me. Sorry. Pardon. Oh sorry. Fire girl coming through.
Wade : Jimmy, what's up? Wendy! How good is it to be here?

In this scene, Ember carefully uses polite expressions to pass through a crowd of strangers. Her use of repeated apologies and soft language reflects the unfamiliarity between her and the people around her. Wade, on the other hand, casually greets others he knows. Ember's strategy is influenced by social distance; she uses politeness to reduce discomfort in interactions with unfamiliar individuals.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the researcher presents the conclusion and suggestions of the research. The conclusion is drawn based on the findings and discussion, while the suggestion is intended for future researchers who are interested in investigating a similar topic.

Through an analysis of the main characters' utterances in the film *Elemental*, the researcher identified a total of 78 instances that exemplify the use of positive politeness strategies. Referring to the framework developed by Brown & Levinson (1987) theory, all fifteen types of positive politeness strategies were observed within the dialogue. The most commonly applied strategies included: attending to the listener's needs, asserting knowledge of the hearer's needs, making offers or promises, including both speaker and listener in activities, and using in-group markers. These strategies appeared frequently, underscoring their significance in fostering interpersonal connections among the characters.

The reason these strategies were used generally reflects the function of positive politeness as a social accelerator. Using these strategies, the speaker (S) intends to build a closer relationship with the hearer (H) by emphasizing solidarity, empathy, and inclusion. The strategies applied by the characters in *Elemental* were appropriate to their social and cultural contexts, aligning with the emotional and multicultural themes of the film. The connection between the strategies and their verbal expression demonstrates a strong alignment between linguistic form, social intention, and situational appropriateness.

REFERENCES

- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1992). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods* (2nd ed.) (Vol. 368). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. Retrieved from https://math.buffalostate.edu/dwilson/med595/qualitative_intro.pdf
- Brown, P., & Levinson. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511813085>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (Fourth edition). Los Angeles: SAGE.
- Khan, Z. M., & Anwar, M. N. (2016). Analysis of Positive and Negative Strategies in Trum's Interview To New York Times. *Government M.A.O. College*.
- Miller-Ott, A., & Kelly, L. (2017). A Politeness Theory Analysis of Cell-Phone Usage in the Presence of Friends. *Communication Studies*, 68, 190–207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2017.1299024>
- Septyaningsih, A. (2007). *An analysis of positive politeness strategy in the film entitled "in good company" (a pragmatic study)* (Sebelas Maret University). Sebelas Maret University. Retrieved from <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/12347483.pdf>
- Trimandala. (2016). Politeness Strategies Used by the Main Character in the Movie "The Great Gatsby." *Udayana University*, 16(2).
- Wati & Puspani. (2020). Positive Politeness Strategies Used by the Character in the Movie "The Patriot." *Humanis*, 24(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.24843/JH.2020.v24.i01.p01>
- Watts, R. J. (2007). *Politeness*. Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatic*. New York: Oxford University Press.