



Positive and Negative Politeness Strategies of CC in Family Switch: A Pragmatic Analysis Based on Brown and Levinson's Theory

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-05-24 Revised: 2026-06-10 Accepted: 2026-06-30 Keywords: <i>Family Switch Movie;</i> <i>Positive and Negative Politeness;</i> <i>Brown and Levinson;</i> <i>Pragmatics</i> DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i1.10789 Corresponding Author: Siti Munawarah ssmunawarah@gmail.com Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Palangka Raya, Kalimantan Tengah	<i>This study examines the positive and negative politeness strategies used by the main character, CC, in the movie Family Switch (2023) based on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. Using a discourse analysis framework, this research identifies and classifies CC's utterances into positive and negative politeness strategies. The primary data are CC's dialogues taken from the movie script and verified by watching the film on Netflix. The findings reveal that CC produces 36 utterances containing positive politeness strategies and 14 utterances containing negative politeness strategies. The most dominant positive politeness strategy is strategy 4: Use in-group identity markers (9 occurrences), followed by strategy 15: give gifts to the hearer (6 occurrences). The most dominant negative politeness strategy is strategy 5: give deference (7 occurrences), followed by strategy 1: be conventionally indirect (3 occurrences). One important finding of this study is that before the body swap, CC mostly uses negative politeness when speaking to her mother. However, after experiencing her mother's role, she begins to use more positive politeness strategies, such as showing empathy and affection. This finding shows that politeness strategies can change depending on social roles and interpersonal relationships. This study contributes to pragmatics by showing how film discourse can serve as a natural laboratory for understanding real-life politeness adaptation.</i>

1. Introduction

Films are a cinematic form of expression that engages audiences by narrating stories, conveying ideas, and evoking emotions. Films reflect cultural realities within society and are closely related to the rapid changes in social, political, and cultural context that shape audience perceptions (Afifulloh, 2025). The complexity of topics presented in films is one of the main reasons why films are widely analyzed in academic studies. The dialogue in the movie, which required conversation and interaction among characters, could serve as an

example for politeness strategies. For instance, the Torres family in the "Yes Day" movie demonstrated positive and negative politeness, which maintained their family's strong communication, harmonious relationships, conflict management, and modeling positive communication behavior (Amin, 2023). There is also another movie about a family that is appealing to be researched. It is called Family Switch (2023).

Family Switch was released by Netflix on November 30, 2023. Family Switch tells the story about an incident during the planetary alignment that caused them to swap bodies the next morning. Despite being family, they have different perspectives that have turned the body-switching into a disaster. According to the "Social Penetration" theory proposed by Altman & Taylor (1973, p. 4), social bonds do not continuously develop and remain stable over time. That was what happened to the Walker family, the mother said: *"I worry that we're all kind of disconnected."* The parents have felt something's off with their child. Especially CC, the daughter, who switched bodies with her mom. CC expressed different utterances before and after switching bodies. Before the switch, CC says, *"I wish you could be me,"* showing confrontation and frustration, then swiftly transitions to *"I'd love to be you"* to express an emotional shift, as CC had encountered the difficulties her mom faces as a mother (Sari et al., 2025). This showed that the interaction between mother and daughter modifies language use.

Communication tends to create interactions among individuals within society. Yule (1996, p. 59) explains that interaction involves participants' social status, particularly with respect to the hearer's social values, such as age and power. This relative social status determines the way an individual speaks and uses language. Social interactions generally carry positive social value, as individuals seek approval from society. This concept is referred to as "face" as introduced by Goffman (2005) in *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Behavior*. Any action or utterance that potentially damages the "face" of the speaker or the hearer is called an FTA (Face Threatening Act). Since individuals seek to maintain their face in social interaction, they employ various linguistic strategies to minimize potential threats to it. This idea is further developed in Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness strategies.

Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed the theory of politeness strategies, which has become the foundation of politeness research in pragmatics. Brown (2015) identifies two distinct politeness strategies, namely positive politeness and negative politeness. Negative politeness appears when an utterance may be unwelcome, causing the speaker to show respect, act carefully, and avoid direct imposition. In Njuki and Ireri (2021), the Honorable Speaker meant to ask the members to take their seats immediately, but instead said, *"I see members at the entrance. We want to start."* This strategy was used to avoid a direct FTA and impede the members. Many people mistakenly think that negative politeness is rude, but in fact, negative politeness strategies are a way to show respect and avoid imposing on the hearer.

On the other hand, positive politeness involves respecting their emotional needs, prompting a need to be approved, to feel close, and to be cared for. For instance, a character in Turning Red (2022), Stacy, used positive politeness by saying, *"You're the cutest thing ever"* (Septaria & Ambalegin, 2023). The utterances showed that the speaker emphasized the intonation and noticed the hearer's interest, which is called exaggeration. This situation is evident in the movie Family Switch between the parents and the children. The dynamics of family relationships affected the politeness strategies they used. Therefore, several studies have applied politeness theory to movies and real life, especially family interactions.

A study by Siahaan et al., (2026) titled *"Pragmatic Analysis of Leech's Politeness Principles in Encanto Movie"* analyzes the use of politeness in the animated movie. Leech's politeness principle is used as a strategy for maintaining good social interaction. In the

Encanto movie, the researchers discover that politeness plays a pivotal role in developing characters and resolving conflicts, thereby building the Madrigal family's harmony. The six maxims applied by each character showed that the main factor of stronger friendships was by showing small acts of kindness, putting themselves down, and supporting each other's perspectives. This study successfully demonstrated how movies can serve as a media to maintain a more effective communication strategy in real life, fostering harmony in everyday interactions.

On the other hand, there is a study titled *Positive Politeness Strategies in Switched Movie* by John K.D. Graham (Yoseka & Ambalegin, 2021). The chosen movie has the same topic as *Family Switch* (2023). The *Switched* movie tells the story of the bodies switching between two girls with different social dynamics. The researchers aimed to find the positive politeness strategy based on Brown and Levinson's theory. The findings revealed that both characters often avoid disagreement and use in-group identity to save the interlocutor's face and maintain closeness in their relationship.

Additionally, researchers from the Philippines have conducted a study of politeness strategies in the household (Llorica & Sosas, 2022). This study also used Brown and Levinson's theory, applying all four strategies: positive, negative, bald-on record, and off-record. The results revealed that the teenagers utilized each strategy for varied goals. Teenagers used positive politeness to represent a close relationship with their parents while conversing at home. The teenagers implemented negative politeness toward their parents to reduce coercion. They also implemented off-record to give suggestions indirectly and bald-on record to convey clear and direct message. The researchers explain that politeness strategies are influenced by how individuals are raised, as well as by the culture and environment in which they grow up. This aligns with Brown and Levinson's (1987, p. 72) theory, which states that the use of each strategy depends on factors, particularly the relationship between the speaker and the addressee and the potential threat in the message.

Those studies display various types of politeness research. However, none have examined how body switching influences the choice of politeness strategy in a family, specifically the utterances produced by CC as the daughter in the *Family Switch* (2023), nor has this data source been analyzed in politeness strategy research. This constitutes the research gap for this study. Therefore, this study analyzes positive and negative politeness strategies in the movie *Family Switch*. The story portrays a situation in which family members switch bodies, creating interactions among four main characters that can be analyzed.

The positive and negative politeness strategies are analyzed using the theory proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson (1987). Their theory provides direction for researchers to focus on dyadic patterns of verbal interaction as the expression of social relationships, shifting the emphasis from merely examining linguistic forms to understanding the relationship between linguistic forms and complex pragmatic inference.

Based on the background, the research questions employed as:

1. What are the types of positive and negative politeness strategies encountered in CC's utterances based on Brown and Levinson's theory (1987)?
2. How do the changes in social roles and interpersonal relationship influence the realization of politeness strategies in verbal interaction?

2. Method

This study uses discourse analysis as its framework. According to Paltridge (2012), discourse analysis examines language patterns across texts and considers the cultural and social contexts in which language is used. It also investigates how social relations between the speaker and the hearer influence language use. Using discourse analysis, the researcher examines the types of positive and negative politeness strategies employed in CC's dialogues in Family Switch Movie. The primary data was selected for several reasons. First, CC acts as a daughter and an achiever in her soccer team. Her interests are very different with her mother. Second, her character undergoes a significant transformation following the body-switching event. It was evident in the study of "Expressive Acts as Indicators of Identity Shift in Family Switch (2023), by Sari et al. (2025). Therefore, the primary data of this research are CC's utterances in the Family Switch movie.

In collecting the data, the researchers searched for the script online and verified it by watching the movie on Netflix. Subsequently, the researchers separated CC's dialogues and focused only on the scenes in which she is involved. Finally, the researchers identified the utterances in the movie in terms of the positive and negative politeness strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson's theory.

After collecting the data, there are several steps involved in analyzing the data. First, the researcher made a table divided into different data by scene, the place the interlocutor, the dialogues, types of relationship, social status. Afterward, the table is used to classify the utterances into positive and negative politeness strategies using Brown and Levinson's theory. Finally, the researchers will display and interpret the data. The data will be interpreted in regard to the interlocutor's interaction based on relationship, and social status. To ensure the reliability of the data, the analysis was reviewed by experts in the pragmatic field.

3. Result

This study demonstrates the result of the positive and negative strategies analysis in the movie Family Switch (2023). The findings show that there are 36 positive politeness utterances occur in the movie. On the other hand, the negative politeness strategies used by CC occur in 14 utterances. The detailed frequencies of each strategy are presented in the table below.

Table 1. Positive Politeness Strategies Frequencies

Strategy(s)	Frequencies
Notice, attend to H (interests, wants, needs, goods)	5
Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)	1
Use in-group identity markers	9
Seek agreement	2
Presuppose/raise/assert common ground	1
Joke	1
Assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants	1
Offer, promise	1
Be optimistic	5
Include both S and H in the activity	1
Give (or ask for) reasons	3
Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)	6
Total	36

The table above showed the frequencies of 12 out of 15 strategies of positive politeness. The analysis of positive politeness strategies in CC's utterances shows that the most dominant strategy is strategy 4: Use *in-group identity markers* (9 occurrences). This is followed by strategy 15: *Give gifts to H* (6 occurrences), which fulfills CC's desire to be liked, admired, and understood. Strategy 1: *Notice/attend to H* and strategy 11: *Be optimistic* each appear 5 times.

Table 2. Negative Politeness Strategies Frequencies

Strategy(s)	Frequencies
Be conventionally indirect	3
Question, hedge	1
Be pessimistic	1
Give deference	7
Apologize	2
Total	14

Based on Table 2, the character uses five types of negative politeness strategies. The most frequently used strategy is strategy 5: Give deference, which appears 7 times. The second most common strategy is strategy 1: Be conventionally indirect with 3 occurrences, while strategy 6: Apologize occurs twice.

4. Discussion

Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 91) explain that the speaker needs to choose a strategy that can minimize the risk of threatening the hearer's face. They also state that each strategy contains different levels of politeness. Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 74) argued that three sociological variables influence politeness strategy choices: Power (P), Distance (D), and Ranking (R). Power is the hearer's control over the speaker (asymmetric), Distance is social closeness between them (symmetric), and Ranking is the cultural weight of a face-threatening act. The greater the P, D, and R, the more speakers use negative politeness to reduce face threats. Nevertheless, the researcher only applies the variables of Power (P) and Distance (D) in this study.

In the movie, there were changes in the application of positive and negative politeness when CC swapped bodies with her mom. CC is a teenager and a daughter who had to swap bodies with her mother, who is an adult and works as a boss at the firm "Atlas". As a result, CC chose different types of positive and negative politeness strategies. Therefore, the researchers would like to provide a further explanation of how changes in social roles and interpersonal relationships influence the realization of politeness strategies in CC's verbal interactions.

1. CC's Realization of Politeness Strategy

Data 1 (00:01:02)

Negative Politeness (Strategy 1: Be conventionally indirect)

Jess (mother) : Hey, kids. Kids, it's time for the annual Christmas video.

CC : Uh, not right now, Mom.

Data 2 (00:16:35)

Negative Politeness (Strategy 5: Give deference)

CC : I know, Mom. And I'm really sorry you had to give up your career cause' you hurt your shoulder, but this is completely different.

- Jess : It's not. I had to start completely from scratch. I'm just trying to protect you from that. If you just applied yourself...
- CC : I hate when you say apply myself. **Mom**, we are different people. You literally just want me to be you. It's suffocating.

Data 3 (01:11:05)

Positive Politeness (Strategy 15: Give gifts to H)

- CC in Jess's body : I'm sorry, Mom.
- Jess' in CC's body : No, no, CC, stop
- CC in Jess's body : **I didn't understand how hard your job is.**

Data 4 (01:11:11)

Positive Politeness (Strategy 2: Exaggerate interest, approval or sympathy to Hearer)

- Jess in CC's body : You were right, honey. Your way works for you, and it doesn't have to be my way to be a good way. More than anything in this entire world, I just want you to be okay.
- CC in Jess's body : I will be **okay cause' I have the best mom in the world, and that's how she raised me.**

Before the body swap, CC primarily used negative politeness strategies when speaking to her mother, Jess. For example, in Data 1, CC says, "*Uh, not right now, Mom,*" a conventionally indirect refusal that avoids direct imposition and respects her mother's negative face (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 132). In Data 2, despite expressing strong disagreement ("*I hate when you say apply yourself*"), she still uses the deference term "*Mom*", recognizing her mother's higher power (P).

After experiencing her mother's life through the body swap, CC shifts toward positive politeness. In Data 3, she says, "*I didn't understand how hard your job is*" – an example of *Give gifts to H* (strategy 12), which shows empathy and redresses the hearer's positive face want to be liked and understood (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 129). In Data 4, she exaggerates affection: "*I have the best mom in the world*" – a clear use of *Exaggerate* (strategy 2), which strengthens solidarity.

This shift supports Brown and Levinson's (1987, p. 74) claim that changes in perceived social distance (D) and increased emotional closeness after role-taking can alter politeness strategy selection. The shifts in politeness strategies also reveal the development of interpersonal communication between the mother and daughter. Altman & Taylor (1973) argued that maintaining a relationship with another person requires a situational context. In this film, the situational context is the body swap. The body-switching experience helps CC and Jess become more open to each other and encourages their self-disclosure (West & Turner in Hasyim (2024)).

2. Social Role and Identity Shifting

Data 5 (00:41:57)

Negative politeness (Strategy 5: Give deference) &

Positive Politeness (Strategy 4: Use in-group identity marker)

- Carrie Jenk : Hey, girl. Oh my gosh. I'm gonna get it together.
- CC in Jess's body : Hey, **Mrs. Jenk**... Hey, **Carrie**. Hi, **Carrie**.

A notable finding in this study is how body-swapping forces CC to temporarily adopt her mother's social role, which alters her perceived power and distance with others. In Data 5, CC first calls Carrie Jenk 'Mrs. Jenk' (deference), then corrects herself to 'Carrie' (in-group

identity marker) after realizing she is in her mother's body. This demonstrates that politeness strategy is not solely determined by the speaker's original identity but by the enacted social role in the interaction (Goffman, 2005, p. 28).

This is simply an example of identity shift in the movie. Moreover, CC who is originally an excellent soccer player, adapts to her mother's role by changing her behavior after switching bodies with her mom. Another example shows how CC handled her mother's role at the firm.

Data 6 (01.07.00)

Positive politeness: (Strategy 4: Use in-group identity marker) & (Strategy 12: Include both speaker and hearer in the activity)

CC in Jess's body: Okay, **guys**, Mr. Molson and his team are on their way. We're gonna present our design for Jefferson Gardens, **but this time, we are going to do it as a team.**

Kara : W-w-w-wait, so you don't want to do it all by yourself?

CC in Jess's body: No. I need help, **guys**. I need you all.

From the utterance by Kara, we can conclude that her mother is an individual who is independent, competent, and accustomed to working alone or leading authoritatively, which is the opposite from CC's character. The use of Strategy 4: Use in-group identity marker (positive politeness) is a way for CC to lessen the distance between her and the team when she asks for help from her mother's team. CC chose Strategy 12: Include both Speaker and Hearer in the activity (positive politeness) to shift the dynamic from hierarchical to egalitarian, ensuring that the team feels involved and valued rather than merely following orders from a boss who is, in reality, a teenager in her mother's body.

3. Factors that Influence the Choice of Politeness Strategy

This table below displayed more of the Power (P) and Distance (D) influences the choice of strategies with different characters. According to Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 74), the choice of politeness strategies is largely determined by three sociological variables, including Power (P) and Distance (D). Power (P) refers to the level of authority or control a speaker has over the hearer. It is an asymmetric relationship because one participant has more power or higher status than the other, such as a parent and a child. Distance (D) refers to the level of familiarity or closeness between interlocutors. It is a symmetric relationship because both participants share the same level of social distance, such as close friends having low distance and strangers having high distance.

Table 3: Positive and Negative Politeness Strategy Analysis

Data	Utterances	Interlocutor	Types of Relationship	Social Status (Power & Distance)	Politeness Strategy
7	Jess: CC Walker, you have a tattoo! CC: At least it's a cute little owl, right ?	Jess (Parents)	Kinship	P: Asymmetric D: Close	Positive Strategy 5: Seek agreement
8	CC: It's just like when we were kids . It's just us.	Wyatt (Sibling)	Kinship	P: Symmetric D: Close	Positive Strategy 7: Presuppose Common Ground

9	Ava: What do you think your mom will say about this? CC: She'll say, um... [in robotic voice] "I am Jess Walker. Definitely a human and not a robot." "It is mathematically more favorable to give up on your dreams in favor of a boring life identical to mine."	Ava	Friendship	P: Symmetric D: Close	Positive Strategy 8: Joke
10	CC in Jess' body: Okay, guys, Mr. Molson and his team are on their way. We're gonna present our design for Jefferson Gardens, but this time, we are going to do it as a team.	Jess's Colleague	Professional	P: Asymmetric D: Moderate	Positive Strategy 12: Include both Speaker and Hearer in the Activity
11	CC: Mr. Molson , I can explain, sir.	Mr. Molson	Professional	P: Asymmetric D: Far	Negative Strategy 5: Give Deference

In data 7, Jess (CC's mother) is surprised to learn that CC has a tattoo. CC responds by asking, "At least it's a cute little owl, right?" Although the Power relation is asymmetric (the mother has higher power), the Distance is close (they are family). CC is using Strategy 5: Seek Agreement, a positive politeness strategy, by framing her statement as a tag question ("right?"). As Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 113) explain, seeking agreement is a strategy based on the assumption that the speaker and hearer share similar wants and values. It is often expressed through a "right" question that encourages a positive response. By using this strategy, CC minimizes potential conflict, reflecting their close relationship despite the unequal power relationship.

In data 8, CC says to her brother Wyatt, "It's just like when we were kids. It's just us." The Power relation is symmetric (siblings have equal status) and the Distance is close. CC employs Strategy 7: Presuppose Common Ground, a positive politeness strategy. By referring to their shared childhood, CC is implying that she and Wyatt still share the same experiences and bond. Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 103) note that this strategy suggests a desire for greater intimacy by presupposing common ground. This effectively reinforces their solidarity and mutual understanding.

When Ava asks (data 9) about her mother's potential reaction, CC imitates her mother in a robotic voice. The Power relation is symmetric (friends), and the Distance is close. CC uses Strategy 8: Joke, a classic positive politeness strategy. Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 124) explain that joking is a fundamental technique of positive politeness as it can put the hearer at ease and minimize the face-threatening potential of a topic. CC builds rapport with Ava and creates a relaxed, friendly atmosphere, assuming they share the same background and sense of humor.

In data 10, CC (in her mother's body) addresses her mother's colleagues: "Okay, guys... we are going to do it as a team." The Power relation is asymmetric (CC, as the leader, holds higher power), and the Distance is moderate (professional colleagues). CC uses Strategy 12: Include both S and H in the Activity, a positive politeness strategy. CC is positioning herself and her colleagues as collaborators with a shared goal by using the pronoun "we".

According to Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 127), this strategy reduces social distance by assuming cooperative assumptions and is a powerful way to redress face-threatening acts.

In this scene (data 11), CC must speak to a high-status client, Mr. Molson. She says, "Mr. Molson, I can explain, sir." The Power relation is asymmetric (Mr. Molson, as the client, has higher power), and the Distance is far (formal business relationship). CC uses Strategy 5: Give Deference, a negative politeness strategy. CC is humbling herself and raising the hearer's status, therefore she used the formal title "Mr. Molson" and the honorific "sir". Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 178) classify the use of honorifics and deference markers as a negative politeness strategy that addresses the hearer's negative face by acknowledging their right to be unimposed upon. This formal language is crucial in a high-power, high-distance situation to show respect and avoid face-threatening acts.

5. Conclusion

This study analyzed CC's positive and negative politeness strategies in *Family Switch* (2023) using Brown and Levinson's theory. The study found 36 utterances of positive politeness and 14 utterances of negative politeness. Moreover, this study examined how changes in social roles and interpersonal relationships influence the realization of politeness strategies of CC in verbal interaction. The discussion demonstrated that before the body swap, CC uses negative politeness with her mother, however after experiencing her mother's role, she shifts to positive politeness strategies such as showing empathy and exaggerating affection.

This indicates that changes of interpersonal relationship and social roles influenced the choice of politeness strategies. This study expands Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory by demonstrating how changes in social roles and interpersonal relationship which triggered by body switching in a movie influence the choice of positive and negative politeness strategies. Furthermore, this study contributes to pragmatics by showing how film discourse can serve as a natural laboratory for understanding real-life politeness adaptation.

This study also has a limitation. This study focuses only on CC's utterances and does not analyze the politeness strategies of other family members (Jess, Bill, Wyatt). Furthermore, this study merely applied positive and negative politeness strategies, not including the Bald on-record and Off-record that can provide the direct and implied meaning of CC's utterances. Future studies should compare politeness strategies across all characters before and after the body swap to see whether similar shifts occur. Besides, future studies should also consider analyzing Bald on-record and Off-record of CC in the *Family Switch* Movie.

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