

## **Positive Politeness Strategies Used by the Main Character in the Movie *It Ends with Us***

**Baiq Kartika Purnama Dewi<sup>1\*</sup>, Syamsurijjal<sup>1</sup>, Ni Ketut Putri Nila Sudewi<sup>1</sup>, Agus Syahid<sup>1</sup>,  
Titik Ceriyani Miswaty<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Bumigora  
[thekartika2001@outlook.com](mailto:thekartika2001@outlook.com)\*

### **ABSTRACT**

This study analyzes the use of positive politeness strategies employed by the main character, Lily Bloom, in the film *It Ends With Us* (2024). Grounded in the politeness theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), this qualitative descriptive research aims to (1) identify the types of positive politeness strategies used by or directed toward Lily Bloom and (2) examine which strategies are dominant and how they influence interpersonal relationships and the storyline's progression. The data were drawn from selected dialogues involving Lily and were analyzed using content analysis techniques. The findings reveal that Lily uses various positive politeness strategies, including giving compliments, using inclusive pronouns, expressing gratitude, offering assistance, and showing empathy. The most frequent strategies include giving compliments, inclusive language, and expressions of gratitude. These strategies not only illustrate Lily's attempt to build solidarity and closeness with others but also reflect her emotional resilience and interpersonal sensitivity in navigating complex social dynamics. The study contributes to the field of pragmatics by highlighting how politeness strategies serve as both linguistic and narrative tools in contemporary film discourse.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Language plays a crucial role not only in conveying information but also in constructing and managing social relationships. One of the most essential aspects of interpersonal communication is politeness, which functions to maintain harmony, reduce friction, and uphold social norms in interaction. Brown and Levinson (1987), in their Politeness Theory, classify politeness into two major types: negative politeness and positive politeness. While negative politeness emphasizes the speaker's respect for the hearer's desire for autonomy, positive politeness is oriented toward the hearer's desire to be appreciated, approved of, and included. Positive politeness strategies aim to minimize the distance between speaker and hearer and foster solidarity, particularly in friendly or emotionally close relationships.

Brown and Levinson (1987) outline fifteen sub-strategies of positive politeness, such as using in-group identity markers, giving compliments, expressing interest, seeking agreement, offering promises, and showing concern. These strategies are context-sensitive and vary

depending on power relations, social distance, and the imposition of the speech act. Holmes (2013) emphasizes that politeness is a socio-pragmatic phenomenon that reflects and reinforces social hierarchy, gender, emotional closeness, and relationship maintenance. Similarly, Yule (1996) asserts that politeness is not merely about speaking kindly but involves strategic choices that manage face needs across different communicative contexts. The use of politeness, particularly positive politeness, becomes more evident in emotionally charged situations where speakers must balance honesty with harmony.

Several previous studies have analyzed politeness strategies in different contexts. Mubin (2023) investigated refusal politeness strategies in *It Starts With Us*, revealing how characters managed emotionally charged refusals using predominantly positive politeness. Astuti (2022) examined politeness strategies in an English textbook and found that positive politeness was the most frequently used. Putu et al. (2022) analyzed English lecturers' use of politeness and speech acts in online classes, identifying a balance of strategies across interaction types. Yousif Yousif Mohammad and Ali Ahmed (2021) focused on EFL students' use of negative politeness strategies and highlighted frequent pragmatic failures. Khoerunisa (2022) studied politeness among literature students and found that bald-on-record strategies were most dominant, with social distance as the key factor. Zakaria et al. (2022) explored politeness in pesantren settings, showing that religious and cultural values shaped politeness behavior. While these studies have addressed various contexts of politeness, few have focused specifically on how positive politeness functions as a narrative and interpersonal tool in emotionally intense, female-led film narratives. This study aims to fill that gap by examining the use of positive politeness strategies by Lily Bloom in the film *It Ends With Us*.

Most politeness studies in film have concentrated on male-dominated genres or comedic contexts, leaving emotionally complex dramas—especially those centered on female protagonists—less explored. Few studies have closely examined how women employ positive politeness strategies in dramatic narratives that highlight trauma, romantic conflict, and moral struggle. The film *It Ends With Us* (2024), adapted from Colleen Hoover's best-selling novel, presents a unique opportunity for such analysis. It tells the story of Lily Bloom, a woman navigating an abusive relationship while striving to find strength and emotional clarity. Her speech reveals multiple uses of positive politeness as she builds intimacy, seeks understanding, and negotiates boundaries with other characters.

This study focuses on two primary objectives: (1) to identify the types of positive politeness strategies used by or directed toward Lily Bloom in the movie *It Ends With Us*, and (2) to examine which strategies appear most frequently and how they influence interpersonal dynamics in the film. This research seeks to contribute to the field of pragmatics by providing an in-depth understanding of how positive politeness strategies function in cinematic discourse and how they shape the representation of female agency, emotion, and communication in contemporary film.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this literature review, the researcher refers to previous studies as a foundation for the present research. Prior studies have investigated politeness strategies in various contexts. Mubin (2023) examined refusal politeness strategies used by or toward the main characters in a novel. Astuti (2022) explored the use of politeness strategies in an English textbook for senior high school students. Putu et al. (2022) analyzed the politeness strategies employed by English lecturers at Dwijendra University during online classroom interactions. Yousif Mohammad and Ali Ahmed (2021) focused on EFL learners' use of negative politeness strategies. Khoerunisa (2022) studied the use of politeness strategies in conversations among English literature students. Zakaria et al. (2022) investigated the politeness strategies of both students and teachers in daily interactions, as well as the factors influencing their use.

Although these studies provide valuable insights, the present research differs from them in terms of its object of analysis. While Mubin (2023) examined a novel, Astuti (2022) analyzed a

textbook, and the other researchers focused on real-life conversations, the current study analyzes politeness strategies as they are used in a movie.

## METHOD

This research employs a qualitative descriptive method to examine the use of positive politeness strategies by the main character in the film *It Ends With Us* (2024). A qualitative approach is appropriate for this study because it emphasizes understanding language use in natural contexts and interpreting meaning through descriptive analysis (Creswell, 2014). This design enables the researcher to describe, interpret, and classify utterances containing positive politeness elements based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. The focus of the study is Lily Bloom, the main character in the film, while the data source consists of her spoken utterances and interactions that reflect positive politeness.

Data were collected using documentation techniques. The researcher watched the film repeatedly and transcribed relevant scenes involving the main character. After transcription, a close reading was conducted to identify utterances that demonstrated positive politeness strategies. These utterances were then marked and categorized according to the fifteen sub-strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), including noticing the hearer, using in-group identity markers, seeking agreement, giving compliments or gifts, and including both speaker and hearer in an activity.

The data were analyzed using content analysis. As Moleong (2017) explains, content analysis is a method for interpreting meaning from textual data through systematic classification. Each selected utterance was examined to determine the type of positive politeness strategy employed, followed by an explanation of how the strategy contributed to relationship-building or emotional negotiation. The dominant strategies were identified by calculating their frequency of occurrence. Finally, the findings were interpreted in relation to the character's psychological role, narrative function, and the broader themes of emotional resilience, trauma, and intimacy represented in the film.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study based on the utterances used by or directed toward the main character, Lily Bloom, in the film *It Ends With Us*. The data were analyzed using the positive politeness strategy framework developed by Brown and Levinson (1987). The analysis focuses on the types of positive politeness strategies used, their frequency, and how they reflect the character's emotional state, intention, and relationship with others. The researcher found that Lily frequently uses positive politeness strategies to build emotional closeness, manage conflict, and assert empathy in the face of personal and relational struggles.

**Table 1. Types of Positive Politeness Strategy**

No.	Types of Positive Politeness Strategy	Utterances	Characters Involved	Time Stamp
1	Compliments	"You're such a good doctor. I can tell you really care."	Lily and Ryle	00:12:35
2	Compliments	"That's really thoughtful of you."	Lily and Atlas	01:01:22
3	Compliments	"That's actually a great idea."	Lily and Alyssa	01:19:07
4	Using Inclusive Pronouns	"Let's grab dinner sometime soon, just the two of us."	Lily and Ryle	00:18:50
5	Using Inclusive Pronouns	"We did a pretty good job today, don't you think?"	Lily and Allysa	00:32:04
6	Using Inclusive Pronouns	"We can work this out together."	Lily and Ryle	01:16:40
7	Expressing Gratitude	"I really appreciate you coming with me."	Lily and Ryle	00:26:44
8	Expressing Gratitude	"Thanks for being so understanding."	Lily and her mother	00:48:13
9	Offering Assistance	"I'm here if you need anything, okay?"	Lily and Atlas	00:58:19

10	Offering Assistance	"If you need help with the paperwork, I'm happy to do it."	Lily and Allysa	01:12:05
11	Using Humor	"You always make me laugh."	Lily and Ryle	00:21:30
12	Using Politeness Markers	"Please don't feel like you have to say yes."	Lily and Ryle	00:39:51
13	Showing Interest and Active Listening	"You have no idea how much this means to me."	Lily and Allysa	01:10:28
14	Empathizing and Validating Feelings	"I know how hard that must've been for you."	Lily and Atlas	01:05:46
15	Using Friendly and Informal Language	"We're going to be just fine, you'll see."	Lily and her daughter	01:24:03

## Types of Positive Politeness Strategies Used by or Toward Lily

### *Noticing and Attending to the Hearer*

This strategy involves showing awareness of the hearer's needs, condition, or situation, and expressing interest in their well-being. In *It Ends With Us*, this strategy is frequently employed by Lily when interacting with emotionally vulnerable characters, particularly Ryle. For example, in one scene, Lily says, "You look really tired. Do you want to talk about it?" This utterance demonstrates Lily's attentiveness to Ryle's physical and emotional state. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), such utterances address the hearer's positive face by making them feel noticed and emotionally supported.

Lily's use of this strategy reflects her role as a caring and emotionally intelligent individual. It reduces social distance and facilitates deeper conversations, especially in moments when her partner appears emotionally distant. Within the narrative, such utterances not only display politeness but also create space for emotional vulnerability, which is crucial to the development and eventual breakdown of Lily's relationship with Ryle. This strategy often serves as a gateway to more emotionally charged discussions, allowing the audience to perceive Lily's empathy and her tendency to prioritize emotional awareness in her communication.

### **Using In-group Identity Markers**

This strategy involves the use of shared references, group identity expressions, or informal speech that creates a sense of familiarity between the speaker and the hearer. Lily frequently employs in-group identity markers when interacting with Atlas, particularly in scenes that recall their shared past. For example, she says, "*We were always good at surviving, weren't we?*" The use of the inclusive pronoun *we* highlights their shared history and emotional experiences, framing their connection as deep and mutual. Brown and Levinson (1987) explain that in-group identity markers indicate familiarity and reduce perceived distance between interlocutors. Lily's use of this strategy demonstrates her desire to reconnect with Atlas in a way that feels natural and emotionally grounded. It also subtly conveys trust and acceptance, even after years of separation. Narratively, this strategy reinforces the bond between the characters and lays the foundation for their emotional reattachment, enabling the audience to recognize the sincerity and comfort present in their dynamic.

### **Including Both Speaker and Hearer in the Activity**

This strategy involves including both the speaker and hearer in the same activity or experience by using inclusive structures such as *let's* or *we*. Lily employs this form in emotionally sensitive contexts to encourage mutual decision-making and cooperation. For instance, when confronting past trauma with Atlas, Lily says, "*Let's take this slow together.*" This utterance conveys partnership and a willingness to navigate the relationship at a manageable pace, emphasizing equality and shared responsibility.

Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that by including the hearer in the proposed action, the speaker reduces imposition and emphasizes solidarity. For Lily, this strategy serves as a polite way to set boundaries while still showing openness. It also reflects her growth in communication,

as she seeks to build healthier relationships through mutual respect. Within the narrative, this strategy marks a shift from reactive emotional responses to conscious efforts aimed at establishing emotional safety and collaboration, reinforcing her character development.

#### **Giving Gifts to the Hearer (Goods, Sympathy, Understanding)**

Strategy 14 entails providing benefits to the hearer, such as emotional support, appreciation, or sympathy. In *It Ends With Us*, Lily frequently expresses gratitude, validation, and emotional warmth toward others. A clear example occurs when she tells Ryle, “*I appreciate that you’re trying. That means a lot to me.*” This expression of appreciation provides reassurance and affirms Ryle’s efforts, even in difficult situations.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), this strategy is one of the most effective ways to satisfy the hearer’s positive face because it affirms their actions and feelings. Lily’s use of this strategy reflects her desire to maintain peace and emotional connection, especially during high-stress or vulnerable moments. Her consistent use of compliments, empathy, and gratitude demonstrates her resilience and her attempt to maintain dignity and humanity despite trauma. Narratively, this strategy strengthens audience empathy for Lily, presenting her as someone who communicates with kindness even while enduring personal conflict.

#### **The Most Dominant Positive Politeness Strategy**

The analysis reveals that the most dominant type of positive politeness strategy in the film is Giving Gifts to the Hearer (Goods, Sympathy, Understanding). This strategy appears consistently across different scenes, particularly during moments of emotional intensity or conflict resolution. Lily frequently uses emotional validation, expressions of appreciation, and words of understanding to de-escalate conflict and maintain connection.

For instance, during a confrontation with Ryle, Lily says, “*I appreciate that you’re trying. That means something to me.*” Even in a high-stress moment, this utterance demonstrates her effort to maintain empathy and mutual respect. As Brown and Levinson (1987) argue, such strategies are effective in emotionally sensitive contexts because they affirm the hearer’s efforts and preserve the speaker’s relational intent.

The dominance of this strategy underscores Lily’s emotional orientation as a character who values peace, connection, and non-confrontational resolution. It also highlights the film’s reliance on emotional dialogue to advance relationships and create impactful scenes. By consistently giving emotional “gifts,” Lily fulfills her role as a protagonist who navigates trauma through compassion and self-awareness.

In conclusion, *It Ends With Us* illustrates a range of positive politeness strategies used by or toward Lily Bloom, with the most dominant being expressions of emotional support and appreciation. These findings align with the function of positive politeness as a tool for reducing social distance, affirming the hearer’s value, and fostering solidarity—elements that are central to Lily’s personal journey and to the emotional impact of the film as a whole.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

This study aimed to identify the types of positive politeness strategies used by or toward the main character, Lily Bloom, in the film *It Ends With Us*, and to determine which strategy was most dominantly used. Based on the analysis using Brown and Levinson’s (1987) framework, it was found that Lily employed a variety of positive politeness strategies throughout the film, including noticing and attending to the hearer, using in-group identity markers, including both speaker and hearer in the activity, and giving gifts to the hearer in the form of sympathy, appreciation, and emotional support.

The most dominantly used strategy was Strategy 14: Giving Gifts to the Hearer (Goods, Sympathy, Understanding). Lily consistently used this form of positive politeness in emotionally intense interactions, especially in situations involving conflict or vulnerability. Her use of this strategy served not only to maintain harmony and emotional closeness but also to reflect her

compassionate and emotionally aware personality. These strategies played an important role in developing the emotional depth of her character and in advancing the narrative through interpersonal tension and resolution.

Overall, the findings indicate that positive politeness in this film is not merely a linguistic feature but a key narrative and psychological device. Lily's use of such strategies allows her to navigate difficult emotional terrain, maintain human connection, and demonstrate strength through empathy.

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