

## Politeness Strategies in Comic Strip Dialogues of Junior High School English Textbooks

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### Article Info

#### Keywords:

comic strip, junior high school textbook, politeness strategies, textbook analysis.

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### ABSTRACT

Within the framework of *Kurikulum Merdeka*, English language instruction emphasizes not only the acquisition of linguistic structures but also the pragmatic use of language across diverse social and cultural contexts. Comic strips, as part of the learning materials, offer authentic language interactions that reflect everyday communication and provide exposure to various politeness strategies. This study employed a qualitative approach with content analysis as the method to examine 164 utterances found in the comic strips. The utterances were classified using Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, which identifies four types of politeness strategies: bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. The findings show that bald on-record strategy was the most frequently used (93 instances), followed by positive politeness (70 instances). Negative politeness was absent, and off-record occurred only once. The predominance of direct strategies is likely attributed to the informal nature of peer-to-peer interactions, where minimal social distance reduces the need for indirectness. These results suggest that comic strips can serve as effective pedagogical tools for fostering learners' pragmatic competence, particularly in the domain of politeness. The study provides pedagogical implications for educators and material developers in designing instructional resources that integrate both linguistic and pragmatic dimensions of language learning.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language skills do not merely involve mastering vocabulary and sentence structures, but also understanding how language is used appropriately within specific social and cultural contexts. In real-life communication, the ability to deliver messages politely, to consider the interlocutor, and to adjust language style to the situation is an essential part of effective communication. Therefore, language learning should not only focus on technical aspects such as grammar and pronunciation but also include pragmatic dimensions like politeness in communication. Students' awareness of polite language strategies needs to be developed from an early stage so they can communicate more empathetically, respectfully, and contextually. This becomes even more relevant when viewed through the lens of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, which emphasizes socially contextual learning materials, one of which is the use of comic strips in junior high school English textbooks.

One of the distinctive features of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* at the junior high school level is its use of text and context-based learning. A prominent example of this is the incorporation of comic strips in English textbooks. These comic strips present engaging visuals and authentic dialogues between characters in everyday situations. They not only help students understand sentence structures and vocabulary but also expose them to various social expressions, speech styles, and politeness norms in English. A study by Wirasa et al. (2025), highlights that communication is deeply influenced by social context and speaker relationships.

The presence of comic strips in textbooks also provides opportunities for students to observe social interaction contexts implicitly, making them a valuable resource for learning politeness in communication. Previous studies have shown the effectiveness of comics in improving English language learning outcomes. Hermawan and Noer (2020) found that using comics increased students' engagement and understanding of sentence structures. Zunita and Marlina (2019) emphasized that narrative visual media like comics facilitated

vocabulary acquisition in more meaningful contexts. Additionally, Siregar (2021); Semenova (2022); Sudarwinoto et al. (2024) pointed out that comics encouraged students to actively comprehend the social context of conversations, which ultimately improved their speaking skills. Hence, comic strips are not only visually attractive but also effective in delivering complex linguistic and social concepts in a contextual and enjoyable way.

Nevertheless, the study of politeness strategies in comic strips within textbooks remains limited. This area deserves attention, as the language used by comic characters reflects specific social norms that students also need to learn. Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness offers a suitable framework to analyze how speakers maintain their interlocutor's *face* through various strategies, namely: bald on-record (direct without softeners), positive politeness (to express closeness or solidarity), negative politeness (to show respect and maintain distance), and off-record (indirect strategies or avoiding direct responsibility). Analyzing these strategies is important for helping teachers and material developers ensure that textbooks support not only linguistic and semantic learning but also shape students' awareness of contextually appropriate language use.

Several previous studies on the use of politeness strategies in educational settings have shown that these aspects play an important role in the learning process. Putri (2018) investigated teacher–student interaction in English classes and found that positive politeness strategies were dominant, reflecting the teacher's effort to build rapport. Wulandari (2020) examined politeness strategies used by students during presentations, revealing frequent use of negative politeness to express respect toward the audience. Meanwhile, Rahmat and Amelia (2021) studied politeness in online discussion forums and found a shift from off-record to bald on-record strategies due to the nature of digital communication. These studies indicate that politeness strategies in educational contexts have been widely discussed, but in-depth study on how such strategies appear in textbooks particularly through comic strips remains scarce.

This study focused on comic strips found in the *English for Nusantara* textbook for Grade VII (SMP/MTs) as the primary data source. This book was selected because it is the most popular English textbook in Indonesia for junior high school students (retrieved on <https://buku.kemdikbud.go.id>, July 20, 2025, from), and it contains a relatively large number of comic strips, making the data rich and varied. These comics feature fictional characters used to deliver language learning content, such as daily expressions, polite utterances, and social interactions. The characters range from students and teachers to imaginative figures, each playing a role in demonstrating socially appropriate communication. Through the dialogues between these characters, the politeness strategies they use can be analyzed to understand how the textbook encourages polite language use in line with cultural values and social norms. Based on this background, this study aims to identify the types of politeness strategies employed in comic strips within the *English for Nusantara* textbook for Grade VII.

## 2. METHODS

This study used a qualitative approach, as the study aims to explore the underlying meaning behind the use of politeness strategies by characters in comic strips in a deep and contextual manner. The method applied is content analysis, a technique used to systematically and objectively examine communication in order to identify the characteristics of messages (Krippendorff, 2004).

The data study consisted of utterances or dialogues between characters found in comic strips within the *English for Nusantara* textbook for Grade VII, published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. Data were collected through documentation by identifying and transcribing all conversations that appear in the comic strips. The data were subsequently filtered for relevance to the study's focus, namely the use of politeness strategies. The analysis process involved classifying the types of politeness strategies according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, which classifies four main strategies: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record. Each utterance was analyzed by considering its situational context, the relationship between speakers, and the communicative intent.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the study along with the relevant discussion based on the theoretical framework of politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). The findings reveal the distribution and variation of politeness strategies employed in the textbook, which reflect how politeness is portrayed in pedagogical materials. The following table summarizes the types of politeness strategies found in the comic strips.

Table 1. Total of Politeness Strategy Type Used by the Characters in the Comic Strip of Seventh Grade of Junior High School

| NO    | Types of Politeness Strategies | Total |
|-------|--------------------------------|-------|
| 1     | Bald On Record                 | 93    |
| 2     | Positive Politeness            | 70    |
| 3     | Negative Politeness            | 0     |
| 4     | Off Record                     | 1     |
| Total |                                | 164   |

The table shows the distribution of politeness strategies used by the characters in the comic strips of the seventh-grade English textbook. Among the four types proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), bald on-record strategy appears most frequently with a total of 93 instances. This suggests that the characters tend to communicate in a direct and straightforward manner, which can be attributed to the fact that most of the conversations occur between students who are already familiar with one another and share an equal social status, resulting in minimal need for social distance or formal expressions. The positive politeness strategy ranks second with 70 instances, indicating that there are also efforts to show friendliness and build solidarity among characters. Interestingly, the negative politeness strategy does not occur at all, reflecting the limited presence of socially distant or hierarchical interactions in the textbook. The off-record strategy is only used **once**, suggesting that indirect or ambiguous expressions are rarely employed. In total, 164 utterances were identified and analyzed, demonstrating the predominance of directness in the linguistic style of the comic strips.

To provide a clearer understanding of how these strategies are realized in context, some analysis of selected utterances representing each type of politeness strategy are presented in the below.

### Bald On Record



Figure 1. Dialogue Employing Bald on Record Strategy

In one of the comic strip conversations, Galang and Andre are two schoolmates engage in a casual dialogue about their hobbies. The interaction begins with Galang enthusiastically expressing his interest in fishing and inviting Andre to join him. However, Andre responds directly with "Well, maybe next time," indicating a polite yet firm refusal. Despite the indirect tone of "maybe next time," the phrase functions pragmatically as a bald on-record strategy, since the refusal is clear and unmitigated, with no further elaboration or softening. This suggests that Andre feels comfortable enough to speak directly due to the equal social status and familiarity he shares with Galang. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), bald on-record strategies are typically used in situations where speakers have a close relationship, no risk of threatening the hearer's face, or where the message must be delivered efficiently and unambiguously. This example aligns with those conditions, as Andre chooses clarity over indirectness, likely assuming Galang will not take offense. Supporting this, a study by Putri and Rahmawati (2021) on student discourse interactions found that bald on-record strategies are often employed among close peers where the social distance is minimal, allowing for more direct communication without being perceived as impolite. In that vein, Alaiyed (2023) also found that when the relationship between speakers is close and the social distance is low, direct communication is more acceptable. The lack of hierarchical barriers or formality allows peers to use straightforward language without risking offense.



**Figure 2.** Dialogue Employing Bald on Record Strategy

In figure 2 show a cut of one comic strip, Galang and Andre who are portrayed as close friends engage in a casual yet meaningful conversation about their hobbies. Previously, Andre had declined Galang's invitation to go fishing, which triggers Galang's curiosity. With sincere interest, he asks, "So what's your hobby?" Andre responds, somewhat surprised, "I like mobile gaming," to which Galang follows up with, "How often do you play mobile gaming?" Andre replies briefly, "Only on weekends," and Galang concludes with a simple, affirming "Nice." This exchange reflects the use of the bald on-record politeness strategy, as characterized by direct, unambiguous utterances without hedging or mitigation. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), bald on-record is typically used in situations where speakers are close and no threat to face is perceived, allowing them to speak plainly and without formality. The directness in this interaction, especially the straightforward questions and answers, exemplifies how such a strategy naturally fits the informal context of peer-to-peer dialogue. Galang's brief "Nice" functions as a closing remark that acknowledges Andre's response without elaboration, further reinforcing the minimal facework required in familiar relationships. This is in line with Putri and Rahmawati (2021); Anwar (2022), who observed that bald on-record strategies frequently occur in student interactions where social distance is low, and there is a high degree of comfort between speakers. The simplicity and clarity in this dialogue highlight how bald on-record strategies can be effective and appropriate in friendly exchanges where mutual understanding and equal footing are present.

### Positive Politeness



**Figure 3.** Dialogue Employing Positive Politeness Strategy

In this comic strip interaction, Galang and Andre who have just recently met, with Andre being a new student begin to build rapport through casual conversation. As their dialogue progresses, Galang asks, "What is your hobby?" and Andre responds plainly with, "I like mobile gaming." Galang then replies enthusiastically, "Oh, I like it too." This short exchange demonstrates a clear instance of positive politeness strategy, as defined by Brown and Levinson (1987). Positive politeness is used to reduce social distance and emphasize solidarity or shared interests between speakers. In this case, Galang expresses similarity in interest with Andre, which functions as a way to build closeness and signal friendliness. Rather than simply acknowledging Andre's answer, Galang's response shows involvement and agreement, creating a sense of inclusion. Brown and Levinson describe such responses as part of the *claim common ground* sub-strategy in positive politeness, where the speaker shows mutual interest to establish interpersonal connection. Although the interaction initially begins between unfamiliar peers, Galang's response marks a shift toward familiarity and bonding. Supporting this, Putri and Rahmawati (2021); Zahra et al (2023) found that positive politeness often arises in student interactions where the goal is to maintain harmony and develop friendly social dynamics, especially when speakers are trying to build new relationships in peer settings. This example highlights how comic strips can

naturally depict real-life pragmatic strategies, helping learners recognize how politeness is enacted in relatable situations.



Figure 4. Dialogue Employing Off Record Strategy

In this dialogue, Monita, a new student introduced by Andre to Galang, is seen attempting to end the conversation in a polite and friendly manner. She says, *“Right! By the way, I’ve got to find my seat. See you later.”* This utterance is an example of positive politeness strategy, as Monita tries to maintain rapport and minimize social distance despite being new to the group. The use of the discourse marker *“By the way”* serves as a soft transition, helping to shift topics and end the conversation without sounding abrupt or dismissive. Additionally, *“See you later”* is a casual, friendly expression that reinforces camaraderie and shows a desire to maintain a positive relationship. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), positive politeness is often used to express solidarity, show friendliness, and recognize the hearer’s desire for inclusion and acceptance. In Monita’s case, this strategy reflects her effort to preserve the “positive face” of her new peers while managing her own need to leave the interaction. This is supported by Putri and Rahmawati (2021); Ginting & Pasaribu (2023), who found that positive politeness is frequently used by individuals in new social contexts to build initial connections and reduce interpersonal distance, particularly when forming new relationships in educational settings.

#### Off Record



Figure 5. Dialogue Employing Off Record Strategy

In this comic strip, Andre introduces a new student, Monita, to Galang. During their conversation, they discover that all three share the same hobby: playing mobile games. As a way to build connection and extend the interaction, Andre suggests, *“You know, we can play mobile games together.”* Galang responds with the idiomatic expression, *“The more, the merrier.”* This particular utterance is an example of an off-record politeness strategy, as theorized by Brown and Levinson (1987). Off-record strategies are characterized by indirectness, where the speaker’s intention is implied rather than explicitly stated, allowing the listener to interpret the underlying message. In this case, Galang’s use of a common idiom indirectly expresses his agreement and enthusiasm for playing together, without stating it overtly. Brown and Levinson (1989) argue that such strategies are often employed when the speaker wants to avoid imposing or prefers a more subtle, socially graceful response. The use of idioms, especially those expressing collective enthusiasm like *“the more, the merrier,”* falls under the category of hints or allusions, which are typical in off-record speech acts. Supporting this, Mujiono and Ula (2020), Al-Adaileh (2023); Ado (2023) in their sociopragmatic analysis, state that idioms and indirect expressions are primary forms of off-record strategies, as they allow speakers to convey intentions subtly while avoiding direct pressure on the interlocutor.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The analysis of comic strip dialogues in the *English for Nusantara* textbook for seventh-grade students reveals how politeness strategies are portrayed in pedagogical materials under the Kurikulum Merdeka. Out of the 164 utterances examined, bald on-record strategies emerged as the most dominant (93 instances), followed by positive politeness (70 instances), with off-record appearing only once and no instance of negative politeness found. These findings indicate that most conversations in the comic strips reflect direct communication, which aligns with the peer-to-peer interactions among characters who share equal social standing and familiarity. The limited occurrence of indirect strategies, such as off-record, and the absence of negative politeness suggest minimal presence of socially distant relationships. This highlights the textbook's emphasis on relatable, everyday interactions that prioritize clarity and simplicity in communication. The discussion of utterances further demonstrates how various politeness strategies are pragmatically applied, offering valuable insights into the integration of sociopragmatic elements in language learning materials. These findings may serve as a reference for educators and material developers in enhancing students' linguistic and pragmatic competence through authentic and socially grounded content.

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