# A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE POLITENESS STRATEGIES OF REFUSALS IN RICHARD LINKLATER'S BOYHOOD

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Abstract

   This research aims to identify and describe the kinds of positive and negative politeness strategies of refusals employed in Boyhood and the factor of choosing a certain type of politeness strategy in Boyhood. This research employed the descriptive qualitative method. The data were in the form of utterances which contain refusals. The data source was Boyhood movie. There were two instruments of this research: the researcher and the data sheet. The data were collected by doing several steps: watching the movie, checking the accuracy of the dialogue in the movie and the transcript, writing down the refusals delivered by the characters, and recording the data into the data sheet. To ensure the data trustworthiness, a triangulation technique was applied. There are two results of this study. The first result is that both of positive and negative politeness strategies are employed by the characters. There are eight sub-strategies of positive politeness that are being applied by the characters: intensifying interest to the hearer, using in-group identity markers, avoiding disagreement, joking, being optimistic that the hearer wants what the speaker wants, including both speaker and hearer in the activity, giving or asking for reasons, and giving gifts to hearer. Negative politeness strategy is realized by questioning and hedging, minimizing the imposition, apologizing, and stating the face threatening act as a general rule. The second result is that all characters in Boyhood consider payoff to be one of the basic factors influencing their choice of performing a certain strategy. The second factor is relevant circumstances which consist of three elements: social distance, relative power, and rank of imposition. This research reveals that positive politeness strategy is employed when the social distance between the speaker and the hearer is close, the relative power between the participants is insignificant, and the rank of imposition is relative small. On the other hand, negative politeness strategy is applied when the rank of imposition is high and the participants have a big difference in terms of social distance and relative power.

Key words: pragmatic, positive politeness strategy, negative politeness strategy, refusal, Boyhood

## INTRODUCTION

Language is an important element which cannot be separated from human life. By communicating via language, people can deliver and receive message without any boundaries. Through language, people also can declare something, express what they feel, and refuse other's people offer, command, request, suggestion, and invitation. According to Takahashi and Bebee (1987: 154) people can refuse something in three ways: direct refusal, indirect refusal, or adjunct to refusal. However, when refusing others' wants, people have to consider some aspects to make the interlocutor not feeling embarrassed and hurt. Furthermore, in order to minimize the possible threat which happens between the speaker and the interlocutor, the speaker has to consider an aspect called politeness.

Yule (1996: 60) defines politeness as a way to show alaert towards the face of someone else. Face, in pragmatics, is divided into two: positive face and negative face. According to Brown and Levinson (in Watts, 2003:86) positive face is an aspect of a person who wants to be accepted by others. Meanwhile, negative face is a desire of a person whose wants is to be not imposed by others. In refusing the interlocutor's offer/command/request/ suggestion/ invitation, a speaker have to be aware of the interlocutor's face. If the speaker cannot satisfy the face wants of the interlocutor, the speaker may damage or threaten the interlocutor face. Thus, in order to minimize the possible face threatening act, a strategy of politeness is needed.

In accordance to the relation between refusal and politeness, the researcher focuses on analyzing the positive and negative politeness strategies of refusals in Boyhood. Boyhood is selected as the object of the research for two reasons. The first reason is that the genre of Boyhood is realistic so it can represent the politeness strategies used by people in this era. The second reason is that the characters in this movie deliver refusals in different ways of politeness strategies, especially positive and negative politeness strategies.

In this research, there are two objectives formulated: (1) to identify and describe the kinds of positive and negative politeness strategies of refusals employed in Boyhood, and (2) to identify and describe the factor of choosing a certain type of politeness strategy in Boyhood.

In analyzing the data, the researcher used a classification of politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson. Brown and Levinson (in Goody, 1978) proposed four highest-level strategies to minimize the possible face threatening namely bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record strategy. In addition, the researcher also employed the theory of factors influencing the choice of strategies which are categorized into two; they are payoff and relevant circumstances (social distance, relative power, and rank of imposition).

## RESEARCH METHODS

Since this research aims to give deep understanding and description about positive and negative politeness strategies of refusals and the factors which influence the choice of a certain strategy, a descriptive-qualitative method was applied. According to Kothari (2004:2-3), descriptive research is a research which lets the researcher observe anything related to the object of the research without having a right to control it. Meanwhile, according to Jensen and Jankowski (2002:4) qualitative research is a research which

observes the production of meaning which is closely related to social and cultural phenomena.

The data of this research were all refusals expressed by the characters in Boyhood

The forms of data were the utterances spoken by the characters. The contexts of data were the dialogues between the characters which contain refusals. The source of data of this research were a movie entitled Boyhood. The instruments of this research were the researcher herself as the primary instrument and a data sheet as the secondary instrument.

In collecting the data, the researcher followed several steps: watching Boyhood, checking the accuracy, writing down the refusals, and recording it into a data sheet. The process of collecting data was followed by the data analysis. The data analysis consisted of four steps: categorizing the data based on Brown and Levinson's theory of positive and negative politeness strategies, classifying the categorized data based on the sub-strategies, analyzing the factors influencing the choice of a certain strategy, and drawing a conclusion.

In order to achieve trustworthiness of the data, a triangulation of the data was applied. There were two kinds of triangulation of data used in this research.

They were theory triangulation and investigator triangulation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Findings

In Boyhood, there are only eight sub-strategies of positive politeness performed by the characters. The main strategies used by the characters are avoiding disagreement and giving or asking for reasons. On the other hand, negative politeness strategy is realized in four ways. The main strategy of negative politeness in Boyhood is minimizing the imposition.

In term of the second objective, payoff, as a prior assumption, is a factor that always occurs in every conversation. The second factor which always influences a speaker to choose a certain strategy is the relevant circumstances (social distance, relative power, and rank of imposition). Social distance occurs in all data as a main factor which influences a character in choosing a certain strategy.

Discussion

In this research, both positive and negative politeness strategies are employed by the characters in Boyhood. In addition, the characters also consider payoff and relevant circumstances as the factors that influence them in choosing a certain type of strategy.

An example of positive politeness strategy is presented in the following conversation.

| MRS. EVANS | : | Hey, you know, you're smart. You should be in school. |
| WORKER | : | I like school, I need school, but it is hard. I work all day... |
| MRS. EVANS | : | Go to night school. At community college. It is -- It is pretty affordable. |

(datum 19)

The pipe worker employs a positive politeness strategy of avoiding disagreement when he says "I like school, I need school". He says it to ensure Mrs. Evans that he agrees with her. However, he continues his statement by giving a good understanding that he has to work all day, which implies that he cannot go to the school because of his condition. By appearing to agree with Mrs. Evans, the pipe worker has satisfied Mrs. Evans' desire, which is to be acknowledged and accepted by the other.

In delivering this strategy, the pipe worker is influenced by two factors: payoff and relevant circumstances. The pipe worker knows that he will get benefit of satisfying Mrs. Evans' positive face by delivering this strategy. On the other hand, related to the relevant circumstances, the factor of social distance holds an important point. The pipe worker and Mrs. Evans have good relationship although they are not in a close relationship. Thus, in order to keep the good relationship between them, a positive politeness strategy is applied.

The next example of the occurrence of this strategy is illustrated in the conversation below.

| CHASE | : | Come on, man. |
| CHARLIE | : | What, are you a pussy? |
| TONY | : | No, I just do not feel like drinking a beer right now. |

(datum 18)

A strategy of positive politeness named giving or asking for reasons is employed by Tony. In the dialogue above, Tony knows that it is not good not to satisfy his seniors' wants, that is the desire of their wants (to drink beer together) to be accepted by Tony. So, he tries to minimize the possible face threatening act by giving reasons for his being unable to drink a beer. Tony performs positive politeness strategy since he knows that he can avoid damaging Chase's positive face by ensuring Chase to believe that Charlie likes what Chase's likes. Tony delivers this strategy because he is also influenced by the relevant circumstances: social distance and rank of imposition. The social distance between Chase and Charlie is not so close. Meanwhile, the rank of imposition is great enough. Thus, Tony delivers this strategy to make the relationship gets better and to lessen the imposition.

The last example of positive politeness strategy is illustrated in the following conversation.

| MRS. EVANS | : | With this job I can't take care of us the way I'd like to. I can't keep going this way. And Grandma said she'd help us out... and it would be nice to be near her. |
| SAMANTHA | : | Fine, Mother. You can do whatever you want but we're not moving.<br>(datum 5) |

In the example above, Samantha knows that her refusal may damage her mother's positive face wants, which is her desire of moving to Houston to be accepted by Samantha. Thus, Samantha tries to be polite by performs two sub strategies of positive politeness namely avoiding disagreement and including both speaker and hearer. Samantha, at first, seems like she agrees to move to Houston but she continues her statement by saying that she and her mother are not going to move. In addition, she also includes her mother in the activity which is signalized by the words 'we're'.

Samantha delivers this strategy since she is influenced by the payoff factor, that is a benefit of satisfying a part of Mom's positive face wants that is the wants to be accepted as a member of the same group. In addition, the choice of this strategy is also influenced by social distance factor. The relationship between them is close enough although they often argue each other. Since their relationship is close enough, Samantha applies positive politeness strategy so that their relationship runs smooth

On the other hand, an example of negative politeness strategy is exemplified in the following conversation.

| MR. EVANS | : | All right, I'll do it. It is no problem. |
| GRANDMA | : | I do not think that's such a good idea. |
| MR. EVANS | : | Look, it is no problem. Alright?<br>(datum 10) |

In order to minimize the imposition, Grandma performs negative politeness strategy. Grandma minimizes the degree of imposition, the intention to say that Mr. Evans' idea is terrible, by replacing the sentence "I do not think that's a good idea" with "I do not think that's such a good idea". By replacing it, Mr. Evans' will assume that Grandma is not being offensive since she only shares an opinion about Mr. Evans offer, not totally refuses him in a direct way. Therefore, Grandma is still regarded as a polite person in Mr. Evans' point of view.

In the conversation above, Grandma refuses Mr. Evans' offer by using negative

politeness. Although they have known each other for years, Mr. Evans has not communicated with Grandma for some years. In addition, the relationship between them is ex mother and son in law. That condition makes the relationship between him and Grandma is not good and the social distance between them is not intimate. Thus, in order to keep that kind of relationship, Grandma applies the hedging strategy.

Another example of the occurrence of negative politeness strategies is illustrated in the conversation below.

> MR. EVANS : Can't you just help me out a little bit, just --
> JIMMY : I'm sorry, muffin.
> (datum 14)

In the conversation above, Jimmy employs the strategy of apologizing to show regret for not helping Mr. Evans. By apologizing for refusing Dad's request, Jimmy damages his own positive face for some degree to show that he is really sorry. In addition, Jimmy delivers this strategy to make Mr. Evans understand that Jimmy shows good intention for him.

Jimmy employs this strategy since he is influenced by payoff and social distance. By going on record with negative politeness strategy, Jimmy can minimize the imposition. On the other hand, Jimmy and Mr. Evans are friends for a long time but Jimmy still wants to show respect when

delivers refusal. Therefore, negative politeness strategy is applied.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS
### Conclusion

In accordance to the first objective, both positive and negative politeness strategies of refusals are employed by the main characters in Boyhood. However, positive politeness is the most frequent strategy applied by the characters since most of all the characters have no distance in relationship. There are some sub strategies which are performed in this research, they are: using in-group identity markers, avoiding disagreement, joking, being optimistic, including both speaker and hearer in the activity, giving or asking for reasons, and giving gifts to hearer. The most often strategies of positive politeness are avoiding disagreement and giving or asking for reasons because the speakers tend to hide their intention of refusing something and the hearers can see the reason of the speakers for delivering refusals so the hearers will be satisfied and the refusal will be accepted.

On the other hand, negative politeness strategy is realized by its sub strategies: questioning and hedging, minimizing the imposition, apologizing, and stating the face threatening act as a general rule. The most often strategy of negative politeness is minimizing the imposition

because there are some occasions whose its degree of obscurity is high.

Related to the second objective, there are two factors influencing the characters in choosing a certain kind of politeness strategy. The first one is payoff. Payoff always appears as an influencing factor since it is a basic consideration of a speaker to perform a certain strategy. The second factor that influences the characters in employing a certain strategy is the relevant circumstances; social distance, relative power, and rank of imposition. In this research, social distance is the factor that always appears. Based on the research, a speaker tends to employ positive politeness strategy if the social distance between the speaker and the hearer is small, the power between the speaker and hearer is insignificant, and the rank of imposition is low. By contrast, a speaker tends to perform negative politeness strategy if the speaker is not close with the interlocutor, has less power than the interlocutor, and the rank of imposition is high.

Suggestions

Considering the conclusions above, the researcher gives two suggestions for the following parties. First, to linguistics students, they can use this research as additional information on politeness strategy, especially positive and negative

politeness strategies of refusals. Second, to the other researchers, the researcher suggests the other researchers to analyze the object by using not only positive and negative politeness strategy but also bald on record and off record strategy.

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