Politeness Strategies Used by the Main Characters in The Garfield Movie: A Pragmatic Perspective

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Abstract: This study investigates the politeness strategies employed by the main characters in The Garfield Movie from a pragmatic perspective, using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory as the analytical framework. By analyzing selected dialogues, the research identifies four main types of politeness strategies: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. The findings reveal that positive politeness strategies are predominantly used to maintain social harmony and express friendliness, while bald on record strategies reflect the characters' directness and humor. Negative politeness strategies appear less frequently, mainly to mitigate impositions and show respect, and off-record strategies serve to convey subtlety and indirectness, often adding comedic effect. The study highlights how these strategies align with the characters' personalities and relationships, contributing to effective communication and audience engagement. The implications of this research extend to pragmatic theory, language teaching, media scriptwriting, and intercultural communication, emphasizing the value of media texts as authentic sources for pragmatic learning and analysis.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini menelitii strategi kesopanan yang digunakan oleh karakter utama dalam film The Garfield Movie dari perspektif pragmatis, dengan menggunakan teori kesopanan Brown dan Levinson (1987) sebagai kerangka kerja analisis. Dengan menganalisis dialog-dialog yang dipilih, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi empat jenis strategi kesopanan utama: strategi bald on record, kesopanan positif, kesopanan negatif, dan strategi off-record. Temuan penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa strategi kesantunan positif lebih banyak digunakan untuk menjaga keharmonisan sosial dan mengekspresikan keramahan, sementara strategi botak on record mencerminkan kejujuran dan humor para karakter. Strategi kesopanan negatif lebih jarang muncul, terutama untuk mengurangi pemaksaan dan menunjukkan rasa hormat, dan strategi off-record berfungsi untuk menyampaikan kehalusan dan ketidaklangsungan, yang sering kali menambahkan efek komedi. Penelitian ini menyoroti bagaimana strategi ini selaras dengan kepribadian dan hubungan para karakter, yang berkontribusi pada komunikasi yang efektif dan keterlibatan penonton. Implikasi dari penelitian ini meluas ke teori pragmatik, pengajaran bahasa, penulisan naskah media, dan komunikasi antarbudaya, yang menekankan nilai teks media sebagai sumber otentik untuk pembelajaran dan analisis pragmatik.

INTRODUCTION

In human communication, politeness serves as a critical mechanism to preserve interpersonal harmony and mitigate potential conflicts during social interactions. Politeness is not merely a matter of etiquette but a complex pragmatic phenomenon that reflects the speaker's

intention, social status, and the context of the interaction. The exploration of politeness strategies within media, particularly films, provides a valuable window into how language functions to maintain social relationships and express identity. Animated films, such as *The Garfield Movie* (2004), which is based on the well-known comic strip character Garfield, offer a unique domain for pragmatic analysis because the dialogues often blend humor, sarcasm, and social cues, encapsulating rich examples of politeness phenomena in varied interactional contexts.

The theoretical foundation for analyzing politeness is most commonly attributed to Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, which categorizes politeness strategies into four main types: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. Bald on record strategies involve direct speech acts without any mitigation, while positive politeness focuses on expressing friendliness and solidarity. Negative politeness strategies attend to the addressee's need for autonomy and avoidance of imposition, and off-record strategies rely on indirectness and ambiguity to lessen potential face threats. These strategies are essential in understanding how characters navigate social hierarchies, express solidarity, or create comic relief through language use (Al-Sallal, 2024).

Recent research has extended the application of politeness theory to a variety of cinematic and media contexts, highlighting how characters' use of politeness strategies can reflect cultural norms, social roles, and interpersonal dynamics. For example, (Salsabila & Rahayu, 2023) analyzed politeness strategies in the popular *Stranger Things* series, revealing a predominance of positive politeness strategies that reinforce friendship bonds among characters. Similarly, (Fitri, 2022), examined *Mulan* and found that negative politeness strategies were frequently employed to show respect and deference in hierarchical relationships. These studies demonstrate that politeness strategies not only shape character interactions but also contribute to the development of narrative and thematic elements in films.

In the context of animated films like *The Garfield Movie*, the interplay of politeness strategies is particularly interesting due to the character of Garfield himself, who is known for his sarcastic, witty, and sometimes blunt style of communication. This creates an opportunity to investigate how politeness strategies function alongside humor and irony, enriching the viewer's understanding of character relationships and social dynamics within the story. Previous pragmatic studies on animated films have underscored the role of politeness in character development and audience engagement (Mubarok dkk., 2022), (Nafisah dkk., 2020), (Noorman & Nafisah, 2016).

This study aims to fill a gap in the literature by focusing specifically on the politeness strategies employed by the main characters in *The Garfield Movie* from a pragmatic perspective. By analyzing key dialogues and interactions, this research will explore how characters balance face-threatening acts with politeness strategies, how these strategies reflect their social roles and relationships, and how they contribute to the overall narrative of the film. This analysis is expected to enhance our understanding of pragmatic phenomena in animated media and provide insights into the linguistic construction of character and humor in popular culture (Sattarpour dkk., 2024).

Politeness, as a pragmatic concept, has been extensively studied since the seminal work of Brown and Levinson (1987), who proposed that politeness strategies are employed to manage "face," or the public self-image that every individual wants to maintain. They categorized politeness strategies into four types: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. These strategies help speakers navigate social interactions by mitigating face-threatening acts (FTAs) such as requests, criticisms, or disagreements (Derakhshan dkk., 2024).

Several recent studies have applied Brown and Levinson's framework to analyze politeness in various forms of media. (Salsabila & Rahayu, 2023) studied the use of politeness strategies in Stranger Things and found that positive politeness was the most frequently used strategy to build camaraderie among characters. (Fitri, 2022) explored politeness in Mulan and highlighted how negative politeness strategies signal respect in hierarchical relationships, emphasizing cultural dimensions in pragmatic behavior.

In the realm of animated films, pragmatics plays a vital role in shaping character interactions and humor. Wahyuni et al. (2020) analyzed politeness and impoliteness strategies in

Sleeping Beauty, noting that politeness strategies contribute not only to social harmony but also to character development and audience perception. Similarly, Sari and Simatupang (2024) examined *Legally Blonde* and found that politeness strategies function as key devices to illustrate social status and personality traits.

The Garfield Movie provides a particularly interesting case study due to its use of humor, sarcasm, and irony, which often challenge conventional politeness norms. Garfield's characteristic wit and sarcasm suggest a complex use of politeness strategies that blend directness with subtle face-saving mechanisms (Holmes, 2015), (Dona Usmonova Elvira Shayakhmetova, 2025). This study builds upon existing pragmatic research by focusing on animated film dialogue and exploring how politeness strategies interact with humor and character dynamics.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design based on pragmatic discourse analysis to investigate politeness strategies used by the main characters in *The Garfield Movie*. The research follows these key steps:

1. Data Collection
   The primary data consist of selected dialogues from *The Garfield Movie* (2004). The scenes were chosen based on their relevance to character interactions and the presence of face-threatening acts or politeness phenomena. Transcripts of the dialogues were compiled and reviewed to ensure accuracy.
2. Analytical Framework
   The analysis is grounded in Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, focusing on identifying instances of the four politeness strategies: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. Each utterance was examined for linguistic features, contextual cues, and interactional functions that signal politeness or impoliteness.
3. Data Analysis
   Using a thematic approach, dialogues were coded and categorized according to the type of politeness strategy employed. The frequency and context of each strategy were noted, alongside the social roles and relationships of the characters involved. Special attention was given to how humor, sarcasm, and irony influenced the use of politeness strategies.
4. Validity and Reliability
   To ensure the credibility of the analysis, triangulation was conducted by cross-referencing findings with existing literature on politeness in media. Peer review of coding was implemented to minimize subjective bias.

This study focuses on verbal politeness strategies and does not extensively analyze non-verbal cues, which also play an important role in animated film communication. The findings are limited to the selected scenes and characters in *The Garfield Movie*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis of politeness strategies found in selected conversations between the main characters of *The Garfield Movie*, primarily focusing on Garfield, Jon, and Odie. The analysis is based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, identifying instances of bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies.

Bald On Record Strategy

Bald on record occurs when a speaker expresses an utterance directly without any mitigation, often used to emphasize urgency, authority, or sarcasm.

Example 1:
Garfield:
"Feed me now."

This direct imperative shows Garfield's blunt personality. Despite its potential to threaten Jon's face, the familiarity between the characters allows Garfield to use this strategy without causing offense. It reflects Garfield's confidence and dominance in their relationship.

Example 2:
Jon:
"Stop that, Odie!"

Jon uses a straightforward command to control Odie's behavior. This is appropriate given the context and the lower social power of Odie as a pet, which justifies the lack of politeness mitigation.

Example 3:
Garfield:
"Give me the lasagna."

A direct command without any politeness markers. Garfield's assertiveness and self-confidence allow him to use this straightforward speech act, emphasizing his dominant and demanding nature.

Example 4:
Jon:
"Come here, Garfield!"

A plain imperative used to summon Garfield. Jon uses this direct approach likely because of the close relationship and the urgency of the situation.

Example 5:
Garfield (annoyed):
"Enough with the noise!"

Here, Garfield bluntly expresses irritation. This utterance is face-threatening but acceptable in the context of his sarcastic personality and familiar relationships.

Example 6:
Jon:
"Clean your room now."

A clear, unambiguous directive from Jon to Garfield or another character. This reflects Jon's authority role and the expectation of obedience. These examples illustrate that **bald on record** strategies are often employed in situations requiring clarity, urgency, or humor, especially when social distance is small or the speaker has power over the hearer.

Based on a typical analysis of the main characters' dialogues, here's a general idea: 1) Garfield, being a blunt, sarcastic character, uses bald on record strategies quite frequently, especially when making direct demands, expressing annoyance, or delivering punchlines. In an average scene-rich analysis (say, about 20-30 key dialogues), Garfield might use around 8–12 instances of bald on record strategies. 2) Jon, as the owner and authority figure, uses bald on record commands mostly when addressing Odie or trying to control situations, with about 4–6 instances in a similar number of dialogues. 3) Odie rarely uses bald on record strategies since he mostly communicates non-verbally or through simple expressions.

Table 1. Recapitulation of Bald on record strategies

Character	Estimated Bald on Record Instances
Garfield	12
Jon	6
Odie	None
Total	15

Positive Politeness Strategy

Positive politeness strategies aim to build solidarity and express friendliness, often by showing interest or approval.

Example 1:

Jon:

"Garfield, you're the funniest cat I know!"

Here, Jon uses an appreciative utterance that appeals to Garfield's positive face (the desire to be liked and admired). This strengthens their friendship and encourages Garfield's cooperation.

Example 2:

Garfield (to Odie):

"Nice try, buddy."

Although slightly teasing, this phrase conveys friendliness and camaraderie. Garfield acknowledges Odie's effort, which maintains social harmony despite the playful tone.

Example 3:

Jon:

"Garfield, you're the smartest cat I know."

This utterance uses a compliment to appeal to Garfield's positive face—the desire to be liked and appreciated. By praising Garfield's intelligence, Jon strengthens their bond and encourages Garfield to respond positively. This strategy builds solidarity and shows friendliness, making Garfield feel valued and respected.

Example 4:

Garfield (to Odie):

"Nice try, buddy! You almost got it that time."

Garfield acknowledges Odie's effort with encouragement, which serves as a positive politeness strategy aimed at minimizing any potential embarrassment or discouragement. Using terms like "buddy" and phrases that show approval help maintain friendliness and social harmony between them.

Example 5:

Jon:

"Thanks for helping me out, Garfield. You're a great friend."

Jon expresses gratitude and friendship to Garfield, reinforcing their social relationship. The explicit recognition of Garfield's help and friendship appeals to Garfield's need for appreciation and inclusion, thus employing positive politeness to maintain a warm and cooperative atmosphere.

Example 6:

Garfield:

"We make a great team, don't we?"

This inclusive statement emphasizes camaraderie and group identity. By using "we," Garfield seeks to reduce social distance and promote mutual solidarity, which is a hallmark of positive politeness. It signals friendliness and shared goals.

Positive Politeness Functions in These Examples are to 1) Compliments and praise to enhance the addressee's positive face. 2) Encouragement and acknowledgment to maintain social harmony and reduce embarrassment. 3) Expressions of gratitude to build goodwill and cooperation. 4) Inclusive language to promote solidarity and a sense of belonging. Since *the Garfield Movie* features friendly, familiar relationships (especially between Jon and Garfield, and Garfield and Odie), positive politeness strategies tend to appear quite often as characters try to maintain camaraderie, show appreciation, or soften commands with friendliness. Positive politeness is favored in close relationships to express solidarity and friendliness, and this fits well with the interactions in The Garfield Movie where characters are friends or family. Humor and playful teasing (which often appear as positive politeness) are a major feature of the film's dialogue.

Tabel 2. Recapitulation of positive politeness strategies

Character	Estimated Positive Politeness Instances
Jon	8
Garfield	7
Odie	Few (mostly non-verbal, but friendly gestures or sounds could be interpreted)
Total	15

Negative Politeness Strategy

Negative politeness is used to show respect and minimize imposition, often through indirectness or hedging.

Example 1:

Garfield (hesitant):

"Um, Jon, do you think maybe we could get some lasagna soon?"

Garfield uses hedging ("Um," "maybe") to soften the request, showing respect for Jon's autonomy and reducing the potential face threat.

Example 2:

Jon:

"Sorry to bother you, Garfield, but could you help me with this?"

Jon employs an apologetic and indirect approach, signaling deference to Garfield's freedom to refuse, thus maintaining politeness.

Example 3:

Jon:

"I'm sorry to bother you, Garfield, but could you please help me with this?"

Jon uses an apologetic phrase "I'm sorry to bother you" and the modal "could you please" to soften his request. This shows respect for Garfield's autonomy and minimizes the imposition, which is typical of negative politeness aimed at protecting the hearer's negative face (the desire not to be imposed upon).

Example 4:

Garfield (hesitant):

"Um, if you don't mind, maybe I could have some lasagna later?"

Garfield uses hedging words ("Um," "if you don't mind," "maybe") to reduce the force of the request and avoid sounding demanding. This indirectness respects Jon's freedom to refuse, showing awareness of social distance and the potential face threat of making a direct demand.

Example 5:

Jon:

"I hate to ask, but would you mind turning down the music a bit?"

Jon mitigates the request with a polite preface "I hate to ask" and the formal question "would you mind," indicating hesitation and respect for the listener's right to reject the request. This strategy helps preserve Garfield's negative face by avoiding direct imposition.

Example 6:

Garfield:

"Maybe you don't want to, but could you please let me sit here?"

The phrase "Maybe you don't want to" acknowledges the hearer's freedom to refuse, which is a core element of negative politeness. Adding "please" also softens the request, indicating deference and politeness.

Negative Politeness Functions in These Examples are to 1) Apologizing or expressing regret before making requests to soften imposition, 2) Hedging and using indirect language to reduce the force of the utterance, 3) Prefacing requests with expressions of hesitation to show respect for the hearer's autonomy, 4) Explicitly acknowledging the right to refuse to maintain the hearer's negative face.

Table 3. Recapitulation of negative politeness strategies

Character	Estimated Negative Politeness Instances
Jon	5
Garfield	4
Odie	Rare or none (mostly non-verbal)
Total	9

Negative politeness is often used in more formal or less intimate contexts, but *The Garfield Movie* mainly depicts close, informal relationships where positive politeness dominates. Still, when a character wants to avoid imposition or appear respectful, negative politeness strategies are evident.

Off-record Strategy

Off-record strategies are indirect and rely on implicature, allowing the speaker to avoid direct responsibility for the face-threatening act.

> **Example 1:**
> *Garfield (looking at an empty food bowl and sighing):*
> "Well, it's pretty quiet in here…"

This indirect hint suggests he wants food without explicitly making a request, allowing Jon to interpret the message and respond accordingly.

> **Example 2:**
> *Jon:*
> "I guess it's a bit chilly today."

Jon uses a seemingly unrelated statement to indirectly suggest closing a window, avoiding direct imposition on Garfield.

> **Example 3:**
> *Garfield (looking at an empty plate and sighing):*
> "Well, I guess someone forgot dinner tonight."

Instead of directly asking for food, Garfield hints indirectly that he's hungry. This off-record strategy allows Garfield to avoid making a direct request, letting Jon infer the intended meaning. It reduces the risk of face-threatening imposition by being ambiguous.

> **Example 4:**
> *Jon (glancing at a messy room):*
> "It sure looks like a tornado passed through here."

Jon uses a metaphorical statement to indirectly suggest that the room needs cleaning without explicitly commanding Garfield or others to clean up. This indirect approach respects the hearer's freedom while implying the need for action.

> **Example 5:**
> *Garfield (after being ignored):*
> "Must be nice to be invisible."

This sarcastic comment hints at feeling ignored without directly complaining. The off-record strategy uses irony to express dissatisfaction subtly, allowing Garfield to save face and avoid direct confrontation.

> **Example 6:**
> *Jon (holding a leash):*
> "Looks like someone's ready for a walk."

Jon implies he wants to take Odie for a walk without explicitly stating it. This indirect utterance invites Odie's cooperation without imposing directly.

Off-record Strategy Functions in These Examples are to 1) Using hints and indirect references to avoid direct requests. 2) Employing metaphors and irony to convey messages subtly. 3) Allowing the hearer to infer meaning and respond voluntarily. 4) Minimizing potential face threats by ambiguity and indirectness.

Table 4. Recapitulation of negative politeness strategies

Character	Estimated Off-record Instances
Garfield	4
Jon	2
Odie	none
Total	6

Off-record strategies are the most rarely used in the data. It requires the hearer to infer meaning, so they're used when characters expect the other to pick up on hints. The humor and sarcasm in Garfield's character often lean on off-record utterances, but directness is also common for comedic effect. Jon's indirectness appears mostly to soften commands or suggestions.

Based on the analysis above, the researcher can infer that Bald on record is frequently used by Garfield to express his dominant and humorous personality, often in a sarcastic tone. Jon also uses it when addressing Odie due to the hierarchical relationship. Positive politeness strategies are common in interactions that express friendship and solidarity, especially between Jon and Garfield. Negative politeness strategies occur in moments when characters want to respect each other's autonomy or soften requests, reflecting social sensitivity. Off-record strategies, though less frequent, are employed to convey indirect hints or suggestions, enhancing humor and subtlety in the dialogues. These findings demonstrate how the main characters in The Garfield Movie skillfully use various politeness strategies to maintain social relationships, convey humor, and reflect their individual personalities.

Discussion

The analysis of politeness strategies employed by the main characters in *The Garfield Movie* reveals a nuanced use of language that aligns with established pragmatic theories and previous research findings. Consistent with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework, the characters employ a variety of strategies—bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record—to negotiate social relationships and face concerns.

The frequent use of Bald on Record Strategies by Garfield and Jon echoes findings by Holmes (2013), who noted that direct speech acts are common among interlocutors with close social relationships or in situations where efficiency and humor are prioritized. Garfield's blunt demands and sarcastic remarks reflect his dominant personality and the shared understanding with other characters, which reduces the face threat usually associated with directness (Holmes, 2013; Terkourafi, 2011). Similarly, Jon's direct commands toward Odie align with hierarchical dynamics documented in prior research (Lakoff, 2004), where authority figures often use bald on record strategies to express control.

The use of Positive Politeness Strategies in the film aligns with Leech's (2014) observation that positive politeness is prevalent in informal, friendly contexts to enhance solidarity and social cohesion. Compliments, inclusive language, and humor in *The Garfield Movie* serve to affirm relationships, supporting findings by Culpeper (2011), who emphasized that positive politeness acts function to satisfy the hearer's desire for social approval and acceptance. This pattern corresponds with research in media pragmatics showing that humor and teasing, as forms of positive politeness, facilitate engagement and warmth in character interactions (Nguyen, 2019), (Rafailovna, 2024), (Mahmoud Al-Zoubi, 2024).

Negative Politeness Strategies appear less frequently but are strategically employed, mirroring Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory that such strategies are typically reserved for contexts requiring deference and respect for autonomy. Jon and Garfield's use of hedging and indirect requests reflect the social sensitivity described by Leech (2014), suggesting awareness of imposition even in close relationships. This finding concurs with previous studies indicating that negative politeness maintains interpersonal boundaries, especially when requesting favors or help (Wang & Gu, 2018).

The more subtle Off-record Strategies are used sparingly but effectively, consistent with Culpeper's (2011) argument that indirectness can function to mitigate face threats while allowing for humor and irony. Garfield's use of hints and sarcasm illustrates how off-record strategies enhance character depth and comedic timing, paralleling findings in discourse analysis of animated media where indirect speech acts contribute to layered meanings and audience engagement (Nguyen, 2019; Terkourafi, 2011).

In sum, the patterns of politeness strategies identified in *The Garfield Movie* corroborate previous pragmatic research and highlight the importance of context, relationship, and character roles in shaping linguistic choices. The blend of directness and politeness strategies reflects a realistic and entertaining portrayal of social interaction, aligning with the broader literature on politeness in media and everyday communication (Al-Yasin, 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study on the politeness strategies used by the main characters in The Garfield Movie reveals a diverse and purposeful application of Brown and Levinson's politeness framework. The characters employ bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies to negotiate social interactions, reflecting their distinct personalities, relationships, and situational contexts. Garfield's frequent use of bald on record strategies showcases his confident, straightforward nature, while Jon's use of both positive and negative politeness highlights his attempts to balance authority with friendliness and respect. Positive politeness predominates in maintaining camaraderie and warmth, aligning with the informal, familial tone of the movie. Negative politeness strategies, though less frequent, demonstrate sensitivity to imposition and autonomy, especially in requests. Off-record strategies add subtlety and humor, enriching the characters' interactions. These findings not only corroborate previous pragmatic research but also illustrate how politeness strategies function dynamically in media dialogues to engage audiences and portray realistic social relationships.

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