



## Politeness Strategies by "Ellie" from the Tv series "The Last of Us."

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### Abstract

This research thoroughly explores the captivating world of politeness strategies employed by the main character, "Ellie," in the immensely popular television series "The Last of Us." The data source was meticulously collected from the HBO streaming service website and a comprehensive transcript repository. Employing Brown and Levinson's politeness strategy framework (1987), the study embarked on a qualitative method analysis, carefully examining the dialogue and interactions of "Ellie" throughout the series. The investigation unravels a fascinating array of insights, shedding light on how "Ellie" masterfully employs diverse politeness strategies in her communications. The study identified 16 instances of various politeness strategies found within the series. Among these, the most frequently observed strategy was the "Bald on Record" approach, utilized a remarkable nine times (comprising 52.25% of the instances). Following this, the "Negative Politeness" tactic emerged with four occurrences (25%), while "Positive Politeness" was deployed twice (12.5%). Lastly, the "Off-record" strategy was observed once (10%). The findings of this research unveil a compelling pattern of "Ellie" consistently employing a wide range of politeness strategies throughout the series. It is intriguing that the prevalence of "Bald on Record" may be attributed to the dangerous and challenging circumstances Ellie and the other characters face in the post-apocalyptic world. Direct communication is a pragmatic approach in such dire situations, minimizing misunderstandings and saving precious time.

**Keywords:** *politeness strategies, the main character, tv series*

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini secara mendalam mengeksplorasi dunia strategi kesopanan yang digunakan oleh karakter utama, Ellie, dalam serial televisi yang sangat populer 'The Last of Us.' Sumber data dikumpulkan dengan cermat dari situs web layanan streaming HBO dan repositori transkrip yang komprehensif. Dengan menggunakan kerangka strategi kesopanan Brown dan Levinson (1987), penelitian ini melakukan analisis metode kualitatif, dengan hati-hati memeriksa dialog dan interaksi Ellie sepanjang seri. Penyelidikan ini mengungkap berbagai wawasan yang menarik, menyoroti bagaimana Ellie dengan mahir menggunakan beragam strategi kesopanan dalam komunikasinya. Penelitian ini mengidentifikasi 16 contoh berbagai strategi kesopanan yang ditemukan dalam serial tersebut. Di antaranya, strategi yang paling sering diamati adalah pendekatan 'Bald on Record,' yang digunakan sebanyak sembilan kali (mencakup 52,25% dari kejadian). Selanjutnya, taktik 'Negative Politeness' muncul dengan empat kejadian (25%), sementara 'Positive Politeness' digunakan dua kali (12,5%). Terakhir, strategi 'Off-

record’ diamati satu kali (10%). Temuan dari penelitian ini mengungkap pola yang menarik di mana Ellie secara konsisten menggunakan berbagai strategi kesopanan sepanjang serial. Menariknya, prevalensi ‘Bald on Record’ mungkin disebabkan oleh situasi berbahaya dan menantang yang dihadapi Ellie dan karakter lain di dunia pasca-apokaliptik. Komunikasi langsung adalah pendekatan pragmatis dalam situasi yang sulit, meminimalkan kesalahpahaman dan menghemat waktu yang berharga.

**Kata kunci:** *strategi kesantunan, karakter utama, tv series*

## **Introduction**

In a society where individuals and language have become not separate, effective communication has emerged as an utmost necessity. From the earliest stages of life, individuals are exposed to language, which shapes and shares their thoughts, feelings, and actions. According to (Wibowo, 2001:3), the definition of language in communication encompasses the most comprehensive and efficient means of expressing ideas, transmitting messages, conveying intentions, articulating emotions, and expressing opinions to others. Additionally, it is essential to improve communication skills by using appropriate language. Further, a study evaluates how human languages are utilized in social interaction and people's relationships.

Moreover (Puspitorini & Hamdani, 2023:96) stated that language and society serve different functions. In other words, language shapes everyday social interactions and is influenced by culture. Consequently, it will lead to Pragmatics. As defined by (Griffiths, 2006:1), Pragmatic deals with the functions of language in social surroundings. Additionally, a study evaluates how human languages are utilized in social interaction and people's relationships. People should focus on their faces to keep in touch and respond to their emotions when interacting socially. As stated by (Yule, 2006), "face" refers to an individual's public perception of themselves. Based on (Brown and Levinson, 1987:68), behaviour that violates the listener's need for self-esteem and respect is termed "face-threatening behaviour, or FTA." Avoiding actions that could harm other people's faces is best in everyday conversation. One strategy to address this issue is to employ acceptable speaking strategies and manners during conversations, or in other words, to be polite. (Permadi, 2018:38) stated that individuals in societies should carefully consider what they say and to whom they speak to avoid offending the listener, which can be achieved through Politeness.

Moreover, Politeness is one of many ways of communication. Politeness helps reduce misunderstandings between the listeners to the speaker. According to (Yule, 2006:60), Politeness is being aware of another person's feelings. It involves the speaker using polite language to avoid imposing on the listeners. By being polite, the speaker can establish positive relationships and social interactions. According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, there are four types of politeness strategies: Bald on Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, and Off-record (indirect). Politeness strategies usually happen in many ways; because of that, tv-series and their script are ideal for researching various politeness strategies.

In this case, the researcher utilized politeness strategies through the utterances of the main character named "Ellie" in the tv series *The Last of Us*, created by Craig Mazin. It was released on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2023, and HBO simulcasted the series. The story is adapted from the popular selling games of the same name created by Neil Druckman, and it was first released on PlayStation 3 in 2013. Additionally, *The Last of Us* tells us about the story following a worldwide pandemic that devastates society; a resilient individual assumes responsibility for a young girl, who could potentially be the last chance for humanity's survival. As stated above, this research is defined solely on the politeness strategy in the tv series "*The Last of Us*." Additionally, there is the aim of the study, such as 1). What types of politeness strategies are used in the utterances between two main characters in the tv series entitled "*The Last of Us*."; 2). What are the motives behind implementing politeness strategies in the dialogues among the characters in the TV series "*The Last of Us*"?

Several studies have been done related to this topic. First, a study titled "*An Analysis of Politeness Strategies Used by Kit Connor in the Heartstopper Series*" by Puspitorini & Hamdani (2023) examines the politeness strategies adopted by Kit Connor. This study uses discourse analysis and applies the theory of Brown and Levinson's politeness strategy. Kit Connor utilizes different politeness strategies, with 37 instances observed. Specifically, the "baldness strategy" was employed 18.9% of the time, equivalent to 7 occurrences. Positive Politeness was used in 54% of cases, totalling 20 instances, while negative Politeness was applied in 24.4%, 9 times. Additionally, an informal approach was used 24.4% of the time, occurring once. Within the positive politeness strategy, Kit Connor's preferred aspect is the "offer and promise" component, which accounted for 18.9% of its usage, or 7 times. Overall, Kit Connor incorporates politeness strategies daily to foster and strengthen positive relationships with others. The similarity and difference between the two studies are that this study used the same theory by Brown and Levinson (1987) about politeness strategies and used a Tv series as a data source. The difference between both studies is that Puspitorini and Hamdani focus only on one character. Meanwhile, this study focuses on two main characters named "Joel and Ellie."

The second research study, by Sari (2023), titled "*The Use of Politeness Strategies in the Enola Holmes Movie: A Pragmatic Analysis*," aims to explore how politeness strategies are employed in the *Enola Holmes* movie and the sociological factors influencing the choice of these strategies by the characters. The study bases its analysis on Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of Politeness and adopts a descriptive qualitative research approach to examine the sociological aspects presented in the *Enola Holmes* movie. The study's findings reveal 82 politeness strategies utilized throughout the movie. These include 32 occurrences of the "bald-on-record" strategy, 25 instances of positive Politeness, 10 occurrences of negative Politeness, 14 instances of the "off-record" strategy, and 1 occurrence of the "say nothing/no FTA" strategy. Additionally, the study identifies three sociological factors—social distance (D), relative power (P), and the absolute ranking of imposition (R)—that influence the characters' selection of politeness strategies in the *Enola Holmes* movie. While there are similarities between this study and Sari's, such as the use of Brown and Levinson's theory, they differ in focus. Sari's study concentrates on sociological factors, whereas this study analyzes the reasons behind applying politeness strategies. Furthermore, the

data sources differ, with Sari's study utilizing the movie "Enola Holmes," while this study examines the utterances of the main characters in the series "The Last of Us."

The third study, entitled "A Pragmatic Analysis of Politeness Strategies in Mulan Movie" by Fitri (2022), examines politeness strategies in the movie called Mulan. The study applied the theory by Brown and Levinson about politeness strategies as the most used strategy in the movie, occurring four times. Bald-on record was used three times each. Off-record and do not do FTA were used twice and once, respectively. The analysis revealed that the characters' cultural background influenced politeness strategies in the Mulan movie. The similarity of this study uses the same theory by Brown and Levinson. Meanwhile, the difference is that Fitri's study uses a movie as the data source, and this study uses Tv series as the data source.

Additionally, this study examines "Ellie," the main character from HBO's "The Last of Us," as she utilizes, using politeness strategies from the Brown and Levinson theory. The researcher selected this data source because it would make an interesting study. The main character in this series used Politeness in their interactions and communication.

## **Method**

This study utilizes the TV series "The Last of Us" as its primary data source. The TV series, created by Craig Mazin and simulcasted by HBO, has been selected due to its rich examples of Politeness. It is worth noting that the TV series has garnered significant attention, with a cumulative audience of 30.4 million, making it the most-watched HBO series and receiving high ratings since its release. Furthermore, adaptations of popular video games have proven successful on streaming platforms, as evidenced by 8.2 million viewers tuning in to HBO for the finale of the latest adaptation. These statistics highlight the immense success of the TV adaptation of "The Last of Us" in recent times.

In addition, data collection for this study uses an observation approach focusing on dialogue extracted from the script for the television series The Last of Us. The data collection process will include the following steps: 1). The researcher will observe the series, paying close attention to the utterances of the main characters; 2). The TV series script will be carefully read to understand the dialogue related to the characters' utterances; 3). The researcher will take detailed notes documenting utterances based on the framework proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) for analyzing politeness strategies. Through these steps, the researcher will gather the necessary data from the TV series to analyze the politeness strategies used by a character named "Ellie" from "The Last of Us" tv series.

## **Result and Discussion**

The data was obtained from The Last of Us series, showing 16 politeness strategies in total data identified. Bald on Record was the most frequent result. The main characters demonstrated their respect for others by preferring this direct strategy to establish a sense of shared similarities with the listener. This approach was used nine times, more than the second-ranked negative Politeness, which was used four times. Positive Politeness and off-the-record strategies came next, with two and one

occurrence each. As a result, the most common politeness strategy among the characters was Bald on Record.

Table 1. Types of Politeness Strategies Found

No	Type of Politeness strategies	Frequency	Percent
1	Bald on Record	9	52.25%
2	Positive Politeness	2	12.5%
3	Negative Politeness	4	25%
4	Off-record	1	10%
Total		16	100%

### A. Bald on Record

According to Brown and Levinson (1987) the bald-on-record strategy, communication is conducted straightforwardly and directly without attempting to minimize the imposition. This approach involves expressing thoughts or requests clearly, unambiguously, and concisely without any form of indirectness or beating around the bush. In this strategy, the speaker's direct communication strategy involves making a request or expressing an opinion without attempting to moderate or soften the message. It places a higher value on effectiveness and clarity than social graces, which might result in a more assertive and less deferential interaction. Additionally, according to Probosini (2020), Bald on Record is a technique for getting to the point of a conversation. This strategy does not reduce threats to the listener's face. Despite being considered impolite because it puts the interlocutor's safety at risk, this tactic is the most effective way to prevent miscommunication.

#### Datum 1

17:42

Joel: "Put your seatbelt on..."  
 Ellie: "*Aren't we gonna help him?*"  
 Joel: "No."

#### Analysis

The conversation above happens when Joel and Ellie meet a stranger who needs help. Additionally, Joel and Ellie were entering a new area that they probably should not enter and wandered around with a car in the empty environment. After wandering around in the quiet city, they met a guy who needed help. Joel suddenly felt suspicious about this man's appearance. He told Ellie to get out of her seatbelt and ask directly to Joel without unambiguously, "*Aren't we gonna help him?*" it happens in intense scenes. In this dialogue, Ellie maximizes her efficiency in an urgent situation.

## Datum 2

29.09

Ellie: "*are you okay*"  
Joel: "I'm alright. Are you alright?"  
Ellie: "yeah."

### Analysis

The conversation occurred when Joel pulled up the steering wheel out of nowhere because the car they used was aimed at the tire, and some shoots by the enemies in the mirror made Joel and Ellie could not see anything upfront. As a result of that sequence, the car they drive suddenly hits an empty building. That sequence made Ellie ask Joel about his condition "are you okay?". In her utterances, Ellie asks directly to Joel about the condition of what happened. Additionally, she felt worried that anything could happen to him.

## Datum 3

30.16

Joel: "You're just a kid. You shouldn't know what it means to... It's not like you killed him but, shooting it...I know what it's like, the first time you hurt someone like that..."  
Joel: "... I'm not good at this."  
Ellie: "*Yeah, you really aren't*"

### Analysis

The conversation showed Ellie that Joel was not doing well with lecturing her. In this scene, Joel feels Ellie should not experience what happened earlier and sympathizes with Ellie. Meanwhile, Ellie felt Joel is not good with lecturing kids around her age because Joel also felt the same with the statement, "*I am not good at this,*" which means Joel is not confident with his utterances. Ellie responded, "*Yeah, you really aren't*", direct to Joel without maximizing efficiency.

## Datum 4

07.28

Ellie: "*what am I even eating?*"  
Joel: "that is 20-year-old chef Boyardee ravioli."  
Ellie: "*that guy was good*"  
Joe: "I actually agree"

### Analysis

The conversation happens when Ellie asks Joel what she eats because she feels the food is tasty. Additionally, the conversation above focuses on Ellie using the "bald on record" tactic of Politeness in her comments. "*What am I even eating?*" is a direct inquiry she makes without hedging or unnecessary politeness indicators. Her query is

clear and to the point. Ellie uses the same direct approach when she says, "*That person was good,*" without trying to soften her sentence or include additional politeness indicators. Ellie adheres to the "bald on record" politeness method in both instances by communicating clearly and simply, using a direct approach without oblique language or unnecessary Politeness.

#### **Datum 5**

9.17

Ellie: "*can I ask you a questions?*"

Joel: "yeah"

Ellie: "*why did the scarecrow get an award?*"

Joel: "because he was outstanding in his field"

#### **Analysis**

The dialogue between Ellie and Joel when they both try to sleep and Ellie tries to give Joel a pun joke which Joel acknowledges. furthermore, Joel receives an unambiguous request from Ellie: "*can I ask you a question?*" Joel gives her the go-ahead with a simple response. Then Ellie asks, "*Why did the scarecrow win an award?*" Both characters communicate clearly and succinctly without using extraneous politeness cues or attempts to soften the request. This "bald on record" strategy exemplifies a relaxed and unstructured conversation where they speak honestly without using additional negative or positive politeness techniques.

#### **Datum 6**

14.35

Ellie: "*what if you don't find him?*"

Joel: "I will"

Ellie: "*how do you know?*"

Joel: "I'm persistent"

#### **Analysis**

The conversation occurred when Ellie and Joel were talking in the car when Ellie asked about Joel's brother, who never reached out to him since they parted. Ellie uses a straightforward communication style in her portion of the conversation. She directly questions Joel's ability to find someone or something when she states, "*what if you don't find him?*" She asks a direct question without using any ambiguous words or hedging. Ellie's direct follow-up query, "*How do you know?*" asks Joel to elaborate on the foundation for his certainty. In return, Joel uses a direct approach and says, "I'm persistent," giving a concise and honest justification for his assurance. Ellie generally communicates in an open, direct manner, known as a "bald on record" strategy.

## B. Positive Politeness

The positive politeness strategy entails using affirming and friendly language to emphasize rapport and express appreciation to the other person to minimize potential threats to their positive face (desire to be liked and respected) during communication. According to Puspitorini & Hamdani (2023), Positive politeness strategies include paying attention to and noticing the listener, exaggerating, and intensifying interest.

### Datum 7

11.02

Ellie: "You fly in one of those?"

Joel: "Few times, sure"

Ellie: "**So, lucky**"

Joel: "Didn't feel like it at the time get shoved into a middle seat, pay 12 bucks for a sandwiches"

Ellie: "***Dude, you got to go up in the sky***"

### Analysis

The dialogue starts when Ellie sees a crushed airplane in the middle of nowhere and asks Joel if he has flown with the airplane before. Additionally, the conversation above showed that it is a positive politeness strategy. Ellie shows from her utterance to Joel excitement and interest. She compliments Joel, such as "*So, Lucky,*" because Joel had flown by plane a few times before. An exaggerated response when Joel about his review of one of his experiences with an airplane before, "*Dude, you got to go up in the sky,*" implied that Ellie was interested when hearing Joel's experience with the airplane.

## C. Negative Politeness

Negative politeness strategies emphasize avoiding imposing on the listener and are directed at the listener's negative face, as stated by Togatorop (2019). Negative Politeness is a politeness strategy that involves using language and actions to show deference, avoid imposing on others, and respect their negative face (desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition).

### Datum 8

03.00

Ellie: "Look, ***I've been thinking about...***"

Joel: "I don't want your sorries"

Ellie: "***I wasn't gonna say I'm sorry. I was gonna say that I've been thinking about what happened***"



## **Analysis**

In the conversation between Ellie and Joel, they are not in the mood for the earlier sequence, in which one of Joel's friends died. Since then, both have not talked much, and Ellie tries to make the conversation. Ellie employs negative Politeness by not directly apologizing despite Joel's implied need for space, showing her consideration for his feelings. Instead, she acknowledges his statement of not wanting apologies. She chooses to discuss the situation rather than impose her apology on him, exemplifying her attempt to respect his emotional boundaries while expressing her thoughts about what happened.

## **Datum 9**

01.10.25

Joel: "Do you know who Linda Ronstadt is?"

Ellie: "*You know, I don't know who Linda Ronstadt is.*"

## **Analysis**

The conversation occurs when Ellie finds a cassette tape in the car and gives it a show to Joel. In the exchange between Joel and Ellie, Ellie utilizes negative Politeness by indirectly responding to Joel's question about Linda Ronstadt, saying, "*you know, I don't know who Linda Ronstadt is.*" By phrasing her response this way, Ellie avoids assuming Joel's knowledge on the subject and, in turn, respects his potential lack of awareness, demonstrating consideration for his feelings and avoiding any potential awkwardness or embarrassment.

## **D. Off-record strategy**

Off-record is a strategy that uses indirect language, and the speaker may opt for expressions that are more general or unrelated to the message being conveyed based on Probosini (2020). Moreover, Off-record communication is a politeness strategy in which the speaker indirectly hints at their intentions or desires without explicitly stating them, allowing the recipient to interpret the message and save face by either ignoring the request or acting on it without feeling obligated. It relies on implicit and ambiguous language to avoid imposing directly on the recipient's autonomy or face needs.

## **Datum 10**

14.07

Ellie: "*If you don't think there's hope for the world why bother going on? I mean you gotta try, right?*"

Joel: "you haven't see the world, so you don't know"

## Analysis

Above conversation, Ellie and Joel sat in the car, and Ellie asked something personal about what Joel had been through for what happened. In addition, Ellie uses the "off-record" politeness tactic in her portion of the conversation. By stating, "Why bother going on if you don't think there's hope for the world? I mean, you've got to give it a shot, right?" She indirectly expresses her opinions and invites Joel to offer his viewpoint without putting pressure on him. With less confrontation and tremendous respect for Joel's feelings, Ellie can use this strategy to broach a touchy subject in their conversation.

## Conclusion

The study explores politeness techniques in the interactions of Ellie, the main character, in a post-apocalyptic setting. Four strategies - Bald on Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, and Off Record - were analyzed, with Bald on Record being the most prevalent. Its directness proves practical in high-risk situations, reducing misunderstandings and optimizing communication efficiency. The characters' reliance on this technique highlights their courage and determination. While other politeness strategies find relevance in less critical scenarios, the dominance of Bald on Record underscores its significance in ensuring survival and effective decision-making throughout the narrative. This study provides valuable insights into the essential role of politeness strategies, particularly Bald on Record, in shaping interpersonal dynamics amidst the challenges of a post-apocalyptic world.

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