

## A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN THE SPILLED MILK PODCAST EPISODE: 'AN UNFILTERED CONVERSATION WITH MY 3-YEAR-OLD SON

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INFO ARTIKEL	ABSTRAK
<p>Sejarah Artikel: (Diisi Editor) Diterima: 05 Desember 2025 Direvisi: 25 Desember 2025 Disetujui: 30 Desember 2025 Tersedia Daring: 30 Januari 2026</p> <p><b>Kata Kunci:</b> Pragmatik Strategi Kesopanan Podcast</p>	<p>Penelitian ini mengkaji penggunaan strategi kesopanan dalam komunikasi orang tua-anak yang berlangsung secara spontan. Secara khusus, penelitian ini diarahkan untuk menjawab dua pertanyaan penelitian: (1) jenis strategi kesopanan apa saja yang digunakan oleh orang tua dalam percakapan spontan dengan anak mereka, dan (2) bagaimana fungsi praktis strategi kesopanan tersebut dalam mengelola face-threatening acts serta menjaga keharmonisan interaksi orang tua-anak. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui teknik simak dan catat terhadap rekaman audio episode podcast pengasuhan anak Spilled Milk berjudul "An Unfiltered Conversation with My 3-Year-Old Son", yang menampilkan interaksi alami antara orang tua dan anak usia balita. Data dianalisis dengan menggunakan teori kesopanan Brown dan Levinson (1987) untuk mengidentifikasi jenis strategi kesopanan serta fungsi pragmatismenya dalam konteks interaksi keluarga. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa keempat strategi kesopanan—bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, dan off-record—muncul dalam data dengan fungsi komunikatif yang berbeda. Strategi bald on-record paling dominan digunakan untuk menyampaikan instruksi secara jelas dan langsung. Positive politeness berfungsi untuk membangun kedekatan, dukungan emosional, dan solidaritas, sedangkan negative politeness digunakan untuk mengurangi pemaksaan dan menghormati otonomi anak. Sementara itu, strategi off-record muncul dalam bentuk ujaran tidak langsung yang bersifat bermain dan kreatif. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa strategi kesopanan dalam komunikasi orang tua-anak tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai mekanisme linguistik, tetapi juga sebagai sumber daya pragmatis penting dalam mengarahkan perilaku, menjaga keharmonisan interpersonal, serta mendukung perkembangan sosial dan linguistik anak dalam konteks keluarga informal.</p>
<p><b>Keywords:</b> Pragmatics Politeness Strategies Podcast</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ABSTRACT</b></p> <p><i>This study examines the use of politeness strategies in spontaneous parent-child communication. Specifically, this study aims to answer two research questions: (1) what types of politeness strategies do parents use in spontaneous conversations with their children, and (2) what practical functions these politeness strategies play in managing face-threatening acts and maintaining harmonious parent-child interactions. This study employed a qualitative descriptive design. Data were collected through listening and note-taking of an audio recording of the Spilt Milk parenting podcast episode titled "An Unfiltered Conversation with My 3-Year-Old Son," which features a natural interaction between a parent and a toddler. The data were analyzed using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory to identify the types of politeness strategies and their pragmatic functions in the context of family interactions. The analysis revealed that four politeness strategies—on-record baldness, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record baldness—appeared in the data with</i></p>

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*different communicative functions. The on-record baldness strategy was most commonly used to convey instructions clearly and directly. Positive politeness serves to build closeness, emotional support, and solidarity, while negative politeness is used to reduce coercion and respect the child's autonomy. Meanwhile, off-record strategies emerge in the form of playful and creative indirect speech. These findings suggest that politeness strategies in parent-child communication serve not only as linguistic mechanisms but also as important pragmatic resources in guiding behavior, maintaining interpersonal harmony, and supporting children's social and linguistic development in informal family contexts.*

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## 1. Introduction

Language plays a fundamental role in human interaction as a medium for exchanging information, expressing emotions, constructing ideas, and maintaining social relationships. Through language, individuals engage in various social contexts such as educational settings, workplaces, and family environments. Language use is dynamic and develops through social interaction, cultural norms, and communicative needs. From an early age, children acquire language through interaction with caregivers, indicating that language learning is inherently social in nature.

Communication is not merely the transfer of information but also a form of social action. Austin (1962) introduced the concept of speech acts, emphasizing that utterances can perform actions and influence interpersonal relationships. This perspective highlights that understanding language requires attention not only to linguistic structure but also to how meaning is constructed and interpreted within specific contexts. In linguistics, this functional aspect of language is examined through pragmatics. Chaer (2012) explains that linguistics focuses on language itself, while Yule (2010) defines it as the systematic study of language structure and use. Pragmatics, in particular, investigates how meaning is shaped by speaker intention, contextual factors, and shared knowledge between interlocutors. Unlike semantics, which focuses on literal meaning, pragmatics explores implied meanings and contextual interpretation in real-life communication (Levinson, 1983; Grice, 1975).

One of the most important concepts within pragmatics is politeness. Politeness plays a crucial role in managing interpersonal relationships and maintaining social harmony. Brown and Levinson (1987) propose that individuals possess face, consisting of positive face (the desire to be appreciated and approved) and negative face (the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition). To manage potential face-threatening acts (FTAs), speakers employ various politeness strategies, including bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. The choice of strategy is influenced by social distance, power relations, and the degree of imposition involved in an interaction.

Politeness strategies are not limited to formal or institutional settings; they also occur in intimate and informal contexts such as family communication. Parent-child interaction is particularly significant because it involves asymmetrical power relations, emotional closeness, and continuous socialization. In such interactions, parents must balance authority, care, and guidance, while children gradually develop pragmatic awareness and social competence through everyday communication. Therefore, examining politeness strategies in parent-child discourse offers valuable insight into how language functions as a tool for both interaction and social development.

In recent years, podcasts featuring spontaneous and unscripted conversations have emerged as rich sources of authentic linguistic data. One such example is the Spilled Milk podcast episode entitled “An Unfiltered Conversation with My 3-Year-Old Son.” This episode presents natural interaction between a father and his three-year-old child, characterized by directness, playfulness, and emotional closeness. The unscripted nature of the conversation allows for the observation of how politeness strategies are naturally employed to manage face, guide behavior, and maintain rapport in a family setting.

Several previous studies have examined politeness strategies in spoken discourse, particularly in media contexts. Salsabila et al. (2024) investigated politeness strategies used in an international webinar and found that positive politeness was the most dominant strategy, as it helped engage the audience in a formal setting. Pramaidana and Gunawan (2022) analyzed positive politeness strategies in the H3 Podcast #7 and revealed that these strategies were used to build solidarity and strengthen speaker-audience relationships. Similarly, Hartati (2021) studied politeness strategies used by a podcast host and identified all four types proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), with positive politeness being the most frequently used. These studies demonstrate that the choice of politeness strategies is influenced by context, social distance, and communicative goals.

However, despite the growing number of studies on politeness in podcasts and media discourse, most research focuses on interactions between adult speakers in formal or semi-formal settings. There is still limited research that examines politeness strategies in parent-child interactions, particularly involving very young children in spontaneous and informal communication contexts. This gap indicates the need for further investigation into how politeness functions in family discourse and early language development.

The present study addresses this gap by analyzing politeness strategies used in the Spilled Milk podcast episode “An Unfiltered Conversation with My 3-Year-Old Son” using Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory. This study aims to identify the types of politeness strategies employed in the interaction and to examine how these strategies function to manage face and maintain rapport in parent-child communication. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on early childhood interaction within an unscripted podcast context, offering new insights into the emergence of pragmatic competence and politeness in young children.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute theoretically to pragmatic studies by extending the application of politeness theory to family discourse and early childhood communication. Practically, the study provides insights for parents, educators, and communication practitioners regarding effective language use in interacting with young children, as well as serving as a reference for future research on politeness strategies in family and new media contexts.

## **2. Method**

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to examine the use of politeness strategies in parent-child interaction. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the research focuses on interpreting meaning, context, and language use as they naturally occur in everyday communication rather than measuring variables statistically. The research is grounded in Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, which classifies politeness strategies into four types: Bald on Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, and Off-Record. This theoretical framework is used to analyze how speakers manage face-threatening acts and maintain interpersonal relationships during interaction. The data of this study consist of spoken utterances produced by a father and his three-year-old son. The data source is an episode of the Spilled Milk podcast entitled "An Unfiltered Conversation with My 3-Year-Old Son." This episode was selected because it presents spontaneous, unscripted, and natural parent-child communication, allowing for authentic observation of politeness strategies in an informal family setting. Data were collected using a documentation technique combined with non-participant observation. The researcher listened to the selected podcast episode repeatedly to gain contextual understanding and transcribed the conversation verbatim. Utterances indicating politeness strategies or potential face-threatening acts were identified and selected based on their relevance to the research focus. The data were analyzed using the interactive qualitative analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, relevant utterances were selected and categorized according to the four types of politeness strategies. The data display stage involved organizing the classified utterances into tables to identify patterns of strategy use by each participant. Finally, conclusions were drawn by interpreting how each strategy functioned to manage face and maintain rapport in parent-child communication, with continuous verification against the theoretical framework.

## **3. Result and Discussion (Hasil dan Pembahasan)**

This section talks about the results of a study on how people use polite ways of speaking in the Spilled Milk podcast episode titled "An Unfiltered Conversation with My 3-Year-Old Son." The study uses Brown and Levinson's 1987 theory of politeness to explore two main questions: (1) what kinds of polite strategies are used when parents talk to their kids, and (2) how these strategies help keep everyone's feelings positive and build a good connection.

### **3.1 Unit of Analysis and Coding Procedure**

The study looks at individual speech parts, which are single, meaningful pieces of talk made by a speaker during their turn, and these parts serve a purpose in communication.

An utterance can be a sentence, a clause, or a short phrase, as long as it expresses a full meaning related to being polite. Turn-taking rules helped divide the transcript into parts, and each part was labeled on its own. To decide if a speech act was a way of being polite, these rules were used:

- a. The sentence needs to give a command, express a feeling, or help with conversation, and it might also deal with how people manage their public image.
- b. The speech should match at least one of the ways politeness is defined by Brown and Levinson in their 1987 work.
- c. In unclear situations, factors like how someone speaks, where they fit in the conversation, and what they're trying to say were used to figure out the best category.

If an utterance used more than one politeness strategy, it was only coded once, based on the main strategy, which was the one that best showed the speaker's main purpose in the conversation. This method prevents counting the same thing twice and keeps the analysis consistent.

### 3.2 Coding Scheme

To enhance transparency and analytical rigor, Table 3.1 presents the coding scheme used in this study, including the strategy label, operational definition, and representative examples from the data.

**Table 3.1 Coding Scheme of Politeness Strategies.**

Code	Politeness Strategy	Operational Definition	Data Example
BOR	Bald on Record	Direct utterances without mitigation, prioritizing clarity and efficiency	"Put a towel on your shirt."
PP	Positive Politeness	Utterances showing approval encouragement, or shared solidarity	"That's very good."
NP	Negative Politeness	Indirect or softened utterances minimizing imposition	"Do you want to tell everybody what our podcast is called?"
OR	Off Record	Indirect, playful, or ambiguous utterances leaving interpretation open	"Monster told me to."

### 3.3 Distribution of Politeness Strategies

The analysis identified 120 utterances that met the inclusion criteria. Table 3.2 presents the distribution of politeness strategies used by both participants.

**Table 3.2 The distribution of politeness strategies used by the parent and the child.**

NO	Politeness Strategy	Participant		Frequency	Percentage
		Child	Parent		
1.	Bald on Record	26	28	44	36,67%
2.	Positive Politeness	7	27	34	28,33%
3.	Negative Politeness	2	19	21	17,5%
4.	Off Record	17	4	21	17,5%
Total		52	78	120	100%

As shown in Table 3.2, Bald on Record strategies are the most frequently used, followed by Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, and Off-Record strategies. This distribution reflects the interactional needs of parent–child communication, where clarity, emotional support, and playfulness coexist.

### 3.4 Analysis of Politeness Strategy Types

#### **Bald on Record Strategies**

Bald on Record strategies use straightforward and honest communication that focuses on being clear rather than trying to save face. In this study, both participants often use these strategies. Examples like the child saying "I don't know you" and "I drink spilled milk" show simple, direct words that are common in how kids speak when they are just learning language. The parent uses clear directions like "Put a towel on your shirt" to make sure the child understands right away and follows the instruction. Brown and Levinson (1987) say that Bald on Record strategies work best when people are close to each other socially and there's not much danger of hurting someone's feelings. In interactions between parents and children, closeness and guidance let people speak openly without causing problems in their relationship. This finding agrees with Hartati (2021), who found that people often use Bald on Record strategies in casual podcast conversations where everyone knows each other well.

#### **Positive Politeness Strategies**

Parents often use positive politeness strategies to show they value the child's efforts and keep a warm, connected relationship. Phrases like "That's smart," "That's very good," and "Yes, exactly" help make the child feel good by showing approval and agreeing with what they say. Following Brown and Levinson's 1987 work, Positive Politeness helps bring people closer together and makes relationships stronger. While earlier research (Pramaidana & Gunawan, 2022; Salsabila et al., 2024) found similar results in interactions focused on adults, this study shows that Positive Politeness is important in early language learning. It helps young children feel more confident and involved in conversations.

#### **Negative Politeness Strategies**

Negative politeness strategies are mostly used by the parent, especially in indirect questions and invitations. Examples include phrases like, "Do you want to tell everybody what our podcast is called?" and "Why do you think people cry when they spill milk?" These ways of speaking make direct instructions softer and show respect for the child's

independence. Brown and Levinson (1987) explain that Negative Politeness is a way of speaking that helps reduce the feeling of being imposed upon and shows respect for the listener's negative face. This study shows how parents are aware of their child's ability to make choices, showing that respect and independence are still worked out even when there's an imbalance in power between parents and children.

### **Off-Record Strategies**

Children often use off-record strategies through imagination and unclear phrases like "Monster told me to" or "Chicken butt." These kinds of statements don't clearly explain what is happening and make the conversation more fun and playful. Brown and Levinson (1987) link Off-Record strategies to managing someone's face indirectly, but in early childhood interactions, these strategies instead show creativity and are used for exploring communication. This finding adds a new way of looking at things by showing that Off-Record strategies can develop naturally over time instead of being planned on purpose.

### **Discussion**

The results show that how parents and children show politeness changes depending on who is speaking and how old the child is. Children often use Bald on Record and Off-Record strategies because they have less understanding of how to manage communication effectively and they like to speak directly or in a fun way. In contrast, parents use both positive and negative politeness in a smart way to handle situations that might threaten someone's face, keep relationships friendly, and control how conversations go. This study builds on previous research by showing that the ways people show politeness in family conversations are not just about being nice, but also help build emotional connections and support language growth. The unique part of this study is how it uses politeness theory to look at natural conversations between parents and children in a podcast, which broadens the area of pragmatic analysis beyond just adult and formal discussions.

### **4. Conclusion**

This study examined the use of politeness strategies in the Spilled Milk podcast episode entitled "An Unfiltered Conversation with My 3-Year-Old Son" to understand how such strategies function in managing face and maintaining rapport in parent-child communication. The findings demonstrate that politeness strategies are actively employed even in informal and intimate family interactions and play a significant role in shaping interpersonal dynamics between parents and young children. The study reveals that four politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), Bald on Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, and Off-Record, are utilized by both the parent and the child, though with different patterns and communicative purposes. The child primarily relies on Bald on Record and Off-Record strategies, reflecting developmental characteristics such as directness, spontaneity, and imaginative expression. In contrast, the parent strategically employs Positive and Negative Politeness to encourage participation, respect the child's autonomy, and mitigate potential face-threatening acts. These findings directly address the research objectives by illustrating not only the types of politeness strategies used but also their functions in maintaining harmony and emotional closeness in parent-child interaction. Importantly, this study highlights that politeness is not merely a matter of

linguistic etiquette or formality, but a dynamic pragmatic resource that supports early socialization, emotional bonding, and the development of communicative competence. The use of politeness strategies in this context reflects an adaptive interactional process shaped by intimacy, authority, and the child's developmental stage.

The findings of this study have several implications. Theoretically, they extend the application of politeness theory to early childhood and family discourse, contributing to pragmatic studies by demonstrating that face management is relevant even in interactions involving very young children. Practically, the study suggests that parents and educators can foster healthy communication and social development by consciously employing supportive politeness strategies in everyday interactions with children. For future research, it is recommended that similar studies explore multimodal aspects of politeness, such as intonation and gestures, or compare politeness strategies across different age groups, family structures, or cultural contexts to deepen understanding of pragmatic development in early life.

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