



Politeness Strategies in Selected Nollywood Movies

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Abstract

This study examined the functions of politeness strategies in managing face and interpersonal relationships in selected contemporary Nollywood films. The study addressed a gap in existing research, which had given limited attention to the pragmatic functions of politeness in recent Nigerian cinematic discourse. The specific objectives of the study were to identify the politeness strategies used in the selected films and analyse their functions in managing face and relationships. The study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design and purposively sampled 12 dialogue excerpts from Brotherhood, A Tribe Called Judah, and Love in Every Word. Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory provided the theoretical framework. The study found that positive and negative politeness were the most frequent strategies, each accounting for 33.33%, followed by off-record politeness at 25.00% and bald-on-record politeness at 8.33%. It also found that strategies varied according to genre and relational context, serving functions such as conflict management, solidarity, face repair, and emotional intimacy. The study concludes that politeness was a dynamic resource for negotiating interpersonal relationships in Nollywood dialogue. The study contributes to scholarship on intercultural and cinematic pragmatics by showing how politeness strategies reflected Nigerian relational and cultural contexts.

Keywords: Politeness Strategies; Face Management; Interpersonal Relationships; Nollywood; Pragmatic Analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Language is central to social interaction, functioning not only as means of transmitting information but also as mechanism through which speakers construct social identities, negotiate relationships, and manage power (Agha, 2022; Blommaert, 2020). In everyday interaction, speakers balance communicative goals with concern for social harmony, processes examined through politeness in pragmatics (Brown & Levinson, 1987/2020; Leech, 2021). Politeness enables interlocutors to mitigate face-threatening acts and attend to their own face needs and those of others (Haugh & Kadar, 2021). Pragmatics research has extended politeness studies beyond naturally occurring conversation to mediated discourse, including television programmes, online interactions, and film dialogue (Dynel, 2020; Culpeper & Haugh, 2021). Although film dialogue is scripted, it draws on culturally recognisable communication patterns and provides useful material for examining socially meaningful language use (Bednarek, 2021; Dynel, 2023). Cinematic interaction thus represents power, solidarity, conflict, intimacy, and relational expectations through culturally situated language use across varied social encounters.

Within African media scholarship, Nollywood is recognised as major cultural industry with substantial local and global influence (Haynes, 2021; Jedlowsky, 2023). Nollywood films

entertain while reflecting Nigerian social values, hierarchies, and interactional norms (Obadare, 2021). Existing scholarship has examined morality, gender, identity, and ideology, yet relatively little attention has been devoted to pragmatic features of film dialogue, particularly politeness strategies (Ogundele, 2020; Opeibi, 2022). Recent pragmatic studies indicate that communicative behaviour, including politeness choices, is influenced by discourse genre and situational context (Kadar & Haugh, 2021; Stefanowitsch & Geeraerts, 2022). Genre can shape expectations concerning directness, mitigation, and emotional expression, influencing management of face-threatening acts (Bednarek, 2021). This issue remains relevant to contemporary Nollywood, where action, family drama, and romance present differing interactional purposes and relational conditions. Brotherhood (2022), A Tribe Called Judah (2023), and Love in Every Word (2025) therefore provide texts for comparative examination of politeness strategies within Nigerian cinema.

Despite scholarship on politeness in everyday and institutional discourse, mediated discourse, particularly film dialogue, remains underexplored in research (Dynel, 2021; Culpeper & Haugh, 2021). Nollywood scholarship has concentrated on narrative themes, ideology, gender, and identity, leaving limited knowledge of how characters negotiate face and relations (Ogundele, 2020; Opeibi, 2022). Although genre influences communicative behaviour and

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politeness choices (Kadar & Haugh, 2021; Stefanowitsch & Geeraerts, 2022), few studies have compared politeness strategies across Nollywood genres released after 2020. Given the limited research regarding comparative pragmatic analysis of politeness in recent Nollywood films, this study aims to examine politeness strategies in three selected Nollywood films. Its specific objectives are to identify politeness strategies and analyse their functions in managing face and relationships. The study will extend pragmatic research on mediated discourse and contribute evidence concerning genre, politeness, and Nigerian film interaction; its implication is better understanding of how Nollywood represents sociocultural norms and interpersonal communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Politeness Theory and Recent Developments

Politeness refers to linguistic and communicative practices through which interlocutors manage social relations, protect face, and reduce potential conflict during interaction. Brown and Levinson's (1987/2020) influential model explains politeness through four principal strategies: bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. The framework assumes that speakers make strategic choices according to factors such as social distance, relative power, and degree of imposition. Its analytical clarity has sustained its use in pragmatic research, although questions concerning its universal applicability have generated sustained debate. Haugh and Kadar (2021) recognise its continuing value while situating politeness within broader interactional and evaluative processes. Leech (2021) similarly maintains that politeness remains useful for explaining interpersonal behaviour, provided that cultural and contextual differences receive sufficient attention. Spencer-Oatey (2021), however, supports approaches that give greater consideration to relational expectations and social norms. These positions indicate continuing agreement on the importance of face management, alongside disagreement concerning how universally fixed politeness strategies can be.

Recent developments have shifted politeness research from treatment of politeness as fixed linguistic behaviour towards approaches that examine how evaluations of appropriateness emerge within particular interactions. Culpeper and Haugh (2021) argue that contextual conditions, participant expectations, and relational histories influence interpretations of politeness, meaning that identical linguistic forms may receive different evaluations across situations. Haugh and Kadar (2021) similarly conceptualise politeness as an evaluative process rather than as direct correspondence between particular expressions and predetermined strategies. This perspective challenges interpretations in which politeness forms possess stable meanings independent of interactional circumstances. At the same time, such developments do not invalidate Brown and

Levinson's categories; instead, they create scope for their use alongside contextual interpretation. Leech (2021) supports continued attention to strategic linguistic choices while recognising variation in social and cultural expectations. The literature therefore suggests that contemporary politeness analysis benefits from combining systematic categorisation with attention to context, participant relationships, and communicative purposes.

The continuing relevance of Brown and Levinson's framework is particularly apparent in research requiring identification and comparison of politeness strategies across discourse settings. Its four categories provide an organised basis for examining how speakers respond to face concerns, while recent interactional approaches encourage researchers to interpret such choices in relation to power, social distance, and relational expectations. This combination is particularly relevant to film dialogue, where scripted interactions represent social relations through characters occupying different positions and pursuing different communicative goals. Existing scholarship therefore supports examination of politeness as both strategic linguistic behaviour and context-dependent social practice. Nevertheless, limited attention has been given to comparative analysis of politeness strategies across contemporary Nollywood genres, particularly action, family drama, and romance. This gap relates directly to the present study's objectives: first, to identify politeness strategies used by characters in *Brotherhood*, *A Tribe Called Judah*, and *Love in Every Word*; and second, to analyse how these strategies manage face, power relations, and interpersonal relationships. The study consequently positions itself within current debates concerning systematic categorisation and contextual interpretation.

Politeness in Mediated and Film Discourse

Mediated discourse refers to communication presented through media platforms in which linguistic interaction is represented, shaped, or reproduced for an audience. Dynel (2020) explains that mediated discourse provides access to stylised forms of interaction that remain socially recognisable despite being constructed for particular communicative purposes. Film dialogue is especially relevant to pragmatic research because scripted exchanges are designed to resemble conversational practices while serving narrative and character-development functions. Bednarek (2021) therefore treats cinematic dialogue as linguistic material through which social meanings can be represented alongside dramatic purposes. Dynel (2023) further establishes film as productive material for pragmatic analysis because characters' utterances can represent politeness, conflict, solidarity, and relational change. This position indicates that scripted dialogue should not be dismissed simply because it is fictional. Instead, its constructed nature requires attention to how linguistic choices represent social expectations. Such an approach is particularly relevant to Nollywood, where dialogue can reproduce culturally recognisable patterns of Nigerian interpersonal communication.

Research on film discourse further indicates that politeness strategies are influenced by genre, character roles, and narrative purposes rather than being distributed randomly. Bednarek (2021) demonstrates that cinematic language is shaped by genre conventions and the communicative requirements of particular scenes, while Culpeper and Haugh (2021) stress the importance of contextual and relational factors in interpreting politeness. These positions converge in suggesting that linguistic choices must be considered alongside the social circumstances represented within films. Action and crime films may favour directness, confrontation, and bald-on-record strategies when characters engage in conflict or assert authority, whereas romantic and family-oriented narratives may place greater emphasis on solidarity, affection, and mitigation (Dynel, 2020). Such tendencies, however, should not be treated as rigid genre rules because individual characters and situations may produce different choices. The literature therefore supports comparative genre analysis while requiring attention to character relationships, power differences, and immediate communicative purposes.

Film discourse also provides evidence concerning how politeness represents wider social values. Bednarek (2021) argues that cinematic language can reproduce culturally embedded expectations concerning respect, hierarchy, intimacy, and interpersonal conduct. This position extends pragmatic analysis beyond classification of linguistic strategies towards consideration of what such strategies represent within particular cultural settings. Dynel (2023) similarly demonstrates that film dialogue can encode socially meaningful interactional practices while serving narrative functions. Nevertheless, existing research has paid greater attention to film discourse in general than to comparative politeness patterns across recent Nigerian films from different genres. Limited attention to contemporary Nollywood is significant because Nigerian cinematic dialogue can represent locally meaningful forms of respect, solidarity, authority, conflict, and intimacy. The present study addresses this gap through identification of politeness strategies in *Brotherhood* (2022), *A Tribe Called Judah* (2023), and *Love in Every Word* (2025), followed by analysis of how these strategies manage face, power relations, and interpersonal relationships across distinct film genres.

Language, Pragmatics, Genre, and Politeness in Contemporary Nollywood Films

Nollywood is widely recognised as one of the most influential film industries in the Global South, with scholarship emphasising its representation of Nigerian social realities, cultural identities, and everyday experiences (Haynes, 2021; Jedlowski, 2023). Research on Nollywood has examined morality, religion, genre, interpersonal relations, family structures, and the role of films as sites of social commentary (Obadare, 2021). Despite this extensive scholarship, linguistic and pragmatic studies of Nollywood remain relatively limited compared with thematic, cultural, and ideological analyses (Ogundele, 2020; Opeibi, 2022). This

imbalance leaves insufficient knowledge of how characters use language to manage face, establish solidarity, express respect, negotiate conflict, and maintain interpersonal relationships. Scholars have therefore called for more systematic pragmatic research on African film discourse, particularly research that incorporates interactional norms from non-Western societies (Ogundele, 2020; Haynes, 2021). Such research can contribute to wider debates on politeness while providing evidence concerning culturally situated Nigerian communicative practices.

Pragmatic analysis of Nollywood dialogue is particularly relevant because language in film simultaneously performs interpersonal and narrative functions. Characters use linguistic choices to express attitudes, establish relationships, exercise authority, respond to conflict, and pursue particular social goals. These functions connect directly with politeness research, which examines how speakers manage face and interpersonal relations within specific contexts. African film discourse can therefore contribute perspectives that are less visible in research based primarily on Western conversational data. Ogundele (2020) and Haynes (2021) indicate the value of examining African cultural productions as sources of knowledge about locally meaningful interactional practices. Such an approach also permits examination of whether established politeness categories adequately account for communicative behaviour represented in Nigerian cinema. Contemporary Nollywood films provide suitable material because they portray interactions across family, romantic, occupational, social, and authority-based relationships. Examining their dialogue can therefore connect pragmatic theory with culturally situated representations of Nigerian social interaction.

Genre also influences linguistic choices, including directness, mitigation, and emotional expression (Bednarek, 2021; Stefanowitsch & Geeraerts, 2022). From a pragmatic perspective, genre establishes expectations concerning appropriate interactional behaviour and the treatment of face-threatening acts (Kadar & Haugh, 2021). These expectations can influence the distribution of politeness strategies across films. Power relations based on age, social position, institutional authority, or interpersonal status may further shape how characters communicate within particular genres (Spencer-Oatey, 2021). Characters occupying positions of authority may use direct strategies when asserting control, whereas characters seeking solidarity, reconciliation, or interpersonal approval may employ positive politeness and off-record strategies (Dynel, 2023). Such tendencies should not be regarded as fixed characteristics of genres because character identity and immediate context also influence linguistic choices. Nevertheless, the relationship between genre and power provides useful grounds for comparative analysis. Contemporary Nollywood films therefore permit examination of how genre, character relations, and communicative purposes jointly influence politeness strategies.

The reviewed literature establishes that politeness research has developed from rule-based accounts towards greater attention to interaction, context, and participant expectations, while Brown and Levinson's framework remains useful for identifying and comparing politeness strategies (Leech, 2021; Haugh & Kadar, 2021). Research on mediated discourse further demonstrates that film dialogue can represent socially meaningful interaction, while genre and narrative circumstances influence linguistic choices. Nollywood scholarship has made substantial contributions to understanding Nigerian culture, identity, morality, family relations, and social commentary, yet pragmatic analysis of film dialogue remains comparatively limited (Haynes, 2021; Jedlowski, 2023; Obadare, 2021). In particular, limited research has comparatively examined politeness strategies across different Nollywood genres using films released after 2020. This gap concerns not only identification of politeness strategies but also their functions in managing face, power relations, and interpersonal relationships. The present study addresses this gap through comparative pragmatic analysis of *Brotherhood* (2022), *A Tribe Called Judah* (2023), and *Love in Every Word* (2025), thereby connecting politeness theory with genre and contemporary Nigerian film discourse.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory

Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson (1987/2020), provided the theoretical foundation for this study. The theory developed from Goffman's concept of face, which refers to the public self-image individuals seek to maintain during social interaction (Goffman, 1967/2021). Brown and Levinson (1987/2020) argued that communicative acts can threaten the speaker's or hearer's face and therefore constitute face-threatening acts (FTAs). They distinguished positive face, which concerns the desire for approval, acceptance, and appreciation, from negative face, which concerns the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition. To manage FTAs, speakers may employ four major politeness strategies: bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. Bald-on-record involves direct and unmitigated expression; positive politeness attends to solidarity and approval; negative politeness minimises imposition through devices such as hedging, indirectness, and deference; and off-record politeness communicates indirectly, allowing the hearer to infer the intended meaning. Strategy selection is influenced by power, social distance, and ranking of imposition. Although the theory has been criticised for its universalist assumptions, its categories remain useful for systematic pragmatic analysis when interpreted in relation to cultural and interactional contexts (Haugh & Kadar, 2021; Leech, 2021).

The theory was applied to identify and interpret politeness strategies in *Brotherhood* (2022), *A Tribe Called Judah* (2023), and *Love in Every Word* (2025). Its four strategy categories

provided the coding framework for the first objective, which sought to identify politeness strategies used by characters in the selected films. The concepts of face, power, social distance, and imposition guided analysis of the second objective, which examined how these strategies managed face, power relations, and interpersonal relationships. The analysis also considered genre and narrative context because action/crime, family drama, and romance may generate different interactional expectations (Bednarek, 2021; Dynel, 2020). Contextual interpretation was therefore used alongside systematic categorisation to account for Nigerian sociocultural meanings and address concerns regarding the application of Brown and Levinson's framework to mediated and non-Western discourse.

Methodology

The study adopted qualitative research design because its objectives required contextual interpretation of politeness strategies and their functions within selected Nollywood film dialogue. Qualitative design was appropriate for examining face management, power relations, social distance, degree of imposition, and interpersonal relationships, all of which depend on interactional context rather than numerical measurement (Creswell, 2021; Paltridge, 2021). The study was cross-sectional because it examined three films released between 2022 and 2025 as representations of contemporary Nigerian cinematic discourse. The target population comprised conversational exchanges containing potential face-threatening acts and politeness strategies in contemporary Nollywood films. The study focused on *Brotherhood* (2022), *A Tribe Called Judah* (2023), and *Love in Every Word* (2025). These films were selected purposively because they represented action/crime, family drama, and romance respectively, thereby enabling comparison across genres. The study was guided deductively by Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987, 2020), particularly its four strategy categories.

The sample comprised twelve conversational excerpts, with four excerpts purposively selected from each film. Selection focused on scenes containing identifiable face-threatening acts, politeness strategies, and interactions involving differences in power, social distance, intimacy, or conflict. Excerpts were also required to contribute meaningfully to character relationships or narrative development. Repeated viewing of the three films constituted the principal data collection procedure. During viewing, relevant scenes were identified, transcribed, and organised according to film title, scene context, participating characters, and interactional circumstances. The selected excerpts were then examined in relation to the study objectives and research questions. Brown and Levinson's (1987, 2020) categories provided the initial coding scheme, comprising bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies. Contextual information concerning power, social distance, and imposition was recorded for each excerpt. Genre, narrative setting, and character relationships were also

considered because recent pragmatic scholarship recognises their influence on politeness interpretation.

Data analysis followed qualitative pragmatic and discourse-analytic procedures. Each excerpt was first read and reviewed repeatedly to establish its immediate conversational meaning and broader narrative context. The utterances containing potential face-threatening acts were then coded deductively according to Brown and Levinson's four politeness strategies. Each coded instance was subsequently interpreted in relation to power, social distance, degree of imposition, character relationship, and film genre. Where an utterance appeared to permit more than one interpretation, surrounding dialogue and narrative circumstances were examined before assigning its principal strategy. The analysis then compared patterns within and across the three films to determine how genre and interpersonal relations influenced politeness choices. Findings were presented through selected excerpts followed by contextual and pragmatic interpretation. Analytical rigour was supported through repeated viewing, consistent application of the coding categories, and comparison of interpretations across all twelve excerpts. Ethical considerations concerned accurate transcription, acknowledgement of the films and

scholarly sources, and responsible use of publicly available material. No human participants were involved, so informed consent and participant confidentiality were not applicable. The study was limited to three films and twelve excerpts, restricting statistical generalisation, but its qualitative design supported detailed contextual interpretation.

RESULTS

This section presents the results of the analysis of politeness strategies in the selected Nollywood films. It focuses on the identification of the strategies and their functions in managing face and interpersonal relationships. The results are organised around the major patterns identified in the data, with attention to their frequency, distribution, communicative functions, and relational contexts. Selected dialogue excerpts provide evidence for interpreting how characters used politeness to negotiate conflict, solidarity, authority, and emotional relationships.

Identification of Politeness Strategies in the Films

The identification of politeness strategies in the selected films is presented in Table 1. The analysis is based on the twelve excerpts selected from *Brotherhood* (2020), *A Tribe Called Judah* (2023), and *Love in Every Word* (2025).

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Politeness Strategies in the Films

Politeness Strategy	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Bald-on-record	1	8.33
Positive politeness	4	33.33
Negative politeness	4	33.33
Off-record	3	25.00
Total	12	100.00

The results in Table 1 show that positive politeness and negative politeness are the most frequently identified strategies, with four occurrences each (33.33%). Positive politeness is realised through expressions of solidarity, shared identity, care, and emotional affiliation, while negative politeness occurs mainly through apologies, requests, and linguistic mitigation of impositions. Off-record politeness accounts for three occurrences (25.00%) and is realised through indirect suggestions, rhetorical questions, and hedging, allowing characters to communicate potentially face-threatening meanings without stating them categorically. Bald-on-record politeness has the lowest frequency, with one occurrence (8.33%), reflecting the use of an unmitigated command in a confrontational context. Thus, the distribution indicates that the selected dialogues rely more heavily on strategies that either protect interpersonal relationships or mitigate face threats than on completely unmitigated directness.

Table 2. Comparison of Politeness Strategies across the Three Films

Film	Bald-on-record	Positive Politeness	Negative Politeness	Off-record	Total
<i>Brotherhood</i> (2020)	1 (25.00%)	1 (25.00%)	1 (25.00%)	1 (25.00%)	4 (100%)
<i>A Tribe Called Judah</i> (2023)	0 (0.00%)	1 (25.00%)	2 (50.00%)	1 (25.00%)	4 (100%)
<i>Love in Every Word</i> (2025)	0 (0.00%)	2 (50.00%)	1 (25.00%)	1 (25.00%)	4 (100%)
Total	1 (8.33%)	4 (33.33%)	4 (33.33%)	3 (25.00%)	12 (100%)

Table 2 reveals clear differences in the distribution of politeness strategies across the three films. *Brotherhood* presents the most evenly distributed pattern, with one occurrence (25.00%) of each strategy, reflecting the coexistence of confrontation, solidarity, and face management within its interactions. *A Tribe Called Judah*

records the highest proportion of negative politeness, with two occurrences (50.00%), compared with one occurrence each of positive and off-record politeness (25.00% each), consistent with the use of apologies and mitigated requests in managing potentially sensitive family relationships. In contrast, *Love in Every Word* records the highest proportion

of positive politeness, with two occurrences (50.00%), while negative and off-record strategies each account for one occurrence (25.00%). This distribution corresponds to the film's emphasis on emotional affiliation, reassurance, and the negotiation of intimacy. The absence of bald-on-record politeness in the latter two films, compared with its presence in *Brotherhood*, further differentiates the communicative patterns associated with the films' relational contexts.

Functions of Politeness Strategies in Face and Relationship Management in the Films

The analysis shows that politeness strategies perform different interpersonal functions across the three films. Their use is closely associated with the nature of the relationships represented, the degree of face threat involved, and the immediate communicative goals of the characters. Four major patterns emerge from the data: directness and the management of conflict, solidarity and relational repair, indirectness and conflict avoidance, and emotional vulnerability and relationship maintenance.

Directness and the Management of Conflict

In *Brotherhood*, direct linguistic forms are prominent in situations characterised by urgency, confrontation, and competing interests. The following excerpt illustrates a bald-on-record strategy:

"Move out of my way now!" (*Brotherhood*, 2020)

The imperative "*Move out of my way*", reinforced by the temporal adverb "*now*", leaves little room for negotiation. There is no mitigating device such as *please*, a modal expression, or an indirect formulation. The utterance therefore constitutes a direct face-threatening act in which the speaker prioritises immediate compliance over the hearer's face needs. In Brown and Levinson's (1987/2020) framework, such bald-on-record behaviour is associated with situations where efficiency, urgency, or the speaker's perceived entitlement to issue an instruction outweighs the need for mitigation. Within the confrontational context of *Brotherhood*, the strategy functions to assert authority and accelerate action rather than maintain interpersonal harmony.

Directness in the film is not restricted to commands. It can also be expressed through rhetorical questioning:

"Do you think I enjoy doing this for you?" (*Brotherhood*, 2020)

The rhetorical question does not request information because the speaker is not genuinely seeking the hearer's opinion. Instead, it communicates dissatisfaction and resistance while indirectly conveying the burden associated with the speaker's action. Its interrogative form gives the utterance a degree of indirectness, allowing the speaker to communicate criticism without explicitly stating it as a declarative accusation. The strategy therefore manages face by reducing the explicitness of the criticism while retaining its force.

The utterance also suggests tension between obligation and personal reluctance, demonstrating how indirectness can communicate interpersonal conflict without eliminating the underlying threat.

Solidarity and Relational Repair

Positive politeness is particularly evident when characters seek to affirm interpersonal bonds or restore relationships disrupted by conflict. In *Brotherhood*, the following utterance invokes shared experience and loyalty:

"You know I've always had your back." (*Brotherhood*, 2020)

The expression "*always had your back*" functions as an appeal to shared history and mutual support. Rather than concentrating on the immediate disagreement, the speaker draws attention to an established relationship of loyalty. This positive-politeness strategy attends to the hearer's positive face by presenting the relationship as one based on solidarity and mutual commitment (Brown & Levinson, 1987/2020). Its function is therefore relational rather than merely informational: it seeks to strengthen affiliation at a point where the relationship may be under pressure.

A similar orientation towards solidarity occurs in *A Tribe Called Judah*:

"My children, let us talk calmly." (*A Tribe Called Judah*, 2023)

The address term "*my children*" constructs a shared familial identity, while the inclusive pronoun "*let us*" places the speaker and hearers within the same social group. The adverb "*calmly*" further establishes a preferred interactional mode by discouraging confrontation. The utterance consequently performs two related functions: it affirms family solidarity and attempts to regulate potentially disruptive interaction. Rather than asserting authority through a bare command, the speaker frames the proposed action as a collective activity, thereby reducing interpersonal distance and encouraging cooperation.

Positive politeness also operates through expressions of care in *Love in Every Word*:

"I just want to make you happy." (*Love in Every Word*, 2025)

The first-person construction "*I just want*" presents the speaker's intention as oriented towards the hearer's emotional well-being. The verb "*make*" and the complement "*you happy*" explicitly foreground the hearer's welfare. The expression therefore functions as an affiliative strategy through which the speaker communicates goodwill and emotional commitment. In the context of romantic interaction, this form of positive politeness supports intimacy by presenting the speaker as attentive to the hearer's desires and feelings.

Another example reinforces this function:

"You know I care about you." (*Love in Every Word*, 2025)

The construction "*you know*" invokes presumed shared

knowledge, while “*I care about you*” directly expresses emotional attachment. The utterance consequently constructs common ground and reassures the hearer of the speaker’s continuing emotional commitment. Positive politeness here serves relationship maintenance by reducing emotional uncertainty and affirming the bond between the participants.

Indirectness and Conflict Avoidance

Off-record strategies are used when characters need to communicate a preference or disagreement without imposing an explicit directive on the hearer. This pattern is particularly visible in *A Tribe Called Judah*:

“Maybe we should think about this again.” (*A Tribe Called Judah*, 2023)

The modal adverb “*maybe*” weakens the force of the proposal, while “*we should*” frames the suggestion as a shared consideration rather than a direct instruction. The speaker does not explicitly state that the previous decision is wrong or demand that it be reversed. Instead, the formulation leaves interpretive space for the hearer. This indirectness reduces the threat to the hearer’s autonomy while still directing attention towards reconsideration. In Brown and Levinson’s (1987/2020) terms, the strategy allows the speaker to communicate an intended meaning while reducing the explicitness of the imposition.

The same concern with face management appears in *Love in Every Word*:

“I don’t know... maybe we should take things slowly.” (*Love in Every Word*, 2025)

The expressions “*I don’t know*” and “*maybe*” create substantial mitigation around the proposal to slow the development of the relationship. Rather than issuing a direct rejection, the speaker presents the position tentatively. This is significant because an explicit rejection could threaten the addressee’s positive face and potentially damage the emerging relationship. The indirect formulation therefore allows the speaker to communicate hesitation while preserving the possibility of continued interaction. The ellipsis also contributes to the impression of uncertainty, making the utterance less categorical and more accommodating.

Apology, Vulnerability, and the Restoration of Face

Negative politeness is especially visible when characters recognise that their actions have imposed upon or offended others. In *A Tribe Called Judah*, the following apology explicitly addresses a previous interpersonal offence:

“I’m sorry, mama, I didn’t mean to hurt you.” (*A Tribe Called Judah*, 2023)

The apology “*I’m sorry*” acknowledges the emotional consequences of the speaker’s conduct, while “*I didn’t mean to hurt you*” provides an account of intention. The address term “*mama*” further situates the apology within a close

family relationship. The utterance therefore functions as an attempt to repair damaged face and restore relational equilibrium. Rather than denying the offence, the speaker acknowledges the hearer’s hurt and distances the self from the intention to cause harm. Such repair work is consistent with the view that politeness involves the management of social relationships as well as the mitigation of individual face threats (Spencer-Oatey, 2021).

A similar pattern occurs when the character explicitly requests another opportunity:

“Please, give me one more chance.” (*A Tribe Called Judah*, 2023)

The politeness marker “*please*” reduces the force of the imperative, while “*one more chance*” communicates dependence on the hearer’s decision. The speaker therefore recognises the hearer’s authority to grant or withhold the requested opportunity. The utterance combines mitigation with vulnerability: the speaker does not assume entitlement to forgiveness but appeals for it. Negative politeness consequently functions as a means of restoring a strained relationship while acknowledging the hearer’s autonomy.

In *Brotherhood*, a similar concern with minimising imposition appears in:

“I need you to stay out of this, please.” (*Brotherhood*, 2020)

Although “*I need you to*” expresses a strong requirement, the final “*please*” mitigates the directive. The utterance thus combines an assertion of necessity with an acknowledgement that the requested action affects the hearer. The strategy is particularly significant because the speaker seeks to control the hearer’s involvement without presenting the command in an entirely uncompromising form. Negative politeness consequently mediates between the speaker’s immediate objective and the hearer’s freedom of action.

The same pattern is more explicitly emotional in *Love in Every Word*:

“Please, forgive me if I have crossed a line.” (*Love in Every Word*, 2025)

The conditional construction “*if I have crossed a line*” avoids presenting the offence as an unquestionable fact while still opening the possibility that the speaker has violated an interpersonal boundary. The request “*please, forgive me*” explicitly places the speaker in a vulnerable position and recognises the hearer’s right to respond. Negative politeness therefore functions here as a mechanism for acknowledging possible wrongdoing, reducing interpersonal tension, and seeking restoration of the relationship.

Across the three films, politeness strategies serve functions that correspond closely to the relational and situational demands represented in the dialogue. *Brotherhood* contains direct commands and confrontational expressions where immediate compliance and authority are prioritised, but

it also employs positive and negative politeness when characters seek solidarity or attempt to manage the consequences of conflict. *A Tribe Called Judah* relies more visibly on inclusive address, indirect suggestions, apologies, and mitigated requests to manage familial relationships. *Love in Every Word* makes extensive use of expressions of care, hedging, and apologetic language to negotiate emotional vulnerability and maintain intimacy.

The excerpts therefore indicate that politeness in the films is not limited to the avoidance of offensive language. It performs distinct interpersonal functions: asserting authority, regulating conflict, expressing solidarity, mitigating imposition, acknowledging offence, protecting autonomy, and sustaining emotional relationships. The linguistic choices are consequently shaped by the relationship between the participants and by the communicative demands of particular situations. The data support Brown and Levinson's distinction among bald-on-record, positive-politeness, negative-politeness, and off-record strategies, while also showing how these strategies acquire specific relational functions within contemporary Nigerian cinematic discourse.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the functions of politeness strategies in managing face and interpersonal relationships in three contemporary Nollywood films: *Brotherhood*, *A Tribe Called Judah*, and *Love in Every Word*. The findings identified four principal strategies: bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record politeness. Positive and negative politeness were the most frequent, each accounting for 33.33% of the identified strategies, followed by off-record politeness at 25.00% and bald-on-record politeness at 8.33%. The comparative analysis further established that the distribution and functions of these strategies varied according to relational and communicative contexts. *Brotherhood* combined directness with solidarity and mitigation, *A Tribe Called Judah* relied more strongly on negative politeness to manage familial sensitivity, while *Love in Every Word* favoured positive politeness to express affection and sustain intimacy. The study concludes that politeness in Nollywood dialogue is a dynamic resource for asserting authority, reducing conflict, expressing solidarity, repairing face, and negotiating emotional relationships. The study extends existing literature by linking politeness choices to contemporary Nigerian cinematic contexts and demonstrating their relevance to genre, interpersonal relations, and cultural meanings. Future research should examine larger film corpora and incorporate comparative analyses across Nigerian languages, genres, and cultural settings.

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- Selected Nollywood Movies Used in the Study:**
23. *Brotherhood* (2022), Directed by Loukman Ali. Written by Jade Osiberu & Abdul Tijani Ahmed. Produced by Jadesola Osiberu & Ope Ajayi.: Greoh Studios.
24. *A Tribe Called Judah* (2023), Directed by Funke Akindele & Adeolu Owu. Written by Funke Akindele, Collins Okoh, & Akinlabi Ishola. Produced by Funke Akindele., Production Company: Funke Ayotunde & Akindele Network (FAAN)
25. *Love in Every Word* (2025), Directed by Stanley Obi). Written by Jamie@itsjamiemykels. Produced by Omoni Oboli. Quantum Leap Productions, Nigeria.