

# Politeness Strategies in Divorce Mediation Within Indonesian Religious Courts

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**Abstract**—Politeness plays a critical role in divorce mediation within religious courts as it significantly affects the mediator's effectiveness in resolving cases. While Brown and Levinson's theory addresses politeness in general discourse, it does not specifically tackle politeness strategies within the context of divorce mediation in religious courts. This research aims to bridge this gap by investigating politeness strategies in the context of divorce mediation. Data collection was carried out using direct observation and interviews with mediators at the Religious Courts in the Sidoarjo region. The results identify the politeness strategies used by mediators, such as bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. An additional politeness strategy, namely sharing story strategy, was also found. Using a case study approach, the research reveals that mediators employ a sharing story strategy to build a sense of empathy, reducing tension and openness to experiences and feelings and promoting understanding and reflection. This strategy also reflects cultural relevance to facilitate successful mediation in divorce cases within religious courts. The factors that influence the use of these strategies, particularly within the context of Indonesian culture, were also explored. The findings contribute conceptually by extending the existing theory and practically by offering insights to enhance communication in mediation processes.

**Index Terms**—divorce mediation, politeness strategies, religious courts

## I. INTRODUCTION

When COVID-19 swept across the globe in 2019, the divorce rate in Indonesia continued to rise, both in major cities like Jakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya and even in smaller towns like Sidoarjo. This trend underscores the heightened social pressures during the pandemic and highlights the critical role of effective mediation strategies in managing marital disputes during crises. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic led to widespread unemployment and a decline in family economies, increasing the cost of living, which resulted in many couples being unable to maintain their marriages. Divorce filings by wives against their husbands reached 70%, indicating that more wives filed for divorce compared to husbands during the COVID-19 pandemic. The increasing number of divorce cases has become a significant concern for religious courts, especially for mediators. In the process of resolving divorce cases in religious courts, aspects of speech acts, politeness, and adherence from mediators or participants are important areas that need to be studied. This research focuses on politeness strategies in divorce mediation within Indonesian religious courts. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory provides a foundational framework for understanding pragmatic strategies aimed at maintaining social harmony and reducing face threats. Although this theory is comprehensive in general discourse, it has not been specifically applied to the context of divorce mediation in religious courts. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring how mediators apply politeness strategies in this particular setting.

Studies on mediation in religious courts have been a topic of debate (Alamsyah & Amri, 2024). The main issues discussed in this field include reducing mediation time, the goodwill of mediators, and disputing parties (Beddu et al., 2021). Goodwill is a crucial factor throughout the mediation process, from initiation to resolution (Prayitno et al., 2022). Previous research (Anam, 2021; Haeratus & Hariati, 2024; Hanifah, 2020) has provided insights into goodwill and mediator factors, as well as general concepts of linguistic politeness in mediation. This study explicitly focuses on analyzing mediators' politeness strategies in handling divorce cases in religious courts.

Research on mediation has made significant contributions to the field of pragmatics. However, there is still a lack of studies specifically addressing mediator's politeness strategies in religious courts. Therefore, it is important to build new knowledge and apply the concept of politeness, specifically in the resolution of divorce cases in religious courts. Brown

and Levinson's politeness strategies are used in this study. The four basic strategies of politeness—direct politeness, positive politeness, negative politeness, and indirect politeness—serve as a basis for analyzing the research data. Furthermore, adherence and politeness in interaction are considered as politeness strategies of mediators in the mediation (Hasmawati Hasmawati, 2021; Donohue & Druckman, 2022).

The research aims to understand the dynamics of mediation in religious courts and provide insights into mediators' politeness strategies and the use of polite language in resolving divorce cases. The research findings are expected to be useful for mediation practitioners, stakeholders, and researchers in the fields of law and mediation. One of the challenges faced by mediators in divorce mediation is the reluctance of parties to reveal the true issues due to privacy concerns because mediators are considered outsiders (Ibrahim, 2013). In this case, politeness, gentleness, and assertiveness in the mediator's approach to uncovering the truth are crucial. Conflicting parties are likely to be more open when the mediator communicates politely, gently, and assertively to encourage them to disclose deeper issues.

In addition to speech acts, a mediator's success in mediation often depends on politeness in speech during explanations. Effective communication is indeed necessary, but politeness in speech is crucial for building longer-lasting and better communication (Boyle, 2017). This study focuses on the politeness strategies employed by mediators in the divorce mediation process within religious courts. Furthermore, the study examines how mediators use politeness principles to facilitate effective communication and reduce conflict between divorcing couples. The mediator's competence in selecting and using the appropriate politeness strategies is crucial in influencing the outcome of the mediation.

A previous related study examines the effectiveness of mediation in psychological and legal contexts to give satisfaction to both conflicting parties (Boyle, 2017; Dowlatabadi et al., 2014). However, this study focuses on pragmatics politeness strategies, which were not covered in the previous research. Thus, it provides a new perspective by analyzing politeness strategies in particular pragmatics contexts of divorce mediation. Furthermore, this study evaluates the communicative competence of mediators, while the previous research focuses on the legal background of mediators. Karmuji (2016) examines the active role of mediators in resolving civil cases while this research specifically analyzes the politeness strategies used by mediators that offer an additional perspective on the mediator's role in communication. Li (2019) identifies strategies for a mediator's success but does not delve deeply into verbal communication strategies. Therefore, this research complements the previous study by focusing on politeness in verbal communication. In this case, this research analyzes mediator politeness strategies in the divorce resolution process.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### A. *Politeness Strategies*

Politeness strategies, as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), are closely tied to the concept of "Face", which refers to an individual's reputation or self-image. This concept is deeply influenced by the cultural context in which communication takes place (Holmes, 2013; Spencer-Oatey, 2008). A speaker will carefully select words, phrases, or sentences based on the situation and conditions of the communication (Grice, 1975). Poor word choices can disrupt communication, fail to meet expectations, and may even threaten someone's "face" or reputation (Searle, 1968; Tannen, 1994). Thus, the concept of "face" is critical to analyzing language as a means of communication, especially in a mediator's communication strategies during mediation. The politeness strategy initiated by Brown and Levinson is used to provide the analysis of politeness in communication. Brown and Levinson (1987) formulated four types of politeness strategies, namely, bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. The politeness theory is applied to analyze divorce settlement processes in religious courts. The explanation of each strategy is provided in the following parts.

#### (a). *Bald-on-Record*

Bald-on-record (BOR) is one of the politeness strategies that is directly used for communication or to-the-point communication. The function of BOR is to make communication more effective and efficient.

#### (b). *Positive Politeness*

Positive politeness (PP) strategy reflects a desire to gain recognition for one's reputation or existence. This strategy consists of 15 specific strategies, including attending to preferences, showing interest, using markers of solidarity, seeking agreement, avoiding disagreement, using humor, expressing optimism, giving reasons, demonstrating reciprocity, and offering gifts.

#### (c). *Negative Politeness*

Negative politeness (NP) involves framing questions in ways that do not impose or burden the client. Negative politeness also includes the desire to avoid giving or receiving direct commands, as this can be seen as an infringement on personal space and is considered impolite in many cultures. Brown and Levinson (1987) stated that there are ten strategies for negative politeness, such as using indirect requests, minimizing imposition, expressing pessimism, showing respect, apologizing, depersonalizing, and stating potential face-threatening acts as general rules.

#### (d). *Off Record*

Off-record (OR) strategy is a communication strategy used indirectly by a person. The strategy aims to maintain a more conducive atmosphere and avoid direct conflict. Off-record is used to avoid face-threatening acts since the messages are delivered in a polite way.

### B. Javanese Politeness Maxims

Language serves as a tool for preserving cultural values and emphasizes the importance of politeness in interactions between mediators and clients (Lee, 2020). One of the theories related to cultural norms applied in this study is Javanese politeness maxims. To lessen the burden, Javanese politeness values such as *empan papan* (self-awareness), *tepa selira* (tolerance), *andhap asor* (humility), and *kurmat* (respect) are strictly adhered to (Gunarwan, 2007). *Kurmat* means the norm to respect others. *Tepa Selira* refers to the readiness to show compassion for someone's situation. *Andhap Asor* is a trait of modesty since self-aggrandizement is considered unacceptable in Javanese culture.

The norms are particularly applied in phatic communication. In communal cultures like Javanese, the purpose of phatic communication is to establish rapport, expand one's social network, and maintain existing social ties. The specific functions of Javanese phatic communication are initiating a conversation by uttering greetings, commenting on the weather, strengthening friendships by asking about marital status, commenting on body types (fat, thin), gossiping about physical appearances (clothes, makeup), pleasing others by complimenting physical appearance, congratulating on achievements, giving birthday wishes, expressing good wishes, comforting others by offering advice, and showing empathy (Widiana et al., 2020). In the divorce mediation context, phatic communication is needed to foster a friendly and peaceful environment so that the conflicting parties feel more comfortable in discussing issues concerning their marriage. In this case, the phatic communication is built based on the Javanese politeness maxims since the mediation takes place in the context of Javanese culture. Javanese principles are important for several reasons. The Javanese principle prioritizes politeness and harmony. In Javanese culture, the value of courtesy (*unggah-ungguh*) and harmony in interactions is highly emphasized. The Javanese principles are culturally relevant. Since mediation takes place within Javanese society, applying these cultural principles reflects respect for local values. The principles can avoid further conflict. The Javanese principles encourage mediators to use gentle and no-threatening language (*tepa selira*) to create a reflective space. In Javanese culture, values such as *eling lan waspada* (thinking before acting) and *rukun* (harmony) are deeply embedded. These strategies prevent face-threatening acts that could escalate conflicts or hurt the feelings of either conflicting party.

## III. METHODOLOGY

The research design employs a case study approach involving two mediators as participants. Two mediators of different genders—male and female—are selected, differing in age, educational background, and region of origin. The selection of mediators with different genders has particular purposes. It balances perspectives and views. In this case, male and female mediators often bring complementary communication and problem-solving styles. Gender diversity in the mediation team can also improve dynamics through diverse communication strategies and levels of emotional intelligence. The mediators of different genders were also selected to understand the extent of politeness exhibited by both of them. The participant demographics for this study are provided in Table 1 as follows:

TABLE 1  
THE PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

No	Pseudonym	Age	Region of Origin	Education	Gender
1	Female Mediator	35	Madurese	Master's Degree (S2)	Female
2	Male Mediator	68	Javanese	Bachelor's Degree (S1)	Male

Ethics in this research require permission from the mediator to record the dialogue in the mediation process in the Sidoarjo Religious Court. The mediator gave consent to the researcher to record and take notes. Data collection techniques were carried out by using direct observation and interviews with mediators at the religious court in the Sidoarjo region. After obtaining the recording of the mediator's conversation with the conflicting parties, the conversations were transcribed, and the utterances containing politeness strategies were classified based on the politeness theory. The method of ethnography was applied in the research procedure. The accurate data were collected based on the required domains. Then, the data were classified according to the particular categories. The next step is linking the main data needed with the taxonomic analysis (Spradley, 2016). Then, the data were analyzed based on Brown and Levinson's theory. The total data was 361, consisting of 156 utterances containing politeness strategies submitted by female mediators and 205 data submitted by male mediators.

## IV. RESULT

The findings show that mediators in the Sidoarjo Religious Courts utilize distinct strategies to navigate divorce cases, whether by mutual consent or repudiation. The nuances of these strategies that are tailored to ensure smooth communication and resolution are highlighted in Table 2.

TABLE 2  
MEDIATOR POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN DIVORCE MEDIATION

Mediators	Politeness Strategies					Total Data (Percentage)
	Bald on-Record	Positive Politeness	Negative Politeness	Off-Record	Sharing Story	
Female Mediator	56 (36.6%)	43 (28,1 %)	53 (34.6%)	3 (1.9%)	1(0.6%)	156 (43.21%)
Male Mediator	93 (54.3%)	58 (33.9%)	37 (21.6 %)	16 (9.3%)	1 (0.6%)	205 (56.79%)
Total Politeness Strategies	149 (41.27%)	101 (27.98%)	90 (24.93%)	19 (5.26%)	2 (0.56%)	361 (100%)

The data shows that the female mediator employed politeness strategies in a total of 156 utterances, or 43.21% of the total data. The mediator used Bald-on-Record (BOR) in 56 utterances or 36.6%, Positive Politeness (PP) in 43 utterances or 28.1%, Negative Politeness (NP) in 53 utterances or 34.6%, Off-Record (OR) in 3 utterances or 1.9%, and finally, sharing stories (SS) in 1 utterance or 0.6%. The female mediator uses different strategies from the male mediator. The male mediator used a total of 205 utterances, accounting for approximately 56.79% of the interactions. From the existing data, BOR was used in 93 utterances (54.3%); PP in 58 utterances (33.9%); NP in 37 utterances (21.6%); OR in 16 utterances (9.3%); and SS was the last strategy used by the mediator, with only one utterance or 0.6%.

The female mediator used the BOR strategy in 56 utterances, consisting of providing information in 13 utterances, asserting in 12 utterances, explaining in 11 utterances, ordering in 5 utterances, advising in 4 utterances, responding in 3 utterances, commenting in 2 utterances, agreeing in 2 utterances, confirming in 1 utterance, calling in 1 utterance, praising in 1 utterance, and greeting in 1 utterance. Thus, the BOR strategy is the most frequent politeness strategy utilized by female mediators.

The dominant politeness strategy employed by the male mediator is the BOR strategy, which involves 93 utterances, with inquiries in 60 utterances, confirmations in 14 utterances, explanations in 6 utterances, affirmations in 5 utterances, informing in 3 utterances, advising in 2 utterances, inviting in 2 utterances, and commanding in 1 utterance.

The BOR strategy is frequently used by mediators, while the SS strategy is rarely used. In other words, both mediators dominantly used the BOR strategy to mediate divorce cases in religious courts. However, the SS strategy had a more positive impact, although it was less frequently used by the mediators in resolving divorce cases. The SS strategy was more successful in achieving reconciliation or returning to a peaceful relationship and continuing the marriage than other strategies. A detailed analysis with related examples is provided in the following sections.

#### A. Bald-on-Record

Bald-on-Record (BOR) is a strategy of communication in which the speaker expresses the message directly. It is necessary to communicate directly when clarity, speed, and necessity outweigh the social norms of politeness. The following data is related to the BOR strategy.

Context: The participants are a male mediator and a husband. The mediator asks the husband whether he has already reconsidered the divorce. The husband answered he had not reconsidered it. The conversation is in the mediation room.

Male Mediator: *Apa sudah dipikir secara mateng, sudah istiqarah? Kita kan punya keyakinan, sudah istiqarah?*  
(Have you thought deeply, have you prayed Istikharah? We have beliefs, have you prayed for guidance?)

Husband: *Belum* (Not yet.)

Mediator: *Belum istiqarah bapak dan ibu sudah merasa ini jalan terbaik.*  
(If you haven't prayed Istikharah, why do both of you feel that this is the best path?)

Husband: *Sudah ndak kuat.* (I'm not strong enough.)

The data demonstrates that the mediator utilizes the politeness strategy of BOR in the form of questioning, aiming to obtain conviction and certainty from the husband to take the appropriate and best action. The linguistic marker of the mediator's politeness strategy is in the form of a question, *Sudah Istiqarah?* 'Have you prayed Istikharah?'. The mediator intends to remind the husband to perform the *Istikhara* prayer to seek guidance and certainty from God regarding all actions and decisions during the mediation. The impact of the mediator's use of the BOR strategy is to instill doubt in the conflicting parties about divorce.

#### B. Positive Politeness

Positive politeness (PP) is a communication strategy that is used to appeal to the listener's positive face, which is their need to be liked, appreciated, or accepted by others. The following conversation between the male mediator and the husband describes how positive politeness is used in the mediation process.

Context: The participants are a male mediator and a husband. The male mediator advises a husband to do introspection on his marriage with the goal of restoring the marriage. The mediation was held in the mediation room.

Mediator: *Mari kita introspeksi, kasibu koblahu kasabu, mari kita koreksi rumah tangga kita ini. Maka carilah, cari yang terbaik sebagaimana wa asiruhuna bil-mahruuf, faingkarah tumuuhunna bil mahruuf An-nisa ayat 19. Andai kata rumah tangga dapat dipertahankan, ayolah kita pertahankan dengan cara baik baik. Gimanapun manusia mempunyai sifat keliru, ada sifat salah, ada sifat pertengkaran, sifat yang tidak baik, tapi kalau toh kita sama mengerti tujuan perkawinan pada waktu qobiltu tazwijaha wa nikaha linafsi bidzalik, insyaallah kalau toh sampai pada tujuan begitu tidak sampai ke pengadilan agama. Mungkin sampean ini ke pengadilan agama ada intrik intrik, yang kurang, ada janji janji yang kurang, yang belum dipenuhi pada waktu perkawinan kan begitu itu. Pada pacaran yang sehidup semati ya kan begitu...enggak.*

(Let's do introspection and consider our responsibilities. Let's fix our marriage. Thus, we seek the best as we maintain them according to the known way. "Live with them in kindness; even if you dislike them, perhaps you dislike something in which Allah has placed much good." An-Nisa, 19. If the marriage can be preserved, let's preserve it in a good manner. Nonetheless, humans have flawed traits. There are mistakes, disputes, and negative traits. But if we both understand the purpose of marriage, at the time of accepting it and taking it as a commitment, hopefully, if we reach that goal, it won't need to go to a religious court. Perhaps in court, there are intrigues, there are unfulfilled promises from the time of marriage, isn't it so? In courtship, it's a matter of life and death, isn't it?)

Husband: *Injih*, (Yes.)

The male mediator utilizes the PP strategy to advise the husband, referring to Koran verses for guidance. The aim is to prompt introspection, correction, preservation of the marital relationship, and encourage conflict resolution. The impact of the mediator's use of the PP strategy is to open the hearts, minds, and perspectives of both conflicting parties regarding the journey of a marriage that has not undergone introspection and correction in order to sustain it.

### C. Negative Politeness

Negative politeness (NP) is a communication strategy that focuses on addressing the listener's negative face, which refers to their desire for autonomy, independence, and freedom from imposition. The following conversation is an example related to negative politeness.

Context: The participants are a male mediator and a husband. The mediator explains to the husband that marriage is not like a game and he must be serious and committed to living together. The mediation takes place in the mediation room.

Male Mediator: *Ini..maka kita buat perjanjian jadi tidak main main, bapak.*

(Here it is. We make an agreement. So, it is a serious matter.)

Husband: *Injih*. (Yes)

The mediator uses the NP strategy to explain the importance of the agreement to both parties, urging sincere adherence and honoring the pact for marriage peace. A linguistic marker of NP strategy is seen when the mediator utters, *Ini..maka kita buat perjanjian jadi tidak main main, bapak* 'Here it is. We make an agreement. So, it is a serious matter'. By uttering it, the mediator prompts both parties to create an agreement and consensus for peace to restore their marriage. The impact of the NP strategy is that the husband can be more serious and accountable as the head of the marriage, ensuring that the wife is not treated abusively. However, the mediator still provides flexibility in the content of the agreement made by both conflicting parties.

### D. Off Record

Off-Record (OR) is a strategy of communication that involves the use of indirect speech to make a suggestion or request and also allows the speaker to avoid directly stating their intentions to give the listener more freedom to interpret the message. The following conversation illustrates the OR strategy.

Context: The participants are a male mediator and a husband. The mediator told the husband to take advice from their parents for a better marriage. The husband should apologize to their parents when they make a mistake to them. The conversation is in the mediation room.

Male Mediator: *Kadang-kadang orang tua dilawan, itu mohon maaf umumnya, sebesar besarnya anak kaya raya tidak bisa mengalahkan kebijaksanaan orang tua. Setinggi tingginya profesor masih mulia SD ya maka banyaklah beristigfar, dan hormati Bapak.*

(Sometimes, parents are opposed, sorry to say, as wealthy as a child might be, they cannot surpass their parents' wisdom. Even if a child becomes a professor while his father is only in elementary school, the child must ask God for forgiveness and still respect his father)

Husband: *Ingih*. (Yes.)

In this case, the mediator employs the OR strategy to emphasize the importance of respecting parents to both parties, emphasizing that wealth or status should not justify disrespect. The linguistic indicator of the mediator's politeness using the OR strategy is seen in the utterance *sebesar besarnya anak kaya raya* 'as wealthy as a child might be', intending to convey to both parties that despite their wealth, they should always respect their parents. Another linguistic indicator is *Setinggi tingginya Profesor* 'Even if a child becomes a professor,' signifying that regardless of their educational

attainment or status, children should still honor their parents although they are not highly educated. The impact of the OR strategy is that the mediator touches the hearts, minds, and perspectives of both parties toward their parents.

### E. Sharing Story

Besides four types of politeness strategies based on Brown and Levinson's theory, there is another strategy used by the mediators, namely the sharing story (SS) strategy. This strategy is used to give a real illustration to the clients. The purpose of the SS strategy is to understand feelings, desires, and motivation to be able to open up space for empathy and reduce tension in interacting. The SS strategy can reconsider the divorce lawsuit. An example of the SS strategy is provided in the following conversation.

Context: The participants are a male mediator and a husband. The mediator advises the husband to learn from the experience of the mediator's child, who is facing similar problems or issues. The conversation takes place in the mediation room.

Male Mediator: *Bukan jenengan tok bapak, anak saya, anak saya pada waktu nikah pertama punya anak satu itu diluar kemampuan untuk membiayai. Naiknya sruuuet, yah..lo mengapa nak, yah minta maaf yah, ya.. baru sekarang sudah hamil...wis nggak apa- apa, teruskan wis nggak apa apa 2, naik lagi sruuuet e....baru 3 bulan kebobolan lagi, terus no nggak papa 4 juga tidak apa apa nak, ada masalah habis rumah.*

(It's not only you, Sir. My child, my child during the first marriage, when my first child was born, it was beyond their capability to support, well... why child, well, I apologize, well... only now she's pregnant... it's all right, it's okay, it happened twice, the second time also beyond their capability to support...only 3 months later, again in trouble, and it's okay, even the fourth time is okay, there's an issue, the house is gone.)

Husband: *Betul pak, kendaraan, semua usaha saya habis, rumah habis semua, saya memang yang salah, tapi namanya manusia ya pak ya..nggak mau terus terusan seperti itu.*

(That's correct, sir, my vehicle, all my efforts, the house, everything is gone. I was indeed at fault, but we're humans, sir, we don't want things to keep going like this.)

The conversation illustrates the mediator's use of the face-saving strategy by sharing a personal experience involving his child, which reflects the situation of both parties. This strategy aims to encourage honesty and empathy that challenges the mediator in resolving religious court cases. The SS strategy is utilized when the mediator said, *Bukan jenengan tok bapak, anak saya, anak saya pada waktu nikah pertama punya anak satu itu diluar kemampuan untuk membiayai* 'It's not only you, Sir. My child, my child during the first marriage, when their first child was born, it was beyond their capability to support.' The SS strategy in the conversation is intended to prompt empathy. The mediator aims to foster understanding and potentially reconsider the divorce lawsuit. The other example of the use of the SS strategy is as follows.

Context: The participants are a female mediator and a husband. The mediator shares experiences with the husband that a wife does not have to know everything about her husband but simply gives her trust. The mediation happened in the mediator's room.

Female Mediator: *Karena ini juga pengalaman, Pak, um... seorang istri, pada dasarnya tahu segalanya... tapi tidak perlu... seperti ini, yang penting adalah kepercayaan, tidak harus tahu segalanya... cukup agar suami saya tidak menyimpan dendam... begitu, Pak... jangan bercerai, Pak... Bu....*

(Because this is also an experience, Sir, um...a wife essentially knows everything... but it's not necessary... like this, the important thing is trust, doesn't have to know everything... but enough that my husband doesn't hold grudges...that's it, Sir... don't divorce, Sir... Ma'am....)

Husband: *Saya tidak bisa menahannya lagi. (I can't bear it anymore.)*

Female Mediator: *Tidak bisa menahannya lagi, dengan istrimu? (Can't bear it anymore, with your wife?)*

Husband: *Iya... dituduh macam-macam setiap hari. (Yes... I am accused of different things every day.)*

The mediation employs the strategy of SS when the female mediator shares her experiences concerning her role as a wife. The utterances *Karena ini juga pengalaman*, 'Because this is also an experience, Sir.' indicate that the mediator has experienced or dealt with issues similar to those experienced by the involved parties. The challenges faced by the mediator in implementing the politeness strategy of the SS include patience, diligence, generosity, and creativity in providing concrete or real examples. This is conducted to ensure that the conflicting husband and wife open their hearts, understand real examples similar to their case, and consequently, become open-minded in expressing the core issues.

## V. DISCUSSION

The factors of gender, age, education, and background of the mediator determine the politeness strategies used in the mediation process in religious courts. The male mediator is resolute, straight to the point, does not chit-chat, but still respects both parties. On the other hand, female mediators are still resolute, do not get straight to the problem, make small talk, and respect. The higher education of the mediator, the more respect is given to the clients. Highly educated mediators excel in navigating the psychological, social, and legal complexities of conflicts. Their insights allow them to detect

emotional undercurrents and foster a balanced atmosphere of empathy and respect. For instance, a mediator with psychological expertise might respond to visible tension by saying, "I sense this topic is challenging for you. Would you like to share more?" Meanwhile, a mediator with legal knowledge might clarify decisions by stating, "This step is significant, and I am here to ensure it's both legally sound and aligned with everyone's best interests." This blend of empathy and expertise empowers parties to resolve disputes with fairness and understanding. Both mediators utilize the appropriate politeness strategies to avoid face-threatening-act that can insult both conflicting parties. The findings support the previous study in the context of African culture that politeness markers serve as a convincing mechanism in order to sustain social relationships (Farinde et al., 2023). In divorce mediation, politeness markers are utilized to convince the conflicting parties to sustain the marriage.

The dominant politeness strategy used by mediators in the process of resolving divorce cases in religious courts is Bald on-Record (BOR). The BOR strategy is used more frequently by mediators compared to other politeness strategies. Mediators often use direct politeness strategies with a tendency of 41.27% out of 361 data, especially when asking clients questions, to obtain quick and accurate responses about actual issues. The aim is to provide prompt responses and advice to resolve conflicts quickly. In the particular context of resolving divorce cases in religious courts, politeness markers are employed to achieve fair agreements. This study is similar to the research conducted by Smith and VanderWeele (2019) on the use of direct politeness strategies but is more specific in context and purpose. In the process of resolving divorce cases, female mediators tend to use a cooperative and empathetic communication style, while men are often more direct or competitive. However, in the context of mediation, trained mediators often integrate a direct, cooperative, and empathetic approach to achieve a fair outcome. In addition, the BOR strategy is used by mediators in complex conflicts to gain time efficiency, openness, honesty, and trust building. BOR is clearly to encourage direct action and trust building to provide solutions to complex problems in the marriage. When the mediator asks straightforwardly about the cause of conflict or the deepest feelings, the problematic party tends to give an honest answer, especially if they feel the mediator is neutral. The other function of BOR is to establish a proper direct approach. It often creates a sense of comfort. This happens because the client feels that the mediator shows a firm, caring attitude and wants to help the party find a solution. Besides that, BOR is used by mediators to get immediate actions so that the mediation does not consume much time. Furthermore, BOR is often used by mediators in the process of resolving divorce cases in religious courts to create closeness to clients so that they can easily get answers that have been hidden.

Meanwhile, the politeness strategy that is rarely used by mediators in mediating the process of resolving divorce cases in religious courts is Off-record. This strategy utilizes indirect speech to make a suggestion or request and also allows the speaker to avoid directly stating their intentions. The Off-record strategy was not frequently used in divorce mediation since mediators need direct clarification and efficient strategies to uncover existing problems so that they can provide advice and answers to clients quickly and accurately. Thus, clients can reconsider the divorce application at the religious court.

Sharing story strategy is the most effective strategy in the divorce settlement process, even though it is rarely used compared to other strategies. This strategy results in a positive impact on resolving marriage problems. The mediator assumes a multifaceted role, going beyond the traditional advisory capacity by incorporating a personal touch. By sharing relatable case examples, whether drawn from their own experiences or the narratives of others, the mediator established an emotional connection. This personalized approach not only fosters empathy but also presents a tangible perspective, enabling the parties to envision the implications of their decisions with greater clarity and depth, especially in the emotionally charged context of divorce. In utilizing the sharing story strategy, mediators use hedges. Previous research has found that hedges can make the environment more comfortable (Liu, 2020). In the mediation context, the mediator uses hedges by recounting his or her personal experiences similar to those experienced by the clients to make the mediation atmosphere more conducive. Mediators also use courteous speech that has been proven to support a peaceful atmosphere (Lee, 2020). Thus, by using courteous speech, mediators can build a friendly situation that supports the divorce mediation process. Negative politeness and professional strategies employed by female mediators are not merely a result of social or cultural norms but are also driven by psychological awareness of the importance of maintaining harmony and avoiding additional conflicts. When dealing with older parties, female mediators adapt their strategies to respect age hierarchies while maintaining the effectiveness of the mediation process. Thus, the female mediators demonstrate a balance between cultural sensitivity and professionalism in fulfilling their roles.

By enhancing mediator communication skills, governments can ensure that the mediation process is more efficient and effective, with the potential to reduce the burden on family courts and promote more peaceful conflict resolution. Therefore, the policy recommendations from this research are to provide sufficient support and resources to enhance training and guidance for mediators, aiming to create more efficient and rational communication practices in religious courts and other mediation settings.

## VI. CONCLUSION

In the divorce mediation context within the religious court, decency plays an important role in maintaining the relationship between the parties and facilitating effective communication. The study explores five politeness strategies used by mediators, revealing how they navigate the emotional and interpersonal complexities of divorce mediation. The Bald-on-Record strategy is used when the mediator needs to be direct, especially in high-conflict situations. While it may

seem dull, it helps avoid misunderstandings and speed up resolution. Mediators use Positive Politeness to strengthen social bonds, show empathy, give compliments, and understand feelings. This approach helps reduce tension and foster open communication. By using the Negative Politeness strategy, the mediator avoids pressuring or dominating one of the parties, respecting their emotional space and autonomy. This strategy is especially important when parties feel vulnerable or defensive, allowing them to communicate without fear of coercion. An Off-record strategy that includes indirect communication allows the conflicting parties to conclude the mediator's intentions without feeling controlled. It maintains dignity and encourages thoughtful decision-making. The Sharing Story strategy is a strategy that stands out in the context of Indonesian culture. In this case, the mediators share their personal experiences to build empathy and connection. Additionally, sharing relevant experiences helps create a personal bond to make the conflicting parties feel understood.

The choice of politeness strategy is shaped by the cultural and social background of the parties, court policies, and religious values. Communal cultures like Javanese respond better to sharing stories and positive politeness, while high-conflict cases often require frankness. These findings offer valuable insights for mediators to reduce tensions and accelerate conflict resolution while maintaining the dignity of the parties involved. The study also expands on Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness by adding a culturally significant sharing story dimension and offers practical recommendations for improving communication in divorce mediation. In this study, the two categories of divorce cases, namely *cerai gugat* (divorce filed by the wife) and *cerai talak* (divorce initiated by the husband), are used as the object of research to maintain data balance. Additionally, the study involved two mediators of different genders to map and analyze the diverse strategies employed by each mediator in resolving divorce cases in the religious court. Although the scope is specific, the findings are expected to provide valuable contributions to religious courts across Indonesia, particularly for mediators. It is hoped that this research could serve as a foundation for future studies that can further complement this study. Further research concerning politeness strategies in religious courts can be conducted in different cultural contexts by using different perspectives, such as sociopragmatics and sociolinguistics.

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