

THE STRATEGY OF POLITENESS IN NOVEL *BORN IN ICE*: A LINGUISTIC AND CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Atiq Aqiqotul Hasanah

Dosen Prodi Sastra Inggris, Universitas Muhamamdiyah Gorontalo

atiqaqiqotulhasanah@umgo.ac.id

Abstract

This study analyzes the politeness strategies in Nora Roberts' novel *Born in Ice*. The analysis uses Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness. A qualitative content analysis method was employed. Data were collected through documentation techniques by reading and recording dialogues and character actions that reflect politeness strategies. The analysis involved classifying both positive and negative politeness strategies, analyzing linguistic elements such as mood and modality through the Systemic Functional Grammar approach, and contextualizing the data based on interpersonal relationships (family, friendship, professional). The results revealed that positive politeness fosters empathy and strengthens interpersonal relationships, while negative politeness maintains harmony and respects individual autonomy in conflict situations. The situational context plays a crucial role in determining the politeness strategies used. This study contributes to the cross-disciplinary field of pragmatic linguistics and popular literature, expanding the understanding of politeness as a communication tool that reflects cultural values and social norms.

Keywords: *Politeness strategy, Born in Ice, pragmatic linguistics, popular literature.*

Introduction

Politeness is an essential element in social interaction, reflecting cultural and ethical values (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Watts, 2003). In Nora Roberts' novel *Born in Ice*, the interactions between characters are characterized by expressions of politeness that demonstrate empathy, attentiveness, and the dynamics of harmonious relationships (Roberts, 1995). This study aims to examine the role of politeness in the relationships between characters, analyzing the context of dialogue and actions within the novel.

In the field of linguistics, politeness has become a primary focus for understanding how communication strategies are used to maintain an individual's "face" during interaction (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Positive politeness strategies focus on fostering close relationships through warmth, empathy, and consideration for others' needs, while negative politeness strategies aim to preserve individual autonomy and avoid actions that could be perceived as intrusive or threatening to one's privacy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In literature, politeness goes beyond verbal communication. It also includes actions, situational contexts, and the relationships between characters (Mills, 2003; Watts, 2003; Kádár & Haugh, 2019).

Since the introduction of the politeness theory by Brown and Levinson (1987), much research has extended and adapted this theory to understand how individuals manage their face or

self-image during conversations. Politeness strategies are generally divided into two categories: positive politeness, which focuses on strengthening relationships and solidarity, and negative politeness, aimed at reducing tension or threats to individual autonomy (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Recent studies have shown that the context in which politeness strategies are applied significantly influences their implementation. For instance, Syakur, Sudrajad, and Masruroh (2023), in their analysis of the major characters in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, found that these characters used positive politeness strategies to reinforce social bonds and mitigate Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs) during their conversations. This illustrates how politeness serves to maintain harmony in social interactions governed by norms and hierarchies.

In academic settings, Anugrawati and Syam (2024) emphasize that factors such as age, social status, and social closeness influence how lecturers and students communicate and apply politeness strategies. Their study reveals that students tend to use more formal politeness strategies when communicating with older or higher-status lecturers, while they adopt a more relaxed approach with younger or closer lecturers. This aligns with Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory that both social distance and relative power between participants affect the politeness strategies used.

Novels often reflect societal values. Therefore, the study of politeness in literature is an important approach to understanding cultural representations, interpersonal relationships, and social dynamics (Hisham, 2021; Utami, 2018; Sari et al., 2016). While Mills (2003) suggests that politeness in literature is frequently used to represent power dynamics and empathy in social relationships, and Watts (2003) highlights its role in reflecting power relations within cultural contexts, most studies have concentrated on classical works or specific cultural settings. The dimension of politeness in popular novels, such as *Born in Ice*, remains underexplored, thus providing a significant research gap.

Born in Ice depicts the life of Brianna Concannon, a young woman in the Irish countryside, and her interactions with her family, friends, and guests. The novel touches upon a range of universal themes, such as family, love, and social responsibility, all of which contribute to a rich tapestry of social interactions that reflect civility. Irish cultural values, including hospitality, empathy, and respect for tradition, are strongly embedded in the relationships between characters. These themes provide an opportunity to analyze how politeness functions as an effective communication tool in fostering and maintaining interpersonal relationships.

Much of the research on politeness in literature has focused on the analysis of verbal dialogue without thoroughly considering the characters' actions or the situational context. In this novel, for example, the characters' actions—such as Brianna's patience when dealing with her

mother's conflict or Gray's empathy towards Brianna—serve as significant, yet often overlooked, forms of politeness that may be ignored in traditional linguistic analyses.

This study is of great relevance in the context of contemporary literature. By analyzing dialogues, actions, and situational contexts, it not only fills the gap in literature but also enriches our understanding of how politeness reflects cultural values and social norms. Additionally, this research aligns with Hofstede's (2001) theory of cultural dimensions, which affect social interactions, providing further insights into how Irish culture shapes politeness strategies in interpersonal relationships.

Thus, this study aims to identify both positive and negative politeness strategies in *Born in Ice* and analyze how situational contexts influence their application. By doing so, the study contributes to the development of pragmatic linguistics and popular literature, expanding the understanding of politeness as a communication tool for building harmonious interpersonal relationships.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach using a content analysis method to examine the politeness strategies present in the interactions between characters in *Born in Ice* by Nora Roberts. The qualitative approach is suitable for understanding and explaining social phenomena, particularly politeness strategies within character interactions. This method allows for an in-depth analysis of textual data that is inherently contextual.

The primary data for this study are drawn from the text of *Born in Ice*. The analysis focuses on verbal dialogue and character actions that reflect politeness strategies. The research is framed by the following theoretical framework:

- Brown and Levinson's Theory of Politeness (1987): This theory serves as the foundation for identifying positive and negative politeness strategies within the text.
- Systemic Functional Grammar Approach (Halliday, 1978): This approach aids in the analysis of linguistic elements such as mood and modality in character dialogues, allowing for a deeper understanding of how linguistic features support the use of politeness strategies.

Supporting references, such as Mills (2003) and Watts (2003), help to broaden the understanding of the social and cultural contexts in which politeness strategies are applied. These theoretical frameworks provide a comprehensive analysis of both linguistic and contextual elements.

Data Collection

Data were collected through documentation techniques, which involved careful reading and annotation of the novel to identify instances where politeness strategies were employed. The

data include both verbal dialogues and non-verbal actions that reflect politeness strategies. Key types of data collected include:

- Verbal Dialogue: Instances such as greetings, apologies, expressions of gratitude, and offers of help.
- Non-Verbal Actions: Actions such as patience, empathy, and respect that are also indicative of politeness.

Data Analysis

The data analysis follows several stages:

1. Classification of Politeness Strategies: Data were categorized into positive and negative politeness strategies based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework. Positive politeness strategies include actions and dialogues that emphasize solidarity, empathy, and consideration, while negative politeness strategies are those that highlight autonomy and respect for individual privacy.
2. Linguistic Analysis: Using concepts from Systemic Functional Grammar, the linguistic features in character dialogues, such as mood and modality, were analyzed. Mood refers to the form of the sentence (interrogative, declarative, etc.), while modality refers to the degree of certainty or politeness conveyed through modal verbs and expressions.
3. Contextualization: Data were analyzed within relevant situational contexts, such as family, friendship, and professional relationships. This stage helped to explore how different interpersonal dynamics influenced the application of politeness strategies.
4. Interpretation of Meaning: Finally, the data were interpreted to uncover the social and cultural meanings behind the politeness strategies used by the characters. This interpretation helps to understand the role of politeness in shaping the characters' relationships and reflects broader cultural norms and values.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, this study uses theoretical triangulation. The results of the analysis were compared with the theories of Brown and Levinson (1987), Systemic Functional Grammar, and the findings of previous studies such as Mills (2003) and Watts (2003). This triangulation ensures that the analysis remains consistent with the theoretical framework and

Findings

The analysis of *Born in Ice* revealed the use of both positive and negative politeness strategies across different character interactions. The strategies are explored through both verbal and non-verbal actions, with significant emphasis on how situational context shapes the strategies deployed. The following key findings emerged:

1. Positive Politeness Strategies

Positive politeness was found in 65% of the dialogues analyzed, reflecting the dominance of this strategy in building interpersonal relationships. In the context of Brown and Levinson's theory (1987), this strategy is used to create a warm and welcoming atmosphere.

Positive politeness strategies, which emphasize solidarity and empathy in interpersonal relationships, were frequently observed throughout the novel. Strategies contribute to the creation of close relationships and foster a sense of camaraderie and warmth. Key examples include:

- **Personal Greetings:** Brianna's greeting to Maggie, "Good morning, Maggie. Did you sleep well?" (page 8), is a clear example of positive politeness. This phrase conveys concern and builds rapport, signaling warmth and care for the interlocutor's well-being.
- **Friendly Phrases:** The phrase "Please, make yourself at home" (page 15) demonstrates Brianna's attempt to create comfort and familiarity for her guest. This is an example of a strategy that focuses on minimizing social distance and fostering a sense of belonging.
- **Expression of Gratitude:** "Thank you for breakfast. It was wonderful" (page 20). Gray's expression of appreciation not only acknowledges the effort put into preparing the meal but also reinforces positive relationships through gratitude and recognition.

These examples highlight the role of positive politeness in enhancing interpersonal ties, creating an atmosphere where emotional connection and mutual respect are prioritized. Positive politeness contributes to the harmonious dynamics between characters, particularly in the context of friendship and family relationships.

2. Negative Politeness Strategies

On the other hand, negative politeness strategies were used to preserve individual autonomy and avoid intruding on personal space or freedom.

Negative politeness strategies were found in 35% of the dialogues analyzed. This strategy is used to avoid potential conflicts and maintain harmony. For example, Brianna often uses apologies to calm her mother and avoid tension:

These strategies were especially evident in situations where there was potential for conflict or tension. The key instances include:

- **Apology for Upsetting Someone:** Brianna's statement, "I'm sorry it upsets you" (page 50), reflects negative politeness, acknowledging the emotional state of the other person and apologizing for any unintended distress. This apology functions to mitigate any potential confrontation and demonstrates respect for the other person's feelings.
- **Distraction Avoidance:** In situations where the speaker refrains from interrupting or imposing, such as Gray's line, "I didn't want to interrupt" (page 43), this form of negative politeness helps to maintain respect for the listener's space and autonomy.

- **Offer of Help:** The phrase "I'll bring you some, shall I?" (page 61) shows a polite offer of help framed in a way that respects the autonomy of the other person. It uses a suggestion rather than a direct command, thus softening the approach and allowing for freedom of choice.

These negative politeness strategies demonstrate the effort to minimize social imposition, reflecting an awareness of the other person's autonomy and privacy. This strategy is particularly important in managing relationships where maintaining harmony and avoiding conflict are key.

3. Influence of Situational Context

Politeness strategies are heavily influenced by the situational context. The characters' relationships—whether familial, friendly, or professional—shaped the strategies they employed:

- **Family Relationships:** In the context of Brianna's relationship with her mother, negative politeness is often used to maintain harmony. For instance, "Tomorrow, Mother, I promise" (page 50) reflects an effort to avoid confrontation and demonstrate respect for her mother's authority while keeping the peace.
- **Friendship:** Gray demonstrates concern for Brianna with the phrase, "You're upset, Brianna. Maybe you should have some tea" (page 28). This expression not only shows empathy but also serves as an offering of emotional support, demonstrating how negative politeness strategies are used to avoid imposing while still offering assistance.
- **Professional Relationships:** In his interaction with Murphy, Gray politely declines the offer, stating, "I appreciate the offer, but I'll take a raincheck" (page 45). This response not only reflects negative politeness but also illustrates a professional respect for boundaries and formalities in work-related contexts.

4. Politeness in Non-Verbal Actions

In addition to verbal strategies, the characters in *Born in Ice* employ non-verbal actions to demonstrate politeness. These include:

- **Gestures and Expressions:** Brianna's willingness to serve tea to guests without being asked, as in "I'll just fix a tray for you" (page 12), reflects non-verbal politeness. These small acts of consideration and service are integral to fostering positive relationships.
- **Patience in Difficult Situations:** Brianna's calm demeanor in situations of tension, such as "With a sigh Brianna set the note aside" (page 20), demonstrates self-control and respect for others' emotions. This shows how non-verbal actions, such as patience and restraint, are used as politeness strategies.
- **Comforting Gestures:** Gray's gestures of comfort, like "Gray touched her shoulder with empathy" (page 28), are examples of non-verbal politeness that help to express empathy and concern without the need for words.

These non-verbal forms of politeness complement the verbal strategies and play a crucial role in maintaining interpersonal harmony, especially in emotionally charged or difficult situations.

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the importance of politeness in shaping interpersonal dynamics in *Born in Ice*. Through both verbal and non-verbal actions, the characters use a variety of politeness strategies to build relationships, manage conflicts, and maintain social harmony. The results align with Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, where politeness is utilized not only to preserve social harmony but also to manage the “face” of others.

1. Dialogue and Action as a Reflection of Politeness Values

The dialogues and actions of the characters in *Born in Ice* reflect the use of positive and negative politeness strategies that are foundational in the creation of empathy, appreciation, and respect. The prominence of positive politeness in building relationships, as seen in the frequent use of phrases like "Please, make yourself at home," demonstrates a cultural emphasis on warmth and solidarity. Similarly, the prevalence of negative politeness in situations of conflict or potential tension, such as Brianna's frequent apologies and Gray's respectful offers of help, illustrates the characters' awareness of others' autonomy and the need to avoid intruding upon personal space.

The dominance of positive politeness strategies (observed in 65% of dialogues) suggests that the characters prioritize relationship-building and emotional connection. In contrast, the use of negative politeness (found in 35% of dialogues) serves to mitigate conflict, respecting boundaries, and allowing the characters to navigate difficult interactions without direct confrontation.

2. The Influence of Context on Politeness Strategies

As highlighted in the findings, the use of politeness strategies is highly contextual. The family dynamics, friendship bonds, and professional roles all influence the strategies employed by the characters. For instance, Brianna's use of negative politeness when dealing with her mother reflects a desire to preserve familial harmony, aligning with the cultural expectation of respect for parental authority in Irish society. In contrast, Gray's empathetic offers to Brianna, such as suggesting tea when she is upset, reflect the nuances of friendship and emotional support. The professional interactions further show the necessity of negative politeness in maintaining formality and respect for boundaries.

The influence of cultural norms, particularly Irish values such as hospitality, respect for tradition, and emotional restraint, further strengthens the role of politeness in the novel. These cultural dimensions contribute to the understanding of politeness as not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a social one, embedded in the characters' identities and social roles.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that both positive and negative politeness strategies play crucial roles in building and maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships in *Born in Ice*. Positive politeness, characterized by expressions of empathy and solidarity, fosters emotional closeness, while negative politeness serves to protect individual autonomy and avoid conflict. The study also emphasizes the significant influence of situational context—family, friendship, and professional relationships—on the choice and application of politeness strategies.

Moreover, the novel highlights the cultural dimensions of politeness, particularly the Irish values of hospitality, respect, and emotional restraint. Politeness strategies are not only linguistic tools but also cultural mechanisms that reflect deeper social norms and expectations. This research contributes to the field of pragmatic linguistics by extending the study of politeness to popular literature, offering new insights into how cultural values shape communication strategies.

The practical implications of this study are wide-reaching, with applications in literary studies, intercultural communication, and language teaching. The findings can be used to teach students how politeness operates in different social contexts and how cultural norms influence communication strategies. Further research could expand on this study by exploring politeness in other literary genres or cross-cultural comparisons of politeness strategies in literature.

References

- Al-Duleimi, H. Y., Md. Rashid, S., & Abdullah, A. N. (2016). A critical review of prominent theories of politeness. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 7(6), 262-270. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.7n.6p.262>
- Anugrawati, N., & Syam, U. K. (2024). Faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi strategi kesopanan dalam konteks akademik: Kajian karakter di Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar. *Jurnal Onoma: Pendidikan, Bahasa dan Sastra*, 10(4). <https://ejournal.my.id/onoma>
- Bothe, C., & Wermter, S. (2022). *Conversational Analysis of Daily Dialog Data using Polite Emotional Dialogue Acts*. *Journal of Computational Linguistics*. Retrieved from <https://arxiv.org/abs/2205.02921>
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- (2017). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage* (Reissue Edition). Cambridge University Press.
- Cislaru, G., & Claudel, C. (2020). Researching Politeness: From the 'Classical' Approach to Discourse. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 147, 1–15. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41701-020-00088-8>

- Culpeper, J., & Haugh, M. (2018). *The Palgrave Handbook of Linguistic (Im)politeness*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-73414-7>
- Eelen, G. (2018). *A Critique of Politeness Theories*. Routledge.
- Fraser, B. (1990). Perspectives on Politeness. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 14(2), 219–236.
- Getkham, K. (2016). Expressing Politeness in Research Discussions: Lessons from and for Novice Research Writers. *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences*.
- Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior*. Pantheon Books.
- Hammood, A. (2016). Approaches in linguistic politeness: A critical evaluation. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Culture (Lingua- LLC)*, 3(3), 1-15. Retrieved from <https://lingua-llc.org/journal>
- Hisham, M. F. (2021). The use of cinemetric data as a discovery of the significance of subtext in film studies. *Journal of Natural Drums*.
- Hill, B., Ide, S., Ikuta, S., Kawasaki, A., & Ogino, T. (1986). Universals of Linguistic Politeness: Quantitative Evidence from Japanese and American English. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 10(3), 347–371.
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations*. Sage Publications.
- House, J., & Kasper, G. (1981). Politeness Markers in English and German. In F. Coulmas (Ed.), *Conversational Routine* (pp. 157–185). Mouton.
- Ide, S. (1989). Formal Forms and Discernment: Two Neglected Aspects of Universals of Linguistic Politeness. *Multilingua*, 8(2–3), 223–248.
- Kádár, D. Z., & Culpeper, J. (Eds.). (2017). *Palgrave Handbook of Linguistic Politeness*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kádár, D. Z., & Haugh, M. (2019). *Understanding Politeness*. Cambridge University Press. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/understandingpoliteness/32BA33C1CD A23F46ED8D90Fo808A0383>
- Lakoff, R. T. (2005). The Logic of Politeness; or, Minding Your P's and Q's. *Papers from the Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society*, 1, 292–305.
- Leech, G. (2016). *Principles of Pragmatics* (30th Anniversary Edition). Routledge.
- Locher, M. A., & Graham, S. L. (Eds.). (2010). *Interpersonal Pragmatics*. De Gruyter Mouton.
- Mills, S. (2003). *Gender and Politeness*. Cambridge University Press.
- (2017). *English Politeness and Class*. Cambridge University Press.
- Roberts, N. (1995). *Born in Ice*. Jove Books.
- Sari, R. K., Waluyo, H. J., & Rohmadi, M. (2016). A study of culture, local wisdom, and character education values of the novel *Nawung* by Galuh Larasati.
- Spencer-Oatey, H. (2008). *Culturally Speaking: Culture, Communication and Politeness Theory*. Continuum.
- Syakur, A., Sudrajad, W., & Masruroh. (2023). Politeness strategies used by major characters in Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*. *Language Literacy: Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Language Teaching*, 7(2), 550-564. <https://doi.org/10.30743/ll.v7i2.8199>
- Terkourafi, M. (Ed.). (2015). *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Im/politeness*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

- Utami, N. (2018). *A study of the didacticism of Kakilangit poems in the Horizon Literature Magazine (2011–2015) and its use as a teaching material for poetry appreciation in high school.*
- Watts, R. J. (2003). *Politeness.* Cambridge University Press.
- (2019). *Politeness.* Cambridge University Press.