



An Analysis of Language Politeness Maxims in Bilingual Elementary School Utterances: A Case Study on Rural School

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-04-30 Revised: 2026-09-04 Accepted: 2026-09-04 Keywords: Bilingualism; Descriptive-pragmatics; Language Politeness; Rural School DOI: DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v13i2.10373 Corresponding Author: Sri Yamtinah jengtina@staff.uns.ac.id Primary School Teacher Education Department, Sebelas Maret University, Surakarta	<i>Politeness in classroom interaction is an essential aspect of students' pragmatic competence, particularly in bilingual contexts where language use is shaped by social and cultural factors. However, limited attention has been given to how politeness is realized in rural elementary school settings. This study aims to examine how politeness maxims are reflected in students' bilingual utterances in a rural classroom. Using a descriptive pragmatic approach, the data (n=12) consist of naturally occurring student utterances collected during classroom interaction and analyzed based on Leech's (2014) Politeness Maxims. The findings show that all six maxims are realized with varying patterns of compliance and violation. Students frequently demonstrate tact, generosity, and agreement through helping behavior, clarification, and supportive responses, reflecting a strong orientation toward maintaining social harmony. However, violations also occur, particularly in the form of direct commands, teasing, and negative expressions in peer interaction. The use of Indonesian and Javanese contributes to these patterns, as students strategically employ both languages to manage formality and interpersonal relations. These findings suggest that politeness is shaped by bilingual competence and local cultural values, and highlight the importance of integrating pragmatic awareness into classroom practices to support more effective and socially appropriate communication.</i>

1. Introduction

Language politeness has been widely recognized as an essential component of students' character development, particularly in shaping how individuals manage social relationships through appropriate language use (Meyer, 2021; Riyanto et al., 2023; Petraki & Ramayanti, 2018). In educational settings, especially at the elementary level, students are expected not only to develop linguistic competence but also to demonstrate pragmatic awareness in aligning their utterances with social norms and interactional contexts (Asteka et al., 2024; Masruddin et al., 2023). Considerable attention has been given to politeness as a reflection of social distance, age, and communicative ability (Atmawati, 2021; Fitriyani & Andriyanti, 2020; Triyono et al., 2025).

However, despite this growing body of research, classroom practices still reveal that students frequently produce utterances that deviate from expected norms of politeness. In fact, previous studies have shown that impolite expressions, direct commands, and emotionally driven responses remain common in elementary classroom interaction (Febriasari & Wijayanti, 2018; Liani & Dafit, 2023; Muharudin et al., 2023). This indicates that politeness is not merely an inherent outcome of language learning, but rather a developing aspect of students' pragmatic competence that requires closer examination in authentic classroom interaction.

In response to this issue, politeness has been extensively examined within the field of pragmatics as a framework for understanding how speakers manage interpersonal relationships through language. In particular, scholars have drawn on established theoretical models to explain how politeness operates in real communicative contexts. Among these approaches, Leech's Politeness Principle remains one of the most widely applied frameworks, particularly through its six maxims: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy (Leech, 2014). These maxims provide a systematic lens to analyze how speakers minimize conflict and maximize social harmony in interaction (see Figure 1).

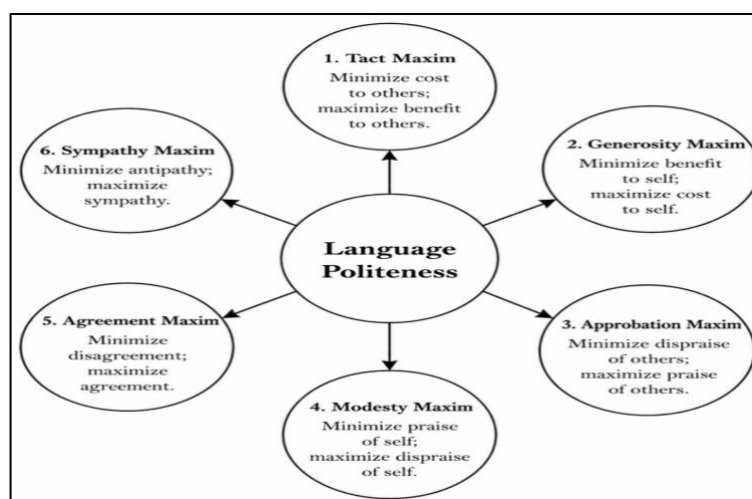


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework proposed by Leech, (2014)

Accordingly, previous studies have employed Leech's framework across diverse contexts, including classroom interaction, higher education discourse, and digital communication, revealing patterns of both compliance and violation of politeness norms (Pasaribu et al., 2022; Sudrajat et al., 2022; Mayrita et al., 2025). In educational settings, research has shown that students' politeness is influenced not only by linguistic competence but also by social dynamics and contextual factors within interaction (Putria &

Riyanto, 2020; Susandi et al., 2024). Moreover, in bilingual contexts, the realization of politeness becomes more complex as speakers navigate multiple linguistic systems and cultural norms. Studies have indicated that bilingual speakers may shift between languages to achieve particular pragmatic effects, including expressing respect, solidarity, or authority (Rahayu & Setiawan, 2021; Joo, 2025).

However, this flexibility may also lead to inconsistencies in politeness strategies, especially among young learners who are still developing their pragmatic competence. Overall, while these studies highlight the dynamic nature of bilingual politeness, they often focus on broader discourse or specific contexts, rather than examining students' natural utterances in everyday classroom interaction.

However, despite the growing body of research on language politeness, most studies have examined politeness in broader contexts such as higher education interaction and digital communication (Pasaribu et al., 2022; Sudrajat et al., 2022; Mayrita et al., 2025), with limited attention to elementary school students' natural classroom interaction. Although several studies have investigated politeness among primary school students (Febriasari & Wijayanti, 2018; Liani & Dafit, 2023; Muharudin et al., 2023), these studies mainly focus on general patterns of politeness or impoliteness without specifically applying a systematic framework such as Leech's Politeness Principle. Meanwhile, research on bilingual speakers has highlighted the role of language choice and code-switching in communication (Rahayu & Setiawan, 2021), yet it remains unclear how bilingualism shapes the realization of politeness maxims in actual classroom utterances.

Furthermore, existing studies rarely address rural school contexts, particularly in relation to how cultural and social environments influence students' politeness strategies in bilingual interaction. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, limited studies have specifically examined students' bilingual utterances in rural elementary schools by using Leech's six maxims as an analytical framework. In response to these gaps, this study aims to explore how politeness maxims are reflected in students' bilingual utterances in a rural elementary school. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research question: How are politeness maxims reflected in students' bilingual utterances in a rural elementary school? Further, it seeks to provide a more contextualized understanding of bilingual politeness by focusing on naturally occurring classroom interaction in a rural setting.

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative case study design by Yin (2017) to investigate students' language politeness in a rural elementary classroom. The case study focused on one class as a bounded system, allowing an in-depth exploration of students' interaction within its context in bilingualism at rural area. The study specifically examined bilingual utterances (Indonesian and Javanese) produced during classroom activities.

The participants consisted of twelve elementary school students (n=12) selected through purposive sampling to provide the valuable insight and specific phenomena related to the research (Cresswell, 2013) which is based on their active participation in classroom interaction and their use of bilingual language. The primary data of this study were students' naturally occurring utterances collected during classroom learning activities. Data were gathered through classroom observation using audio recordings, field notes, and documentation to capture authentic interaction. In addition, interviews with teacher were conducted to provide supporting contextual information regarding students' language use and classroom practices.

The analysis was conducted using a pragmatic approach, focusing on the interpretation of utterances in relation to their context. Leech's Politeness Principle (2014), particularly the six maxims (tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and

sympathy), was employed as the main analytical framework to identify patterns of politeness compliance and violation in students' bilingual utterances. Furthermore, data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (2014) interactive model, which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. To ensure the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was applied by comparing observational data with interview results.

3. Results

The findings of this study show how politeness maxims are realized in students' bilingual utterances in a rural elementary classroom. The analysis is based on naturally occurring interactions during classroom activities, including both compliance with and violations of politeness principles as proposed by Leech (2014). These findings suggest that students' language use is influenced not only by their linguistic ability but also by social relationships, classroom situations, and local cultural norms. For a clearer overview, the findings are summarized in Table 1, which is presented below:

Table 1. Summary of Politeness Maxims in Rural Elementary School Context

No	Maxim	Summary of Findings (Rural Context)
1	Tact Maxim	Direct commands are frequently used without polite markers, showing little effort to reduce burden on others.
2	Generosity Maxim	Students often show willingness to help, lend items, and respond positively to requests.
3	Approbation Maxim	Praise is present, but negative comments and mockery also appear in several interactions.
4	Modesty Maxim	Very few utterances reflect self-lowering expressions; most are neutral and direct.
5	Agreement Maxim	Agreement is expressed in some cases, but disagreement is often stated directly.
6	Sympathy Maxim	Some utterances show care and concern, while others lack empathy or include harsh expressions.

In addition to the summary above, the distribution of compliance and violation across the six politeness maxims is presented in Figure 2 to provide a clearer comparison of their occurrence in the data.

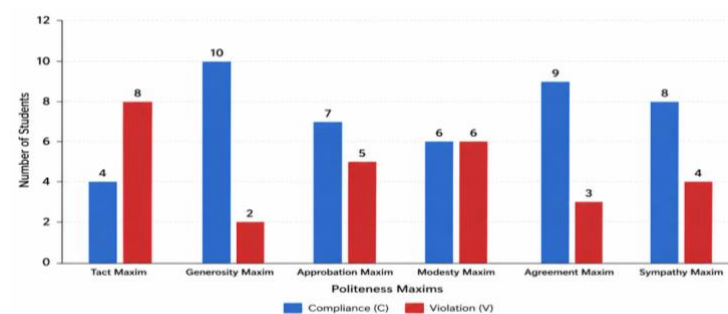


Figure 2. The Politeness Maxim Data Distribution

As shown in Figure 2, the tact maxim shows the highest level of violation, while the generosity maxim demonstrates the highest level of compliance. Other maxims, such as approbation, agreement, and sympathy, show varying patterns between compliance and violation, although compliance remains more dominant. Meanwhile, the modesty maxim

presents a balanced distribution between compliance and violation. Furthermore, each maxim is discussed in more detail in the following subsections.

Tact Maxim in Students' Bilingual Utterances

The findings show that the tact maxim is less frequently observed, with 2 instances of compliance and 4 instances of violation. This indicates that students more often produce utterances that increase cost to others rather than those that provide benefit.

Violations of the tact maxim occur when students place a burden on their peers without attempting to minimize it. For example, in Utterance 7, a student said, "*aku titip nyoh buakne sampah ya Rel*" (CLHO 08III2). This utterance directly assigns responsibility to the listener, which increases the cost to others and does not reflect an effort to reduce imposition. In this case, the speaker prioritizes their own need over the listener's effort. In contrast, compliance with the tact maxim can be seen when students attempt to provide benefit or maintain balance in group work. For instance, in Utterance 6, one student asked, "*Sekarang aku bagian ngapain?*" and another responded, "*Naura sing ngelem aja, ini tolong*" (CLHO 08III2). This interaction shows an effort to distribute tasks more fairly, which reflects consideration for others and an attempt to provide benefit.

Overall, the findings suggest that the tact maxim is not consistently applied in classroom interaction. Students tend to prioritize task completion, which often leads to utterances that increase cost to others rather than minimizing it. However, some instances still show that students are able to express consideration by providing benefit to their peers.

Generosity Maxim in Students' Bilingual Utterances

The findings show that the generosity maxim is the most frequently observed maxim in students' bilingual utterances, with 5 instances of compliance and only 1 instance of violation. This indicates that students tend to prioritize others' needs and are generally willing to take on cost for themselves in classroom interaction. Compliance with the generosity maxim is reflected in students' readiness to offer or accept requests for help. For example, in Utterance 14, one student asked, "*Boleh bantuin iki ngga?*" and the other responded, "*Ya*" (CLHO 07III2). This response shows a clear willingness to help, where the bilingual's speaker accepts additional effort for themselves in order to benefit others.

These findings suggest that students in the rural classroom tend to show a strong orientation toward helping behavior. They rarely refuse requests and are more inclined to support their peers during group activities. This pattern reflects that maximizing cost to self and providing benefit to others is commonly practiced in their interaction.

Approbation Maxim in Students' Bilingual Utterances

The findings show that the approbation maxim is relatively well observed, with 4 instances of compliance and 2 instances of violation. This indicates that students tend to express positive evaluation toward others more often than negative ones in classroom interaction.

Compliance with the approbation maxim can be seen in utterances that show appreciation or respect toward others. For example, in Utterance 20, a student said, "*ya bagus dong, cakep*" after a friend talk about his new hair cut "*Iki loh poniku, kedepan depan semua*" (CLHO 08III2). This expression reflects appreciation and functions as a form of positive evaluation toward the friend. Similarly, in Utterance 22, a student said, "*Bu, niki pripun nggih? Juga ditulis?*" to seek clarification, as she was unsure about the task (CLHO 07III2). This utterance shows respect and politeness, indicating an effort to value the teacher as the interlocutor. However, violations of the approbation maxim still occur when students express negative judgments toward others. For instance, in Utterance 24, a

student said, “*iki temanku Gobl*k*” (CLHO 06V2), which clearly reflects a negative evaluation and lowers the value of the listener. This type of utterance shows a lack of effort to minimize dispraise toward others.

Overall, the findings suggest that although students are generally able to express appreciation and respect, negative expressions are still present in their interaction. This indicates that the use of the approbation maxim is relatively developed, but not yet consistently maintained in all situations.

Modesty Maxim in Students' Bilingual Utterances

The findings show that the modesty maxim presents a balanced pattern, with 3 instances of compliance and 3 instances of violation. This indicates that students display both self-lowering and self-praising expressions in relatively equal proportions during classroom interaction.

Compliance with the modesty maxim can be seen when students avoid praising themselves and instead show self-awareness or self-correction. For example, in Utterance 27, a student said, “*Ya Allah menceng-menceng*,” which reflects awareness of a mistake. Another student responded, “*Is enggak kok*.” This interaction shows that the speaker does not elevate themselves but instead acknowledges imperfection, which aligns with minimizing self-praise. In contrast, violation of the modesty maxim occurs when students explicitly praise themselves. For instance, in Utterance 28, a student said, “*Ini gambar aku bagus loo*” (CLHO 08III2). This utterance clearly reflects self-praise which goes against the principle of minimizing praise of self.

Overall, the findings suggest that the modesty maxim is not consistently applied among students. While some utterances reflect self-awareness and restraint, others show a tendency to express self-praise directly. This balance indicates that students are still developing their ability to manage self-expression in a socially appropriate way.

Agreement Maxim in Students' Bilingual Utterances

The findings show that the agreement maxim is relatively well observed, with 4 instances of compliance and 2 instances of violation. This indicates that students tend to express agreement more often than disagreement during classroom interaction.

Compliance with the agreement maxim can be seen when students show alignment with the speaker's idea. For example, in Utterance 36, the teacher asked, “*Sampai istirahat berarti?*” and a student responded, “*Iya bu, gitu aja waktunya nggak apa-apa*” (CLHO 05V2). This response clearly reflects agreement, as the student accepts and supports the teacher's suggestion. However, violations of the agreement maxim still occur when students express disagreement directly. For instance, in Utterance 38, when the teacher asked, “*Sepuluh menit cukup?*” a student responded, “*Nggak cukup lah bu...*” (CLHO 05V2). This utterance shows disagreement, as the student does not accept the proposed idea and presents a different view.

Overall, the findings suggest that students are generally inclined to maintain agreement in interaction. However, they still express disagreement when necessary, which indicates that the maxim is applied but not always consistently.

Sympathy Maxim in Students' Bilingual Utterances

The findings show that the sympathy maxim is relatively well observed, with 4 instances of compliance and 2 instances of violation. This indicates that students tend to show concern and supportive responses toward others in classroom interaction.

Compliance with the sympathy maxim can be seen when students express care or try to prevent harm to others. For example, in Utterance 46, one student said, “*Tapi hati-hati*”

(CLHO 07III2) while reminding a peer during a task involving scissors. This utterance reflects concern and attention to the listener's safety, which aligns with maximizing sympathy toward others.

However, violations of the sympathy maxim occur when students show lack of concern or reject others in a dismissive way. For instance, in Utterance 50, a student responded, "*Ih bunda. Aaa diem!*" (CLHO 07III2). This utterance reflects rejection and does not show empathy or consideration toward the speaker, indicating a lack of sympathy in the interaction. Overall, the findings suggest that students generally demonstrate sympathetic behavior in their interactions. However, some utterances still reflect a lack of empathy, which shows that the maxim is applied but not consistently in all situations.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that students' bilingual utterances in a rural elementary classroom do not reflect an equal distribution of Leech's politeness maxims, but rather show a tendency toward certain pragmatic orientations. In particular, students demonstrate stronger compliance with maxims related to relational harmony—such as generosity, agreement, and sympathy—while showing weaker control over maxims related to imposition and self-expression, namely tact and modesty. This pattern suggests that students prioritize maintaining social relationships over managing pragmatic balance in interaction.

From a theoretical perspective, this tendency reflects a selective realization of Leech's (2014) Politeness Principle. While the principle assumes that speakers aim to both minimize cost and maximize benefit in interaction, the present findings indicate that, in this context, maximizing benefit to others (e.g., helping, agreeing, showing concern) is more dominant than minimizing imposition. The high compliance in the generosity maxim, for instance, shows that students are willing to take on cost for themselves, which aligns with Leech's notion of politeness as other-oriented behavior. Similarly, the frequent use of agreement and sympathy suggests that maintaining interpersonal harmony becomes a central goal in students' communication (Leech, 2014; Riyanto et al., 2023).

However, the lower compliance in the tact maxim indicates that students often overlook the need to minimize cost to others, especially in task-oriented interactions. This suggests that pragmatic control is influenced by situational demands, where task completion may take priority over politeness strategies. In addition, the balanced pattern in the modesty maxim shows that students are still negotiating their self-expression, as they move between self-lowering and self-praising utterances. This finding highlights that the development of pragmatic competence is not uniform across all maxims, but varies depending on the communicative function of the utterance.

These findings also extend previous research on classroom politeness, which emphasizes that students' language use is shaped by social interaction and contextual factors (Putria & Riyanto, 2020; Susandi et al., 2024). However, while earlier studies tend to focus on general patterns of politeness or impoliteness, this study shows that different maxims are realized unevenly within the same interactional setting. This suggests that politeness should not be viewed as a single unified competence, but rather as a set of pragmatic strategies that develop at different levels. Furthermore, the bilingual context of the students plays a significant role in shaping these patterns. As suggested in previous studies, bilingual speakers use different languages to achieve specific social meanings, such as expressing solidarity or respect (Rahayu & Setiawan, 2021).

In this study, Javanese is often used in informal and socially close interactions, supporting expressions of solidarity, while Indonesian tends to be used in more structured, task-related communication. This functional distribution indicates that bilingualism does

not only expand linguistic repertoire, but also influences how politeness is realized across contexts. In relation to the rural setting, the dominance of harmony-oriented maxims also reflects the influence of local cultural values that emphasize cooperation, respect, and social cohesion (Atmawati, 2021; Prayitno et al., 2018). Students' tendency to agree, help, and show concern suggests that these cultural norms are internalized in their daily interaction. However, the presence of violations across several maxims indicates that students' pragmatic competence is still developing, particularly in managing imposition and self-presentation.

Overall, this study suggests that politeness in bilingual rural classrooms is not merely a reflection of linguistic ability, but a dynamic interaction between cultural values, social relationships, and communicative purposes. The findings highlight the need to view politeness as a context-sensitive and developing competence, rather than a fixed set of rules applied uniformly across interaction.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that students' bilingual utterances in a rural elementary classroom reflect an uneven realization of Leech's politeness maxims. The findings show that students tend to prioritize relational harmony, as indicated by higher compliance in generosity, agreement, and sympathy maxims. In contrast, lower compliance in tact and the balanced pattern in modesty suggest that students are less consistent in managing imposition and self-expression. These results indicate that politeness in this context is shaped not only by linguistic ability but also by social interaction, cultural values, and communicative purposes within the classroom. The bilingual setting further supports this process, as students use different languages to express closeness, respect, and task-oriented communication. However, these findings should be interpreted carefully, as they are limited to a small number of participants and a specific rural classroom context.

Based on these findings, this study suggests that politeness should be explicitly integrated into classroom practice, rather than assumed as a natural outcome of language learning. Teachers may play an important role in guiding students to not only maintain harmony but also develop awareness of how to minimize imposition and manage self-expression appropriately. In addition, future research is recommended to involve a larger number of participants and different educational contexts, such as urban schools, in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of bilingual politeness. This study is limited by its focus on a single classroom and a small sample size, which may not fully represent broader student interaction patterns.

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