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POLITENESS STRATEGIES USED IN WOLE SOYINKA'S A DANCE OF THE FORESTS

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Abstract

This study examines politeness strategies used in Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*. Previous studies on politeness strategies have explored politeness strategies reflected in 'Little women movie', politeness strategies employed by Jordanian Professors in online classes, and politeness strategies in lecturer-students classroom interaction, but not much scholarship have been done on politeness strategies used in Soyinka's *A Dance of the **Forests***. This study, therefore, analysis politeness strategies used in Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*. The study adopted Brown's and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory as its theoretical framework and deployed qualitative descriptive and quantitative designs to analyse its data. The data for the study were extracted from the text *A Dance of the Forests*, and analysed. The result showed that the characters in the text deployed politeness strategies: Bald-on-record politeness strategies, positive politeness strategies, negative politeness strategies and off-record politeness strategies in their dialogues. The dominant politeness strategies the characters deployed in their dialogues are positive politeness strategies. The second dominant politeness strategies which the characters used in their dialogues are Bald-on-record. The third predominant politeness strategies that the characters employed in their dialogues are off- record politeness strategies. Negative politeness strategies are the forth principal politeness strategies that the characters used in their dialogues. The study concludes that effective and efficient use of politeness strategies in dialogical discourse enable interactants to converse with each other or one another without frictions or conflicts.

Keywords: Politeness strategies, Face threatening acts, Politeness, Positive face, Negative face, *A Dance of the Forests*.

Introduction

Agbedo (2015) defines politeness as "showing good manners towards others" (p.318). This definition indicates that politeness means behaving in a way that is correct for the social situation a person is in, and showing he or she is careful to consider other people's needs and feelings. Yule (2004) sees politeness as "being tactful, modest, and

nice to other people” (p.134). In the course of interaction some interlocutors say something which threatens self-images of others. This is labelled face threatening acts (FTAs). Face threatening acts are expressions which threaten the face needs of the hearers. Yule (1996, as cited in Fafiyebi & Ayodele, 2023) corroborates the above assertion by declaring that face threatening acts (FTAs) are utterances which pose a threat to the self-esteem of the hearers.

Politeness strategies are strategies employed by participants in speech event to mitigate threat to the positive and negative face of the participants who are faced with face threatening acts in the course of interaction. Fiveable. Inc (2025) upholds the above definition by asserting that politeness strategies are communicative approach employed to manage social relationships and lessen face threatening acts in interaction. There are politeness strategies that the speakers often deploy to mitigate threat to the face needs of others who are faced with face threatening acts. The strategies are Bald-on-record politeness strategies, positive politeness strategies, negative politeness strategies, and off-record politeness strategies.

Bald- on- record politeness strategies

Bald-on-record politeness strategies as defined by Brown and Levinson, involved speaking directly and clearly without attempting to minimize the potential face threatening acts (FTAs). This denotes that the speaker is not concerned with the hearer’s feelings. His or her focus is on getting the message across efficiently and effectively (AI Overview, n.d.). Bald-on-record strategies involve giving command or making request directly, e.g: “give me the report,” instead of “could you please give me the report?”; Making direct assertion, e.g: “you are wrong”, instead of “I think you might be mistaken.” Making utterances which do not soften threat to the hearer’s face, e.g. a friend stating his opinion: “That outfit is terrible” (AI Overview, n.d).

Positive Politeness Strategies

Positive politeness strategies occur when the speakers recognise that the hearers have the desire to be respected, that is, their positive face needs should be met (Nugrahanto & Hartono, 2020). One's positive face needs is the desire to be loved and be appreciated by others. Positive politeness strategies involve jokes; being optimistic, e.g: "I am sure you can handle it", "I have good feeling about this". Using "we" or "us" to emphasis share participation, e.g: "let us do this together", "we are in this together." Softening the force of statements with words or phrases that indicate uncertainty, e.g. "kind of", "sort of", "maybe", "perhaps," and "a little bit." Using tag questions, e.g: "isn't it?", "don't you think?" and "right?" Using honorifics or titles. Making promises; explaining rationale behind a request or a statement. Making utterances that indicate agreement, e.g: "yes, I agree completely." Using nicknames or terms of endearment such as "love" and "honey." Giving compliments, e.g: "That's a great idea", "I really admire your work on this" (AI Overview, n.d). Positive politeness strategies also involve polite request, e.g: "please, pass the salt".

Negative Politeness Strategies

Negative politeness strategies are strategies geared towards hearers' negative face. The strategies seek to avoid imposition on the hearers. They strive to prevent interlocutors from interfering in one another's freedom (Kinegeni et al., 2024). Negative politeness strategies involve avoiding direct request or command or question, e.g. instead of saying: "Give me the book", you might say: "Do you think you could pass me the book?" Expressing regret for any potential imposition or inconvenience, e.g: "sorry to bother you, but,," Using formal language to show respect. Minimising imposition on the hearer, e.g: "I'm not sure if this is the right way to do it, but ..." Asking polite question such as "could you help me with this?" And presenting disagreements as opinion, e.g.: "in my own opinion" (AI Overview, n.d).

Off-record Politeness Strategies

Off-record politeness strategies are politeness strategies “are indirect communication methods that avoid making a direct request or statement to preserve listener’s feelings and maintain social harmony” (AI Overview, n.d, para. 1) Off- record strategies involve, asking questions that don’t require direct answers. Using words and phrases that are not precise or specific. Using language that minimises severity of a situation, and deploying figurative language to convey meaning indirectly (AI Overview, n.d, para. 1).

Academics and researchers have conducted research on politeness strategies employed by Jordanian Professors in online classes; students’ politeness in language use and politeness reflected in little woman movie. To the best of my knowledge based on the available literature no scholarly attention has been given to politeness strategies used in *A Dance of the Forests*. Therefore, the current study examines the politeness strategies used in the text. The specific objectives of the study are:

- i. to identify politeness strategies used in the text *A Dance of the Forests*;
- ii. to analyse the politeness strategies in accordance with the text preoccupation; and
- iii. to calculate the frequencies of occurrence and percentages of the politeness strategies and tabulate them in order to determine which politeness strategies the author preferred.

Review of Related Literature

Fridolini et al. (2021) analysed politeness strategies reflected in Little women movie. The study aimed at identifying the politeness strategies deployed in the little women movie, and indicating the dominant one used. The study adopted Brown’s and Levinson’s

(1987) politeness theory as its theoretical framework and deployed descriptive qualitative design to analyse its data. The result indicates that the characters in the movie used the politeness strategies: Bald-on-record politeness strategies, positive politeness strategies, negative politeness strategies, off-record politeness strategies and don't do the face threatening acts. The dominant politeness strategies used in the movie were positive politeness strategies. Based on the findings, the study concludes that the characters in the little women movie used politeness strategies, namely, Bald-on-record politeness strategies, positive politeness strategies, negative politeness strategies, off-record politeness strategies and don't do the face threatening acts. The dominant politeness strategies used in the movie were positive politeness strategies. The former focuses on the politeness strategies used in "Little women movie" while the latter is concerned with politeness strategies used in *A Dance of the Forests*.

Ifechelobi (2014; as cited in Yakubu, 2022), carried out a study on students politeness in language use: A study of undergraduate students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The study aimed at investigating the politeness strategies students used and the extent of students' impoliteness with their lecturers and the repercussions of the students' action. Brown's and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory was adopted as theoretical framework of the study. The primary data for the study were obtained through non-participation observation. The data were analysed and the result showed that there were situations where students' utterances and actions amount to impoliteness and face threatening acts (FTAs). Such behaviour often leads to frictions or conflicts. The study concludes that for harmonious and peaceful coexistence between the students and the lecturers, students should avoid face threatening acts in language use. The former focused on students' politeness in language use while the latter is concerned with politeness strategies used in Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests*.

Banat et al. (2024) carried out a pragmatic analysis of politeness strategies employed by Jordanian professors in online class interaction. The study aimed at finding out preferred negative politeness strategies used by the professors in the online class interaction. It adopted Brown's and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory as its theoretical framework and deployed qualitative design to analyse its data. The primary data for the study were sourced from ten recorded lectures of five professors. The data were analysed and the result showed that the professors used seven different preferred negative politeness strategies in the online class interaction. The seven different preferred negative politeness strategies the professors deployed are: indirectness, questioning, hedging, giving deference, impersonalizing speaker and hearer, apologising and minimising imposition. The study concludes that negative politeness strategies were used by the professors to save the students face and to make the students feel intimacy with them during the online class interaction. It recommends that research should be conducted on politeness strategies used in complements, greetings and refusals. While the former deals with pragmatic analysis of politeness employed by the Jordanian professors in the online class interaction, the latter is concerned with politeness strategies used in Soyinka's text, *A Dance of the Forests*.

Nugrahanto and Hartono (2020) carried out research on politeness strategies in lecturer-students classroom interaction at the biology class, Sanata Dharma University. The study aimed at identifying the politeness strategies used by lecturer-students in the classroom interaction and pointing out the most frequent politeness strategies used. The research deployed qualitative design to analyse its data. The data for the study were obtained through observation. They were analysed, and the result showed that the politeness strategies that the lecturer-students used in the classroom interaction are: Bald-on-record politeness strategies, positive politeness strategies, negative politeness strategies and off-record politeness strategies. Positive politeness strategies are the dominant politeness strategies that the teacher-students used in classroom interaction; they occurred

with 50 percent. The second dominant politeness strategies that the teacher-students used in the classroom interaction are Bald-on-record politeness strategies; they occurred with 32 percent. The third predominant politeness strategies that the teacher-students employed in the classroom interaction are negative politeness strategies; they occurred with 16 percent. Off-record politeness strategies are the fourth predominant politeness strategies that the teacher-students deployed in the classroom interaction. The former deals with politeness strategies the teacher-students used in the classroom interaction, while the latter focuses on the politeness strategies used in the text, *A Dance of the Forests*.

Putri and Fitrawati (2022) analysed politeness strategies used in “Yes Day Movie”. The study aimed at identifying politeness strategies used in the movie and pointing out the dominant and the least strategies used. Data for the study were extracted from the script of the movie. Brown’s and Levinson’s (1987) Politeness Theory was adopted as theoretical framework. Qualitative descriptive design was deployed to analyse the data. for the study. The result showed that characters in the movie deployed politeness strategies such as bald-on record politeness strategy, positive politeness strategy, negative politeness strategy and off- record politeness strategy to interact with one another. The dominant politeness strategy the characters used in the movie was bald- on record politeness strategy while the least politeness strategy they used was off- record politeness strategy. Bald – on record occurred with a frequency of 69 or 59 percent. Positive politeness strategy and negative politeness strategy occurred with a frequency of 22 or 19 percent each while off- record politeness strategy occurred with a frequency of 4 or 3 percent. The former analysed politeness strategies used in “Yes Day Movie” while the latter is concerned with politeness strategies used in *A Dance of the Forests*.

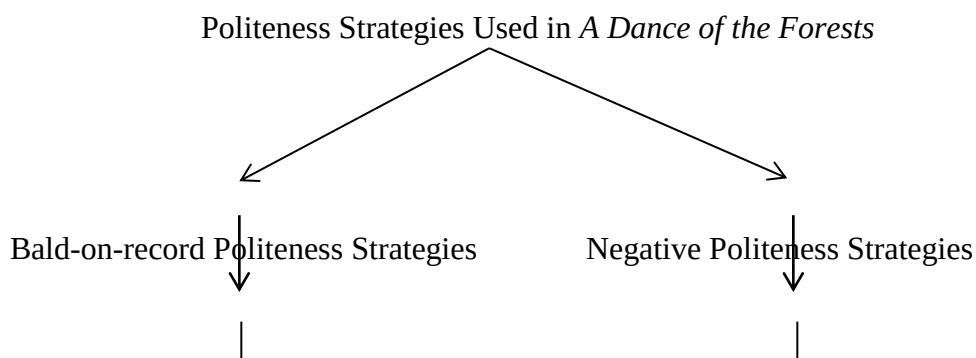
Theoretical Framework

Brown and Levinson propounded the most popular politeness theory in 1987. The theory is influenced by Goffman’s (1967) notion of face. Goffman (1967) defines face as

one's public self-image that every person has and wants it to be protected in an interaction. In Brown's and Levinson's politeness theory, face is divided into positive face and negative face. In the opinion of Brown and Levinson (1987), every person has two face needs: positive face and negative face. According to them, positive face is the desire to be loved or appreciated by others while negative face is the wish to have one's actions unimpeded by others. Brown and Levinson (1987) further point out that people often perform some activities which threaten the self-images of others. And this has an impact on the maintenance of relationships (Agbaglo, 2017).

Under normal circumstances, people strive to avoid face threatening acts (FTAs) while interacting with one another, but when it becomes impossible to avoid the face threatening acts, participants in speech event select politeness strategies appropriate to their needs. The politeness strategies that are often selected are: Bald-on-record strategies, positive politeness strategies, negative politeness strategies, off-record politeness strategies and don't do the face threatening acts (Agbaglo, 2017).

Figure 1:



Methodology

The text *A Dance of the Forest* was read and data for the study were extracted from it. Eighty-three extracts were chosen using random sampling techniques to give every data a chance of being selected. The selected data were analysed using mixed approaches, namely, quantitative and qualitative designs and insights from Brown's and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The data are characterised by a politeness strategies: Bald-on-record politeness strategies, positive politeness strategies, negative politeness strategies and off-record politeness strategies.

Bald-on-record Politeness Strategies

Bald-on-record Politeness Strategies such as commands, direct assertion and utterances which do not soften threat to the hearer's face, are deployed by the characters in the text *A Dance of the Forests*. The followings are the extracts that indicate commands deployed by the characters while interacting with one another:

Bola: "Get out and pack your things." (p.5)

Aroni: "Be quiet. When last did you see Ogun?" (p.11)

Aroni: "Don't leave your house for the moment." (p.12)

Bola: "Shut up" (p.22)

Madam Tortoise: "I order you to follow him" (p.53)

Physician (scared): "Be quiet. For heavens sake do not speak so loud." (p.56)

Historian: "Be quiet soldier! I have here the whole history of Troy...." (p.57)

Mata Kharibu: "I want them taken away immediately..." (p.58)

Physician: ".... Execute them at once your Highness." (p.59)

Madam Tortoise: "Come here solder." (p.63)

The commands are given without attempting to minimise the potential face threatening acts (FTAs) which threaten the face of the hearers. These imply that the hearers' public self-images have been threatened. They feel less important in the eyes of others.

Direct Assertion

The characters made direct assertion while interacting with one another.

Ola: "You are wrong there. It was not expected." (p.20)

Historian: "This man is a traitor ... " (p.56)

These utterances are made to get messages across efficiently and effectively without considering face need of the hearers.

Utterances which do not Soften Threat to the Hearers' Face.

An utterance which does not soften threat to the hearer's face is also deployed by a character in the text. It can be seen below.

Ola: "That doesn't make sense." (p.19)

The above utterance does not soften threat to the hearer's face. A speaker who employs Bald-on-record politeness strategies speaks directly and clearly without making an attempt to soften threat to the hearer's face. Bald-on-record politeness strategies are often used by interlocutors who are intimate or close to each other.

Positive Politeness Strategies

The followings are positive politeness strategies deployed by the characters in the text: Words or phrases that indicate uncertainty; polite request; tag questions; utterances that indicate agreement, nicknames, compliments; honorifics or titles; making promises and using words which emphasis share participation. They are treated as follows:

Words or Phrases that Indicate Uncertainty

Demoke: "... perhaps we will meet. But the reveller doesn't buy a cup before he's invited."

(p.4)

Murete: "Maybe I was sleepy." (p.11)

Adenebi: “Maybe the legendary Prester John him-self..” (p.33)

Adenebi: “Perhaps a descendant of great Lisabi. Zimbabwe ...” (p.33)

Councillor: “Perhaps Aroni merely acts on his own.” (p.35)

Agboreko (sighs): “Perhaps I should go and summon Murete once more. He might have eaten by now” (p.35)

Adenebi: “Perhaps this is some sort of play for gathering, but I am too busy to worry my head a moment longer about all this mystery ...” (p.37)

The forces of the above statements are softened by using words such as maybe and perhaps which indicate uncertainty.

Polite Request

Polite requests are some of the politeness strategies deployed by the characters in the text to interact with one another.

Dead man: “... please, will you take my case?” (p.4)

Obaneji: “please ... please... let me go.” (p.19)

Obaneji: “please ... please ... let us change the subject.” (p.20)

Demoke: “Please, don’t upset yourself – not over him.” (p.22)

The use of marker “please” softens threat to the hearer(s) face.

Tag Questions

Tag questions are among the positive politeness strategies deployed by the characters in *A Dance of the Forests*. They lessen threat to the positive face of interlocutors who are faced with face-threatening acts (FTAs).

Obaneji: “You are the cover, aren’t you?” (p.6)

Murete: “I don’t know myself, do I?” (p.11)

Ogun: “...you are no friend to Eshuoro, are you?” (p.13)

Obaneji: “...you put it off the road recently, didn’t you?” (p.16)

Obaneji: “I asked you, didn’t I?” (p.19)

Bola: "... You are very kind, are you not?" (p.22)

Old man: "... I can't see a cloud, can you?" (p.41)

Murete: "... you can count on them, can't you?" (p.46)

Utterances Indicating Agreements

Utterances indicating agreement are among the positive politeness strategies deployed by the characters in the text. The extracts below are invested with 'yes' which indicate agreement. They are used to lessen threat to the face of interlocutors who are faced with face threatening acts.

Mute: "Yes, yes, Aroni." (p.13)

Bola: "For once I agree with you." (p.14)

Obaneji: "... Yes, it was something of an old warrior. I grew a real affection for it."
(p.16)

Obaneji: "Yes, your apprentice ..." (p.18)

Adenebi: "... Yes, just the sort of thing you would carve, ..." (p.23)

Old man: "Yes, yes, the Chimney ought to do it." (p.31)

Old man: "Yes, yes, yes!" (p.31)

Old man: "Yes my son carved it." (p.32)

Old man: "Yes, don't look surprised. We come from a long line of carvers." (p.32)

Adenebi: "Yes. In fact I think we rested in this clearing for sometime." (p.36)

Old man: "Yes, yes. They passed here." (p.38)

Old man: "Yes, yes we'll be patient." (p.38)

The Use of Nicknames

Nicknames are some of the positive politeness strategies used in the text to mitigate threat to the face needs of the characters faced with face threatening acts. The ones used in the text are as follows:

Demoke: "Madame Tortoise. Just think ... I have been with her all day." (p.22)

Demoke: “Madame Tortoise, that is who you are?” (p.22)

Demoke: “Madame Tortoise is the totem-most of it anyway ...” (p.23)

Giving Compliment

Utterances which are deployed to give compliments to soften threat to the face of the hearers who are faced with faced threatening acts are identified in the text. They are as follows:

Adeneji: “...you are so clever and knowledgeable...” (p.17)

Murete: “,, That is commendable...” (p.46)

Forest Head: “... You have done very well ...” (p.51)

Being Optimistic

Optimistic remark often softens threat to the face of the hearer. The one used in the text is:

Councillor: “Very sure I am absolutely certain.” (p.29)

Using Honorifics or Titles

Honorifics or titles are deployed by the characters in the text to show respect to one another. They lessen threat to the face of those faced with face threatening acts. The ones used in the text are as follows:

Ademobi: “Sir, will you kindly explain what is happening?” (p.31)

Adenebi: “Sir, I am still waiting for some sort of explanation. I know I am not dreaming.” (p.31).

Court poet: “Madame, it is my turn to be unriddled.” (p.52)

Court poet: “...Madame, you must not say you have lost your canary ...” (p.52)

Physician: “Your Majesty!” (p.54)

Historian: “Your Highness has been too lenient.” (p.57)

Historian: “Your Majesty, I am only the court historian.” (p.58)

Historian: “His Majesty has decided wisely. Those men can never again be trusted.” (p.58)

Slave Dealer: “The Honourable Historian here can testify to it.” (p.61)

Slave Dealer: “Mr. Physician, I assure you most sincerely that you are mistaken..” (p.61)

Making Promises

Promises are some of the positive politeness strategies employed by the characters in the text to mitigate threat to the faces of others who are faced with face threatening acts.

The promises made by the characters in the text are as follows:

Forests Head: “We will ... use ... him.” (p.51)

Mata Kharibu: “We will fight this war ...” (p.58)

Eshuoro: “... I will not leave without it.” (p.67)

Using “we” or “us” to Emphasis Share Participation

Using we or us to emphasis share participation of the characters in events, constitute positive politeness strategies used by the characters in the text to lessen threat to the face of others who are faced with face threatening acts. The ones deployed by the characters in the text are as follows:

Adenebi: “...we resolved to carve a totem, a totem that would reach to the sky.” (p.32)

Ant Leader: “We take our colour from the loam and blindness hit them and they tread us underfoot.” (p.76)

Ant Leader: “We are the blazers of the trail. If you are forest father, we think we are your children.”

Ant Leader: “We take our colour from the fertile loan...” (p.77)

Negative Politeness Strategies

Negative politeness strategies such as expressing regret for an imposition or inconvenience, are deployed by the characters to lessen threat to the face of others who are faced with face threatening acts (FTAs). The ones used in this text are as follows:

Obaneji: “I am sorry. Why are you here?” (p.8)

Obaneji: “I am sorry. Believe me, I didn’t mean to hurt you.” (p.26)

Obaneji: “Again I apologize ...” (p.20)

Obaneji: “Once again, I am sorry ...” (p.20)

Old man: “Forgive me...” (p.36)

Off-record Politeness Strategies

Off-record politeness strategies are made up of parts of politeness strategies deployed by the characters in the text *A Dance of the Forests*. Off-record politeness strategies used by the characters in the text are figurative expressions which convey meanings indirectly. The ones the characters deployed in their dialogues in the text are as follows:

Demoke: “... when the cockered decides its fire burning on his head, the only thing to do is pour water on it.” (p.6)

Demoke: “As the saying goes, if the red monkey only tumble in his parlour, no one would know he had any son.” (p.7)

Murete: “...When the leaves tremble, it is no concern of the roots.” (p.9)

Old man: “... It is only the cockroach who shouts vanity when the chicken struts.” (p.34)

Agboreko: “If the wind can get lost in the rainstorm, it is useless to send him an umbrella.” (p.38)

Agboreko: “... When the crops have been gathered, it will be time enough for the winnowing of the grains.” (p.84)

Another: “We are the headless bodies when the spade of progress delves.” (p.78)

Another: “We are the dried leaves, impaled on one-eyed brooms.” (p.78)

Agboreko; “If the flea had a home of his own, he wouldn’t be out on a dog’s back.” (p.34)

As we pointed out earlier, the speaker who deploys off-record politeness strategies to lessen threat to the face of the hearer does not disclose his intention in what he utters. It is left for the hearer to infer the speaker’s intention from what the speaker utters.

5.0 Findings

The study revealed that the characters in the text deployed politeness strategies such as Bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record politeness strategies in their dialogues. The dominant politeness strategies the characters used in their dialogues are positive politeness strategies; they occurred with a frequency of 57 or 68.67 percent. The second dominant politeness strategies that the characters deployed in their dialogues are Bald-on-record politeness strategies; they occurred with a frequency of 12 or 14.46 percent. The third predominant politeness strategies that the characters employed in their dialogues are off-record politeness strategies; they occurred with a frequency of 9 or 10.84 percent. The fourth predominant politeness strategies that the characters used in their dialogues are negative politeness strategies; they occurred with a frequency of 5 or 6.02 percent.

Table 1: Politeness Strategies Summary across A Dance of the Forests

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Bald-on-record Politeness Strategies	12	14.46
Positive Politeness Strategies	57	68.67
Negative Politeness Strategies	5	6.02
Off-record Politeness Strategies	9	10.84
Total	83	100

From the above table we notice that the characters deployed 57 positive politeness strategies to mitigate threat to the positive face of those who are faced with face threatening acts. Besides, they employed 12 bald- on- record strategies to speak directly and clearly to others without minimising potential threat to their face. They utilised 9 off- record politeness strategies to convey messages without directly stating their attentions, making

the messages less face threatening. The characters also used negative politeness strategies to avoid imposition on the hearers' negative face

Conclusion

The study was focused to examine trajectories and linguistics significance of politeness strategies in the dialogues of the characters in the text *A Dance of the Forests*. The data analysed in the study showed that the characters deployed four different types of politeness strategies: Bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness and off-record politeness strategies in their dialogues. The study, therefore, is implicated in its ability to shape the minds of the public to grasp the role of language in dialogical discourse. The study concludes that using politeness strategies in the dialogical discourse enable the characters to have dialogue with one another smoothly.

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