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Politeness Strategies in Squid Game: A Pragmatic Analysis of Power, Survival, and Social Interaction

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ABSTRACT

Politeness theory has been widely applied in the pragmatics, yet little is known about its role in leadership portrayal in survival games. This study aims to examine the politeness strategies which have been utilized by the Song Gi hun (the main character) in South Korean series called Squid Game through the lens of Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness. The research concentrates on episodes 1, 2, 8, and 9 and aims to investigate how Gi Hun employs the linguistic strategies ranging from desperation-induced bluntness to careful, empathetic communication that is supportive of his emergence as a leader. This research adopts the qualitative method and analyze 255 dialogues from the series, this research classifies into on record, positive, negative, off-record, and avoidance strategies usage. It is found that on-record politeness is the most frequently used strategy (56%) reflecting urgency and directness in discussing stressful circumstances. As the story progresses, however, Gi-hun increasingly engages in positive and negative politeness, as well as off-record strategies, displaying his adaptability and emotional intelligence as well as his strategic leadership skills. In a broader sense, the research demonstrates how politeness strategies in extreme environments do not only reflect power and social relationships but also contribute to the development of leadership, thus filling the pragmatic standpoint in high-stakes public narratives.

INTRODUCTION

Politeness theory, developed by Brown and Levinson (1987), describes how people deal with face-threatening acts (FTAs) in social interaction. It describes how people employ positive, negative, and off-record talk in an attempt to preserve social harmony and reduce conflict. The paper discusses the



application of politeness theory in the first two (1-2) and the last two (8-9) episodes of Squid Game. The present paper is all about the politeness strategies adopted by Soeng Gi Hun, who is the main character of the series, and how his character evolves from episode to episode. The first few episodes introduce social organization and social relations between contestants and depict the politeness strategies used in order to build coalitions and address uncertainty. The last few episodes reveal the deconstruction of social norms due to intensification of survival necessities and a displacement by straight talk and calculated deceit.

According to Yule (1996), politeness is the behaviour used to demonstrate awareness of another person's face throughout the conversation. Politeness theory is the essence of pragmatics and sociolinguistics studies that focus on how individuals manage and construct social harmony through language. Politeness theory accounts for how individuals use indirectness of speech, honorifics, and other politeness routines to preserve social safety. According to Brown and Levinson's, politeness theory has an essential aspect referred to as "Face". Face is the central component of politeness theory and it has two components. Positive Face: To be approved of, liked, and appreciated by others. Example: Seeking flattery, social acceptance. Threats: Insult, criticism, disagreement. Negative Face: Desire to be left alone, imposition-free, and independent. Example:

Seeking privacy, avoiding obligations Threats: Requesting something, giving orders, interruption." Face maintenance must be done to keep social harmony intact, and politeness strategies help in avoiding threats to it. Now there are two methods of performing actions so that the face or use of the politeness can be preserved. Certain types of face-threatening activities (FTA) are those that, by definition, go against the speaker's or listener's facial desires, according to Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 65). For instance, when the speaker insults the hearer, the hearer's positive face will be damaged; similarly, when the speaker commands the hearer, the hearer's negative face will be damaged. Additionally, it might harm the speaker's personal reputation. They are both face-saving and face-threatening behaviours. Acts that threaten the face (FTAs) An action or speech that puts the speaker's or listener's face in danger is known as a face-threatening act (FTA).

Positive face threats are critical comments like "Your presentation was dull," disagreeing with the comment, "I don't agree with that," or not even noticing someone's presence or contribution. Negative face threats are commands like "Do it now!" or requests like "Can I borrow \$100?" Cutting off someone is also a case of face-threatening act. Being a tendency to cut off human relations, politeness strategies are utilized to reduce them. As defined by Brown and Levinson (1987), speakers use different levels of politeness strategies in an effort to reduce FTAs. The Bald-on-Record strategy uses no politeness. Yule (1996) identifies that "bald on record would potentially be a threat to other's face and for a face-threatening act to be successfully accomplished, positive and negative politeness has to be employed." This approach employs direct, clear, and plain speech, generally deployed in the situation of emergency or where social threat is absent, e.g., "Pass me the salt" or "Leave now!" Positive Politeness conveys friendliness and compliment. Examples are: "You're so much of a good cook! Can you please pass the salt?" or "I know you're excellent at this.

Can you assist me? " This is typically used between friends, colleagues, or equal-status peers. Negative Politeness shows respect for negative face by being indirect, showing deference, and apologetic in order to respect autonomy. Examples are: "I do not like asking, but could you pass the salt?" or "I'm terribly sorry to intrude, but might I borrow your notes?" This one is usually applied in formal contexts where space has to be kept. The Off-Record strategy (indirect speech) shirks responsibility by implying rather than stating, allowing interpretation to the listener. For example, "This food is missing something..." implies asking for salt without asking for it, and "Wow, I have so many assignments!" implies asking for help without stating so explicitly. This is employed when the speaker wants plausible deniability. Brown and Levinson also describe three forces that determine the selection of politeness strategy. Power (P) is the relative difference in status between hearer and speaker; for instance, a boss might use bald-on-record with an employee, and an employee might use negative politeness with a boss. Social Distance (D) is the

degree of friendship or familiarity between hearer and speaker; people who are friends tend to use positive politeness, but people who are strangers use negative politeness. Rank of Imposition (R) is the level of burden the request has on the hearer undefined .

Background :

Politeness theory, developed by Brown and Levinson (1987), explains how people manage face in social interaction. “Face” is a synonym for a person’s self-image, which can be apportioned to positive face (the want to be liked and appreciated) and negative face (the want for freedom of action and non-imposition). The theory identifies face-threatening acts (FTAs) or acts capable of harming somebody’s face and offers methods through which they are minimized, such as bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies.

Squid Game (2021) is a South Korean series that uses survival, hierarchy, and desperation themes in a death apocalyptic game. The series has an interesting premise for politeness strategy analysis since characters are negotiating under extreme social and psychological pressures.

This essay uses politeness theory to the first two and final two episodes of Squid Game and explores how linguistic politeness (or impoliteness) indexes social hierarchy, desperation, and changing power relations. By doing so, it tries to make explicit how politeness strategies change under desperate circumstances and what this says about human nature in danger.

Research problem:

This study aims to add to Squid game, academic studies of such a series are limited, particularly in pragmatics, politeness strategies’ and character progression. Even though linguistic strategies of characters in life-threatening situations with extreme stakes continue to be fully studied.

Brown and Levinson’s (1987) Politeness Theory, the politeness study has been widely employed in natural discourse, literature, and Western media. Little analysis has nonetheless been conducted on politeness strategies operating in non-conventional, high-stakes contexts, such as the survival games involving life and death in Squid Game.

Specific research gap:

Shortage of Pragmatic Analysis in Survival-Based Media, politeness strategies addresses mundane interaction and not survival-based conditions where power, fear, and desperation define interaction. This research explains how politeness strategy matters in character survival and leadership enhancement. It offers a glimpse into hierarchical relations, indirect speech, and honorifics shaping Korean media interaction. A yet-to-be-researched politeness leaderships link, existing leadership media-centric research has been more inclined to emphasize powerful, assertive acts than verbal means such as politeness.

Significance of the study:

This research plays important role in the pragmatics field, particularly in understanding the politeness theory strategies under intense communicative situations. It provides insights into how Soeng gi hun, navigate face threatening acts when subjected to high stakes situations. The study highlights south Korean cultural markers, such as honorifics, indirectness, and hierarchal discourse structure .Through the analysis of these contextual features are applied in squid game.

How seong gi hun employs politeness strategies, how the character employs strategies in different situations. His speech pattern displays a combination of positive and negative politeness record, off record strategies.

In the first two episodes gi hun uses courteous interaction to create alliance and deal with power cautiously, in order to survive.

In previous two episodes he use ethical leadership tool use emotional intelligence, restraint and moral strength, gi hun gradually develop leadership traits throughout the game.

This approach outlines the plan for analyzing the use of politeness strategies and face-saving acts within Squid Game, focusing on characters’ relationships, particularly Seong Gi-hun and the Front Man. The

analysis will be based on Politeness Theory (Brown and Levinson, 1978) and explore how characters deal with face-threatening acts (FTAs) and employ politeness strategies to sustain or break social relationships.

Research objectives

- 1- Analyze the Evolution of Seong Gi-hun's Politeness Strategies Throughout "Squid Game"
- 2- Analyze How Seong Gi-hun's Politeness Strategies Shape His Image as a Leader

Research. Questions

- 1- What are the politeness strategies used by Seong Gi hun as he progresses through Squid Game?
- 2- How do Seong Gi-hun's politeness strategies contribute to his leadership role in Squid Game?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Politeness is the behaviour used to demonstrate awareness of another person's face throughout a conversation (Yule, 1996). While doing the conversation there are Lots of principles which should be taken care about language. One of the principles is politeness. Politeness creates the impression of the speaker on the listener during a conversation. Hoza (2007) said, Individuals may not retain individual conversations, yet they undoubtedly recall their general impression of the other person and the emotional quality of the interaction.

Yule's statement (1996), "bald on Record would potentially represent a threat to other's Face and for avoiding a face threatening act to be Accomplished, positive and negative politeness is needed to be used. Indrawati (2010) conducted research on the Friends TV series, analysing the politeness approach implemented in the film and determining what strategy is used in the event of a face-threatening act (FTA). Three themes of story are decided to analyze politeness strategy. The findings indicate that, in the context of FTA, speakers employed a positive strategy based on Brown and Levinson's hypothesis. The results demonstrate that speakers used the positive strategy from Brown and Levinson's theory in the situation of FTA. By giving the hearer more verbal and nonverbal attention and engaging them in the conversation more deeply, speakers demonstrate their concern and empathy for them. However, when Batubara et al. (2022) examined the politeness tactics employed by Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump during the 2016 presidential debate, they discovered that 34% of their statements were negative politeness. In order to "[achieve] maximally efficient communication," which adheres to the conversational norms known as the Maxims, bald on record is utilized, according to Brown and Levinson (1987: 94–98). Collectively, (Fatimah & Simanjuntak, 2021) analyzed the politeness strategies in the four main Characters in sitcom "Tetangga Masa Gitu" They used theory by Brown and Levinson (1987) To figure out the politeness strategies. They used a qualitative approach in their investigation. The study's findings demonstrated that each couple in the sitcom employed a variety of politeness techniques, including bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record. The study on politeness tactics used by the protagonist of the film "Bridge to Terabithia" was reviewed by Fitria et al. (2020). The data analysis is derived from the film's narrative. She employed the qualitative research method and Brown and Levinson's theory as her primary theory. She discovered that pleasant politeness and being bald on record are the most common tactics. According to Holmes (2001), being courteous typically entails considering the feelings of others (p. 268). To put it another way, courteous people put others at ease. Speaking politely does not, however, imply that you must always win over the Hearers. Therefore, being polite means addressing listeners. Considering their connections to the speakers, appropriately.

METHODOLOGY

1. Research Method

A qualitative research approach is employed here, and close discourse of the dialogues in Squid Game selected as a strategy since it offers close study of various ways in which language builds social relationships, power, and character motivation. It will examine and identify and then classify politeness

strategies and face-saving acts as displayed in major scenes from the first two and final two episodes of Squid Game.

Qualitative Analysis:

These will include analyses of conversations to identify character patterns for employing politeness strategies (bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, off record, and avoidance) and face-saving acts (positive and negative face-saving).

Contextual Interpretation:

The discussion will also place an account of situational context, power, and relationships through which one character will comprehend the use of politeness strategies.

2. Data Collection

The evidence for this research will be transcribed conversations between the first two and final two episodes of Squid Game. The analysis will be centered on the primary scenes between Seong Gi-hun, with an emphasis on those where politeness strategies and face-saving behaviors are most salient.

- **Selection of Scenes:** Scenes are chosen due to their applicability to the research inquiries, particularly those with interactions where politeness strategies are displayed in order to maintain power and social relations.

- **Transcription:** The chosen scenes will be transcribed as they are happening, such as nonverbs like one and pauses where politeness strategies will be facilitated in understanding.

- **Contextual Interpretation :** Contextual notes will also be written on the situations, such as the power dynamic between characters, the stakes in the interaction, and emotional status of the characters. This will help to answer and justify our main research questions

3. Data Analysis:

The data analysis will involve categorizing the dialogues based on the politeness strategies and face-saving acts employed by the character. The analysis will follow these steps:

1. Categorization of Politeness Strategies:

- On Record: Direct, unambiguous statements with no attempt to mitigate FTAs.
- Positive Politeness: Strategies that show friendliness, solidarity, and approval.
- Negative Politeness: Strategies that show respect, deference, and minimize imposition.
- Off-Record (Indirect): Hints or indirect statements that avoid direct responsibility.
- Avoidance: Complete avoidance of the face threatening acts to avoid clash

2. Contextual Analysis:

The analysis will cover power struggles (e.g. Gi-hun vs. Other players) and use of strategic politeness in order to view the leader in certain situations for all players. Besides, the emotional and situational context of each interaction will be understood in order to understand the reason behind some politeness strategies.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is Politeness Theory, as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1978). This theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how people manage face in social interactions, particularly in situations where face-threatening acts (FTAs) are likely to occur.

Key Concepts of Politeness Theory:

1. Face:

- Positive Face: The desire to be liked, appreciated, and approved of by others.
- Negative Face: The desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition.

2. Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs):

Actions that threaten either the speaker's or the listener's face. Examples include:

1. Criticizing someone (threatens positive face).
2. Giving orders (threatens negative face).
3. Apologizing (threatens the speaker's positive face).
4. Making requests (threatens the listener's negative face).

3. Politeness Strategies:

- **Bald on Record:** Direct, unambiguous statements with no attempt to mitigate FTAs. Used in urgent situations or when the relationship allows for directness.
- **Positive Politeness:** Strategies that show friendliness, solidarity, and approval. Used to maintain closeness or solidarity.
- **Negative Politeness:** Strategies that show respect, deference, and minimize imposition. Used to maintain distance or show deference.
- **Off-Record (Indirect):** Hints or indirect statements that avoid direct responsibility. Used when the speaker wants to avoid responsibility for the request.
- **Avoidance:** Complete avoidance of the FTA to prevent conflict.

Application to Squid Game:

In Squid Game, characters often navigate high-stakes, life-or-death situations where power dynamics shift rapidly. The use of politeness strategies and face-saving acts is crucial in maintaining alliances, asserting authority, and navigating conflicts.

In this research, we have worked on the politeness strategies used in the squid game by its main character Soeng Gi Hun. Squid game is the one of recent series and although there has been a very little research on that, so we have analysed the politeness strategies' used by Soeng gi Hun in Squid game season 1 in 4 episodes. We have choosed first two (1-2) episodes and the last two episodes (8-9). The purpose to choose these episodes was to see the major character transformation of Soeng gi Hun and the plot twist of the series. As our second objective is to analyze the Soeng Gi Hi Hun's image as leader which occurred due to series of events and situations he faced till the last episode. Politeness has been conceptualized especially as strategic conflict-avoidance or as strategic construction of co-operative social interaction (cf. Eelen2003, p. 21, Watts 2003, p.47)

.Hence squid game shows the nature of human behaviours under life and death situation. By using this theory we can deeply understand the. Nature of human being and thier use language under certain conditions. Now there are two types of acts that can be done to show politeness. Face saving act and the face threatening act. Face saving act tries to lessen the threat and face saving act threatens the face or personal image of a person.

Gi-Hun often uses positive politeness to build alliances and show empathy, even in desperate situations. For instance, when comforting other players, he might say, "We're in this together," which reinforces solidarity and mutual support.

FINDINGS

This study focuses on the analysis of politeness theory and it's strategies used in the Squid game first two (1-2) and last two (8-9) episodes from season one. In order to understand the politeness theory we must have to understand it's key concepts. Face is the central unit in politeness theroy. In Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987), face refers to a person's public self-image, and it has two aspects:Face which is the central unit of politeness strategies' can be divided into two categories. Positive and Negative face.

Table:1 Types of Face from Brown and Levinson model of Politeness Theory (1987)

Face	Example
Positive Face	Seeking compliments, wanting social acceptance, being indirect, Appreciation, try to make others feel in group, show empathy, offer encouragements
Negative Face	Ignore, order, Making requests, Interruptions, avoid obligations, apologize, being direct and independent, Exclude from the group, criticize, disagreements.

This section reports the results of the study based on the content analysis of 255 dialogues of Soeng Gi-Hun in Squid Game. The content analysis was done in answer to the following research questions:

1- What are the politeness strategies used by Soeng Gi hun as he progresses through Squid Game?

2- How do Soeng Gi-hun's politeness strategies contribute to his leadership role in Squid Game?

This study only focuses on the politeness strategies used by Soeng gi Hun as he was the main character and last survivor the game. The analysis is broken down into five politeness strategies : Positive ,Negative ,Off record , on record , and avoidance in this series . There were total (255) dialogues analysed which offered the wide range of politeness strategies through out the series. The findings of the study suggests the most common and frequent strategy used by Soeng Gi Hun was on record politeness with 146 occurrences which is 56% of all utterances. Where as positive politeness was used 42 times which is (16.47% of all utterances) , negative politeness was used 42 times which is ((16.47% of all utterances) , off record politeness was used 20 times which is (7.8

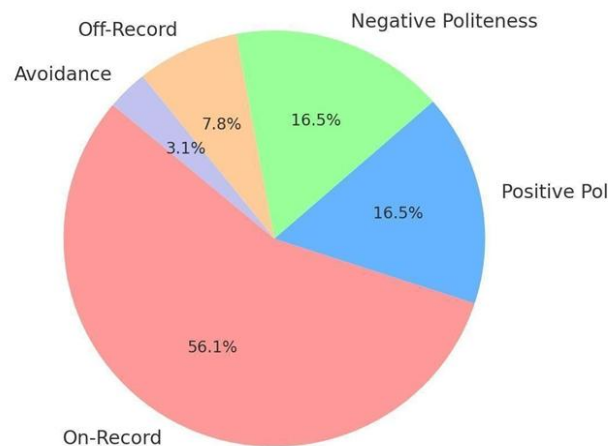
% of all utterances) and the least recorded politeness strategy was avoidance which was used 8 times and 3.31% of the total utterances . Here is the quantitative breakdown of these strategies and their frequencies .

Data Overview:

Table : 2 Quantitative breakdown of the data into percentages (Types of politeness Strategies)

Politeness Strategy	Frequency (No dialogues)	Percentage (%)
Positive politeness (desire to be liked)	42	16.47%
Negative politeness (Independent)	42	16.47%
Off record Politeness (Indirect)	20	7.8%
On record Politeness (Direct)	143	56%
Avoidance (silence / no response)	8	3.13%

Figure: 1 Distribution of Gi hun's politeness strategies in 255 dialogues from the (1,2,8,9) episodes :
Distribution of Gi-hun's Politeness Strategies



In this analysis of 255 dialogues Soeng Gi hun uses on record politeness strategies in 143 dialogues (56.07%) making it the most dominant form of communication. This significant use of the on record politeness can be justified by his social ,economical , cultural and psychological sensitivity in different situations.

Episode wise breakdown and shift in the politeness strategies :

Episode: 1

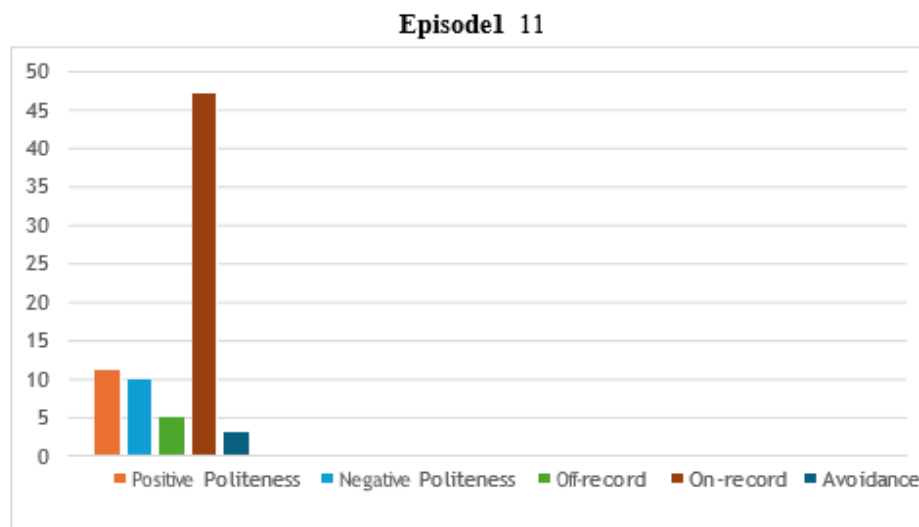
In episode one there were total 76 dialogues analysed. From which he used positive politeness 11 times , negative 10 times , off record 5 times , on record 47 times and avoidance 3 times. During the first episode, Gi-hun has predominantly opted for on record politeness measures in instrumental needs (47/76 dialogues). This reflects his immediate situation of desperation, financial distress, and powerlessness. In requests or commands, Gi-hun is most blunt; things are so urgent in that situation that he sees no reason

to beat around the bush. For example: he would command his mother simply: "Give me some more, huh?" No hedging and no softening whatsoever. The frequency correlates with Gi-hun's in-character early phase in which he had little luxury to carry on any strategic communication-his needs were simply base and very urgent. Now, it is, however, interesting to note 11 instances of positive politeness. Gi-hun attempts warmth with his daughter despite his troubles, calling out words of affection: Ex: "Look forward to it, honey!" and being extravagantly generous in front of the child, so he keeps up the image of a caring father. His negative politeness (10 instances) in this episode manifests itself when he expresses apologetic compliments or indirect phrases such as: Ex : "Excuse me, sorry" while brushing past people during escapes from debt collectors. Therefore, mostly in contexts of low power, Gi-hun negotiates the imposition away. Times of off-record politeness and refusal appeared only five and three times, respectively; hence at this time, he is not yet considering layered or indirect approaches-survival remains the priority .

Table :03 : Quantitative breakdown of the data into percentages (Types of politeness Strategies)

Politeness Strategy	Frequency	Percentages
Positive politness	11	14%
Negative politeness	10	13%
Off record politeness	5	6%
On Record Politness	47	61%
Avoidance	3	3%
Total	76	100%

Figure:03 : Graphical Representation of frequency of different politeness strategies in Episode (01)



Episode :02

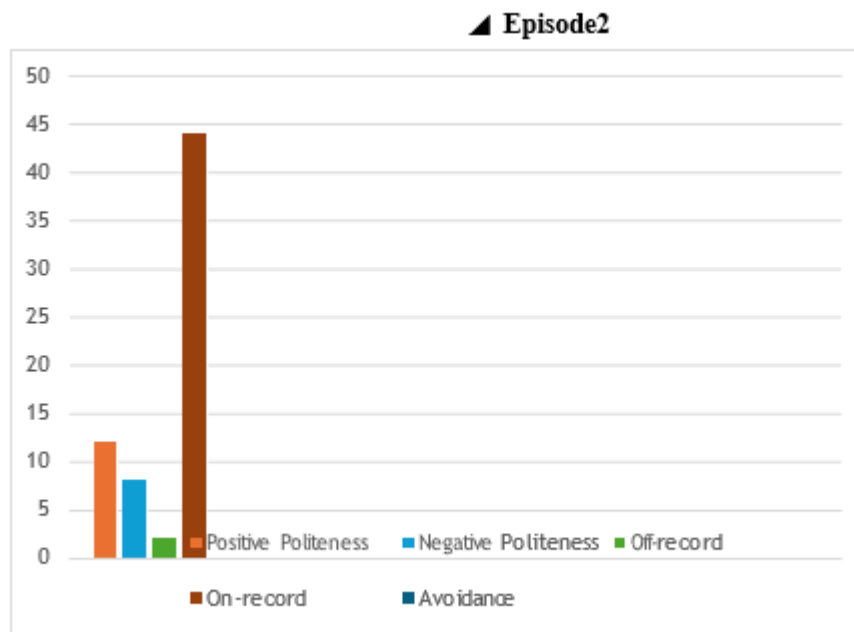
In episode two total 66 dialogues were recorded with 12 positive , 8 negative , 2 off record , 44 on record and 0 avoidance strategies are used .Episode 2 shows Gi-hun continuing to use on-record politeness strategies; whereas, in this episode, Gi-hun's discourse strikes a balance between increased positive politeness (12 instances) and grudgingly off-record politeness (2 instances). His change in behavior

suggests that he is no longer acting solely on desperate impulse; rather, he is becoming adaptive and more careful in his social communicative actions. Gi-hun's resource use of positive politeness, for example, concern for other players, helps him forge alliances early on. Comforting words to Il-nam justify the view that Gi-hun is beginning to think about face-saving and building rapport as tools of survival, while respectful conversation with Sang-woo only strengthens this. Correspondingly, a slight reduction in negative politeness with eight occurrences suggests that he is holding back, but with more confidence than before, relying less on hedging and more on clear yet considerate communication. Avoidance disappears since he approaches matters, being present and actively participating in group decisions.

Table :04: Quantitative breakdown of the data into percentages (Types of politeness Strategies)

Politeness Strategy	Frequency	Percentages
Positive politeness	12	18%
Negative Politeness	08	12%
Off record politeness	02	3%
On Record Politeness	44	66%
Avoidance	00	00%
Total	66	100%

Figure:04 : Graphical Representation of frequency of different politeness strategies in Episode (02)



Episode: 08

In episode 8 total dialogues were 43 . he utilized positive politeness 11 times , negative politeness 17 times , off record politeness 5 times ,on record politeness 21 times and avoidance zero times. In this 8th episode the most strategic transformation is evident .In fact, the eighth episode marks the clearest manifestation of the imminent strategic change. The spike was huge in negative politeness (17 of the 43 turns) probably

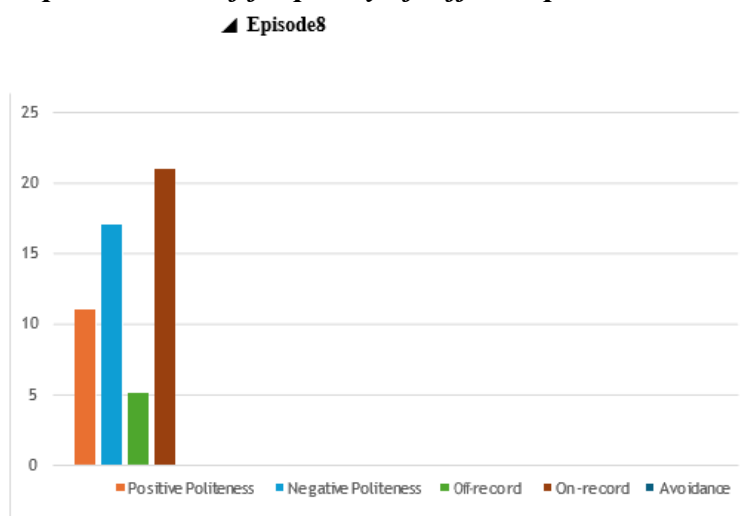
indicating his increasing awareness of the power asymmetries as well as the emotional context running high with the game's conclusion. Gi-hun has become extremely careful, formal, and deferential in highly emotional discussions, and herein lies the particular importance of this behavior. It very clearly and deliberately indicates a strategic

decision to be humble- knowing that, in critical moments, the enemy will anger and cost him alliances and trust by overt forcefulness. For instance, there is the careful, yet empathetic, speech while trying to comfort Sae-byeok while respecting her pain. The 21 on-record politeness suggests he remains decisive, but probably lacking in a bit of bluntness because he has some emotional intelligence. However, he continues to maintain positive politeness (11 times) making an indication that he is trying to maintain links in an increasingly fragile setting. On the other hand, the offrecord politeness indications would probably include indirect references and implications instead of expressing overt disapprovals - which is typical of political awareness.

Table :05: Quantitative breakdown of the data into percentages (Types of politeness Strategies)

Politiness Strategy	Frequency	Percentages
Positive Politiness	11	25%
Negative politeness	17	39%
Off record politiness	5	11%
On Record Politiness	21	48%
Avoidance	00	00%
Total	43	100%

Figure:05 : Graphical Representation of frequency of different politeness strategies in Episode (08)



Episode :09

Lastly in episode 9 total 59 dialogues were recorded. From which 8 were positive , 7 negative , 8 off record ,31 on record and 5 avoidance .His communication is undergoing the most strategic balancing in Episode 9. On-record politeness acts 31 times to reassert his leadership role to be decisive and clear, especially during his last confrontations and decisions. Off-record politeness here, however, is used as a strong

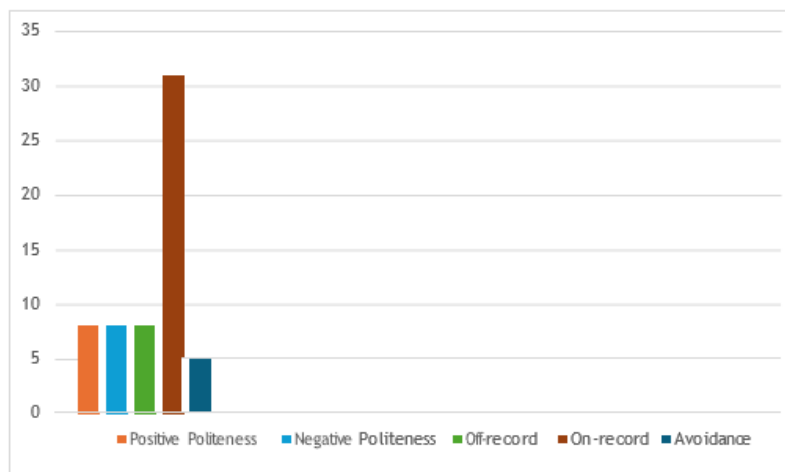
weapon, in which Gi-hun shows his strategic indirectness when it comes to emotionally laden situations: farewell to fellow players and considerations regarding their sacrifices. It could pretty well be said, however, that positive politeness (8 times) is a subtle yet important element in all emotionally charged scenes showing care and loyalty. The frequency of avoidance (5 times) being recorded during the final confrontation is also significant: it captures doubts, internal struggles, and emotional unavailability. Avoidance did not make him appear weak; it rather added touches of realism in exploring human complexities, where silence and withdrawal afford him time to wrestle with the moral dilemmas at stake.

Table :06: Quantitative breakdown of the data into percentages (Types of politeness Strategies)

Politeness Strategy	Frequency	Percentages
Positive Politeness	8	13%
Negative Politeness	7	11%
Off record Politeness	8	13%
On record Politeness	31	52%
Avoidance	5	8%
Total	59	100%

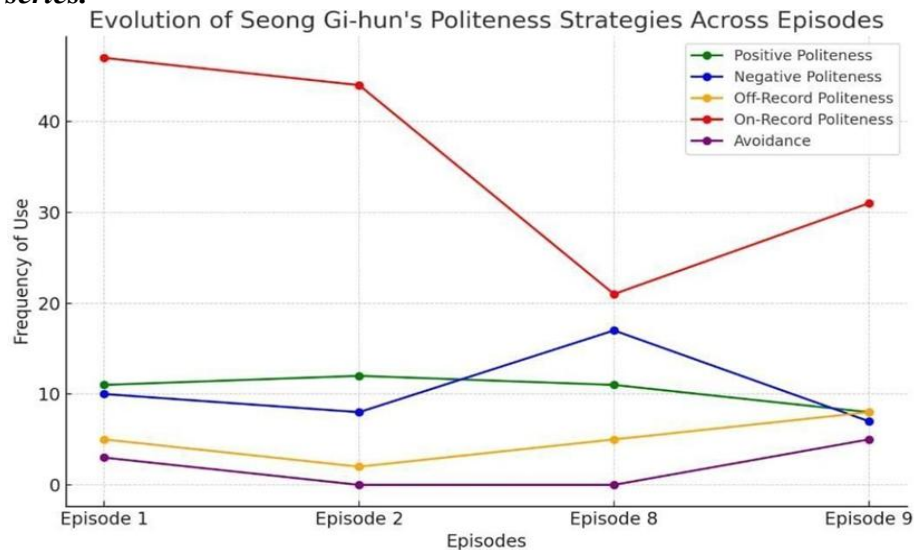
Figure:06 : Graphical Representation of frequency of different politeness strategies in Episode (09)

Episode9



The development of goons lightness tactics from the most fundamental survival oriented directness to a more intricate interplay of balance in communication is shown in this episode by episode progression of each story. He starts out desperate and honest, but he gradually transforms into a crafty communicator who knows when to be direct and cautious, when to be sympathetic, and when to keep quiet for the greater good. This choice reflects his development from a helpless and struggling man into a very capable leader who uses empathy, respect, and honesty to guide people's trust. Such leadership is based on his ability to modify his language use in response to the social and emotional transitions of those around him, not on his absolute power.

Figure:07 Graphical Representation of the Evolution of politeness strategies used by Soeng Gi Hun through out the series.



Justification for Seong Gi-hun's Predominant Use of On-Record Politeness Strategy:

His dominant usage of on-record politeness strategies in 255 dialogues was with Seong Gi-hun in 143 dialogues, 56.07%, thus making it the highest in petrified types of communication. Such an on-record usage can be justified by investigation.

1. His Social Desperate Condition and Financial Desperation:

In the first few episodes, Gi-hun is portrayed as desperate anyway. He is obviously burdened with debts, family problems, and powerlessness.

When he is financially stressed, he speaks directly and bluntly to his mother, loan sharks, and at the betting counter.

For example:

"Give me some more, huh?" "I will pay you! I mean it!"

This bald-on-record usage reflects urgency and lack of power-one can't afford to be subtle or strategic about it, as immediate attention and solutions are needed from his situation.

2. Cultural and Character Background:

As a character, at the beginning of the series, Gi-hun represents a straightforward lowermiddleclass Korean man with limited education and little social status.

In the Korean social hierarchy, it is usually the lower class that speaks more directly, except when talking with family or peer relations- the power distances are either too small or clearly defined. His on-record style features his unschooled, genuine, and mostly spontaneous personality.

3. Crisis and an Environment with High Pressure:

The deadly games inevitably immerse him in on-record speech when in danger; this is a tried and tested survival technique:

For instance:

"Stop! Don't move!" "Let's go together!"

Under high-pressure circumstances, there is no scope for ambiguity. It is clear that instructions have been such that saving lives becomes a possibility.

4. The Construction of Authority and Leadership :

Gi -hun uses on-record politeness more often in order to show confidence and decisiveness which makes him better fit for leadership role. As a leader is the one who guides and provide instruction in such harsh survival based circumstances without any hesitation to navigate through crisis.

For example:

"Follow me."

"We'd survive if we worked together."

His speech has changed from vulnerability to authority by using much on-record politeness strategy without any hesitation.

5. Emotional Truthfulness and Relatability

His character, perceived via intensely emotional lense captivates the audience most. Direct speech, at times unrestrained and at other times poignant, significantly contributes to the portrayal of the character as authentic and relatable. Additionally most of the game is not manipulative nor unduly formal, which enhances a portrayal of a leader who speaks honestly and humanly. Justification is provided at the end of the argument's presentation. Soeng Gi-hun's frequent on record politeness techniques is a linguistics choice that reflects his:

- Social desperation,
- Disempowerment,
- Cultural directness,
- Crisis-driven communication requirements, and
- Leadership development.

Ultimately, it constructs him into a clear, resolute, and approachable leader: a man commanding respect not through manipulation but through clear and direct speaking in weakness and strength.

Leadership Role of Soeng Gi hun:

The primary research question guiding this analysis is: **How do Soeng Gi-hun's politeness strategies contribute to his leadership role in Squid Game?**

Soeng Gi-hun's politeness strategies shape his image as a leader throughout Squid Game. With the use of on-record, positive, negative and off-record politeness, Gi-hun demonstrates his developing ability throughout the game to adapt to circumstances, manage relationships and finally emerge as a leader.

Episode 1 sees Gi-hun uses on-record politeness in (47 out of 76 dialogues). Directness here shows vulnerability, desperation and lack of power. In this easily stage leadership is missing : Gi-hun is reactive, blunt and frequently uses direct requests or commands. However, at this stage, he still uses positive politeness strategy (11 times) which shows his caring attitude with his daughter in particular, which is his natural instinct to connect with others. His limited use of negative politeness (10 times) and off-record politeness (5 times) shows that he still hasn't learned to be strategically careful. At this point, Gi-hun's use of politeness strategies shows him as frank yet impulsive, with a grounds for leadership more in sincerity than in strategy.

By **Episode 2**, on-record politeness strategy remained dominant which he used in (44 out of 66 dialogues). By the end of this episode Soeng Gi-hun learnt a greater balance in his communication. With the increased positive politeness (12 times) and ongoing use of negative politeness (8 times) in this episode, Gi-hun seems to be earning trust and extending deference where warranted. Off-record politeness was employed (2 times), perhaps indicates the strategic choice for survival. Gi-hun's strategic use of politeness started to reflect the traits of leadership. He no longer cares only for himself, he is beginning to consider others and helps them. He

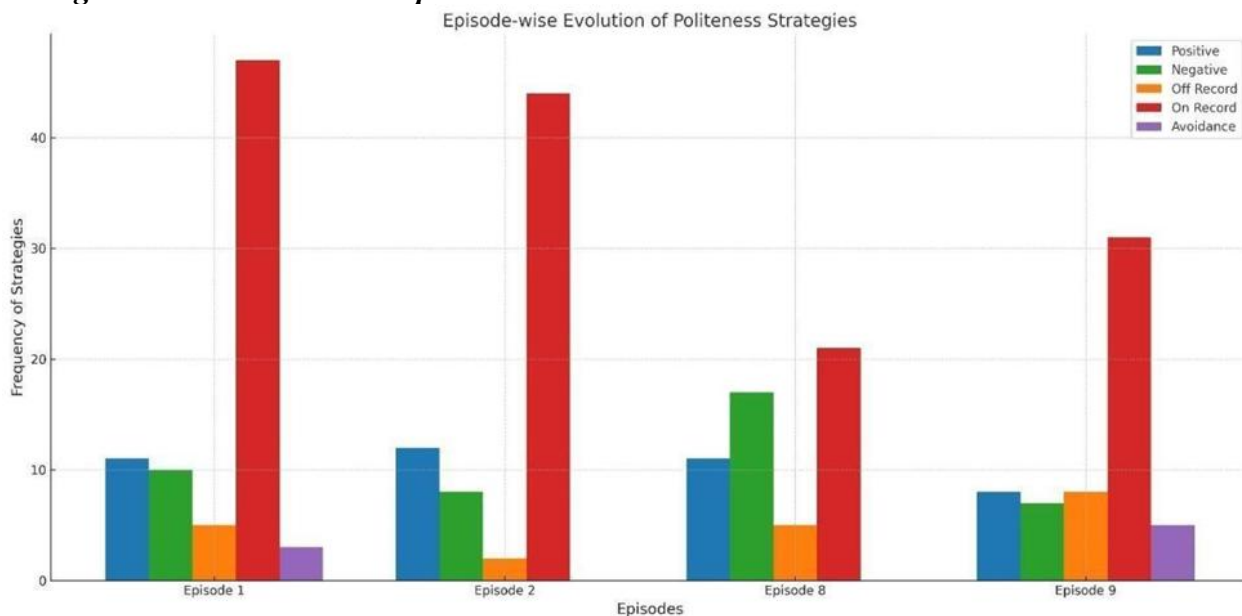
negotiates group relationships; his mix of openness with kindness and consideration enhances his reputation for being able to cooperate and empathize.

There is a major change in Gi-hun's communication style in **Episode 8**. Gi-hun exhibits authority through his on-record politeness (21 times out of 43 dialogues) while simultaneously establishing caution and respect for others through his significantly increased use of negative politeness (17 times). Thus begins the consolidation of his leadership: issuing commands but also taking special care in preserving interpersonal relationships. His use of positive politeness is more or less the same at this point (11 times) in that he still tries to build trust and give emotional support. He has now developed some capacity for

indirect, subtle communication through his off-record politeness (5 times), and this will serve him well in emotionally charged situations. In these episodes, Gi-hun emerges as a conscientious leader, integrating authority and empathy spell out in whatever communication he has used as per the emotional needs of the other.

Finally, in **episode 9**, the combination of politeness on record outdoor 59 dialogues and increasingly higher off-record politeness (8 times) reflects the entire picture of Gi-hun's leadership as it finalizes. Losing indecision and using simple public expressions to confront and manage emotionally charged situations on characteristics of high contrasting on this poor decision-making. This has caused him to be polite in both positive and negative ways 8 times and 7 times respectively but it may be used selectively and effectively to show concern and care even when he makes their choices. He is portrayed as a leader who carries moral responsibility rather than just power because of his fight because he uses avoidance for five times which relate to time of indecision and internal struggles.

Figure:08 Graphical Representation of the Evolution of politeness strategies used by Soeng Gi Hun through out the series and it's episode wise break down.



Thus, generally, Gi-hun's politeness strategies evolve from impulsive, survival-propelled immediacy to measures that are well stated and considered using clarity, empathy, caution, and indirectness. Such language development is thus also reflective of his leadership journey, making him a very sympathetic, responsible, and adaptable one with direct and immediate communication when necessary, honour-very with respect and humility and building trust, and if necessary employing strategic subtlety. The careful balance between authority and empathy that is built into the speech patterns makes a leader who is trustworthy and worth following-not through fear or dominance but through sincerity and adaptability-and emotional intelligence.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to analyse the application of politeness theory in squid game .Data were collected for this study on exploring the applicability of Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory on the dialogues of Seong Gi-hun in Squid Game episodes 1, 2, 8, and 9, using a qualitative research method. An elaborated discourse analytical and contextually interpretative framework over the 255 dialogues transcribed revealed and classified on-record, positive, negative, off-record politeness, and avoidance strategies amongst Gi-hun's utterances. The most used politeness strategy was on record politeness . There were total (255) dialogues analysed which offered the wide range of politeness strategies

through out the series. The findings of the study suggests the most common and frequent strategy used by Soeng Gi Hun was on record politeness with 146 occurrences which is 56% of all utterances. Where as positive politeness was used 42 times which is (16.47% of all utterances) , negative politeness was used 42 times which is ((16.47% of all utterances) , off record politeness was used 20 times which is (7.8 % of all utterances) and the least recorded politeness strategy was avoidance which was used 8 times and 3.31% of the total utterances. The selected scenes were based on their face-threatening acts and leadership moments, making the situational analysis of each act richer in context concerning power dynamics, societal relationships, and emotional undercurrents.

Gi-hun's character revealed that on-record politeness strategies were the most prominently employed strategy in the early episodes; indeed, on-record politeness represented his desperation for survival. From that perspective, Gi-hun's increasing use of positive and negative politeness strategies combined with off-record and avoidance strategies reflected his growing emotional intelligence and flexibility. The episode-by-episode analysis showed a transition in Gi-hun's communication from blunt conversations focused on just survival to strategically empathetic and dialogically balanced interactions—hallmarks of an emerging leader.

The study argues that in extreme environments like Squid Game, politeness not only acts as a survival mechanism but also cultivates one's leadership skills. This qualitative, context-based approach provides an insight into how language manifests human behavior in times of stress; it shows that leadership is a construct based on sincerity, adaptability, emotional intelligence, and communicative skill, rather than gouging one's authority. This study also fills a gaping hole in pragmatic analyses of media based on survival and emphasizes the connection between politeness, power, and leadership.

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