

Face-Threatening Acts Performed by Characters in the “Darkest Hour” Movie

Authors : Putu Kristian Bayu Yadi Cahyadi^{1*}, I Gst. Ayu Gde Sosiowati², Putu Lirishati Soethama³

Affiliations : ^{1,2,3} Faculty of Humanities, Udayana University

*Correspondence : kristianbayu214@gmail.com

Abstract : Face-threatening Acts or FTAs are an interesting phenomenon within the linguistic branch of Pragmatics to study and investigate. It involves not only acts that threaten interlocutors but also strategies for doing these acts. Subsequently, this study focused on the FTAs phenomenon, specifically occurred in the movie, *Darkest Hour*, a movie revolving around Winston Churchill's reign as the UK's Prime Minister. This study aimed to find out FTAs performed by the characters and how the characters attempt to either reduce it or not. Consequently, the data were obtained from the movie, *Darkest Hour*. This study used Qualitative and Descriptive methods to analyze the FTAs phenomenon in line with Brown and Levinson's (1987) initiated theory. This study would attempt to identify what FTAs occur in the movie and determine what strategy is being used at the same time. Ultimately, this study found cases of FTA towards the hearer's positive face (i.e., complaints, criticism, reprimands, non-cooperation, insult, expression of violent emotion, raising dangerously emotional topics, accusation, disapproval, disagreement, irreverence.) more frequent than the negative counterpart (i.e., order, suggestion, advice, warning, request, threat, anger, and reminder). In addition, the characters tend to perform those FTAs directly and without minimization. Based on those findings, the FTA phenomenon in this movie might occurred due to the character's persistence in holding and imposing their virtues on others.

Keywords : *FTAs, strategy in performing FTAs, FTA phenomenon, Pragmatics, Darkest Hour*

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1. Introduction

Humans as social beings are accustomed to sharing their ideas, thoughts, or knowledge through communication. In communication, while uttering those ideas or thoughts, a speaker can offend the hearer whether intentionally or not. This phenomenon is known as face-threatening acts (FTAs). Normally, a person would try to avoid the use of face-threatening acts in communicating to strengthen mutual respect towards each other's faces. Unfortunately, this principle cannot be applicable all the time. Instead, a person is forced to threaten the hearer's face in certain circumstances. Nevertheless, some individuals might choose to redress the threat in their speech, or in other words, they attempt to reduce or minimize the threat toward the hearer's "face".

Discussing FTAs phenomena requires a cluster of theories in pragmatics. It begins with Goffman's face theory (1967), which he views as a person's self-worth or self-image. It could refer to that person's desire to be liked, approved, and respected by others (positive face) or their independence, the freedom to act as they chose (negative face). This concept can be maintained, uphold, or even damaged. The term "damaged" can be explored with Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory regarding Face-threatening Acts (FTAs). In addition, it includes the strategies to redress or minimize them (FTA strategy).

This article attempts to investigate the phenomena of Face-threatening Acts in "The Darkest Hour" movie, specifically to find out the specific actions and types of FTA as well as strategies used by the characters in reducing those FTAs. Per those objectives, this pragmatic study would be focused on the FTAs performed by the characters toward their hearer as well as how they utilized strategy in doing it –or in other words, their attempt to either minimize the spoken threat or not–. Therefore, those utterances would be limited only to the FTAs toward the hearer's face (positive and negative). The utilized strategies, on the other hand, would be limited to the aspect of record (bald-on and off-record).

There had been several studies related to the investigation of FTAs. One of which is Agantiem, who researched performing FTA in a familiar communicational space in 2017. He investigated the FTAs occurred between characters in Adichie's novel, *Purple Hibiscus*. Furthermore, established those acts either accomplished or not the participants' illocutionary goals. He used the theory from Brown and Levinson (1987) on FTAs for the analysis. This literature concludes a familiar participant would perform face-threatening acts to protect their self-image. The literature seemed to investigate the types of FTAs, yet the theory is based on the strategy, which is an error –yet only implied the actual types of FTAs towards the hearer's face in the discussion–. Moreover, the FTA phenomena being studied by this literature is concerning more about the speech acts rather than the specific FTA itself.

Another journal article by Agustina in 2021, researched face-threatening acts which were uttered by lecturers in negotiating. She used the theory from Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory on FTA and its strategy. Unfortunately, she did not break down the data analysis, which is the analysis of utterances, as she only displayed the numbers. However, she classified the specific strategy which was used by the respective lecturers. She concluded most of the FTAs were performed by male lecturers. Moreover, she found out longer experience lecturers tend to produce more face-threatening utterances.

In addition, Cahyaningrum's undergraduate thesis in 2022, investigate on FTAs performed by the main characters in the movie "The Half of It". She analyzed the data using Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory. In conclusion, she found all four types of FTAs and four strategies

to perform the FTAs. Interestingly, the characters all together tend to perform the FTA towards the hearer's positive face and redress those threats with off record strategy. Nonetheless, the scope of this literature is too wide to investigate the FTAs phenomenon.

Those studies merely identify the existence or quantity of each aspect in a respective scenario. They did not give further explanation on the connection between performing the FTAs and using the respective strategy. Therefore, this study would attempt to figure out:

- A. What Face-Threatening Acts are performed by the characters in the "Darkest Hour" movie?
- B. How the characters performed the Face-threatening Acts in the "Darkest Hour" movie?

2. Method

This study involved qualitative and descriptive research methods to answer the two formulated problems, i.e., types of Face-Threatening Acts and strategies for doing the FTA, to comprehend the phenomena of Face-threatening Acts holistically. This method would help in creating an accurate and structured explanation based on the facts of the FTA phenomena because descriptive research, according to Suryana (2010, p.10), is problem-based research, and qualitative, according to Cresswell (2012, p.47), aims to explore and give a complete understanding of the issue.

The data of this study was taken from a movie entitled "The Darkest Hour". It is a movie adaptation of Winston Churchill's reign as the UK's prime minister during the Second World War. This movie revolves around his policies and political decisions during his term. Furthermore, it is known that in politics, there tend to be conflicts between two or more parties. This movie surely portrays those particular conflicts, which is essential to investigate the phenomena of Face-threatening Acts. The study would have the utterances from the movie as the primary data and its script (the written form of the movie) as the secondary data, which were obtained from the site https://thescriptsavant.com/pdf/Darkest_Hour.pdf.

The data were collected through a documentation method and note-taking technique. The collecting process involved in watching the movie, with the guidance of the movie script, to properly pinpoint the utterances in which the characters perform the Face-threatening Acts. The study used the following steps in data collection. The first step was to document the relevant utterance along with the conversation (for context) in the movie. The second step was to compare the conversation in the movie with the movie script to make the data more accurate. The third step was to note down the utterances produced by the characters which indicate the phenomenon of FTA. The final step was to sort the appropriate data for the analysis stage based on the theory initiated by Brown and Levinson (1987).

The study adopts Creswell's (2012, p. 180) strategy for data analysis in qualitative research and descriptive technique. It consists of preparing and organizing every selected data for the analysis (which was done in a form of a transcript), then reducing those data (which involved highlighting the relevant utterances with bold), and finally representing the data (in the form of paragraph in the discussion, which would lead to the conclusion of the study).

The implementation of each step of the analysis stage would be under the foundation of the Face-threatening Acts theory by Brown and Levinson (1987). The study would attempt to categorize types of Face-threatening Acts into two groups, namely FTA towards the hearer's

positive and negative face. Despite the fact Brown and Levinson (1987) classify Face-threatening Acts into four types, this study attempted to narrow down the scope of discussion, –mentioned in the background–, to investigate the phenomenon from the perspective of the hearer. In addition, the strategy in doing those FTAs would be divided into only the record aspect to investigate the FTA's level of harshness.

Moreover, Brown and Levinson (1987) divide those classifications into smaller and specific groups, i.e., the specific acts and the specific strategy for every single one of the Face-threatening Acts types and the strategy used in doing them, respectively. The FTAs towards the hearer's negative face include the act of a request or order, advice or suggestion, warning, reminder, threats, offer, promise, compliments or congratulation, anger, hatred, and lust. Meanwhile, the FTAs towards the hearer's positive face includes expression of disapproval, accusations, complains and reprimands, contempt or ridicule, criticism, insults, contradiction or disagreement, challenges, expression of violent emotion, irreverence or taboo, bringing bad news about the hearer and boast oneself, raising dangerously emotional topics, non-cooperation act, like interrupting the hearer's speech, use a status-marked identifier to refer the hearer.

The bald-on-record strategy can be divided into, non-minimization of FTA (which includes, the condition involving the importance of maximum efficiency, the condition involves giving an urgent metaphor as emphasize to the hearer, the speaker talks as if he asks the hearer to take care of him, the speaker's desires to satisfy the hearer's face is a small chance, the situation revolves around the hearer's interest, the situation where the speaker permits something that the hearer requested) and FTA oriented usage (welcoming the other, farewell and greetings, and offers). The off-record strategy can be classified into, inviting social implicatures (which includes, being ironic, giving association clues, giving hints, overstating, presupposing, understating, using contradiction, using metaphors, using rhetorical, questions using tautologies) and being vague or ambiguous (being ambiguous, be vague, displace the hearer, over-generalize, to be incomplete by using an ellipsis).

Ultimately, in presenting the analysis, each reduced data and its interpretation and explanation would be accordance with the Face-threatening Acts theory (their respected classification) by Brown and Levinson (1987). Furthermore, each datum would represent each specific category and their explanation to answer the formulated problems.

3. Discussion

In the movie itself, 28 cases of FTA towards the hearer's negative face and 68 cases of FTA towards the hearer's positive face were found. Specifically, the threatening acts towards the hearer's negative face are divided into order, suggestion, advice, warning, request, threat, anger, and reminder. Whereas the specific threatening acts towards the hearer's positive face are divided into, complaints, criticism, reprimands, non-cooperation, insult, expression of violent emotion, raising dangerously emotional topics, accusation, disapproval, disagreement, and irreverence. Whereas the strategies are divided into 75 bald-on-record (non-minimization of the FTAs) and 21 off-record (invite social implicatures).

3.1. FTAs towards *The Hearer's Negative Face*

Datum 1

Winston: "Under whose command is the Calais Garrison?"

Ismay: "Brigadier Nicholson."

Winston: "Very well, **tell Nicholson that it is of the greatest importance to this island that... that... his garrison draw the enemy's tanks, artillery, and bombers away from Dunkirk. Invite their wrath... and to fight on, if needs be... until the destruction of his command.**"

Winston **ordered** General Ismay to make the Calais Garrison baits for the Germans. The FTA indicates the action expected of Ismay to do. Moreover, it would imply that Ismay sent those men to their graves if so. Naturally, Ismay does not want that to happen. Nonetheless, it is a direct order from the prime minister. Subsequently, it threatens Ismay's negative face.

Datum 2

Winston: "Air-cover? For our troops?"

Dowding: "The Luftwaffe controls the skies. We simply don't have enough planes to challenge them. **I strongly recommend we stop sending our precious fighter planes to be wasted in France... save them for our defense.**"

Air Marshal Downing, **suggested** Winston preserve the fighter plane as a form of defense. By uttering "strongly recommend", Downing indicates that it would be best for Winston to do as he thinks. This would limit Winston's choice to whether agree or disagree with the suggestion, and to extension, he cannot rely on the fighter planes for helping the troops even if he disagrees. Therefore, this threatens Winston's negative face.

Datum 3

Clemmie: "I don't want you to be disliked."

Winston: "More than I already am?"

Clemmie: "Darling, you may be on the brink of having tremendous power, surpassed only by the King. **With such power you really must try to be more kind and, if possible, calm.**"

Clemmie gave him **advice** on behaving if he becomes the prime minister. She indicates it would be wise for him to be well-behaved. It can be implied that she knew Winston is a straightforward man and direct in speaking toward others. Consequently, he would tend to hurt or offend others. Therefore, she implies, to be a loved and respected Prime Minister, it would be best for Winston to be more kind and calmer than he already is. Consequently, this advice limits Winston from behaving as himself, thus threatening his negative face.

Datum 4

Evans: "**Indiscretion in conversation, or any other form, within or without these rooms, regarding what happens here is a statutory offense and punishable by up to two years imprisonment with hard labor. Clear?**"

Elizabeth: “Crystal.”

Evans, a War Office official, **warned** Elizabeth about the rules of working there. He specifically warned her about the prohibition regarding indiscretion speech of things that occurred in that office. Essentially, if she violated it, she would be punished by imprisonment and hard labor. Subsequently, he indicates that she should be mindful of her speech to avoid the consequences. As a result, it threatens her negative face to have freedom of speech topics.

Datum 5

King George: “I have been asked, if plans should be drawn, to evacuate my family and I, to Canada. **I wish to know the opinion of our prime minister.**”

Winston: “My opinion would be that you must do what you feel is right for yourself, your family, and for the country”

King George **requested** Winston’s opinion of the royal family’s evacuation plan. This indicates that the king wanted Winston to speak his thoughts regarding the matter. Consequently, this limits Winston’s freedom to talk about different topics. Furthermore, it would also make him under pressure since he was speaking to the king. This would require him to choose his words carefully, which is indicated by his response. Nevertheless, this threatens Winston’s negative face.

Datum 6

Halifax: “**If you will not allow any further exploration of a peace agreement, then you will have my resignation.**”

Winston: “Don’t be absurd, I need you, Edward. You know I do!”

This scenario portrays the action of threats from Halifax, a member of Winston’s war cabinet, towards Winston. This occurred due to Winston’s persistence in rejecting a peace agreement with the Germans. As a result, Halifax gave a **threat** to Winston by stating he would step down from the war cabinet. This indicates that he would resign unless Winston allows the exploration of the peace agreement. Consequently, he threatens Winston’s negative face

Datum 7

Halifax: “If you will not allow any further exploration of a peace agreement, then you will have my resignation.”

Winston: “**Don’t be absurd. I need you, Edward. You know I do!**”

Following datum 6’s scenario, Winston reacted with **anger** towards Halifax’s statement to resign. In his anger, he deemed Halifax as absurd and claimed that he needed Halifax to stay, perhaps to persuade and appease his associates, in the war cabinet. The act of anger, therefore, implied his desire for Halifax’s presence in his cabinet by using strong negative expressions. In doing so he hopes to encourage Halifax to relent from his decision and threatens his negative face at the same time.

Datum 8

Winston: "Don't be absurd. I need you, Edward. You know I do"

Halifax: "**The choice is yours. You have 24 hours to enter into peace talks, or I resign.**"

As a result of datum 7, Halifax **reminded** Winston of his previous threat, which includes his resignation if Winston fails to approve the peace talk negotiation with Germany. It has a similar indication with datum 6. Nonetheless, it is a form of restatement. This indicates his persistence and steadfastness in his decision, which resembles Winston's. Nevertheless, it points out that Winston's freedom of action is limited. Consequently, it threatens Winston's negative face.

3.2. FTAs towards The Hearer's Positive Face

Datum 9

Winston: "Read it back."

Elizabeth: "To General Ismay. In light of today's events, the time is right for many prep..."

Winston: "**RIPE! Not RIGHT! God's teeth girl! I said ripe, ripe, ripe - P-P-P!**"

Winston employed Elizabeth as his typist. But on her first day, she made several errors. Consequently, he **complained** to Elizabeth due to the spelling error in the letter. She misheard Winston's dictation of "ripe" and typed "right" instead. As a result, Winston complains to her by directly stating her mistake. Moreover, in delivering the complaint, he also cut her speech thus showing an act of *non-cooperation*. As a result, he threatens Elizabeth's positive face.

Datum 10

Winston: "Single-spaced?! Single space! **Were you not briefed, young lady?**"

Elizabeth: "Someone set it on "single-spaced" before I realized and..."

Winston took the telegram and discovered another error, i.e., single-spaced paragraph. This caused him to give a **reprimand** by asking her a rhetorical question. This implies Winston's assumption of Elizabeth disregarded her training. Interestingly, the reprimand is preceded by complaints. Nevertheless, they indicate his negative judgment towards her, specifically her work. Therefore, threatening her positive face.

Datum 11

Elizabeth: "Someone set it on "single-spaced" before I realized and..."

Winston: "**Then why did you persist?!**"

Upon learning her excuse, Winston cut her speech and gave another reprimand. He did it by questioning her decision to continue doing her errors. This action shows Winston's **non-cooperation**. Not only does it show his negative evaluation, but also his ignorance of her further explanation by interrupting her speech. Therefore, those series of actions performed by him threaten Elizabeth's positive face.

Datum 12

Clemmie: "I've noticed a recent deterioration in your manner. You're not so kind as you used to be. **You've become rough, sarcastic, overbearing, and rude.**"

Winston: "Is this about the new girl?"

Clemmie gives Winston a **criticism** about his recent actions, which is being rude towards Elizabeth, his newest typist. She judged and compared his current attitude with the past, which is shown by the first two sentences of her utterance. The threat is shown in the third sentence as she plainly described his current state of manners. It indicates that she has negative evaluations of him and dislikes his current manners. Subsequently, it threatens his positive face (acts the way he pleases).

Datum 13

Winston: "General, tell Brigadier Nicholson, "The Germans must not reach the sea! Not before we get our boys off that bloody beach!" I take full responsibility."

Halifax: "**Really?**"

Halifax sarcastically **insults** Winston by questioning his decision and responsibility to sacrifice Brigadier Nicholson's garrison. He accomplished this action by asking a rhetorical question, "Really?". This indicates his disbelief and dislike of Winston's decision. Moreover, it implied his lack of respect for Winston. As a result, his action threatens Winston's positive face.

Datum 14

Halifax: "Really?"

Winston: "**REALLY! YES SIR!** It is the reason I sit in this chair!"

As a result of datum 13's scenario, Winston reacts toward Halifax's disobedience and insolence. As the superior, who felt disrespected, he snaps and **expresses violent emotion** as a response towards Halifax. This is achieved by yelling his response Halifax (marked by the capitalized utterances). Moreover, he added that it is his responsibility since he is the Prime Minister and not Halifax. This indicates his motivation to gain Halifax's fear (of him) and ignorance toward Halifax's positive face at the same time.

Datum 15

Halifax: "Surely, before you take full responsibility for the death of 4,000 men, you'd wish to consider every available avenue?"

Winston: "What is this?!"

Halifax: "**What is your mind on the principle of peace talks?**"

In **raising a dangerously emotional topic**, Halifax starts with a question suggesting that Winston would want to take into consideration every alternative (implying the ones he despised) before standing firm on his decision. Eventually, Halifax mentions the peace talks, which is the opposite of Winston's virtue. It cornered Winston since it suggests the idea of him avoiding it. As a result, it threatens Winston's positive face.

Datum 16

Winston: “What is this?!”

Halifax: “What is your mind on the principle of peace talks? **Do we take it for example, that you preclude yourself from even considering engaging in such negotiations?**”

As the continuation of datum 15, Halifax added another question indicating his **accusation** of Winston avoiding the peace talks. He implies that Winston preferred bloodshed instead of negotiating with the Axis. By doing so, Halifax cornered and threaten Winston’s positive face.

Datum 17

Winston: “Viscount Halifax, **the approach you proposed is not only futile... but involves us in deadly danger.**”

Halifax: “**THE DEADLY DANGER HERE IS THIS ROMANTIC FANTASY OF FIGHTING TO THE END!!!** What is “the end” if not the destruction of all?”

Winston **disapproves** of Halifax’s proposition by stating his plan is vain and dangerous. He indicates negotiating with a dictator is a dangerous plan. Therefore, implying he dislikes the peace talk proposition, hence threatening Halifax’s positive face.

Datum 18

Winston: “Viscount Halifax, the approach you proposed is not only futile... but involves us in a deadly danger.”

Halifax: “**THE DEADLY DANGER HERE IS THIS ROMANTIC FANTASY OF FIGHTING TO THE END!!!** What is “the end” if not the destruction of all?”

As a response to datum 17, Halifax use the idea of “deadly danger” against Winston. He indicates that fighting the dictator is far more dangerous than negotiating with him. Subsequently, he harbors disagreement with Winston’s plan and claims that it is the actual danger. He added that it would only lead to the destruction of every side. Consequently, he threatens Winston’s positive face in return.

Datum 19

Producer: “Prime Minister, are we ready?”

Winston (mumbles): “One moment, one moment.”

Producer: “We are going live.”

Winston: “**I SAID ONE MOMENT, DAMN YOU!**”

The action of **irreverence** occurred when Winston was about to broadcast his speech on the radio. He was still revising his speech when he was told by the producer that they were going live. Nonetheless, the producer chose to signal Winston. This provoked him to get angry and curse at the producer, which indicates he does not value the producer’s desire to get *on air* immediately. Therefore, the producer’s positive face is threatened.

3.3. *Bald-On-Record Strategy*

Datum 20

Winston: "Read it back."

Elizabeth: "To General Ismay. In light of today's events, the time is right for many prep..."

Winston: "**RIPE! Not RIGHT! God's teeth girl! I said ripe, ripe, ripe, -P-P-P!**"

Elizabeth is being criticized by Winston due to the spelling error in the letter. She misheard Winston's dictation of "ripe" and typed "right" instead. As a result, Winston *complains* to her. In performing the complaint, he did not reduce the threat and performed it directly. It is because Elizabeth must know her error. Subsequently, he used the bald-on-record strategy, which is in line with the non-minimization case. Specifically, it indicates the importance for Winston to be direct and use urgent metaphors to give emphasize (i.e., "God's teeth girl!").

Datum 21

Halifax: "**If you will not allow any further exploration of a peace agreement, then you will have my resignation.**"

Winston: "Don't be absurd. I need you, Edward. You know I do!"

This scenario portrays the threat from Edward Halifax towards Winston due to Winston's persistence in rejecting a peace agreement with the Germans. Halifax, thereby, threaten Winston by directly stating that he would resign from the cabinet if Winston chose to go along with his decision. Moreover, he would not want to perform the threat by being vague. Consequently, he did not attempt to minimize the FTA and speak plainly about it, since he did not wish to satisfy Winston's face.

3.4. *Off-Record Strategy*

Datum 22

Elizabeth: "There's a telegram."

Evans: "**Ssshhh!**"

While everyone was listening to the news on the radio, Elizabeth announced a telegram for Churchill. Not knowing the importance of the telegram, Evans ordered her to be quiet. In doing this action, he did not speak plainly to order for her silence as he would have been a hypocrite for lifting his voice. Subsequently, he used an association cue of silence, i.e., "shhh", thus ordering her to be quiet indirectly and minimizing the threat of ordering her.

Datum 23

King George: "Winston lacks judgement."

Chamberlain: "He was right about Hitler."

King George: "**Even a stopped clock is right twice a day.**"

King George is displeased and deemed Winston as indiscreet. Chamberlain, however, defends his successor's views on Hitler. As a result, the King agrees that due to his indiscrete, Winston is "benevolent", but solely in that area. Meaning, it is one of his up-side out of many down-side. Therefore, he responds with tautologies (i.e., "even a stopped clock is right twice a day"), which implies Winston is seldomly right, thus giving Chamberlain a subtle criticism.

Datum 24

Winston: **"Single-spaced?! Single space?! Were you not briefed, young lady?"**

Elizabeth: "Someone set it on "single-spaced" before I realized and..."

Winston gave Elizabeth complains and reprimands for her lack of competence in working for him. Nevertheless, in uttering these acts, he did not state it plainly. Instead, he used a series of rhetorical questions, which is not to be answered directly, but to give Elizabeth the subtle idea of her incompetence. Consequently, this showed the attempt Winston took in reducing the FTA.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings, there are 28 cases of FTAs toward the hearer's negative face and 66 cases of FTAs toward the hearer's positive face. Moreover, the specific threatening acts towards the hearer's negative face are divided into order, suggestion, advice, warning, request, threat, anger, and reminder. Whereas the specific threatening acts towards the hearer's positive face are divided into complaints, criticism, reprimands, non-cooperation act, insult, expressions of violent emotion, raising dangerously emotional topics, accusations, disapproval, disagreement, and irreverence.

As for the strategies in performing those FTAs altogether are divided into 75 cases of bald-on-record strategies (which include the Non-minimization case, due to the importance of maximum efficiency, the need in giving an urgent metaphor as an emphasis, the small chances of satisfying the hearer's face) and 19 cases of off-record strategies marking the reduction of the FTA (which include the character to invite social implicatures by giving association cues, tautologies, and rhetorical questions).

In the discussion, it can be seen that some of the FTA are connected, in which a character responds to an FTA with another FTA. This might be due to the steadfastness of the interlocutor's view of something. For instance, the FTAs exchange in the conversation between Winston Churchill and Edward Halifax. The prime minister insisted that they should fight back while his subordinate and cabinet preferred peace agreements with the Axis, which is the opposite of Winston's belief and virtue. The two different perspectives would clash and yield several cases of FTAs toward the hearer's positive face. Furthermore, it can be concluded that the characters tend to perform the positive FTAs to the hearer with the bald-on-record strategy. Therefore, indicating that they are less likely to minimize the FTA while communicating with each other and demonstrating their persistence in holding and imposing their ideas and beliefs on the other character.

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