

## NEGATIVE POLITENESS STRATEGIES USED BY MAIN CHARACTER IN “THE IMITATION GAME” MOVIE

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### ABSTRACT

*This research aims to find out types of negative politeness strategies expressed by the main character in the movie titled The Imitation Game. This research is categorised as descriptive qualitative research. The data of the research were taken from utterances identified as negative politeness strategies by the main character “Alan Turing” and analysed with theory proposed by (Brown & Levinson, 1988). Data were collected using the observation and non-participatory method. Additionally, to analyse the data, pragmatic identity method were used. The result discovered in this research are; 5 be conveniently indirect, 16 question and hedge, 1 be pessimistic, 6 give deference, 4 impersonalise interlocutors, and 4 state the FTA as the general rule, totalling to 36 indication of negative politeness strategies. Question and hedge became the most frequently used strategy the main character tends to assume unwillingness to comply to the other characters in The Imitation Game movie.*

**Keywords:** negative politeness, pragmatics studies, the imitation game

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Communication and language are the essentials needed by human in conveying messages and information. With human being a social being, this further made language more important in human's life. Human communicates the social aspect of feelings, ideas, information, and desire. There are diverse amounts of language in this world and people have developed way in understanding it based on their social scope. Communication happens in a lot of way, one of which is media. Media as communication often depicted digitally as it has utterances—being said by a person—. Movie is a convenient media to express utterances as it contains conversations. Conversations involves speaker and hearer in the same event and context, hence interlocutors—people who involved in a conversation—has to understand each other.

The understanding of language comes from both parties of hearer and speaker or known as interlocutors. In understanding it, each party must give and receive the same information regarding the context, purpose, and intentions. Furthermore, in conveying messages, way of expressing communication will vary depending on the speaker and hearer. In communication there are informal and formal communication. The politeness in conveying messages can be heard and interpreted as how the speaker intended to mean. Typically, politeness can be seen when a speaker has intention of

respecting and avoid offending the hearer in conversation (Holmes, 1995). In this case, the politeness affects the public “face” of the speaker. This politeness face then expresses two different type of face which are, positive face needs and negative face needs. A face is public self-image of a speaker (Yule, 1996). When utterances are done with consideration of interlocutors' face, the utterances are considered as a polite form. The general use of this phenomena commonly happens in real life. While talking to older person or someone more superior, speaker tends to reduce threat to the speaker by giving deference. Example can be seen as below.

Student : “Have received the paper I submitted, **sir?**”

Teacher: “There are not any on my table”

The student asked the teacher which has superiority over him hence the use of the deference in the end of the student question. By giving deference, it is expected to reduce threat to the hearer by maintaining respect in request.

Another phenomenon of politeness can be seen in this conversation below

Det. Nock : “**Professor Turing?** My name is Detective Nock. Manchester Police. Sergeant Staehl here tells me you’ve had a robbery last night.”

Turing : “Take a step back and don’t breathe heavily”

The conversation above happened in conversation between characters in the movie "The Imitation Game" at the time mark of 00:03:45. Detective Nock (speaker) in that conversation was trying to have Alan attention and in hope of gaining more information about the robbery that occurred in his domicile. In order to not leave burden to the Alan (hearer), the speaker used negative politeness strategies of giving deference. Suriadi, in his journal mentioned that by presenting a respect through deference, it would have created an award to hearer which then hearer can respond to interlocutor with full attention. Although Alan did not respond with expected response, Detective Nock still managed to express politeness.

As explained above, negative politeness strategy is used to avoid burden for the listener. Politeness is often used in communication in order to gain proper information of related context. Furthermore, in the movie "The Imitation Game", the conversations in between characters are said to be formal and politeness comes into hands.

There are researches done in the similar discussion regarding the politeness strategies. This research takes two previous research as reference and as comparison. Suriadi (2017) in his journal researched about The Politeness Strategy and Its Scale of Ahok's Statements as a Governor of Jakarta. The research was done with qualitative method and negative politeness strategy is used a lot by

Ahok. They concluded that negative politeness strategies is used in order to gain advantage in giving the speaker spotlight without heeding to the interlocutors.

Similar research was done by Makasiahe et al., (2020). This research analysed the politeness strategies uttered by characters in the movie *Big Hero 6*. Qualitative and descriptive method are utilised in this research and theory by Brown and Levinson. This research concluded six negative politeness strategies and using question or hedging is the most frequently used by the characters in the movie.

Sijabat & Ambalegin (2019) did a research about positive and negative politeness strategies. The research took data from a novel titled "The Last Song". This research concluded that all the politeness strategy are used but not 8 negative politeness strategies.

The previous research are using the same theory proposed by (Brown & Levinson, 1988). This research conducted the same topic but with different data source. This research described negative politeness used by the main character in the movie *The Imitation Game*.

## **2. NEGATIVE POLITENESS STRATEGIES**

According to Brown et al., (1988) there are several strategies that can be used to convey negative politeness strategies.

a. **Be Conveniently Indirect**

This indirectness strategies is used to mitigate burden to the hearer. Brown et al., (1988) mentioned that conventional indirectness conceals the clash of desire, which by then each party partially agreed on. For example:

Aunt Cass: **The University called again.** It's been a few weeks since classes started. But they said it's not too late to register.

Hiro: Okay. Thanks. I'll think about it. (Makasiahe et al., 2020)

b. **Question, Hedge**

Question and hedge is used in negative politeness strategies with the assumption of unwillingness to comply with the speaker. To complement desire hedges is used to minimise threat as mentioned in Brown et al., (1988), using hedges to avoid commitment to them is fundamental method in disarming interactional threat. For instance:

Hiro: "**Maybe** enough flying for today. **What do you say?**" (Makasiahe et al., 2020)

c. **Be Pessimistic**

Be pessimistic on the request is one of the strategies used in hope hearer will comply with the request. This strategy is done by blatantly express

doubt the appropriateness of the speaker's request (Brown & Levinson, 1988) Example can be seen as below:

Speaker: "**By chance if you have time after lunch,** I'd like to talk about our project"

d. **Minimise the Imposition**

Minimising the impact of request by reducing the imposition is part of negative politeness strategies. Typically to reduce imposition—threat to hearer—words such as *just* and *a bit* (Brown & Levinson, 1988). One example from Ardi et al., (2018)

Speaker: "He lied to you. I wouldn't kiss him. I don't even like him. The only reason I was there was because you insisted that we go." (Sijabat & Ambalegin, 2019)

e. **Give Deference**

With presenting respect—defences—to the hearer, it is expected to avoid burden to hearer by establishing superiority between interlocutor. Brown et al., (1988) argued that deference is used to defuse probable threat among interlocutor by indicating that the addressee's rights to relative immunity from imposition are recognised. Meaning to reduce threat by establishing rights and respect in request. The utterance below is an example:

Speaker: "Please be quick, Sir."  
(Ardi et al., 2018)

**f. Apologise**

Apologise can be utilised to reduce burden to the hearer by conveying regrets in case of unwillingness is given by the hearer. Brown et al., (1988) mentioned that there are four possible way to express regret; admit the impingement, give overwhelming reasons, indicate reluctance, and beg for forgiveness. An example can be seen as following:

Mr Han: "Stop saying "ass"!"  
Dre: "**Sorry**"

**g. Impersonalise interlocutors**

Omitting name and initial of the speakers and hearer is expected to not burden the conversation. Following utterance can be example:

Speaker: **That Mazda has been parked in a no-parking area for hours.**  
Hearer: It's mine, officer.

**h. State the FTA as General Rule**

To minimise threat, stating the FTA in the request or conversation can be utilised. Brown et al., (1988) mentioned to show speaker does not want to impinge—giving negative impact—to the hearer, FTA can be stated in some general social rule, laws, or regulation. For instance:

Speaker: "**School prohibits possession of cell-phone**, I will have to take it away from you"

**i. Nominalise**

Nominalisation is a phenomenon in which words from another part of speech is converted into noun. Nominalisation is expected to raise formality of conversation hence to avoid burden between interlocutors. According to Brown et al., (1988) degree of formality goes parallel with the degree of nouniness. Example:

Speaker: "Your good performance on the examinations impressed us favourably" (Brown & Levinson, 1987)

**j. Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H**

This strategy utilised the method of giving reciprocal rewards or good things in order to obtain speaker desires. Brown et al., (1988) mentioned that speaker has the possibility to minimise threat by explicitly reciprocate with favour to hearer or by disclaiming any favour in return. For example:

Speaker: "**I'd be grateful** if you would do me this favour"

**3. RESEARCH METHOD**

In doing this research, the researchers applied descriptive

qualitative research method and used the observation analysis because it aimed to examine the content of data in form of a movie script in order to identify negative politeness methods. Qualitative research is done with intention to acquire specific and whole understanding of the phenomena in the social field (Creswell, 2013). Sugiyono (2013) mentioned observation method prioritise the process of observation and memory and the utilisation of observation method is used if the research is related to human behaviour. Furthermore, non-participatory technique is also used to collect the data as the researchers does not take part in the data source. Data are collected from watching movie and reading the transcript of the movie "The Imitation Game" thoroughly. And data further will be noted down with relation to the negative politeness strategies utterances.

This research was also utilising pragmatic identity method as the data collected are utterances from individuals (Sudaryanto, 2015). The analysis technique in this research is done by aligning

theory from Brown & Levinson (1988) and the data source. Analysis procedure are done as follows; (1) Data from the movie *The Imitation Game* are classified based on negative politeness strategies (2) Data are analysed with Brown and Levinson's theory (3) Data further answered by the types based on theory. The researchers present the data in informal manner in which data are presented using words and phrases. Result of research are presented in the research discussion.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### 4.1. Results

The result of this research consisted of 36 utterances of related negative politeness strategies. The politeness strategies used amongst 36 utterances are; be conveniently indirect, question and hedge, be pessimistic, give deference, impersonalise interlocutors, and state the FTA as general rule. The findings of the data are listed in table below.

**Table 1.** Negative politeness strategies found in the move "The Imitation Game"

Types	Utterances of negative politeness strategies	Total
Be Conveniently Indirect	"Politics isn't really my area of expertise." "You need me a lot more than I need you. I like solving problems, Commander And Enigma is the most difficult problem in the world." "Are we to work together, then? I prefer to have my own	5



	<p>office.”</p> <p>“I found the Beale cipher, the Bible.”</p> <p><b>“Christopher's become so smart.</b> If I don't continue my treatment, then they'll...they'll take him away from me. You can't let them do that. You can't.”</p>	
Question, hedge	<p>“Would you prefer I made a joke?”</p> <p>“Good. Let me try, and we'll know for sure, won't we?”</p> <p>“Peter asked who was hungry. Can I have some soup, please?”</p> <p>“Are you going to London? Would you deliver a letter for me?”</p> <p>“So, I can give these men orders now?”</p> <p>“May I continue, please? Thank you.”</p> <p>“May I get on with this now, please?”</p> <p>“Careful, will you? It not a toy.”</p> <p>“We have a group of young ladies who tend to all of our clerical tasks: assistants, translators. They live together in town. Would that be a more suitable environment?”</p> <p>“Would you like to play?”</p> <p>“How do you mean you work alongside a German?”</p> <p>“Helen, Why do you think your German counterpart has a girlfriend?”</p> <p>“What would the Germans think if we destroy their U-boats?”</p> <p>“So, our convoy suddenly veers off course... a squadron of our air bombers miraculously descends on the coordinates of the U-boats. What will the Germans think?”</p> <p>“Peter, do you have the...630 decryp...”</p> <p>“Hello. Can I... can I speak to Stewart Menzies, please? It's urgent”</p>	16
Be pessimistic	<p>“Gentlemen, I don't believe that you could find the chap that did this if he walked up to you and spat in your face. What I could use right now is not a bobby, but a really good cleaning lady. So, unless one of you has an apron in your car, I suggest you file your reports and leave me alone.”</p>	1
Give Deference	<p>“I'm not sure I can evaluate that, Mr...”</p> <p>“Hardly seems fair that that's a requirement for employment here, Mr...”</p> <p>“Yes. Joan, what was the last 6:00 a.m. message?”</p> <p>“You know why people like violence, Hugh?”</p> <p>“You wanted to see me, sir?”</p> <p>“May I leave, Headmaster?”</p>	6

Impersonalise interlocutors	<p>"Take a step back, and don't breathe heavily."</p> <p><b>"Are we to work together, then?"</b> I prefer to have my own office."</p> <p>"Welcome, ladies. If you'd like to follow me."</p> <p>"Two years' work. Everything that we've done here will all be for nothing"</p>	4
State the FTA as general rule	<p>"Miss Clarke, I find tardiness under any circumstance, unacceptable Take a seat so that we may continue."</p> <p>"Now, as I was saying, you have six minutes to complete the task in front of you. Gentlemen and lady, begin."</p> <p>"Our job is not to save one passenger convoy, it is to win the war."</p> <p>"Now, Detective, you get to judge. So, tell me... what am I?"</p>	4
Total		36

## 4.2. Discussion

### DATA 1

Cmdr. Denniston: "Well, you do realize that 600 miles away from London there's this nasty little chap called Hitler who wants to engulf Europe in tyranny?"

A. Turing: **"Politics isn't really my area of expertise"**  
(00:09:35– 00:04:19)

This utterance happened in Denniston's office where Turing is having an interview with him regarding the program. Turing used indirect negative politeness strategies to answer Cmdr. Denniston's question. Instead of replying bald on with a "no", Turing conventionally indirectly answer with "politics isn't really my area of expertise". This strategy is used to conceal the clash of desire, which by then each party partially agreed on.

### DATA 2

Turing: **"Are we to work together, then? I prefer to have my own office."**

Cmdr. Denniston: "You're a team, and you will work as one."

(00:13:55 – 00:14:01)

This utterance uttered by Turing happened when Turing and others are discussing with Cmdr. Denniston regarding the program they are going to do. Turing was not interested with working with the rest of the expert and he requested to do it alone. Alan used the being indirect as the negative politeness strategy. This strategy is used to conceal the clash of desire, which by then each party partially agreed on.

### DATA 3

Peter: "Who's hungry? Let's go"

Turing: "I'm hungry"

Cairncross: "What"

Turing: **"Peter asked who was hungry. Can I have some soup, please?"**

(00:18:46 - 00:18:57)

Turing used question and hedging as negative politeness



strategy in response to Cairncross question. This strategy is used with the assumption of unwillingness to comply with the speaker. To complement desire hedges is used to minimise threat. Alan tries to minimise the threat as he might have offended Cairncross in the first place as he asked Turing repeatedly regarding the lunch.

#### DATA 4

Turing: Mr. Menzies! Mr. Menzies! Are you going to London?  
Menzies: "Possibly."  
Turing: **"Would you deliver a letter for me?"**  
(00:23:00 – 00:23:14)

This utterance happens as Turing chase down Mr. Menzies in order to request help to deliver a letter to Winston Churchill in London. Turing uses question as negative politeness strategies to complement his intention. This strategy is used with the assumption of unwillingness to comply with the speaker. To complement desire hedges is used to minimise threat.

#### DATA 5

Miss Clarke: "Apologies for my tardiness. The bus caught a flat tire."  
Turing: **"May I continue, please? Thank you."**  
(00:29:41 – 00:29:46)

This utterance happened in Turing class where he was conducting a test to look for suitable candidates. Miss. Clarke was interrupting Turing whilst he explain about the rules. He requested to

stop the interruption and used question as negative politeness strategy to complement his intention. This strategy is used with the assumption of unwillingness to comply with the speaker. To complement desire hedges is used to minimise threat.

#### DATA 6

Staff: "The secretaries are to head upstairs. This room's for the candidates."  
Turing: **"May I get on with this now, please?"**  
(00:29:49 – 00:29:55)

Turing requested to get on with his explanation of rules regarding the test he was conducting. The interruption between Miss. Clarke and the staff made him distracted and he used question as negative politeness strategy to stop the interruption. This strategy is used with the assumption of unwillingness to comply with the speaker. To complement desire hedges is used to minimise threat.

#### DATA 7

01:08:34  
Det. Nock: "Right, that's... that's what it's about?"  
Turing: **"Would you like to play?"**  
Det. Nock: "Play?"  
(01:08:34 – 01:08:45)

Detective Nock interrogated Turing as he found suspicion about what he did during the war. Turing explained about his theory to Detective Nock. And to explain further he asked Detective Nock whether he would like to demonstrate the theory. Turing used

question as negative politeness strategy to complement his intention. This strategy is used with the assumption of unwillingness to comply with the speaker. To complement desire hedges is used to minimise threat.

#### DATA 8

Turing: "Gentlemen, I don't believe that you could find the chap that did this if he walked up to you and spat in your face. What I could use right now is not a bobby, but a really good cleaning lady. So, unless one of you has an apron in your car, I suggest you file your reports and leave me alone."

Officer: "As you say, Professor Turing"  
(00:04:34 – 00:04:56)

This utterance happened in Turing's house where robbery occurred. The officers came to check regarding the case and Turing is bothered by their presence. In order to make the officers leave, Turing make a pessimistic remark suggesting them to leave. Turing were being pessimistic as the negative politeness strategies. This strategy is done by blatantly express doubt the appropriateness of the speaker's request

#### DATA 9

Turing: "**Hello. Can I... can I speak to Stewart Menzies, please? It's urgent**"

Secretary: "One moment, please."  
(01:28:50 – 01:28:54)

This utterance happened over phone call done by Turing. Turing request to talk to Mr Menzies and in order so, he used hedge as negative politeness strategy. This strategy is used with the assumption of unwillingness to comply with the speaker. To complement desire hedges is used to minimise threat.

#### DATA 10

Cmdr. Denniston: "Now, it says here you were a bit of a prodigy in the maths department"

Turing: I'm not sure I can evaluate that, **Mr...**"

(00:08:41 – 00:08:47)

Turing replied to Cmdr. Denniston with respect by trying to make deference, but couldn't complete the deference as he does not yet know Cmdr. Denniston name. Deference is used as negative politeness strategies as to reduce threat by establishing rights and respect in request.

#### DATA 11

Turing: "**You wanted to see me, sir?**"

Headmaster: "Turing. Sit down"  
(01:39:34 – 01:39:37)

Turing was called by the headmaster as the headmaster wanted to talk about something. Turing came to the room and affirmed whether the headmaster was looking for him. In order to respect the headmaster, Turing utilised the negative politeness strategy of giving deference. Deference is used as negative politeness strategies as to reduce threat by establishing rights and respect in request.

#### DATA 12

Headmaster: "I see. Very well"

Turing: **"May I leave, Headmaster?"**

Turing requested a leave from his headmaster in this utterance. But as the headmaster has superiority above him, he had to use politeness strategy. Turing utilised giving deference as the negative politeness strategy. Deference is used as negative politeness strategies as to reduce threat by establishing rights and respect in request.

#### DATA 13

Det. Nock: "Professor Turing?"

Turing: **"Take a step back, and don't breathe heavily."**

(00:03:57 – 00:04:02)

Turing was cleaning cyanide spilled all over his floor as officers comes in to interrogate him regarding the robbery that occurred in his house. Turing suggested the officers to step back, but in he did not utter any pronoun. This is classified as Impersonalise interlocutors of negative politeness strategy. Omitting name and initial of the speakers and hearer is expected to not burden the conversation.

#### DATA 14

Turing: **"Now, as I was saying, you have six minutes to complete the task in front of you. Gentlemen and lady, begin."**

Mr Menzies: "Six minutes. Is that even possible?"

(00:40:41 – 00:31:25)

This utterance happened in Turing class where he was conducting a test to look for suitable candidates. Turing told the audiences to start the test but before so he stated the face threatening act as the general rule as to lessen threat. This is classified as using FTA as general rule of negative politeness strategies. This is strategy is used to show that the speaker does not want to give negative impact to the hearer, FTA can be stated in some general social rule, laws, or regulation.

#### DATA 15

Turing: **"Now, Detective, you get to judge.** So, tell me... what am I? Am I a machine? Am I a person? Am I a war hero? Am I a criminal?"

Det. Nock: "I can't judge you"

(01:38:39 – 01:39:12)

Turing requested Detective Nock to continue with the demonstration. In order to lessen threat to Det. Nock he utilised face threatening act as the general rule of negative politeness strategy. This is strategy is used to show that the speaker does not want to give negative impact to the hearer, FTA can be stated in some general social rule, laws, or regulation.

### 5. CONCLUSION

This research concluded there are 6 types of negative politeness strategies used by the main character in the movie "The Imitation Game". The strategies found in this research are; 5 be conveniently indirect, 16 question and hedge, 1 be pessimistic, 6 give

deference, 4 impersonalise interlocutors, and 4 state the FTA as general rule, totalling to 36 indication of negative politeness

strategies. The main character in the movie has curious and likes to avoid threat behaviour, hence the use politeness strategies by him.

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