



Politeness Strategies in Film: A Pragmatic Analysis of Dialogue in “The Social Network”

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history: Received 09 May 2025 Revised 21 June 2025 Accepted 23 June 2025 Available online 30 June 2025</p> <p>ISSN: 2986-3848</p> <hr/> <p>How to cite: Abdul Aziz, A.K., & Hashim, H.U. (2025). Politeness strategies in film: A pragmatic analysis of dialogue in “the social network”. <i>International Journal Linguistics of Sumatra and Malay (IJLSM)</i>, 4(1), 25-37.</p>	<p>This qualitative content analysis explored the application of politeness strategies by characters in the 2010 film <i>The Social Network</i>, guided by Brown and Levinson’s (1978) politeness theory. The study systematically examined the film’s dialogue to identify instances of positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on record, and off-record strategies. Data were drawn from the official screenplay and fan-generated transcripts to ensure comprehensive coverage and contextual accuracy. A coding manual was developed to enhance consistency in identifying and categorising the strategies. The findings shed light on how language functions as a strategic tool in navigating interpersonal dynamics, power relations, and conflict within the high-pressure tech industry portrayed in the film. By addressing a gap in research on cinematic communication, the study contributes to the broader fields of pragmatics, media discourse, and communication studies. The implications suggest that politeness strategies in film not only reflect real-world communicative norms but also provide insights for screenwriters, educators, and media analysts. Future research could expand on this analysis by comparing politeness strategies across different genres or cultural contexts.</p> <p>Keywords: Brown and Levinson, Cinematic Communication, Film Discourse Analysis, Politeness Strategies, <i>The Social Network</i></p>



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1. Introduction

Politeness is a fundamental aspect of human communication that governs social interaction and helps maintain interpersonal harmony. The concept has attracted the attention of linguists, sociologists, and language philosophers for decades, with foundational contributions from Lakoff (1973, 1977), Leech (1983), and most notably Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987). Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory distinguishes between positive and negative faces and outlines strategies speakers use to mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs). It also remains a cornerstone in understanding how language functions in managing relationships and navigating social hierarchies. In recent years, there has been growing interest in how these politeness strategies manifest in real-life conversations and mediated forms of communication, such as film. Cinematic dialogue is particularly rich for linguistic analysis because it mimics natural speech while being shaped for narrative and dramatic effect. Fatkhurozi (2007) emphasizes that films reflect real-world social dynamics and values, making them viable texts for studying speech phenomena like politeness. However, there is limited scholarly attention to systematically exploring politeness strategies within cinematic scripts, particularly in high-conflict, character-driven films. Previous studies have focused on politeness strategies in family-friendly or socially conventional films. For instance, Rachman et al. (2023) examined politeness in *Christopher Robin*, emphasizing themes of kindness and familial bonds. Nur Safitri et al. (2015) explored strategies in *The Big Wedding*, highlighting how language maintains social decorum. Yolanda et al. (2022) focused on negative politeness in *Charlie’s Angels*, demonstrating gendered linguistic behavior in action-driven narratives. Despite

these contributions, there remains a gap in analyzing cinematic texts that depict high-stakes, competitive environments—contexts where face-threatening acts are common and strategic language use is essential.

This study addresses this gap by investigating politeness strategies in *The Social Network* (2010), a biographical drama that portrays the rise of Facebook and the complex interpersonal dynamics surrounding its creation. Mark Zuckerberg, the film's central figure, is characterized by social awkwardness, bluntness, and a high level of ambition—all of which make him a compelling subject for examining how politeness strategies are employed, avoided, or subverted. His frequent use of direct, assertive, or sarcastic language offers rich material for analyzing Brown and Levinson's politeness typology in a cinematic context. There is a paucity of research that bridges the gap between theoretical models of politeness and their application in scripted, dramatized conversations. This study contributes by offering a structured, empirical analysis of how politeness strategies function in filmic dialogue to reflect character relationships, assert power, and resolve conflict. It introduces a novel methodological approach—qualitative content analysis of film transcripts supported by a coding manual grounded in Brown and Levinson's theory.

This study is underpinned by three research objectives as follows:

1. To identify the politeness strategies used in the movie *The Social Network* (2010)
2. To determine the types of politeness strategies used in the movie *The Social Network* (2010)
3. To investigate the reasons for the identified politeness strategies used in the movie *The Social Network* (2010)

This research is significant for linguists, media scholars, screenwriters, and educators interested in pragmatics, discourse analysis, and character development in film. By analyzing how language reflects and shapes social dynamics in a competitive professional setting, this study enhances the understanding of politeness strategies in mediated discourse and offers practical insights for constructing authentic and impactful dialogue in screenwriting.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Background (*Brown & Levinson's Politeness Theory (1978)*)

The politeness theory proposed by Brown and Levinson in 1978 is an influential framework that provides an understanding of the role of politeness in language use and social interaction. Their theory proposes that speakers use politeness strategies to maintain face, which refers to the public self-image of individuals in social situations. The "face" theory is essential in the framework, as it refers to an individual's desire to be respected, approved of, and maintain their public self-image (Brown & Levinson, 1978). In their study, Brown and Levinson identified two aspects of face. First is the positive face, which is the desire to be liked, approved of, and have one's wants respected by others. Secondly, there is the negative face, which is the desire to have autonomy and freedom of action and not be impeded or imposed upon by others. In relation to face, speech acts such as requests, criticisms, or disagreements are considered threatening to a speaker's or hearer's face. These are labeled as "face-threatening acts" (FTAs), and speakers will employ various politeness strategies to avoid being face-threatened. The strategies are based on the framework, including positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on record, off record strategies, and not doing the FTAs. Based on the theory, a speaker chooses to use a politeness strategy based on three factors: power (the relative power differential between the speaker and hearer), social distance (the degree of familiarity and closeness between the speaker and hearer), and rank of imposition (the degree to which the FTA is seen as an imposition on the hearer) (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Brown and Levinson's theory proposes that speakers will choose a different or a more intricate type of politeness strategy as the frequency of one of the factors increases to avoid FTAs. Their theory has faced criticism due to its difficulty in operationalising and quantifying the key factors of P, D, and R, as well as the potential oversimplification of complex social dynamics. However, their framework has also received support from studies examining politeness strategies across various languages and cultures. Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory is still essential, as the framework provides understanding of how politeness affects language use and social interaction.

In terms of the expansion of the study, this framework has explored multiple cultural variations in politeness strategies. Brown and Levinson's theory was initially based on observations of English; however, it has been widened as further research has studied how politeness is conceptualised and enacted in diverse cultural contexts, highlighting the need to consider the role of cultural values and beliefs in shaping linguistic behaviour. Additionally, ongoing research has delved into applying politeness theory to other parts of language use, such as requests, apologies, and compliments. Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory remains a foundational and influential framework in studying language and social interaction, despite the critiques and

the need for further amendments and expansion. Its initial framework continues to shape our understanding of how speakers manage face and navigate social relationships through their linguistic choices.

The theoretical framework for this study is based on the work of Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) on politeness strategies. Their politeness theory has been widely used and tested in various contexts, including the studies of character utterances and conversations in films and media. Using the framework, researchers have studied how characters employ different politeness strategies, such as positive and negative politeness in their daily social interactions to maintain face. A study by Rachman et al. (2023) analysed the politeness strategies used by the main characters in the film “Christopher Robin” and the motivations behind their use. The researchers analysed the specific politeness strategies used by each main character while explaining their motivations, which could be intrinsic payoffs or sociological variable circumstances according to the theory. The main findings were that the character Christopher Robin used the most politeness strategies, as he implemented all four types. Pooh did not use any off-record strategies, while Madeline used the most off-record strategies compared to the other characters. Regarding motivations, only Christopher Robin had intrinsic payoffs and sociological variable circumstances, while Pooh and Madeline only exhibited intrinsic payoffs. The researchers concluded that politeness in communication is important for maintaining relationships, which aligns with the themes of kindness and family in the “Christopher Robin” film. The researchers suggest the findings provide inspiration for using politeness strategies in real-life communication practices (Rachman et al., 2023).

Another study done by Nur Safitri et al. (2015) analysed the politeness strategies used by the characters in “The Big Wedding” movie directed by Justin Zackham. They employed a qualitative approach using descriptive methods and content analysis to examine the movie script. The researchers found that the characters used all four types of politeness strategies based on Brown and Levinson’s theoretical framework. Positive politeness was used most frequently, followed by bald-on-record, off-record, and negative politeness. The researchers discussed how the strategies were employed to minimise face-threatening acts, satisfy hearer’s face, convey the speaker cares about the hearer, claim in-group membership, seek agreement, and tell white lies. The researchers concluded that politeness strategies are important communication tools used by speakers to maintain the hearer’s face and achieve their goals.

A different study done by Yolanda et al. (2022) used Brown and Levinson’s (1992) negative politeness strategies as its theoretical framework to analyse the use of negative politeness strategies in the 2019 film *Charlie’s Angels*. By using a qualitative approach, the researchers identified and analysed 39 examples of the ten negative politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1992). These strategies include being conventionally indirect, using questions and hedges, being pessimistic, minimising the imposition, giving deference, apologising, personalising the speaker and hearer, stating the face-threatening act (FTA) as a general rule, nominalising, and going on record as incurring debt or not indebteding the hearer. The researchers concluded that the characters used these strategies based on the context of the conversation and situation to show concern for the other person’s face and communicate politely (Yolanda et al., 2022).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Approach and Design

This study adopted a qualitative research approach, employing content analysis as the primary method to investigate politeness strategies in cinematic dialogue. Qualitative research is appropriate for exploring complex social interactions and the meanings behind communicative behaviors (Tenny et al., 2022). Specifically, content analysis enables researchers to systematically identify patterns, themes, and categories within textual data, thus allowing in-depth interpretation of language use (Columbia University, n.d.). This research is descriptive and interpretative in design, aiming to analyze how politeness strategies are employed in the film *The Social Network* (2010), and to uncover the contextual motivations underlying the characters’ linguistic choices. The study is framed within Brown and Levinson’s (1978, 1987) Politeness Theory, which categorizes politeness into four main strategies: positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on record, and off record.

3.2. Data Selection and Sampling

The research object is the full-length feature film *The Social Network* (2010), directed by David Fincher and written by Aaron Sorkin. The film was selected through purposive sampling, a non-probability technique in which the researcher deliberately selects a case that is rich in relevant data and aligned with the study’s objectives. This film was chosen due to its critical acclaim, cultural relevance, and the complex portrayal of interpersonal dynamics in a high-stakes professional context, making it a suitable medium to observe various

politeness strategies in action. There are no human participants involved in this study. The units of analysis are the dialogues of the characters in the film, which are treated as data sources.

3.3. Data Types and Sources

The primary data for this research consisted of:

- The official screenplay of *The Social Network*
- Fan-generated dialogue transcripts are available online

The film's audio-visual content was cross-referenced with the screenplay and transcripts to ensure completeness and accuracy. The data were compiled and organized into a single document, arranged chronologically by scene, with metadata indicating speaker names, contextual cues, and timestamps.

3.4. Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process involved:

1. Obtaining the screenplay and verified fan transcripts of *The Social Network*.
2. Watching the film multiple times to cross-validate dialogue accuracy and observe character interactions in context.
3. Annotating dialogue excerpts with relevant metadata such as speaker, setting, tone, and scene.
4. Organizing the data into a corpus suitable for content analysis.

3.5. Research Instrument

The primary instrument used for analysis was a researcher-developed coding manual based on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. The coding scheme included operational definitions and examples of the four main strategies:

- Positive Politeness
- Negative Politeness
- Bald on Record
- Off Record

This coding manual ensured consistency and objectivity in identifying politeness strategies throughout the film.

3.6. Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis was conducted in two phases:

Phase 1 : Content Analysis (Coding Phase):

The researcher examined the entire film script line by line, identifying and categorizing utterances according to the politeness strategy employed. Each utterance was coded using the coding manual and categorized according to context, intention, and interactional outcome.

Phase 2 : Thematic Analysis (Interpretation Phase):

After coding, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis to explore why specific strategies were used in particular scenes. Thematic categories were developed around four guiding aspects:

- a) Power Dynamics: How characters assert or negotiate social power.
- b) Social Relationships: How politeness influences relationship development.
- c) Conflict Resolution: How politeness strategies mitigate or escalate conflict.
- d) Contextual Factors: How situational cues, such as setting or audience, shape language choices.

3.7. Trustworthiness and Credibility

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, triangulation of data sources was employed by comparing the screenplay, film dialogue, and online transcripts to confirm accuracy. On top of that, member checking was conducted by consulting a supervisor and an expert in the field to verify the coding consistency and interpretation of the data. Inter-coder reliability was ensured by involving a second coder who reviewed a subset of the data. Discrepancies were discussed, and the coding manual was refined accordingly. Methodological triangulation was also applied by cross-referencing the findings with prior studies on cinematic politeness (e.g., Fatkhurozi, 2007; Rachman et al., 2023; Yolanda et al., 2022). Using these procedures, the study aims to offer a rigorous and nuanced account of how politeness strategies are realized in scripted dialogue and why they are strategically employed within cinematic portrayals of professional and social conflict.

4. Findings and Discussions

In "The Social Network," the characters employ various politeness strategies, notably positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on record and off-record strategies, reflecting the complex interpersonal dynamics at play. The predominance of these strategies can be attributed to the nature of the relationships among the characters, particularly in the context of ambition, competition, and social awkwardness. As a socially awkward genius, Mark Zuckerberg embodies the stereotype of individuals who may struggle with social interactions, often leading to direct or indirect communication styles that can be perceived as passive-aggressive.

In "The Social Network," the usage of politeness strategies by the main characters was highly influenced by the power dynamics showcased in the film. Based on further analysis, the researcher found that the casts employed bald on record strategies to assert their dominance and challenge one another directly. For example, Mark Zuckerberg said, "There is no requirement that I enjoy being here listening to people lie. You have part of my attention -- the minimum amount needed," to undermine the credibility of his opponents while simultaneously asserting his intellectual superiority. Mark's being direct and blunt shows his confidence, which aligns with Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, in which bald-on-record strategies are used when speakers feel they have more power and dominance than the hearer. Furthermore, the researcher also found that negative politeness strategies were employed when characters navigate hierarchical relationships, which was seen when Mark diminished Erica's status for going to Boston University, in which he quickly retracted his sentence by saying he was not commenting on her parents. The portrayal of social hierarchy in the conversation shows an awareness of power dynamics, as Mark struggles with understanding the need to maintain respect in the interaction.

The film displays strong characterisation of the social relationships portrayed heavily through politeness strategies in their daily interactions. Positive politeness strategies, such as the expression of admiration and acknowledgment of achievement, have a very high influence on people in order to keep the connection between people and connectivity. For example, Divya complimented Mark on his work with Facemash so that he can build a sense of "we are on the same boat" and mutualism, because he wants Mark to be in their team, and he knows that he is a Mark fan. Brown and Levinson (1978) highlight that positive politeness aims to enhance social bonds, and this is evident in how the characters seek to hop on board with Mark's success, while simultaneously asking for his help to achieve their own ambitions.

Another prominent theme that is portrayed in the film is conflict resolution. In "The Social Network", conflicts are present in most scenes, as the characters are always discussing something in a high-stakes environment. Negative politeness is a common tactic when it comes to confrontation, as it is a method of avoiding FTAs. For example, characters may practice hedging in their statements or politeness when addressing sensitive topics. This aligns with Brown and Levinson's (1978) argument on the importance of face-saving during conflict. On the other hand, conflicts can also be escalated by using the bald-on-record strategies. Bald-on-record allows the speaker to express their frustrations openly, which Mark saw multiple times. The duality of politeness strategies shows how conflict resolution is a complex idea in the film, as it can both maintain a speaker's face and allow a speaker to express himself bluntly.

Contextual factors are a significant theme that influences the choice of politeness strategies used by the characters in the film. This is prominent as the film depicts the high-stakes environment and the competitive nature of Silicon Valley, portraying how these contextual factors shape the characters' personalities. Positive politeness is commonly used in professional settings such as meetings and depositions, as the conversation involves people with different power dynamics. Meanwhile, bald-on-record strategies are more common in informal settings, allowing more direct conversations between the characters. Another interesting context that influences the characters' use of politeness strategies is their personality. For example, Mark is a very socially awkward guy, and this factor led him to fluctuate between being direct and indirect in a conversation, which is a common occurrence in the film. The interplay between context and communication emphasises the importance of situational circumstances in affecting interpersonal relations. Overall, the themes of power dynamics, social relationships, conflict resolution, and contextual factors are prominent in the film, and they showcase how these themes can influence the characters' use of politeness strategies. Furthermore, this further proves that politeness strategies serve as a tool to manage interpersonal connections whilst also helping individuals achieve their goal in saving face or expressing themselves as seen in "The Social Network".

4.1. Positive Politeness Strategies

This strategy seeks to build or maintain a positive relationship between the speaker and the listener by expressing friendliness and showing interest or approval. It often involves compliments, agreements, and expressions of solidarity (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Table 1. Classification of the positive politeness strategies identified in the movie

Positive Politeness Strategies		
Code	Sentence	Analysis
PP1: Expressions of Admiration or Approval	<p>Sean: Tell me about the strategy you're using.</p> <p>Mark: Okay. For instance, we wanted Baylor in Texas, but Baylor already had a social network on campus so instead of going right after them, we made a list of every school within a hundred miles and put TheFacebook on those campuses first. Pretty soon all the Baylor kids were seeing their friends on our site we were in.</p> <p>Sean: Perfect.</p> <p>Eduardo: Thank you, it was mine.</p>	<p>The phrase "Perfect" can be seen as a form of positive politeness. It expresses approval or satisfaction with the current situation, which aligns with positive politeness strategies that aim to build solidarity and mutual benefit by expressing approval or solidarity with the addressee.</p>
PP1: Expressions of Admiration or Approval	<p>We were really impressed with Facemash and then we checked you out and you also built Coursematch.</p>	<p>Divya's statement is primarily an example of positive politeness. By expressing admiration for Mark's work on Facemash and mentioning his involvement in Coursematch, she is building solidarity and mutual benefit. This approach aims to create a positive atmosphere and establish a rapport with Mark.</p>
PP1: Expressions of Admiration or Approval	<p>Ma'am, I know you've done your homework and so you know money is not a big part of my life, at the moment I could buy Harvard University, take the Phoenix Club and turn it into my ping pong room.</p>	<p>By saying "I know you've done your homework," Mark is acknowledging Gretchen's preparation and competence, which can be seen as a form of positive politeness. This approach builds rapport by expressing approval of her professionalism.</p>
PP2: Offering Help or Support	<p>Dustin: Who are the girls?</p> <p>Eduardo: Jenny and Alice. Dustin: Oh hi</p> <p>Jenny: Is there anything we can do?</p> <p>Mark: No. That's it. Yale and Columbia, let's go!</p>	<p>In the dialogue between Dustin, Eduardo, Jenny, and Mark, Jenny's sentence, "Is there anything we can do?" exemplifies positive politeness. This inquiry reflects her desire to engage with the group and contribute positively to the situation. By asking if there is something she can do, Jenny expresses a willingness to assist and be involved, which fosters a collaborative atmosphere. This aligns with Brown and Levinson's (1978) notion of positive politeness strategies that</p>

		aim to build rapport and solidarity among participants in a conversation.
PP2: Offering Help or Support	Marylin: You don't want any lunch?	In this statement, Marylin employs a positive politeness strategy by extending an invitation to share food, which can foster a sense of inclusion and camaraderie. The phrase "You're welcome to" implies an openness and willingness to share, aiming to create a friendly atmosphere despite Mark's previous refusal.
	Mark: No.	
	Marylin: You're welcome to some salad.	
	Mark: No, thank you.	

Positive politeness strategies are used by the characters to foster rapport and create a sense of solidarity in their interactions. Politeness strategies are employed to increase respect for both others and oneself. In regular interactions, speakers cannot always express speech in a polite manner, which is likely to damage the hearer's sentiments. For example, Divya's remark, "We were really impressed with Facemash and then we checked you out and you also built Coursematch," is an example of positive politeness, as he showed his admiration for Mark's accomplishments. This acknowledgment builds mutual benefit between both of them and strengthens their relationship, contributing to a positive environment. Furthermore, Mark's statement to Gretchen, "I know you've done your homework," serves as another example of positive politeness, as he recognises her competence and preparation as a lawyer. By expressing approval of her professionalism, Mark enhanced his rapport and demonstrated respect towards Gretchen. These instances portray how characters in the film use positive politeness strategies in their social interactions, emphasising the importance of approval and solidarity amidst the competitive nature of their entrepreneurial pursuits.

4.2. Negative Politeness Strategies

This strategy aims to avoid imposing on the listener by showing deference and acknowledging potential imposition. It often involves apologies, hedging, and indirectness (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Table 2. Classification of the negative politeness strategies identified in the movie

Negative Politeness Strategies		
Code	Sentence	Analysis
NP1: Hedging	I want to be straightforward and tell you that I think you should be a lot more supportive. if i get in, i'll be taking you to the parties and you'll be meeting people that you wouldn't normally get to meet.	The offer to take her to parties and meet new people was intended as a form of positive politeness, aiming to build solidarity and mutual benefit. However, the unintended implication about her social status turned it into a face-threatening act.
NP1: Hedging	All I meant is that you go to Boston University (B.U.). And so you're not likely to – I wasn't making a comment on your parents – I was saying you go to B.U.	The speaker is attempting to clarify their intention and avoid any perceived insult, which involves a degree of negative politeness. By saying "I wasn't making a comment on your parents," the speaker is trying to mitigate any potential threat or offense caused by their previous statement.
NP1: Hedging	Tyler: Sir, i honestly don't think you're in any position to make that call.	Tyler begins with "Sir, I honestly don't think," which serves to acknowledge Summers' authority while simultaneously expressing

	Summers: I was U.S. Treasury Secretary, I'm in some position to make that call.	disagreement. This phrase is a common hedging strategy that softens the impact of his critique.
NP1: Hedging	Marylin: You're welcome to some salad. Mark: No, thank you.	By adding "thank you," he acknowledges Marylin's offer and expresses gratitude, which softens the rejection. This indicates an awareness of social etiquette and an attempt to maintain respect in the interaction, despite his earlier directness.
NP2: Apologising	Summers: And you're here because? **silence** Either of you can answer. Tyler: I'm sorry, I thought you were reading the letter.	Tyler begins with "I'm sorry," which serves to acknowledge any potential offense caused by his previous silence or misunderstanding. This expression of apology mitigates any face threat by showing deference to Summers' authority and acknowledging the social dynamics at play. By explaining his thought process, Tyler attempts to justify his actions while also maintaining respect for Summers.

Negative politeness strategies were also prominent in "The Social Network" as characters navigate their relationships with caution and awareness of social hierarchies. For instance, when Mark stated, "All I meant is that you go to Boston University (B.U.). And so you're not likely to – I wasn't making a comment on your parents – I was saying you go to B.U.," he attempts to clarify his intention and avoid any perceived insult towards Erica. According to Gangga Swari et al. (2024), this effort to avoid potential face threats demonstrates negative politeness, as Mark acknowledges the possibility of offense and seeks to preserve the listener's face. By explicitly stating, "I wasn't making a comment on your parents," Mark shows deference and attempts to maintain respect within the conversation by hedging his words to soften the blow. This strategy reflects an understanding of the delicate nature of interpersonal dynamics, especially in a confrontational setting where maintaining professionalism is important despite underlying tensions.

4.3. Bald on Record Politeness Strategies

This strategy involves making direct statements without any minimisation of the imposition. It's typically used when the speaker feels the situation is urgent or when the level of imposition is low (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Table 3. Classification of the bald on record politeness strategies identified in the movie

Bald on Record Politeness Strategies		
Code	Sentence	Analysis
B1: Direct Statements or Requests	Erica: Listen. you're gonna be successful and rich. But youre going to go through life thinking that girls dont like you because you're a tech geek. And I want you to know, from the bottom of my heart, that that won't be true. it'll be because youre an asshole.	Despite the initial expression of sympathy and the use of "from the bottom of my heart," which might suggest sincerity or concern, the statement directly and bluntly insults the person by calling them an "asshole." The use of this strong language without any mitigation is characteristic of a bald on record approach, where the speaker does not attempt to soften the impact of their words
B1: Direct Statements or Requests	Mark: Four hours? That would be impressive except for the fact that the algorithm I used was written on	Mark's response is primarily a bald on record strategy. He directly challenges the IT person's claim by downplaying the

	my dorm room window. Keep up the great work.	complexity of the algorithm and implying that the security system is not as sophisticated as claimed.
B1: Direct Statements or Requests	Lecturer: And I see we have our first surrender. don't worry Mr. Zuckerberg, brighter men than you have tried and failed this class.	The professor's initial statement, "And I see we have our first surrender," is a direct and unmitigated comment that can be seen as a bald on record strategy. It explicitly states Mark's perceived action without softening the impact.
B2: Blunt Refusals	Marylin: You don't want any lunch? Mark: No.	Mark's response is a clear and direct "No," which exemplifies a bald on record strategy. This type of communication is characterised by straightforwardness and a lack of politeness markers or hedging. By providing a blunt refusal without any additional context or softening language, Mark communicates his decision unequivocally.
B3: Assertive Language	Mark: I think if your clients want to stand on my shoulders and call themselves tall, they have a right to give it a try. But there's no requirement that I enjoy being here listening to people lie. you have part of my attention -- the minimum amount needed. The rest of my attention is back at the offices of Facebook where my employees and I are doing things that no one in this room, including and specifically your clients, are intellectually or creatively capable of doing. Did I adequately answer your condescending question?	Mark's statement is primarily a bald on record strategy. He directly expresses his disdain for the situation and the people present, stating that he does not enjoy listening to what he perceives as lies. This approach reflects his confidence in his position and lack of concern for social niceties, as he openly challenges Gage's authority and the credibility of his clients without any mitigation.
B3: Assertive Language	Tyler: Sir, I honestly don't think you're in any position to make that call. Summers: I was U.S. Treasury Secretary, I'm in some position to make that call.	Summers' reply is direct and assertive, emphasising his past position of authority without any softening language or politeness markers. By stating his former role as U.S. Treasury Secretary, Summers employs a bald on record strategy, asserting his authority and justifying his capability to make decisions. This response reflects confidence and a clear dismissal of Tyler's challenge, reinforcing the power dynamic in their interaction.

Bald on record strategies are common in the film, as characters often engage in direct conversations. This approach allows them to assert their positions and challenge one another openly. In the excerpt where Erica states, "It'll be because you're an asshole," it shows a clear instance of bald on record strategy through the use

of direct language. Despite her initial sympathetic tone suggested by phrases like "from the bottom of my heart," Erica's statement is a direct insult by labeling the individual, Mark, as an "asshole." This strong language is an example of a bald-on-record strategy, as it does not have phrases that would save face. Instead, Erica's approach is characterised by its straightforwardness and lack of concern for social etiquette, showcasing her intention to convey her message directly. Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that bald on record strategies are employed when speakers feel they have sufficient power or when the social distance between interlocutors is minimal. In this film, the competitive atmosphere and high stakes lead characters to prioritise clarity over politeness, resulting in confrontational exchanges that reveal their underlying motivations and tensions.

4.4. Off-Record Politeness Strategies

This strategy involves being indirect and hinting at what the speaker wants without directly stating it, leaving it up to the listener to infer the intended meaning. This helps the speaker avoid direct imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Table 4. Classification of the off-record politeness strategies identified in the movie

Off-Record Politeness Strategies		
Code	Sentence	Analysis
O2: Irony or Sarcasm	Mark: Match dot com for Harvard guys? You know you really don't need a damn forensic team to get to the bottom of this. If you guys were the inventors of Facebook, you'd have invented Facebook.	While Mark's statement is direct, it also indirectly conveys a message about the simplicity or lack of originality of Divya's idea. This could be seen as an off-record strategy because it implies that their idea was not innovative or significant enough to lead to the creation of Facebook.
O1: Metaphors or Analogies	Tyler: If I were a drug dealer, I couldn't give free drugs to 650 on the first day. Divya: and this kid (Mark) doesn't even have four friends.	Tyler's comment is an indirect way of expressing admiration for Mark's success with Facebook. By using a metaphor involving a drug dealer, Tyler conveys a message about the impressive scale of Mark's achievement without directly stating it. This approach allows for plausible deniability of any direct compliment. While Divya's statement is direct, it also indirectly conveys a message about the perceived irony or contradiction between Mark's social isolation and his ability to create a highly successful social network. This could be interpreted as an off-record strategy because it implies that Mark's success is unexpected given his personal circumstances.

O2: Irony or Sarcasm	<p>Tyler: I'm sorry President Summers, what you just said makes no sense at all.</p> <p>Summers: I'm devastated by that.</p>	<p>Summers' sarcastic response implies a meaning that is not explicitly stated. His statement suggests that he is not genuinely devastated; instead, he is mocking Tyler's criticism. This indirectness allows him to express his feelings without directly confronting Tyler.</p>
O1: Metaphors or Analogies	<p>Tyler: This idea is potentially worth millions of dollars.</p> <p>Summers: Millions of dollars? Cameron: Yes!</p> <p>Summers: You might be letting your imagination run away with you.</p>	<p>The phrase "letting your imagination run away with you" is metaphorical. It implies that Tyler's ideas may be overly ambitious or unrealistic without directly stating that his idea is foolish or unreachable. This indirectness allows Summers to express skepticism while avoiding a blunt confrontation.</p>

Off-record strategies are also significantly used by the characters in the film, allowing them to convey messages indirectly while preserving plausible deniability. For example, Tyler's metaphor about drug dealing serves as an indirect compliment to Mark's success, while simultaneously highlighting the absurdity of his achievement, gaining hundreds of registered Facebook users in just the first launch. Another example is in the dialogue where Tyler states, "I'm sorry, President Summers, what you just said makes no sense at all," and Summers responds with, "I'm devastated by that,". We see a clear example of off-record strategy used by Summers, as he uses irony and sarcasm to respond to the twins. Summers' statement is not a genuine expression of devastation, but rather it serves as a sarcastic remark that implies his feelings toward Tyler's criticism. This indirectness allows Summers to convey his feelings of mockery without directly confronting Tyler, thereby maintaining some sense of professionalism while also asserting his authority in the conversation. The sarcasm embedded in his response creates a layer of meaning that challenges Tyler's assertion without engaging in an outright argument. By using this off-record strategy, Summers effectively communicates his dismissal of Tyler's critique while avoiding a direct confrontation, showing how figurative language can serve as a tool for managing conflict in professional settings. Off-record speech occurs when a speaker says something general or unconnected to what they truly intend. This interaction highlights the complexities of communication, where irony can be employed to navigate social hierarchies and express dissent in a more palatable manner. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), off-record strategies enable speakers to avoid face threats by allowing ambiguity in their statements. In "The Social Network," this ambiguity reflects the complexities of relationships among characters who are both collaborators and competitors.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This study set out to investigate the use of politeness strategies in the 2010 film *The Social Network* using Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) Politeness Theory as its analytical framework. The three objectives were: (1) to identify the politeness strategies used by characters in the film, (2) to examine how these strategies were employed in various interactional contexts, and (3) to explore the contextual or pragmatic motivations behind the choice of these strategies. The findings revealed that all four politeness strategies, positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on record, and off record, were prominently used by characters throughout the film. Positive politeness was used to foster camaraderie, solidarity, and cooperation, especially in moments requiring persuasion or alliance-building. Negative politeness was applied to maintain social distance and minimize imposition, particularly in tense or hierarchical exchanges. Bald-on-record strategies were evident in scenes involving confrontation or urgency, showcasing the directness and assertiveness of characters such as Mark Zuckerberg. Off-record strategies, often in the form of sarcasm or indirect language, highlighted the nuanced, often passive-aggressive nature of social interaction in a competitive, high-stakes environment. The

implications of these findings are twofold. Theoretically, this study contributes to the relatively limited body of research on politeness strategies in cinematic discourse, especially in high-conflict professional settings. It underscores how scripted dialogue can mirror real-life communication patterns and power dynamics, enriching our understanding of pragmatic language use in media. These insights can inform screenwriters, linguists, media scholars, and educators on how language choices shape character relationships, audience perception, and thematic development in storytelling.

However, the study is not without limitations. First, it focuses solely on a single film, which may limit the generalizability of the findings across different genres, cultures, or character archetypes. Second, the analysis is limited to the textual dialogue, without an in-depth multimodal exploration of paralinguistic features such as tone, gesture, or facial expressions that also contribute to politeness. Lastly, while efforts were made to ensure inter-coder reliability, the subjective nature of qualitative analysis may introduce some degree of interpretive bias. In sum, this study advances scholarly understanding of politeness strategies in film and bridges the gap between theoretical pragmatics and applied media discourse. Though scripted, it affirms that cinematic dialogue can serve as a valuable lens through which to explore the dynamics of human interaction, power, and social negotiation.

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