



Constructing Interpersonal Relationship through Politeness Maxims Between Violet and Finch in “All The Bright Places”

Ni Putu Irma Setiani¹, Ni Wayan Suastini²

^{1,2}Sastra Inggris, Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar

Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-07-25 Revised: 2026-10-13 Accepted: 2026-10-16 Keywords: <i>Movie Dialogue;</i> <i>Interpersonal Relationship;</i> <i>Politeness Maxims;</i> <i>Pragmatics;</i> <i>Relational Development Model</i> DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i2.11969 Corresponding Author: Ni Putu Irma Setiani putuirma0892@gmail.com 12 Sastra Inggris, Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar	<i>Politeness maxims in film dialogue are often examined only to identify the dominant type across a movie, which leaves little explanation of how these maxims relate to the development of a relationship between two characters. This study analyzes the scripted dialogue between Violet Markey and Theodore Finch in “All the Bright Places” (2020) to identify the types of politeness maxims they use and to interpret how these maxims accompany the development of their relationship. Using a qualitative pragmatic discourse analysis, 50 dialogues were selected from the movie through documentation, classified according to Leech’s (1983) six politeness maxims, and interpreted through Knapp’s (1978) Relational Development Model. The results show that all six maxims appear, with the Tact Maxim occurring most frequently (32%), followed by the Sympathy Maxim (22%), the Approbation Maxim (20%), the Agreement Maxim (12%), the Modesty Maxim (10%), and the Generosity Maxim (4%). When the data are read chronologically, the Tact, Agreement, and Generosity Maxims appear mainly in the early exchanges, where Finch invites Violet without pressuring her, while the Sympathy and Approbation Maxims appear later as concern and appreciation begin to come from both characters. The Modesty Maxim appears in Finch’s most personal disclosures. These patterns suggest that the relational meaning of a politeness maxim changes with the stage and emotional context of the relationship. Because the data are scripted dialogue and the analysis is interpretive, the findings describe how politeness is represented in the movie and do not show that politeness causes a relationship to develop. The study contributes by combining Leech’s maxims, which identify the function of an utterance, with Knapp’s stages, which place that function within a developing relationship.</i>

1. Introduction

Communication plays a central role in daily life, allowing people to exchange ideas, emotions, and intentions while building and maintaining social relationships. Successful communication depends not only on the words people choose but also on how those words are interpreted in a particular context (Yule, 1996). This concern with meaning in context belongs to pragmatics, and one important part of it is politeness, because speakers are expected to talk in ways that keep social relationships harmonious and avoid unnecessary conflict. Holmes (1995) adds that politeness is shaped by social factors such as the relationship between speakers, their relative status, and the situation of the conversation.

Leech (1983) explains politeness through the Politeness Principle, which guides speakers to minimize impolite expressions and maximize polite ones through six maxims. The Tact Maxim minimizes cost and maximizes benefit to the other, while the Generosity Maxim minimizes benefit and maximizes cost to oneself. The Approbation Maxim minimizes dispraise and maximizes praise of the other, whereas the Modesty Maxim minimizes self-praise and maximizes self-dispraise. Lastly, the Agreement Maxim minimizes disagreement between speakers, and the Sympathy Maxim minimizes antipathy and maximizes sympathy toward the other. Because each maxim describes a specific pragmatic function, the framework is useful for identifying what a speaker is doing with an utterance.

Politeness is often studied through film dialogue because movies show characters who express emotions, solve problems, and develop relationships through conversation (Muzaqi, 2025). Differences in the characters' personalities and backgrounds also give varied data for examining how politeness is realized in different situations (Nabila & Heryono, 2025). Film dialogue, however, is scripted and performed. It is written by screenwriters and delivered by actors, so it is not a record of naturally occurring conversation. It is a representation of interpersonal communication, and findings from it describe how politeness is represented in a story and not how real speakers behave. Even so, fictional films offer meaningful representations of social interaction that allow researchers to examine how politeness is expressed in characters' relationships (Sudiantari & Satwika, 2025).

Studies that apply Leech's (1983) framework to movies show that the dominant maxim differs from film to film. The Tact Maxim was the most frequent in "Lady Chatterley's Lover" (Paramitha & Candra, 2024), the Agreement Maxim in "The Adventure of Tintin" (Muliarta & Ardiantari, 2024), the Approbation Maxim in "Moana" (Capah et al., 2023), and the Generosity Maxim in "Karate Kid" (Mundiarti et al., 2022). Similar results were reported for the Tact Maxim in "The Magician Elephant" (Widanti et al., 2023), the Agreement Maxim in "Forever My Girl" (Purnami et al., 2022) and "Little Women" (Fahira & Ningsih, 2022), and the Approbation Maxim in "The Squid Game" (Firdaus & Simatupang, 2022).

Other studies look at function or pattern. Artha et al. (2022) found that the Generosity and Agreement Maxims dominated "Toy Story 4", with irony as the most frequent function. Somad et al. (2024) reported that the main character of "Totally Killer" applied the same four maxims across different timelines, which suggests a stable personal

pattern. Trifani and Rohana (2023) found that compliment strategies in "Pursuit of Happiness" expressed appreciation and kept the interaction positive, and Siahaan et al. (2026) argued that politeness helped maintain family harmony in "Encanto".

These studies show that politeness maxims are widely present in film dialogue, but they share a limitation. Most of them report which maxim is dominant across a whole film, usually among many characters, and treat the maxims as separate counts. Even when function is discussed, as in the case of family harmony (Siahaan et al., 2026), the analysis rarely follows how the use of politeness changes between two specific characters as their relationship moves from distance toward closeness. A frequency count cannot show this, because the same maxim can have a different meaning early and late in a relationship.

Relationship development offers a way to address this limitation. Knapp (1978) describes relationships as moving through stages of coming together, namely initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, and bonding. In the early stages, partners exchange short and careful talk and look for common ground, while in later stages they share more personal feelings and experiences and become more connected. Because these stages are marked by changes in what partners say and how they say it, the model can show when and for what purpose a politeness maxim appears in a relationship.

This study therefore combines two frameworks that answer different questions. Leech's (1983) maxims identify the type and pragmatic function of an utterance, such as reducing pressure on the listener, giving praise, or showing sympathy. Knapp's (1978) model interprets the relational significance of that utterance, that is, what the exchange shows about the stage of the relationship at that point. Used together, they make it possible to ask not only which maxim is used but also what the maxim does at a particular stage. The gap addressed here is that the studies reviewed above count maxims across a film and do not link them to the stages of one relationship between two characters.

The study analyzes scripted dialogue between Violet Markey and Theodore Finch in "All the Bright Places" (2020), directed by Brett Haley and adapted from Jennifer Niven's novel. The film follows two characters who meet while coping with grief and gradually become close, so their conversations offer a clear case for observing how politeness is represented in a developing relationship. The study aims to identify the politeness maxims used by the two characters and to interpret how these maxims relate to the development of their relationship in the film. It is expected to contribute to pragmatic analysis by showing how maxim types can be read together with relationship stages, to film discourse analysis by offering a way to read dialogue across a narrative, and to the understanding of interpersonal communication by showing how the meaning of politeness can change as closeness grows.

The study is guided by two research questions: (1) What types of politeness maxims are used by Violet Markey and Theodore Finch in "All the Bright Places" (2020)? (2) How do these politeness maxims relate to the construction of the interpersonal relationship between the two main characters?

2. Method

Research Design

This study is a qualitative pragmatic discourse analysis of scripted film dialogue. A qualitative approach was chosen because the study focuses on interpreting the meaning and function of utterances in context and not on testing a hypothesis. According to

Creswell (2014), a qualitative approach is used to explore and understand the meaning that individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human phenomenon, with data presented in the form of words rather than numbers. Frequencies are reported only to describe the distribution of the data. Because the data come from a script written for performance, the dialogue is treated as a representation of interpersonal communication and not as naturally occurring conversation.

Data Source

The data source is the movie “All the Bright Places” (2020), directed by Brett Haley. The movie lasts about one hour and forty-eight minutes and is presented in English. It was chosen because it centers on the developing relationship of two characters who are coping with grief and personal struggles, so a large part of its dialogue is about trust, care, and emotional closeness and not about external conflict or action. The analysis focuses on the conversations between the two main characters, Violet Markey and Theodore Finch, who appear in most scenes and take part in the majority of the important interactions. They have different emotional backgrounds. Violet becomes reserved after the loss of her sister, while Finch appears outgoing and spontaneous despite his own difficulties. These differences affect how they speak to each other and make their dialogue relevant for examining politeness in a developing relationship.

Data Collection

The data were collected through the documentation method. The researcher watched the movie several times to understand the storyline and the order of events. The dialogue was then transcribed and checked by comparing the audio with the official subtitles. For every conversation between Violet and Finch, the researcher recorded the speaker, the timestamp, and the situation in which the exchange took place, and organized this information into a data list.

Data Selection

From the transcript, an utterance or a short exchange was selected as a datum when it met two conditions: it realized at least one of Leech’s (1983) six politeness maxims according to the criteria in Table 1, and its context was clear enough to be interpreted. Utterances that only gave information, playful teasing without a clear maxim, and lines whose function could not be determined from the context were not selected. When several consecutive lines worked together as one speech act, such as a continuous apology or invitation, they were treated as one datum. After the first selection, the transcript was read again to check that no suitable exchange had been missed. This procedure produced 50 dialogues. From these, nine exchanges were chosen for detailed analysis in the Discussion because they illustrate each maxim clearly and provide enough contextual information.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed in three steps. First, each datum was classified into one of Leech’s (1983) six maxims based on its linguistic form and its function in context, using the criteria in Table 1. Second, each datum was assigned to a stage of Knapp’s (1978) Relational Development Model by checking its position in the story and the indicators in Table 2. When the position in the story and the indicators did not agree, the indicators were given priority because the timeline alone does not show what the speakers are doing.

Third, the data were arranged by timestamp, and the use of each maxim was compared across the early, middle, and later parts of the film to see how its function changed as the relationship developed. The results are presented in tables to show the distribution of the data and in descriptive explanations to show how each maxim works in its context.

Coding Procedure

Each datum was counted under one maxim only. When an utterance could represent more than one maxim, it was classified according to its main function in the exchange, and the other possible reading was acknowledged in the analysis. For example, a turn that both gives control to the listener and limits the speaker's own behavior was classified by its main function. An utterance was not classified as a maxim only because it expressed concern, support, or affection. It had to meet the criteria in Table 1 through its wording and its context.

Table 1. Criteria for Identifying the Politeness Maxims

Maxim	Criteria used in this study
Tact	The speaker reduces the cost to the listener or increases the listener's benefit, for example by giving an option or control, softening a request, or marking the purpose of a question.
Generosity	The speaker accepts a cost, such as time, effort, or responsibility, for the listener's benefit and does not ask for something in return.
Approbation	The speaker praises or appreciates the listener, or avoids criticizing the listener when criticism is possible.
Modesty	The speaker lowers his or her own value or criticizes himself or herself. A self-disclosure is counted only when its wording lowers the speaker's own value.
Agreement	The speaker reduces disagreement by agreeing with or validating the listener's view, fully or partly, before adding anything else.
Sympathy	The speaker shows concern, goodwill, or emotional closeness directed at the listener, which reduces the emotional distance between them. Expressing a feeling that is not directed at the listener is not counted.

Table 2. Indicators Used to Assign Knapp's Relationship Stages

Stage	Indicators used in this study
Initiating	First contacts; short and careful exchanges; the speakers are still deciding whether to continue the contact.
Experimenting	The speakers explore common ground through low-risk topics, invitations, and requests; self-disclosure is limited, and the listener may still resist or test the speaker.
Intensifying	More personal topics and feelings are shared; closeness is expressed openly; each speaker shows concern for the other, and the listener is more receptive.
Integrating	Very private experiences are disclosed; the speakers treat each other as a main source of support, and their personal worlds begin to overlap.

Analytical Trustworthiness

Because pragmatic interpretation can be subjective, several steps were taken to keep the analysis consistent. The criteria in Table 1 and Table 2 were applied to every datum, and each datum was interpreted together with its context and not from its wording alone. The data list with speaker, timestamp, and context was kept so that each classification can be traced back to the movie. The classification was then reviewed by the second author, and differences in interpretation were discussed until both authors agreed. These steps improve consistency but do not remove the interpretive nature of the analysis, and no statistical measure of agreement was calculated.

Ethical Considerations

The data come from a commercially released movie that is publicly available, and no personal data from real people were collected. Because the movie is a copyrighted work, only short excerpts needed to support the analysis were quoted, each with a timestamp and a citation, and the dialogue was used only for academic analysis. The excerpts are not intended to replace the movie.

3. Results

A total of 50 dialogues containing politeness maxims were identified in the interactions between Violet Markey and Theodore Finch. All six types of politeness maxims proposed by Leech (1983) were found. The distribution of the maxims is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Types of Politeness Maxim Found in the Dialogues

No	Politeness Maxim	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1	Tact Maxim	16	32%
2	Sympathy Maxim	11	22%
3	Approbation Maxim	10	20%
4	Agreement Maxim	6	12%
5	Modesty Maxim	5	10%
6	Generosity Maxim	2	4%
Total		50	100%

Table 3 shows that the Tact Maxim was the most frequent (16 dialogues, 32%), followed by the Sympathy Maxim (11 dialogues, 22%), the Approbation Maxim (10 dialogues, 20%), the Agreement Maxim (6 dialogues, 12%), the Modesty Maxim (5 dialogues, 10%), and the Generosity Maxim (2 dialogues, 4%). These frequencies show how often each maxim was found. They do not show how important a maxim was for the relationship, which is examined in the Discussion.

Distribution Across the Film

When the nine analyzed exchanges are arranged by timestamp, the maxims differ between the early, middle, and later parts of the film. In the early part (19:00 to 41:03), Finch produces the Agreement Maxim (Data 1), the Approbation Maxim (Data 5), the Generosity Maxim (Data 2), and the Tact Maxim (Data 3), and Violet responds with

resistance, deflection, a limit, or a refusal. In the middle part (51:20 to 58:07), Violet produces the Sympathy Maxim (Data 6 and Data 8), accepts Finch's Approbation (Data 7), and answers Finch's Tact (Data 4) with a personal fear. In the later part (1:04:11), the Modesty Maxim appears in Finch's disclosure of his father's abuse (Data 9). Table 4 summarizes the main function, speaker, and relationship stage of each maxim in these exchanges.

Table 4. Summary of Function, Speaker, and Relationship Stage of Each Maxim in the Analyzed Data

Maxim	Frequency	Main function	Speaker	Relationship stage
Tact	16	Reducing pressure by giving Violet control or marking a question as sincere	Finch	Experimenting (Data 3); intensifying (Data 4)
Sympathy	11	Showing concern and closeness toward the other	Violet	Intensifying (Data 6, 8)
Approbation	10	Giving personal praise	Finch	Experimenting (Data 5); intensifying (Data 7)
Agreement	6	Creating common ground by validating Violet's view	Finch	Experimenting (Data 1)
Modesty	5	Self-disclosure with self-dispraise	Finch	Integrating (Data 9)
Generosity	2	Giving time and effort without expecting a return	Finch	Experimenting (Data 2)

4. Discussion

This section discusses the findings through four main points that follow the development of the relationship. Each point is supported by exchanges from the movie. Leech's (1983) maxims are used to explain the type and pragmatic function of each utterance, while Knapp's (1978) model explains what the exchange shows about the stage of the relationship. Because the data are scripted dialogue, the discussion describes how politeness is represented in the film. It does not claim that politeness caused the relationship to develop. At most, the maxims appear together with, and seem to contribute to, the changes shown in the story.

1. Tact, Agreement, and Generosity as Ways of Creating Psychological Safety

In the early exchanges, Finch's utterances mostly try to make it safer for Violet to stay in the interaction. Invitations and requests can threaten the listener's freedom to act, which Brown and Levinson (1987) call negative face, so a speaker who wants to keep the interaction going has to reduce that threat. Three maxims do this in different ways.

Data 1

Violet: "Maybe I don't wanna get out, maybe I'm sick of people."

Finch: **"Yeah, people are stupid but the tiniest few might actually mean well."**

All The Bright Places (2020). Time: 19:00

This exchange happens while the two characters walk at night, shortly after Finch invites Violet to be his partner for the wandering project. Violet resists by saying that she is tired of people. Finch does not argue with her. He first agrees "people are stupid" and then adds a different view "the tiniest few might actually mean well". The utterance is classified as the Agreement Maxim because Finch reduces disagreement by validating Violet's view before offering another one. The agreement is partial, since the second half of the turn still gives a different opinion, so its function is to keep the conversation open and not to end the disagreement. The exchange fits Knapp's (1978) *experimenting* stage, in which the speakers look for common ground through low-risk topics.

Data 2

Violet: "What is this?"

Finch: **"That's a reminder that sooner or later, you're gonna have to get back into the world all by yourself. But I'm happy pushing you for now."**

Violet: "Well, I said I was only gonna do two, so..."

All The Bright Places (2020). Time: 36:43

This exchange happens at school, after Violet finds a stone with the words "your turn" in her locker and Finch explains that it is a reminder to continue the wandering project without him. Finch says that he is happy to keep pushing her for now, so he accepts the effort of encouraging her and says that it is not a burden. This is classified as the Generosity Maxim because the speaker takes on a cost, his time and effort, for the listener's benefit and asks for nothing in return. Violet's reply, which reminds him that she agreed to only two locations, sets a limit and shows that she is not yet ready to match his effort. This fits the *experimenting* stage, since Finch is still trying different ways to keep Violet involved while she remains careful about her commitment.

The Generosity Maxim occurs in only two dialogues (4%), but this exchange shows why frequency and relational importance are not the same. Finch's reminder could be heard as an obligation, and the Generosity Maxim lowers that pressure by presenting his effort as freely given. In this way a rare maxim supports other maxims, such as Tact, at a time when trust is still weak. Its low frequency may also be explained by the fact that emotional effort is often shown through actions in a film and is not stated in words.

Data 3

Violet: "No, Finch. I'm not getting in a car!"

Finch: **"Look, here. I'll take the keys, and I swear not to drive faster than 30 miles per hour through town or 50 on the interstate. If at any time you wanna stop, we stop."**

All The Bright Places (2020). Time: 41:03

This exchange takes place outside Violet's house in the morning, when Finch suggests a 165-mile trip to a place he found for their wandering project. Violet refuses to get into a car because her sister died in a car accident. Finch responds by taking the keys, promising a low speed, and saying that they will stop whenever she wants. The utterance

is classified as the Tact Maxim because its main function is to reduce the cost to Violet by giving her control over when the trip ends. Some parts of the turn, such as limiting his own driving speed, also carry a cost for Finch and could be read as generosity. They were counted under Tact because the main function of the turn as a whole is to give Violet control. This matches the *experimenting* stage, since Finch adjusts his request to test how much Violet is willing to trust him, and her refusal shows that trust is still limited.

Data 4

Finch: "What are you afraid of?"

Violet: "It's cold."

Finch: **"Serious question: what are you afraid of?"**

Violet: "Dying."

All The Bright Places (2020). Time: 58:07

This exchange happens at a lake, where Finch is about to swim and invites Violet to join him. When Violet answers his question about her fear with a light reply "It's cold", Finch repeats the question and marks it as a "serious question". Violet then answers that she is afraid of dying. This utterance needs careful classification because asking about a personal fear can impose a cost on the listener, and a gentle tone does not automatically make a question tactful.

It is classified as the Tact Maxim for three reasons found in the context. Finch lets Violet answer lightly the first time, he then signals that an honest answer is welcome by calling the question serious, and Violet can still choose how much to say. At the same time, the repeated question adds pressure, so the utterance lies between tact and a face-threatening request. Tact here does not remove the risk of the question but makes it safer to answer. The exchange fits the *intensifying* stage, since Violet now shares a real fear and not only a surface answer.

Read together, the four exchanges show a similar pattern. Finch reduces the cost of staying in the interaction before he asks Violet for more, and Violet's responses (resistance, a limit, a refusal, and a light answer) show that trust is not yet established. This pattern is consistent with Knapp's (1978) description of the *experimenting* and *intensifying* stages. However, the data do not show that these maxims produced Violet's later willingness to ride in the car or to share her fear. They show how Finch's politeness is represented alongside those changes.

The Agreement Maxim is less frequent here (12%) than in studies where it dominated, such as Fahira and Ningsih (2022). This may be because the family relationship in "Little Women" already exists, while the relationship in this film is just beginning, so other maxims come first.

2. *Approbation and Sympathy as Signs of Growing Reciprocity*

The Approbation and Sympathy Maxims show how the direction of appreciation and care changes during the film. The first two exchanges below show the same type of praise from Finch receiving two different responses, and the other two show Violet giving warmth and concern.

Data 5

Finch: **"Oh, I found another quote for you. 'I feel a thousand capacities spring up in me.' It's from *The Waves*. You've got at least a thousand capacities in you. Even if you don't think so."**

Violet: "You know people call you 'The Freak,' right?"

All The Bright Places (2020). Time: 20:12

This exchange happens when Finch walks Violet home after their first real conversation. Finch has prepared a quote beforehand and tells Violet that she has at least a thousand capacities, even if she does not think so. The utterance is classified as the *Approbation Maxim* because it gives strong and personal praise about Violet's potential. The last clause shows that Finch knows Violet does not see herself this way. Violet does not accept the praise and mentions Finch's reputation as "The Freak", which turns the focus away from herself. This fits the *experimenting* stage, since Finch is trying a new way to connect while Violet is still careful about how much to trust him. Capah et al. (2023) also found the *Approbation Maxim* to be the most frequent in "*Moana*", but a frequency count does not show how the listener responds, and here the response is what shows the relational meaning of the praise.

Data 6

Violet: "You know, you don't have to be so pushy."

Finch: "You say 'pushy,' I hear assertive, bold, inspiring."

Violet: "Uh, relentless, irritating, arrogant."

Finch: "Sexy..."

Violet: **"It's nice to have a friend again."**

All The Bright Places (2020). Time: 51:20

This exchange happens in Finch's car during their road trip for the wandering project. The two characters tease each other with different words for "pushy", and Violet then says that it is nice to have a friend again. The utterance is classified as the *Sympathy Maxim* because Violet expresses goodwill and closeness toward Finch, which reduces the emotional distance between them. The word "again" implies that she has missed having someone close to her. This is one of the clearest moments in which Violet voluntarily expresses warmth. The exchange fits the *intensifying* stage, where closeness begins to be stated openly after a playful moment. This is consistent with Siahaan et al. (2026), who argue that politeness helps strengthen relationships among characters, although they studied a family that already exists.

Data 7

Finch: "You know what I like about you Ultraviolet?"

Violet: "What?"

Finch: **"You're all the colors in one at full brightness."**

All The Bright Places (2020). Time: 51:40

This exchange happens at one of the places they visit for the wandering project, soon after the playful moment in the car. Finch first asks a lead-in question, and Violet answers "What?", which invites the compliment. Finch then tells her that she is all the colors in one at full brightness, a compliment tied to her nickname "Ultraviolet". The utterance is classified as the *Approbation Maxim* because it gives praise that is personal and not a

general compliment. Compared with Data 5, Violet now accepts the praise and even asks for it. This exchange fits the *intensifying* stage, where appreciation is expressed more deeply and received more openly.

Data 8

Violet: "Did you lose your phone? I've been texting. I've been calling."

Finch: "Look, let me just show you this really fast. Hold on."

Violet: **"You could've taken a second to respond... so I knew you were OK."**

Finch: "I know, I had to take care of a couple things."

All The Bright Places (2020). Time: 57:07

This exchange happens after the characters return from their trip to Indiana. Finch has not answered Violet's messages and calls, and then appears at her house as if nothing is wrong. Violet asks if he lost his phone and tells him that she only wanted to know he was okay. The utterance is classified as the Sympathy Maxim because her complaint is based on concern for Finch's safety and not on being ignored. Finch answers that he had things to take care of, which does not address her concern directly. The exchange fits the *intensifying* stage, since Violet now shows concern first and does so openly.

Taken together, these exchanges show a change in direction. In the early exchange (Data 5), Finch gives praise and Violet deflects it. In the middle part of the film, Violet accepts Finch's praise (Data 7) and expresses her own warmth (Data 6) and concern (Data 8). In the analyzed data, the Sympathy exchanges are all produced by Violet, and they appear after Finch's invitations and praise. This movement from Finch as the main giver of care to Violet also giving it is one of the clearest patterns in the analysis, and the Approbation and Sympathy Maxims are the ones through which it is expressed. Because the pattern is based on scripted dialogue and on selected exchanges, it describes how reciprocity is represented in the film. It does not show that praise or concern caused it.

3. Modesty and Self-Disclosure as Markers of Deeper Vulnerability

Data 9

Violet: "Did he do that to you?"

Finch: **"I used to be a lot smaller. I used to not know how to get out of the way.**

People don't like messy, right?"

All The Bright Places (2020). Time: 1:04:11

This exchange takes place at the lake after Violet notices a scar on Finch's stomach and asks if his father did it. Finch says that he used to be smaller and did not know how to get out of the way, and he ends by saying that people do not like "messy". The utterance is classified as the Modesty Maxim because Finch lowers his own value by describing himself as something people do not like, and the tag question "right?" asks Violet to confirm it. This classification needs care. The utterance is mainly a disclosure of abuse, so it can also be read as emotional vulnerability or as self-blame linked to trauma, and Leech's (1983) Modesty Maxim was originally described for situations such as responding to praise.

The classification here depends on the self-dispraising wording, and the other readings are not excluded. Violet's own disclosure in Data 4 "Dying" is not counted as Modesty because it names a fear and does not lower her own value. The exchange fits the *integrating* stage, since a very private experience is shared and Violet's question shows that she now asks about private matters.

All five Modesty dialogues in the data come from Finch. This suggests that in this film, self-disclosure with self-dispraise belongs mostly to him, while Violet's vulnerability is expressed through her answers and through the Sympathy Maxim. Within the story, Finch's self-dispraise can be read as a sign of the difficulties that the film develops later. This is a narrative interpretation. A politeness-maxim classification cannot show a character's mental condition, so this study does not draw psychological conclusions about Finch.

4. The Changing Relational Meaning of Politeness Across Stages

The data above show that the relational meaning of a politeness maxim changes with the stage and emotional context of the relationship, even when the maxim type stays the same. The Tact Maxim in Data 3 protects Violet from a demand by giving her the option to stop, while in Data 4 it makes it safer for her to disclose a fear. The Approbation Maxim in Data 5 is deflected, but in Data 7 it is accepted and even invited. The Generosity and Agreement Maxims appear rarely, but they support the other maxims when trust is still weak. This means that frequency counts, such as those in Table 3, show how often a maxim appears but not how important it is for the relationship.

This finding shows how the two frameworks complement each other. Leech's (1983) maxims explain the type and pragmatic function of each utterance, such as giving control, giving praise, or showing concern. Knapp's (1978) model explains the relational significance of the same utterance within the development of the relationship. Without Leech's maxims, the stages would not be linked to specific linguistic acts, and without Knapp's stages, the maxims would only be counted as separate items.

This contribution differs from studies that report the dominant maxim across a whole film, such as Capah et al. (2023) and Paramitha and Candra (2024). It also differs from Somad et al. (2024), who reported that one character kept using the same maxims across different timelines. In the present study, the function of the same maxim changes between stages, which may be because the focus is on the relationship between two characters and not on the habit of one character.

The findings should not be read as showing that politeness builds the relationship. The maxims accompany the changes in the relationship and appear to contribute to them within the narrative, but the data cannot show cause and effect, because the scenes were written and performed to show a relationship that grows.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it analyzes one movie and two characters, so the patterns cannot be generalized to other movie or to real conversations. Second, movie dialogue is written by screenwriters and delivered by actors, so it cannot be treated as direct evidence of naturally occurring interpersonal communication. The findings describe how politeness is represented in a story. Third, the classification of maxims and the assignment of relationship stages are interpretive. The criteria and the review by two authors were used to keep them consistent, but no statistical measure of agreement was calculated.

Finally, the nine exchanges discussed were chosen because they illustrate each maxim clearly, so they are representative examples and not proof of every pattern in the 50 dialogues. The findings may still be useful as a model for reading politeness across a

narrative in movie discourse analysis, and as examples for discussing how politeness changes meaning in context in language classes, but these uses should remain modest.

5. Conclusion

This study identified all six of Leech's (1983) politeness maxims in the scripted dialogue between Violet Markey and Theodore Finch in "All the Bright Places" (2020). The Tact Maxim was the most frequent (32%), followed by the Sympathy Maxim (22%), the Approbation Maxim (20%), the Agreement Maxim (12%), the Modesty Maxim (10%), and the Generosity Maxim (4%). When read through Knapp's (1978) Relational Development Model, the maxims follow a pattern that fits the story: Tact, Agreement, and Generosity in the early exchanges, Sympathy and Approbation in the middle part as concern and appreciation come from both characters, and Modesty in the later disclosure of vulnerability. The main insight is that the relational meaning of a maxim changes with the stage and emotional context of the relationship, so frequency alone does not show how important a maxim is.

The study contributes to pragmatic research by showing how Leech's maxims, which identify the function of an utterance, can be combined with Knapp's stages, which place that function in a developing relationship. Because the data are scripted dialogue from one film and two characters, and the analysis is interpretive, the findings describe how politeness is represented in the movie and do not show that politeness causes a relationship to develop. Future research could apply the same framework to other movie or to naturally occurring conversation, use more than one coder with a measure of agreement, and compare how relationship stages are marked across different genres.

6. References

- Artha, B. T. B., Udayana, I. N., & Sedeng, I. N. (2022). Politeness maxims in dialogue Toy Story 4 movie. *Stilistika: Journal of Indonesian Language and Literature*, 2(1), 89–99. <https://doi.org/10.24843/STIL.2022.v02.i01.p08>
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- Capah, M. J., Napitupulu, F. D., Pakpahan, C., & Sinaga, S. J. (2023). An analysis of the politeness principle of the main character in the "Moana" movie. *Innovative: Journal of Social Science Research*, 3(2), 3908–3921.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Fahira, F., & Ningsih, T. W. R. (2022). Types and scale of politeness maxims in Little Women movie. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 10(1), 30–45. <http://dx.doi.org/10.35760/jll.2022.v10i1.6464>
- Firdaus, R. S., & Simatupang, E. C. M. (2022). The maxim of politeness in the Squid Game film series: A pragmatic study. *Ethical Lingua: Journal of Language Teaching and Literature*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.30605/25409190.412>
- Holmes, J. (1995). *Women, men and politeness*. Longman.
- Knapp, M. L. (1978). *Social intercourse: From greeting to goodbye*. Allyn & Bacon.
- Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics*. Longman.

- Muliartha, I. M. D. N., & Ardiantari, I. A. P. G. (2024). An analysis of politeness maxims in the movie "The Adventure of Tintin". *RETORIKA: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa*, 10(2), 415–423. <https://doi.org/10.55637/jr.10.2.8097.415-423>
- Mundiarti, D., Wulandari, R. S., & Rois, S. (2022). Politeness principles in Karate Kid movie. *Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra*, 9(2), 82–87.
- Muzaqi, A. I. (2025). An analysis of politeness maxim based on Leech's principles in the movie Fawltly Towers: The Hotel Inspectors. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial, Humaniora dan Seni (JISHS)*, 3(6), 979–983.
- Nabila, I., & Heryono, H. (2025). Politeness principles in "Murder on the Orient Express" film: A pragmatic study. *JALL (Journal of Applied Linguistics and Literacy)*, 9(1), 97. <https://doi.org/10.25157/jall.v9i1.18027>
- Paramitha, N. M. S. M., & Candra, K. D. P. (2024). Analysis of politeness maxims found in Lady Chatterley's Lover movie. *ELYSIAN JOURNAL: English Literature, Linguistics and Translation Studies*, 4(3), 291–300. <https://doi.org/10.36733/elysian.v4i3.7449>
- Purnami, N. P. M., Qomariana, Y., & Mas Indrawati, N. L. (2022). Politeness maxim used by characters in Forever My Girl movie. *Udayana Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 6(1), 30–33. <https://doi.org/10.24843/UJoSSH.2022.v06.i01.p07>
- Siahaan, T. V., Sitompul, G. N., Alivia, G. A., & Sitio, J. br. (2026). Pragmatic analysis of Leech's politeness principles in Encanto movie. *EJI (English Journal of Indragiri): Studies in Education, Literature, and Linguistics*, 10(1), 388–406. <https://doi.org/10.61672/eji.v10i1.3358>
- Somad, A., Sari, N., & Arman. (2024). Politeness principles of Pam Miller in Totally Killer movie. *Canon: Jurnal Penelitian Bahasa dan Sastra*, 3(1), 9–19.
- Sudiantari, N. L., & Satwika, I. G. A. A. S. (2025). A pragmatic study of politeness maxims in the movie "Kung Fu Panda 4". *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*, 13(2), 6652–6664. <https://doi.org/10.24256/ideas.v13i2.7798>
- Trifani, E., & Rohana, Y. (2023). The politeness strategy in compliment in Pursuit of Happyness movie. *IREELL: Indonesian Review of English Education, Linguistics, and Literature*, 1(2), 214–229. <https://doi.org/10.30762/ireell.v1i2.2181>
- Widanti, N. N. T., Savitri, P. W., & Beratha, N. L. S. (2023). Politeness maxims performed by characters in "The Magician Elephant" movie. *International Journal of Current Science Research and Review*, 6(4), 2638–2642.
- Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.