EXPLORING LEECH'S POLITENESS PRINCIPLE IN *PLUTO* (2023): A PRAGMATIC STUDY OF ANIME DIALOGUE

Dinda Aqiila Azman, Mhd Syafiq Aliy Asghar, Olyvia Basariah P M Purba, Kristina Cut Noprilita Samosir

Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Sumatera Utara

dindaaqiilaaqiila49@gmail.com

Abstract

This study investigates politeness strategies in the anime series Pluto (2023), adapted from Naoki Urasawa's reimagining of Tezuka's Astro Boy. Grounded primarily in Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle. The data were selected dialogue excerpts that explicitly reflected interpersonal negotiation, which were collected through documentary and note-taking techniques. Following Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) interactive model, the analysis was conducted through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the Tact and Approbation maxims are the most dominant politeness strategies, likely because these maxims reduce potential face threats and promote positive interpersonal alignment, thereby foregrounding themes of empathy, ethical responsibility, and harmonious human–robot coexistence. Instances of politeness are strategically used to mitigate conflict, assert moral positioning, and construct emotional depth in character interactions. This study contributes to media pragmatics and anime linguistics by demonstrating how Leech's maxim-based politeness model can illuminate ethical dimensions in animated discourse and expand cross-cultural politeness inquiry beyond Japanese honorific norms.

Keywords: Politeness Principles, Pragmatics, Anime, Media Discourse

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji strategi kesantunan dalam serial anime Pluto (2023), yang diadaptasi dari reinterpretasi Astro Boy karya Tezuka oleh Naoki Urasawa. Berlandaskan terutama pada Prinsip Kesantunan Leech (1983). Data penelitian berupa kutipan dialog terpilih yang secara eksplisit mencerminkan negosiasi interpersonal, yang dikumpulkan melalui teknik dokumentasi dan pencatatan. Mengikuti model analisis interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña (2014), analisis dilakukan melalui tahapan kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa maksim Tact (Kebijaksanaan) dan Approbation (Pujian) merupakan strategi kesantunan yang paling dominan, kemungkinan karena maksim-maksim ini mampu mengurangi potensi ancaman terhadap muka (face) dan mendorong keselarasan interpersonal yang positif, sehingga menonjolkan tema empati, tanggung jawab etis, serta koeksistensi harmonis antara manusia dan robot. Praktik kesantunan digunakan secara strategis untuk meredam konflik, menegaskan posisi moral, dan membangun kedalaman emosional dalam interaksi antartokoh. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada kajian pragmatik media dan linguistik anime dengan menunjukkan bagaimana model kesantunan berbasis maksim Leech dapat mengungkap dimensi etis dalam wacana animasi serta memperluas kajian kesantunan lintas budaya di luar norma kehormatan (honorifik) bahasa Jepang.

Kata kunci: Prinsip Kesantunan, Pragmatik, Anime, Wacana Media

1. INTRODUCTION

Language plays a vital role in human interaction, functioning not only as a medium for conveying information but also as a means of building and maintaining social relationships. Through linguistic exchanges, individuals express ideas, negotiate meaning, and share emotions while simultaneously managing social expectations (Anisti et al., 2023; Dharma et al., 2025). Communication therefore extends beyond the transmission of messages; it encompasses the ability to use language in ways that foster harmony and avoid threatening the interlocutor's social image (Holmes, 2013), making pragmatic competence essential in everyday interactions. The study of language use in context falls within the domain of pragmatics, which examines how meaning is shaped by situational factors, speaker intentions, and the interpersonal dynamics involved in communication (Cutting & Fordyce, 2020; Dey, 2023; Jovanovska & Tashkoska, 2023). Pragmatics highlights that meaning cannot be fully understood through literal interpretation alone; rather, it must account for contextual cues, cultural norms, and speaker-listener relationships (Yule, 2020). Within this field, politeness represents a core concept that reflects how speakers uphold social norms, show consideration, and preserve interpersonal harmony.

A foundational framework for politeness is provided by Leech's (1983, 2014) Politeness Principle, which expands the Cooperative Principle by emphasizing that speakers strategically use language to maintain social equilibrium. Leech (1983) proposes several maxims—such as the Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, and Sympathy maxims—that encourage minimizing expressions that could harm another's face while maximizing expressions that enhance social rapport. This model highlights the importance of balancing communicative goals with social appropriateness. Complementing Leech's perspective, Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory focuses on the concept of face, distinguishing between positive face (the desire to be appreciated) and negative face (the desire for autonomy). They identify politeness strategies—bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record—that speakers employ to mitigate face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Their model has become one of the most influential frameworks in pragmatics, offering a systematic approach to understanding how individuals manage politeness in interaction.

In the present study, Leech's (1983) framework is adopted as the primary analytical lens. This choice is motivated by the nature of *Pluto*: The Anime Series, which features intricate moral dialogues, emotional negotiation, and empathy-driven interaction. Leech's maxim-based approach is particularly suitable for identifying the moral and interpersonal

considerations embedded in the characters' speech, as it offers a more fine-grained and ethically oriented analysis of politeness behavior. Unlike Brown and Levinson's (1987) emphasis on face-threatening acts, Leech's perspective foregrounds cooperative social values—making it especially relevant for examining dialogues centered on empathy, morality, and human-robot relations portrayed in the series. Films provide a compelling context for exploring politeness. As cultural artifacts, films simulate real-life interactions through carefully crafted dialogues that mirror authentic communicative practices. Characters' speech in films reflects complex social dynamics (Lu, 2023), making film discourse a valuable site for analyzing pragmatic strategies, including politeness. Examining politeness in film dialogue can therefore deepen our understanding of how language constructs interpersonal relationships in mediated settings. Film and media dialogue provide rich data for politeness research, as cinematic conversations simulate natural language use while foregrounding social conflict, emotion, and character identity (Dynel, 2013; Culpeper, 2011). Scholars have shown that media language reveals how politeness and impoliteness strategies function narratively, reflecting psychological tension, power dynamics, and social positioning (Bousfield, 2008; Culpeper & Terkourafi, 2017). These studies highlight that politeness in media discourse is not merely stylistic, but contributes to character development and thematic construction, making fictional dialogue a productive domain for pragmatic analysis. Previous studies on politeness have typically focused on natural conversation (Gervasio et al., 2019; Rostiana, 2021; Surjowati, 2021; Wardoyo et al., 2023), novels (Syakur et al., 2023; Widyastuti, 2019), and formal speech events (Almora & Heryono, 2025; Eliyana, 2023; Lingga & Natalina, 2024; Simangunsong et al., 2024). Although some researchers have examined politeness in films (Fitri, 2022; Mustafa et al., 2024; Nur & Rosa, 2019; Rajagukguk et al., 2021), these studies predominantly focus on Western or live-action films. To date, research specifically addressing politeness strategies in anime films remains limited, particularly in contemporary titles. Anime in particular has emerged as a meaningful site for examining pragmatic phenomena, especially regarding honorifics, emotion expression, and face-work in character interaction (Haugh & Obana, 2011; O'Keeffe et al., 2020). Furthermore, while previous studies on *Pluto*: The Anime Series have explored aspects such as character design and aesthetic elements (Aldian et al., 2024; Lindblom, 2025), none have investigated how politeness strategies are employed within its dialogue. This leaves an evident gap in the literature regarding pragmatic analysis of politeness in modern anime, especially in narratives characterized by psychological depth, ethical dilemmas, and emotionally intense interactions. Addressing

this gap, the present study analyzes the politeness strategies used by the characters in *Pluto*: The Anime Series (2023). This research aims to identify and interpret the politeness principles embedded in the series' conversational exchanges. Through this analysis, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how pragmatic principles operate in audiovisual media and how politeness is used to construct and negotiate social relationships in fictional narrative contexts.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to analyze the politeness strategies used by the characters in *Pluto*: The Anime Series (2023). A qualitative approach was selected because the primary focus of the research is to interpret language use in context and explore how politeness strategies are realized in naturally occurring dialogues within the series. This design aligns with pragmatic studies that emphasize meaning, intention, and interpersonal relations in communication. The data for this study were selected dialogue excerpts that explicitly reflected interpersonal negotiation, which were taken from the eight-episode Netflix adaptation of *Pluto*: The Anime Series (2023). The series was chosen due to its rich interpersonal interactions, psychological depth, and emotionally nuanced dialogue, which provided fertile ground for examining politeness in communication. The object of analysis consisted of character utterances that demonstrated potential politeness strategies based on the research framework. The data were collected using documentary and note-taking techniques. The researchers watched the entire series multiple times to capture relevant linguistic phenomena. The steps included: (i) watching each episode and transcribing dialogue excerpts manually; (ii) identifying scenes that involved interpersonal communication and emotional negotiation; (iii) selecting utterances that indicated politeness strategies or violations; and (iv) recording contextual information such as speaker identity, relationship, and situation. A total of 73 representative dialogue excerpts were selected based on their relevance to politeness features. The data in this study were analyzed using Leech's (1983, 2014) Politeness Principle as the analytical framework. The analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles et al. (2014), which consists of three key stages. First, data condensation was carried out by selecting dialogue excerpts that reflected politeness strategies and organizing them into maxim categories, namely Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, and Sympathy. Second, data display involved systematically tabulating the selected utterances together with their contexts and interpretations. Finally, conclusion drawing was conducted by examining how politeness strategies were employed within the narrative and identifying dominant patterns across

the data. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of this study, several strategies were applied throughout the research process. Credibility was strengthened by repeatedly watching the series, cross-checking significant scenes, and applying theory triangulation through the combined use of Leech's (1983, 2014) Politeness Principle. Dependability was maintained by thoroughly documenting the procedures for coding and interpreting the data, ensuring that the analysis could be replicated. Confirmability was achieved by presenting direct transcript excerpts as evidence to support interpretations, minimizing researcher bias. Lastly, transferability was addressed by providing detailed contextual descriptions, allowing the findings to be relevant and applicable to other studies focusing on pragmatics in anime or film dialogue.

3. FINDINGS AND DISUSSIONS

The results of the analysis reveal that five out of six politeness principles proposed by Leech (1983, 2014) were found in the utterances produced by the characters in *Pluto*: The Anime Series (2023) with different frequencies. The Sympathy Maxim was not found in the film. The results are summarized in Table 1.

Table: 1 Types and frequency of politeness principles in *Pluto*: The Anime Series (2023)

Politeness Maxim	Frequency	Dominant Characters	Function in Narrative
Tact	23	Gesicht, Atom	Maintains harmony, reduces confrontation
Approbation	17	Atom, Tenma (violation)	Promotes empathy, contrasts morality
Modesty	8	Gesicht, North No. 2	Expresses humility, equality
Agreement	11	Gesicht, Atom	Builds consensus, softens disagreement
Sympathy	14	Atom, Helena, Haas	Expresses compassion, emotional connection
Total	73		

Table 1 summarizes the distribution of politeness maxims identified in *Pluto*, revealing a total of 73 occurrences across selected dialogue excerpts. The Tact Maxim appears most

frequently (23 instances), predominantly employed by Gesicht and Atom. This suggests that characters consistently prioritize minimizing imposition and maintaining interpersonal balance, reflecting the series' emphasis on careful emotional negotiation and conflict avoidance, especially in morally and psychologically sensitive contexts. The Approbation Maxim ranks second with 17 occurrences, frequently associated with Atom, whereas Professor Tenma is notable for violating it. While Atom uses praise and reassurance to build emotional support, Tenma's deliberate face-threatening utterances function as narrative markers of internal conflict and moral rigidity. Thus, approbation usage and violation together serve to contrast moral orientations and emotional maturity among characters. Sympathy emerges in 14 instances, particularly in moments of grief, loss, and emotional vulnerability, primarily enacted by Atom, Helena, and Haas. Its presence underscores the narrative's focus on compassion and emotional recognition, even in interactions involving prejudice and trauma. Agreement (11 instances) is used to soften disagreement and maintain cooperative dialogue, while Modesty (8 instances), observed in reflective exchanges involving Gesicht and North No. 2, reinforces humility and shared moral accountability. Overall, the frequency pattern highlights the centrality of empathy-driven communication in the anime. Politeness strategies are not only linguistic devices but also thematic tools for portraying emotional intelligence, ethical development, and the bridging of human-robot boundaries. The prevalence of harmony-oriented maxims confirms that *Pluto* uses politeness to construct moral contrast, deepen character psychology, and articulate the series' broader message about humanity, dignity, and coexistence. The collected excerpts illustrate how characters in *Pluto* employ politeness strategies to negotiate emotional uncertainty, social hierarchy, and ethical reflection. Consistent with Leech's (1983, 2014) Politeness Principle, the data reveal attempts to minimize conflict, maintain harmony, and express empathy, often aligning politeness with the anime's broader themes of humanity and moral consciousness among artificial beings. In sum, the comparison with Stand by Me Doraemon and Adit dan Sopo Jarwo underscores that while politeness in animated media generally functions to maintain social cohesion and convey character relationships, *Pluto* expands this function significantly. It employs politeness as a semiotic resource for exploring the limits of morality, the nature of sentience, and the instability of human ethical superiority. The findings thus demonstrate that linguistic politeness in media texts is not merely a stylistic or interpersonal tool but also an ideologically charged mechanism for shaping audience perceptions of agency, empathy, and moral legitimacy across biological and artificial forms.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This study examined politeness strategies in *Pluto* (2023) using Leech's Politeness Principle as the primary theoretical lens, supported by Brown and Levinson's facework model where relevant. The analysis demonstrates that the anime employs politeness not merely as a conversational device, but as a narrative instrument for expressing moral tension, emotional depth, and relational ethics between humans and robots. The predominance of the Tact and Sympathy maxims highlights the series' thematic emphasis on empathy, dignity, and the preservation of harmony amid conflict and existential uncertainty. Politeness strategies serve to soften confrontation, establish trust, and underscore the characters' moral agency, reinforcing *Pluto*'s central message regarding compassion and humanity in technologically mediated interactions. By applying Leech's framework to global anime discourse, this research contributes to expanding pragmatic inquiry beyond culturally bound models of Japanese politeness, demonstrating the value of a universalist approach for analyzing emotional and ethical dimensions in media language. The findings underscore the relevance of politeness theory in contemporary animated storytelling and suggest avenues for further research, including cross-anime comparative studies, multimodal politeness analysis incorporating visuals and tone, and corpus-based investigations of politeness in scripted media.

5. REFERENCES

Aldian, A. A., Ahmad, H. A., & Ratri, D. (2024). Analisis komparatif desain karakter pada seri animasi Pluto (2023) dan komik Astro Boy (1952). *VCODE: Journal of Visual Communication Design, 4*(1), 1-17. https://doi.org/10.26887/vcode.v4i1.4321

Almora, S., & Heryono, H. (2025). Politeness Strategies Used by the Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs in a Speech at the General Debate of the United Nations: Pragmatics Study. *JURNALISTRENDI: Jurnal Linguistik, Sastra, dan Pendidikan, 10*(1), 235-249. https://doi.org/10.51673/jurnalistrendi.v10i1.2334

Anisti, A., Tambunan, R. M., Sidharta, V., Sampean, S., & Syatir, S. (2023). Family communication patterns in the era digital technology. *ARRUS Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities, 3*(6), 750-756. https://doi.org/10.35877/soshum2225

Bousfield, D. (2008). *Impoliteness in interaction*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Budiarta, I. W., & Rajistha, I. G. N. A. (2018). Politeness in "Adit dan Sopo Jarwo" animation. *Lingua Cultura, 12*(1), 25-30. https://doi.org/10.21512/lc.v12i1.1822

Culpeper, J. (2011). *Impoliteness: Using language to cause offence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Culpeper, J., & Terkourafi, M. (2017). Pragmatics and (im)politeness. In J. Culpeper, M. Haugh, & D. Kadar (Eds.), *Palgrave handbook of (im)politeness* (11-39). London: Palgrave.

Cutting, J., & Fordyce, K. (2020). *Pragmatics: A resource book for students* (4th ed.). London: Routledge.

Dey, M. D. (2023). Four main characteristics of English pragmatics. *LLT Journal, 26*(2), 510-519. https://doi.org/10.24071/llt.v26i2.6202

Dharma, Y., Seneru, W., & Obi, S. N. (2025). The role of communication in building tolerance and unity in a diverse society: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Communication, Religious, and Social Sciences (JoCRSS), 3*(1), 13-24. https://doi.org/10.60046/jocrss.v3i1.219

Dynel, M. (2013). *Pragmatics of fiction*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Eliyana, E. (2023). Infrastructure development: Politeness strategy in the speech of the Indonesian President, Jokowi. *Calls: Journal of Culture, Arts, Literature, and Linguistics, 9*(2), 197-214. https://doi.org/10.30872/calls.v9i2.12230

Fitri, Z. (2022). A pragmatic analysis of politeness strategies in Mulan movie. *English Education Journal, 13*(2), 185-201. https://doi.org/10.24815/eej.v13i2.21980

Gervasio, M., Humphrey, D. R., & Ireri, K. (2019). Politeness strategies employed by Chuka university students in their social media discourse. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature, 7*(8), 53-64. https://doi.org/10.20431/2347-3134.0708006

Haugh, M., & Obana, Y. (2011). Politeness in Japan. In D. Z. Kádár, & S. Mills (Eds.), *Politeness in East Asia* (pp. 147-155). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Holmes, J. (2013). *An introduction to sociolinguistics* (4th ed.). London: Routledge.

Jovanovska, S., & Tashkoska, M. (2023). Discourse pragmatics and language variation. *Web of Scientists and Scholars: Journal of Multidisciplinary Research, 1*(1), 48-55. https://webofjournals.com/index.php/12/article/view/30

Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics*. London: Longman Group Limited.

Leech, G. (2014). *The pragmatics of politeness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lindblom, S. (2025). Monsters in our shared world: Aesthetic Action, and the billionaire creators of Historical Action. *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture, 17*(1), 2559454. https://doi.org/10.1080/20004214.2025.2559454

Lingga, F. A., & Natalina, C. (2024). Analysis politeness strategy of Prabowo Subianto speech on the CSIS Indonesia event. *Dharmas Education Journal (DE_Journal), 5*(1), 155–167. https://doi.org/10.56667/de_journal.v5i1.1305

Lu, Z. (2023). How do films reflect our societies today? An analysis of films and film genres. *Communication, Society and Media, 6*(4), 69-75. https://doi.org/10.22158/csm.v6n4p69

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. London: Sage.

Mulyono, E. (2016). Politeness principle analysis in cartoon movie entitled Stand by Me Doraemon. Premise: *Journal of English Education and Applied Linguistics, 5*(1), 9-23. https://doi.org/10.24127/pj.v5i1.413

Mustofa, I., Fadhilah, N., Zain, A. R., & Nasrullah, N. (2024). Exploration of politeness strategies between main characters in the Green Book Movie. *Journal of Language Intelligence and Culture, 6*(1), 73–88. https://doi.org/10.35719/jlic.v6i1.150

Nur, I. M., & Rosa, R. N. (2019). An analysis politeness strategies in the directive uttered by characters in Big Hero 6 Movie. *E-Journal of English Language and Literature, 8*(3), 69-75. https://doi.org/10.24036/ell.v8i3.105551

O'Keeffe, A., Clancy, B., & Adolphs, S. (2020). *Introducing pragmatics in use*. London: Routledge.

Rajagukguk, Y., Sinambela, E., & Pasaribu, A. N. (2021). Politeness strategy and principles used in conversation on Green Book Film. *International Journal of Educational Research &Amp; Social Sciences, 2*(3), 568–573. https://doi.org/10.51601/ijersc.v2i3.47

Rostiana, H. (2021). Politeness strategy used by clothes vendors at traditional market Pasar Bojong. *Journal of English Education Studies, 4(*1), 55-60. https://doi.org/10.30653/005.202141.67

Simangunsong, P. A., Saragi, C. N., & Sipayung, K. (2024). Politeness strategy used by President Barack Obama speech. *Jurnal Onoma: Pendidikan, Bahasa, Dan Sastra, 10*(2), 1542–1548. https://doi.org/10.30605/onoma.v10i2.3502

Surjowati, R. (2021). The politeness strategies used by the students with regional multicultural background. *NOBEL: Journal of Literature and Language Teaching, 12*(1), 112–135. https://doi.org/10.15642/NOBEL.2021.12.1.112-135

Syakur, A., Sudrajad, W., & Masruroh, M. (2023). Politeness strategies used by major characters in Jane Austen's novel, Pride and Prejudice. *Language Literacy: Journal*

of Linguistics, Literature, and Language Teaching, 7(2), 550-564. https://doi.org/10.30743/ll.v7i2.8199

Wardoyo, A. H. H., Mahmud, M., & Nur, S. (2023). Politeness strategies in barbershop. *Celebes Journal of Language Studies, 3*(2), 361-370. https://doi.org/10.51629/cjls.v3i2.161

Widyastuti, W. (2019). The analysis of politeness strategy used by the main character of novel "The Sun Also Rises". *Journal of Pragmatics Research, 1*(2), 118-138. https://doi.org/10.18326/jopr.v1i2.118-138

Yule, G. (2020). *The study of language* (7th ed). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.