# Translating Politeness: Adapting Directive Speech Acts in Children's Storybooks for Indonesian Culture

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the translation of politeness in directive speech acts within children's storybooks, focusing on parent-child interactions. Directive speech acts inherently threaten the hearer's face, requiring politeness strategies. The study analysed five children's books in English and their Indonesian translations using content analysis based on Brown & Levinson's politeness theory. The findings reveal that parents in both source text (ST) and target text (TT) use bald on-record, positive politeness, and negative politeness strategies. However, positive politeness is more prevalent in the TT compared to the ST, while bald on-record directives decrease, making parents in the TT sound more polite. The TT also displays a greater number of positive politeness sub-strategies of using in-group identity markers. These modifications reflect Indonesian cultural norms, emphasizing nurturing parents. As for children, the results show that while bald on-record strategies dominate in the ST, the TT shifts towards a higher use of positive politeness strategies, particularly marked by the frequent use of kindship address froms to male and female parents, indicating a more respectful and relationship-oriented tone. Negative politeness strategies remain consistent between the ST and TT, reflecting children's attempts to show deference and minimise imposition when addressing their parents. These findings highlight the importance of cultural context in translating politeness strategies in children's literature, demonstrating that modifications in translation can effectively convey social and moral values, constributing to the character-building of Indonesian children.

**Keywords:** politeness strategies, directive speech acts, parent-child interactions, cultural norms, children's literature translation

# 1   Introduction

The issue of politeness can be problematic for translators. Norms of politeness vary significantly between cultural context [[1]; [2]]. For example, what is considered polite in one society (e.g. inderectess in requests) might be seen as evasive or even rude in another.   Moreover, the way politeness is expressed varies from one language to another [3]. To deal with politeness strategies in translation, a translator may need to choose between two conflicting choices. In one hand, if s/he changes the source text (ST) politeness strategies in the target text (TT) in order to make the translation acceptable for target readers, s/he may produce inaccurate translation. In the other hand, if s/he maintains the ST politeness strategies and transfers them in the TT, s/he may bear unnatural translation.  It can be said that 'politeness' can make a translator face a dilemma.

This paper tries to analyse the strategies of politeness in children story books, to see how politeness strategies are tackled by the translator.  This paper will only examine the politeness strategies of directive speech act. Directive speech act is chosen for it automatically threates hearer's face [ [4];[5]] which  potentially encourages speakers to use politeness strategies.

Transferring politeness strategies from English children's storybooks to the Indonesian language presents significant challenges due to the distinct cultural norms and values that shape each language's expressions of politeness. Cultural differences often influence what is deemed polite or impolite, making direct translation of politeness strategies problematic. For instance, an expression that conveys politeness in English might not have an equivalent in Indonesian, or worse, could be considered rude or inappropriate. This cultural discrepancy complicates the translator's task, as they must navigate these differences while maintaining the essence of the original text.

In the context of children's literature, this issue becomes particularly critical, as such books play a vital role in teaching young readers about societal norms, including politeness. As noted by scholars [[6]; [7], [8]] the translation of children's books requires not only linguistic accuracy but also cultural adaptation to ensure the translated material is appropriate and educational for the target audience. The translator faces a dilemma: altering the original politeness strategies to fit Indonesian cultural norms may result in a translation that feels more natural and acceptable to the target readers but risks losing the authenticity and intent of the source text. Conversely, retaining the original strategies may lead to a translation that seems foreign or awkward, potentially hindering the readers' comprehension and engagement. Therefore, translators must carefully balance these competing demands to produce a translation that is both accurate and culturally relevant, ensuring that Indonesian children can learn about politeness in a manner that aligns with their cultural context.

There has been extensive research on politeness strategies and their significance in translation across various languages. However, a notable gap is identified in literature study regarding the application of these strategies in the translation of children's books, especially concerning directive speech acts. Current research mostly addresses the difficulties of preserving cultural equivalence in translation practices, but frequently neglects the subtle adaptations of politeness strategies.

Children's storybooks are crucial in shaping early perceptions of societal norms. However, how translators handle the complex interplay between maintaining the politeness strategies of the source text and communicating the cultural relevance in the target language, especially within the Indonesian context has been overlooked. Further investigation into this area is essential to comprehensively understand the complexities and implications of translating politeness strategies in children's literature.

## 2    Literature Review

Theory of speech act was firstly introduced by a British philosopher John L. Austin [[9];[10]; [4]. Austin raises speech act theory on the basis of his argument  that "... basically when someone says something, he also did something" [4]. For example, when someone says *I promise tomorrow I'll bring the book*, he is using the word *promise* and  doing an act of  'promising'.

The theory proposed by Austin [4] led many linguists to develop the study of speech acts. As a result, the classifications of the types of speech acts vary. In this paper, the discussion of the types of speech acts focuses on whether the speech act is performed directly or indirectly and on the classification of speech acts suggested by Searl  [5].

The classification of direct and indirect speech acts is on the basis of the formal speech forms [11]. Declarative sentences are    conventionally used to convey information or to make statements, interrogative sentences are used to ask questions, and imperative sentences are used to issue orders or directives.   If someone uses a sentence for performing an act  according to its form, it means tha he has performed a  direct speech act [11]. For example, if the word "Where is the eraser?" is used to ask where the eraser is put and the speaker only expect an answer about the place (eg at the table or in the cupboard book], the speech act realized in the utterance of  "Where is the eraser?" is a direct speech act. If a speaker uses a sentence for a purposes that is not in line with the type of the sentence, the speech act performed is an indirect speech act. For example, a teacher can ask students to

get an eraser kept in the cupboard in the classroom by saying  "Where is the eraser?"

There has been a large number of theoretical and research books and articles concerning linguistic politeness. In the present paper, however, we will focus on politeness strategies postulated by Brown and Levinson [4]. Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness is chosen since it suggests politeness strategies in more detail. Moreover, between politeness theories proposed by the other experts, this theory is regarded as the most influential theory of politeness. [[9]; [12]; [13] [14]

Studies conducted politeness by Brown and Levinson is associated with face-management [3]. In Brown and Levinson's theory, there are two main groups of acts, namely face-threatening speech acts ( FTA) and face-saving acts  (FSA) [9], [4]. Some examples of actions that threaten the negative face include: orders, requests, suggestions, advice, warnings, threats, challenges, offer, promise, praise, expression of strong negative feelings (such as hatred and anger towards) [4]. Some examples of actions that threaten positive face include disapproval, criticism and disrespectful expressions  [4].

There are five main strategies in Brown and Levinson's politeness theory  [3], namely (1) bald on record strategy, (2) positive politeness, (3) negative politeness, (4) off the record and (5) without the FTA. They have have different sub-strategies, as can be seen in the following table:

**Table 1**: Sub Strategy politeness Positive, Negative politeness and Indirect Speech Acts

| No | Positive Politeness Strategies |
|---|---|
| 1. | Noticing and attending to hearer's interests, wants, deeds and goods |
| 2. | Exaggerating interest, approval and sympathy to hearer |
| 3. | Giving special attention to hearer |
| 4. | Using in-group identity marker |
| 5. | Seeking agreement |
| 6. | Avoiding disagreement |
| 7. | Presupposing/raising/asserting common ground |
| 8. | Making jokes |
| 9. | Asserting |
| 10. | Offering and promising |
| 11. | Being optimistic |
| 12. | Including both speaker and hearer in an activity |
| 13. | Giving (or asking for) reasons |
| 14. | Assuming or asserting reciprocity |
| 15. | Giving sympathy to hearer |

| No | Negative Politeness |
|---|---|
| 1. | Being conventionally indirect |
| 2. | Using question, hedging |
| 3. | Being pessimistic |
| 4. | Minimizing the imposition |
| 5. | Giving deference |
| 6. | Apologizing |
| 7. | Impersonalizing Speaker and Hearer |

| No | Off Record Strategy |
| --- | --- |
| 8. | Stating the FTA as a general rule |
| 9. | Nominalising |
| 10. | Going on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting hearer |

| No | Off Record Strategy |
| --- | --- |
| 1. | Giving hints |
| 2. | Giving association clues |
| 3. | presupposing |
| 4. | understating |
| 5. | overstating |
| 6. | Using tautologies |
| 7. | Using contradictions |
| 8. | Being ironic |
| 9. | Using metaphors |
| 10. | using rhetorical questions |
| 11. | Being vague |
| 12. | Being ambiguous |
| 13. | Over-generalizing |
| 14. | Displacing hearer |

[3]

## 3    Method

It is a product-oriented translation research. The main sources of data of this study are five children story books, both the English versions and the Indonesian versions. The books analyzed are those written by Janine Amos, they are:

1) Feelings: Afraid [15] translated by Fr. Purna Wijayanti [16]
2) Feelings: Jealous [17] translated by B. Eny Wahyuni [18]
3) Feelings: Lonely [19] translated by Y. Dwi Koratno [20]
4) Viewpoints: Kind [21] translated by B. Dwianto Edy Prakosa [22];
5) Viewpoints: Reliable [23] translated by Y. Yeni Kristanti [24]

    To analyse the books, content analysis is applied to identify and to classify the politeness strategies used by the characters in the books to do directive speech acts. [13]theory of politeness strategy is considered in the identification and classification.

    This research-based paper tries to propose a prototype of translating politeness in directive speech act in children's story books, focusing on directive speech acts performed by parents to children and children to parents. Those Directive speech acts are thoroughly observed for it automatically threatens hearer's face [[4];[5]] which potentially encourages speakers to use politeness strategies.

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# 4    Results

There are fourty one directives identified in the English story books analysed. The directive speech acts are performed with three types of politeness strategies, they are bald on record, positive politeness strategies and negative politeness strategy. The following chart summarizes the politeness strategies used by the characters in the story books analysed when performing directive speech.
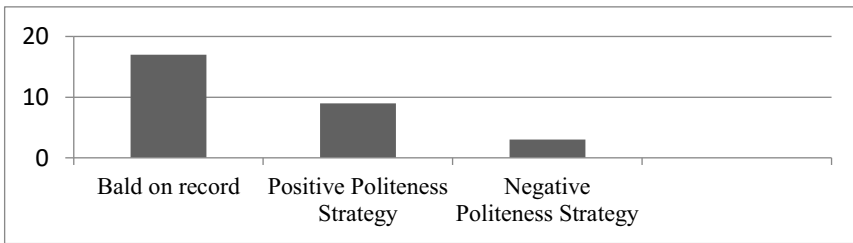


**Fig 1**: Politeness Strategies Used by Parents Towards Children in Directive Speech Acts in the Source Text
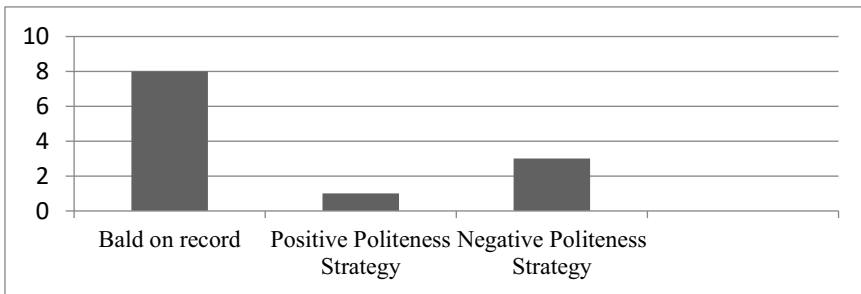


**Fig 2**: Politeness Strategies Used by Children Towards Parents in Directive Speech Acts in the Source Text

   The above figures clearly shows that bald on record strategy is predominantly used by parents when giving directive to children. The strategy is used in 17 instances, reflecting the unambiguous and direct nature of parental authority in the story books. Positive politeness strategies is less frequently used by parents compared to the bold on record, while negative politeness strategies are used the least. This indicates that while there are some efforts to softern requests or show

respect for the child's autonomy, directness prevails in parent-to-child interactions in the five English storybooks analysed.

As for the politeness strategies used by children when performing directive speech acts to parents, bold on record strategy is also predominantly used, although not as frequently used as by parents. Children in the English storybooks analysed, however, very rarely use positive politeness strategies, suggesting that they engage less in attempts to build solidarity or familiarity when giving directives. Negative politeness strategies, on the other hand, are used more frequently than the positive one. They can reflect a greater degree of deference or attempts to mitigate the imposition when children speak to their parents.

The politeness strategies in the ST and in the TT will be discussed in more detail based on the domain of participants.

## 4.1 Parents to Children

As has been explained, in the children English story books analyzed, parents performed directive speech act using three super strategies, they are bald on-record, positive politeness strategy and negative politeness strategy. The analysis of politeness strategy in the translation shows the same super strategy. The translation, however, shows different tendency of the frequence of the use of politeness strategies, as can be seen in the following chart.
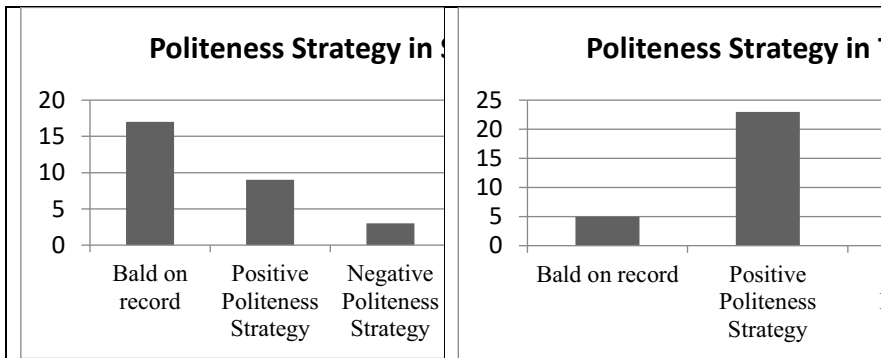


**Fig 3**: Comparison of Politeness Strategies Used by Parents to Children between the Source Text and the Target Text

As can be clearly seen in Figure 3, super strategy of bold on record is the ost prevalent in the source text, while the positive politeness strategy dominates the target text. Furthermore, the chart also shows a decrease in the number of directive speech acts employing the negative politeness strategy in the target txt, dropping from 3 instaces to just 1. The observations indicate that parents in the translated version appear more polite compared to those in the source text.

The higher occurances of positive politeness strategies in the translation are attributed to three key factores: all directive speech acts utilizing politeness strategies in the source text were retained in the target text (11 instances), and many bald on record directives in the source text were translated into positive politeness strategies (9 instances) as well as some negative politenss strategies being translatex into positive politeness strategies (2 instances).

Even though this is not the focus of this study, it is woth noting that the bald on-record directives in the source text that are retained as bald on-record in the target text are found in the books translated by male translators (2 books). In contrast, translations  by female translators predominantly feature positive politeness strategies. This strategy emphasizes friendly relationships and expresses group reciprocity.

The results of the analysis on the specific sub-strategies of positive politeness used by parents when performing directives to children in both the source text and target text shows interesting findings. The positive politeness sub-strategies in the TT is more varied compared to that in the ST. In the TT, parents use sub-strategy of seeking agreement which is not used by them in the ST. Interestingly, parents in the TT use sub-strategy of using in group identity marker is a way more often than those in the ST.  The sub-strategy in the TT is marked by the use of address terms, such as first person address form including names (such as Eli, Ani, Deni and Jaka) or those referring to kids (such as nak). The address terms can maintain the social relationship between the speaker and the hearer. The above facts suggest that when performing directive speech act, parents in the TT sound more friendly to their daughters or sons compared to those in the ST.

### 4.2  Children to Parents

As outlined earlier, the children's English storybooks analysed feature children performing directive speech acts with three primary strategies: bald on-record, positive politeness, and negative politeness. The analysis of the politeness strategies used to perform directive speech acts by children to parents in the Indonesian translation books indicates the same main strategies are used. Nevertheless, the translation presents a different trend in the frequency of their use, as depicted in the chart below.
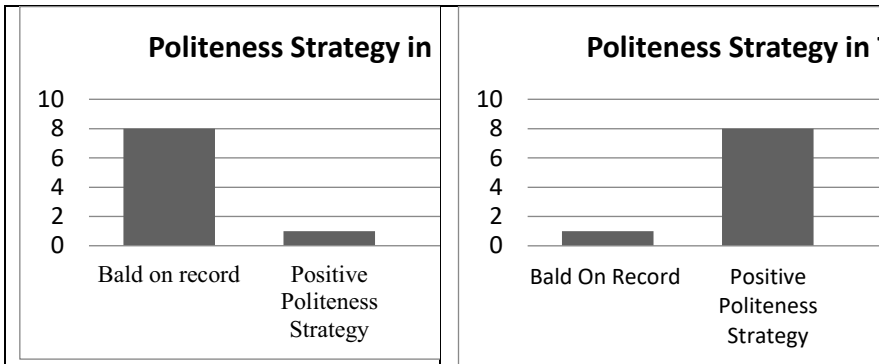
**Fig 4**: Comparison of Politeness Strategies Used by Children to Parents between the Source Text and the Target Text

The analysis of the politeness strategies employed by children when performing directive speech acts to their parents reveals a significant shift betweeen source text and the target text. In the ST, the bald on-record strategy is the most frequently used politeness strategy by children, with 8 instances. This suggests a more direct approach in the way children communicate their needs or requests to their parents.

In contrast, in the TT, the positive politeness strategy becomes dominant, with 8 instances, compared to mere 1 instance in the source text. The higher number of positive politeness in the TT are due to the fact that almost all of the bald on record directives in the source text are translated into positive politeness strategies, while all directive speech acts utilizing politeness strategies in the source text were retained in the target text. The directive speech acts performed using bald on record super strategy are changed into directive speech acts performed using positive politeness super strategy, particularly using in-group identity, marked by the use of address forms of 'Bu (Mom), when children talk to their mothers, and 'Ayah (Dady)' when children talk to their fathers.

The use of negative politeness strategies exhibits a distick pattern compare to bald on-record and positive politeness strategies. Negative politeness strategies used by children in the source text are preserved in the target text, as indicated by the same number of occurrences, particularly through the indirect sub-strategy. This strategy is aimed at respecting the hearer's negative face, which refers to their desire not to be imposed upon and to maintain freedom of action [9]. By employing this strategy, the speaker provides the hearer with the opportunity to decline, which enhances the politeness of the speech act [25]. The more opportunities the speaker gives for the hearer to refuse, the more polite the directive appears [25]. This reflects a careful approach in maintaining the hearer's autonomy while issuing a directive, thus softening the potential imposition inherent in the speech act.

## 5    Discussion

The analysis of politeness strategies employed by parents and children when performing directive speech acts in English children's storybooks offers insightful findings, particularly when compering the source text and the target text. By focusing on three primary strategies – bald on record, positive politeness, and negative politeness – this study reveals how politeness strategies are  employed differently depending on the relationship between the speaker and the hearer, as well as the cultural context of the translation [[13]; [26]]

In the source text has shown that the bald on-record strategy is the most frequently used by parents when directing their children. This strategy is characterized by its directness, reflecting the authority parents hold in the interactions depicted in the storybooks. Bald on-record directives are often delivered without any mitigation, emphasizing clarity and efficiency in communication. This pattern is consistent with cultural norms that grant parents a high level of authority, particularly in child-rearing contexts [27]. However, positive politeness strategies are less commonly employed by parents in the ST. These  strategies typically involve efforts to build solidarity, minimize social distance, or appeal to the child's emotions. The relatively lower frequency of positive paleness suggests that while parents occasionally soften their directives to preserve the relationships with their children, direct authority remains the dominant mode of communication [28]. Negative politeness strategies are used even less frequently by parents. Negative politeness strategies are designed to minimize imposition and show respect for the hearer's autonomy [2]. The limited use of these strategies reflects the assumption that, in these storybooks, children are expected to comply with their parents' directives without the need for excessive politeness or deference  [29]

In the target text, there is a noticeable shift in the use of politeness strategies. While bald on-record strategies remain present, their frequency decreases significantly. In contrast, positive politeness strategies dominate the target text, showing a greater emphasis on fostering warmth and solidarity in the parent-child relationship  [1]. This shift can be attributed to cultural differences between the source and target languages, where the translation adapts the tone of parental directives to align with cultural expectations of politeness and social harmony in the target context [30]. Moreover, the negative politeness strategy is reduced, further emphasizing a more positive and relationship-focused approach in the target text. This shift from bald on-record to positive politeness strategies in the target text reflects a change in how parental authority is portrayed [31]. In the Indonesian translation, parents are shown to use more affectionate and socially considerate language, particularly through the use of in-group identity markers such as terms of endearment or first-person address forms line "nak" (meaning "child"). This suggests that parents in the target text are depicted as more friendly

and emotionally attuned to their children's needs, in contrast to authoritative tone found in the source text.

Similar to parents, children in the source text also predominantly use the bald on-record strategy when directing their parents, though less frequently. This direct approach reflects the straightforward nature of children's communication in the storybooks, where they are less concerned with mitigating their requests or showing deference to their parents. Children in the source text rarely use positive politeness strategies, with only one instance identified. This indicates that children do not often employ strategies designed to build solidarity or reduce social distance when speaking to their parents. This lack of positive politeness might reflect the hierarchical nature of the parent-child relationship, where children are less expected to use such strategies to mitigate their requests. Interestingly, negative politeness strategies are used more frequently by children than positive politeness, reflecting a greater degree of deference or an attempt to soften their directives. Negative politeness strategies often involve indirectness or hedging, which allows the speaker to show respect for the hearer's autonomy. In the source text, children may use these strategies to avoid imposing on their parents or to give them the option to decline the request.

The target text, however, presents a different pattern. In the translation, positive politeness strategies become the most frequently used by children, while bald on-record strategies decrease significantly. This indicates a shift toward more relationship-oriented communication, where children's directives are framed in a way that emphasizes familiarity, solidarity, and respect. The shift may also reflect cultural expectations in the target language, where children are encouraged to be more polite and considerate in their communications with elders. The negative politeness strategies used by children remain consistent between the source text and the target text. This suggests that while the overall tone of children's directives becomes more positive and socially attuned in the target text, there is still an effort to maintain some degree of deference and respect for their parents' autonomy. Negative politeness strategies allow children to mitigate the imposition of their requests, reflecting a careful balance between directness and politeness.

One notable trend in the target text is the increase use of in-group identity markers, particularly the use of address forms such as "Bu" (Mom) and "Ayah" (Dad). These markers enhance the sense of closeness and familiarity in the child-parent relationship, further contributing to the more polite and affectionate tone of the target text.

## 6    Conclusion

The analysis of directive speech acts in children's storybooks demonstrates the significant impact of cultural norms on translation practices. The findings suggest

that translators must carefully consider the cultural expectations of their target audience, particularly in contexts involving hierarchical relationships such as those between parents and children. The increased use of positive politeness strategies and the reduction of bald on-record directives in the TT reflect a deliberate effort to enhance the perceived politeness and cultural appropriateness of the translated text. These adaptations not only potentially make the translation more acceptable to Indonesian readers but also highlight the intricate relationship between language, culture, and translation.

In addition to these findings, the study also revealed an interesting pattern in the translations of directive speech acts based on the gender of the translator. The politeness strategies used in the source text tend to be retained in the translations produced by male translators. In contrast, translations by female translators predominantly feature more positive politeness strategies resulted from the retained politeness strategies and the shift of bald on record super strategy and the negative politeness strategy. This suggests that gender may play a role in how politeness is conveyed in translated texts. Future research could further explore gender-based variation by analysing larger sample of children's books and comparing the politeness strategies used in translations by male and female translators. Such studies could provide deeper insights into how gender influences translation choices, particularly in the context of politeness and directive speech acts, and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between translator identity, language, and culture.

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