



A Pragmatic Study of Politeness Maxims in the Movie “Kung Fu Panda 4”

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Abstract

This study analyzes the application of the Generosity and Approbation Maxims in the animated film Kung Fu Panda 4, based on Leech's (1983) theory and Holmes's (1992) framework on social factors influencing their use. Using a descriptive qualitative method, nine utterances from the main characters were analyzed through non-participant observation and note-taking. The findings reveal that both maxims are expressed through self-sacrifice, offering help, and praising others, which strengthen interpersonal relationships, demonstrate solidarity, and reflect each character's personality. The study highlights the crucial role of politeness in maintaining positive communication within animated films.

Keywords: *Politeness Maxims; Generosity Maxim; Approbation Maxim*

Introduction

Communication is a fundamental aspect of human interaction, enabling individuals to exchange messages, convey meanings, and establish relationships. Effective communication relies not only on the choice of words but also on the interpretation of meaning within social contexts (Yule, 1996). Pragmatics examines how context influences the meaning of utterances, particularly in maintaining social harmony through politeness strategies. Leech's (1983) politeness theory describes how speakers use specific maxims to express respect, while Holmes's (1992) framework on social factors influencing their use emphasizes the role of status, power, relationships, and setting. Politeness can also be studied through media that depict human-like interactions, such as animated films (Fitri, 2020).

Animated films present diverse dialogues and character interactions that mirror real social behavior and illustrate the application of politeness in various contexts (Dewiyani, 2023). Moreover, the variety of characters' backgrounds and personalities in these films provides rich material for studying how politeness

strategies are realized in different social contexts.

Several studies have examined the use of politeness maxims in films, though most have focused on live-action rather than animated movies. The first study was conducted by Nuriani et al. (2024), entitled "An Analysis of Approbation and Sympathy Maxims Based on Leech's Politeness Principles in Emma Movie." This study found that the approbation maxim occurred most frequently. The next research was carried out by Muhaling & Hampp (2023), entitled "An Analysis of Politeness Maxims Used by the Main Characters in Me Before You Movie."

The study analyzed six politeness maxims and identified the approbation maxim as the most dominant. Another study was written by Saskara et al. (2022), entitled "Politeness Maxim Applied by Characters in Victoria & Abdul Movie." This research examined six maxims and five politeness scales, applying Leech's framework to assess politeness levels. Another study was conducted by Firdaus & Simatupang (2022), entitled "The Maxim of Politeness in The Squid Game Film Series: A Pragmatic Study." This study analyzed 30 utterances of politeness maxims, with the approbation maxim appearing most frequently. The last study was conducted by Pardede & Pratiwi (2019), entitled "An Analysis of Politeness Principal Maxims Found in Big Hero 6 Movie". This study analyzed the types of politeness maxims in the animated movie "Big Hero 6" and found that the tact maxim was the most frequently used.

Although Leech's politeness theory has been applied in various communicative contexts, research focusing on animated films remains limited. Animated films often construct imaginative worlds where characters display exaggerated emotions and stylized interactions, offering unique opportunities to study how politeness is adapted and represented in non-realistic but socially meaningful ways. Furthermore, few studies investigate how Holmes' (1992) social factors, such as status, power, relationships, and situational setting influence the use of politeness maxims within animated narratives.

This study focuses specifically on the Generosity and Approbation Maxims. These two maxims were selected because they play a central role in shaping cooperative and harmonious relationships among characters, especially in narratives that emphasize moral values, teamwork, and mutual respect. In Kung Fu Panda 4, these aspects are particularly relevant as the story follows Po's journey of personal growth and leadership transition, where interactions between characters often involve giving advice, showing appreciation, and demonstrating a willingness to help or sacrifice for others. The film, produced by DreamWorks Animation and released in 2024, continues Po's adventure as he mentors a new generation of heroes while facing internal and external conflicts. Its storyline highlights moral and interpersonal themes, making it a suitable context for analyzing politeness and its relation to social dynamics.

Based on this gap, this study addresses the following questions:

1. How are the Generosity and Approbation Maxims realized in Kung Fu Panda 4?
2. How do social factors influence the use of these maxims in the film?

The objective of this study is to analyze the realization of these politeness maxims and the role of social factors in shaping character interactions. By combining Leech's (1983) politeness maxims with Holmes's (1992) framework on social factors influencing their use, this research provides a deeper understanding of how language, social context, and character interactions collectively shape politeness in animated films. This study also contributes to the field of pragmatics by offering insights into how politeness maxims are realized in fictional dialogues, expanding understanding of the relationship between linguistic choices and social context in media representations.

Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method that aims to analyze the application of Generosity and Approbation maxims in utterances from the animated film Kung Fu Panda 4. This method was chosen to analyze the contextual meaning and pragmatic function of politeness strategies in fictional dialogues. Qualitative methods produce data in the form of words or utterances that are analyzed to understand their meaning (Moleong, 2006).

The data sources consist of utterances produced by the main characters, including Po, Zhen, Mr. Ping, and Li. The movie was watched repeatedly by the researchers to understand the storyline and interactions between the characters. The data collection was conducted using non-participant observation and note-taking, focusing on identifying utterances that potentially reflect the Generosity and Approbation Maxims. Contextual information such as timestamps, speakers, settings, and relationship dynamics was also recorded to support a comprehensive analysis.

The data analysis in this study followed a descriptive qualitative approach, aiming to interpret how the Generosity and Approbation Maxims are realized and how social factors influence their use. The analysis was conducted in three main steps. First, the researcher identified and categorized the utterances according to Leech's (1983) politeness maxims, focusing on the Generosity Maxim and the Approbation Maxim. Second, each utterance was examined within its situational context, considering the speaker's intention, relational dynamics, and emotional tone. Finally, the use of politeness was interpreted based on Holmes's (1992) social factors, including status, power, relationship, and setting, to explore how these elements influenced the expression of politeness in fictional interactions. The findings are presented descriptively and discussed narratively to emphasize the contextual meaning of each utterance.

Results and Discussion

Politeness maxims, introduced by Leech (1983), serve as principles that guide speakers in maintaining harmonious and respectful communication. This study focuses on analyzing two types of politeness maxims, namely the Generosity Maxim and the Approbation Maxim, and also considers the social factors that influence their use, based on Holmes's (1992) theory. The data consist of nine utterances from the movie *Kung Fu Panda 4*, with four utterances reflecting the Approbation Maxim and five reflecting the Generosity Maxim. These utterances clearly illustrate the characteristics of each maxim and provide sufficient context to examine how politeness is realized in various situational contexts. The following sections will discuss these utterances in detail according to their respective maxims.

1. Generosity Maxim

Generosity maxim is the maxim that involves minimizing benefit to self and maximizing cost to self for the sake of others, highlighting the willingness to prioritize other's needs (Leech, 1983:133). There was a conversation that occurred in "*Kung Fu Panda 4*" in which the characters used the generosity maxim, as shown below:

Data 1



Kung Fu Panda 4 (2024). Time: 00:24:01

Po: **"Wanna split my almond cookie?"**

Zhen: "You're just gonna give me half of the goodness of your heart?"

Po: "Mm-hmm."

In the conversation above, the situation occurs when Po and Zhen are starting their journey together to Jupiter City. Po offers Zhen an almond cookie by saying, "Wanna split my almond cookie?" Zhen responds with surprise and Po replies simply "Mm-hmm," which means yes. Po's action reflects the Generosity Maxim. He willingly offers something he likes to Zhen, showing selflessness, warmth and desire to care for others even in small ways. This action is also a way to start social connection, where sharing food shows kindness and trust. Thus, besides being polite, this action serves a social function to strengthen relationships. Zhen accepts the offer, which

becomes a benefit for her as she enjoys the food and feels included. This moment helps to create a sense of connection and trust between them.

The factor influencing the politeness maxim in the data above is the context of situation, particularly the relation of participants. Po and Zhen have just started their journey together, and although they are not close at this point, they begin to build a connection. Po's generous act of offering his almond cookie reflects his intention to be friendly and supportive. This moment shows how politeness is used to create a sense of trust and comfort between two characters who are still getting to know each other.

Data 2



Kung Fu Panda 4 (2024). Time: 01.04.20

Mr. Ping: "Po. Wait! Please be reasonable"

Po: "I'm not going anywhere until I get my stuff back"

Li: "No stuff worth your life"

Po: **"As long as I'm still the Dragon Warrior, I won't get anyone else get hurt because of me"**

This data begins with Mr. Ping and Li trying to stop Po from going after the Dragon Warrior Staff, which had been taken by the enemy. Despite their concerns, Po refuses to step back. He says "As long as I'm still the Dragon Warrior, I won't get anyone else get hurt because of me" is a form of indirect speech act that requires him to take personal risk. Instead of directly stating "I will sacrifice myself", Po avoids making others feel guilty or responsible. This indirect yet firm statement is an example of Generosity Maxim, as proposed by Leech (1983), because it minimizes benefit to oneself and maximizes benefit to others. Through this expression, Po clearly shows that he does not want anyone else, including his father or innocent people, to be harmed because of his situation. This action also reinforces Po's image as a responsible hero, friend, and partner.

The factor influences the politeness maxim in the data above is the context of situation, especially the relationship between participants. Based on Holmes (1992) explanation of social factors, Po's words reflect his close relationship with Mr. Ping and Li, as well as his strong sense of duty as the Dragon Warrior. Although they try

to protect him, Po chooses to protect them instead, showing his selflessness. His decision to face danger alone demonstrates the Generosity Maxim because he puts the safety of others above his own needs. The situation also shows how emotional closeness and roles can influence the use of polite language that expresses care and sacrifice.

Data 3



Kung Fu Panda 4 (2024). Time: 01.06.11

Po: "What do you care if I get killed or not?"

Zhen: **"Please Po. Just let me do one right thing"**

This conversation happened when Zhen tried to stop Po from fighting The Chameleon, as she knew how dangerous the enemy was. Zhen said, "Please, Po. Just let me do one right thing" to show that she wanted to protect Po and take the risk herself. This is an example of the Generosity Maxim, because Zhen puts Po's safety first and doesn't think about her own, as she takes the burden upon herself to protect Po. Additionally, this utterance subtly implies that Zhen shows a willingness to sacrifice herself to make amends for her past mistakes. Her words are polite and full of care. She doesn't want Po to get hurt, so she offers to face the danger instead.

The factor that influences the use of this politeness maxim is the setting, particularly the seriousness of the threat they face and the development of their relationship. As they grow closer, Zhen begins to show care and concern more selflessly. Her words are not just polite, they are filled with sincerity and courage, emphasizing her readiness to protect someone she cares about.

Data 4



Kung Fu Panda 4 (2024). Time: 01.06.38

Zhen: "You can't beat her, you know?"

Po: "You're probably right. But I have to try. **Get as far away from this place as you can**"

This data occurs when Po is about to face a powerful enemy, and Zhen tries to stop him. Aware of the great danger they are facing, Po responds, "Get as far away from this place as you can", which reflects an example of the Generosity Maxim, as Po directly told Zhen to save herself, while he stays behind to face the danger. This not only demonstrates the Generosity Maxim, but also carries a deep emotional implication: that

Zhen's safety is more important to Po than his own. According to Leech (1983) politeness theory, this utterance maximizes the cost to oneself and maximizes benefit to others. The increasing closeness of their relationship and the urgency of the situation further support the appropriateness of using this strategy.

The factors that influence the politeness maxim in the data above are the relationship between the participants and the setting of the conversation. Based on Holmes (1992), the relationship between Po and Zhen plays a key role in how they communicate. Their growing bond leads Po to use generous and caring language, showing his willingness to protect her at all costs. Additionally, the setting also affects the expression of politeness. Since the conversation takes place in a high-risk and dangerous situation, Po expresses himself in a direct and selfless manner to ensure Zhen's safety, reflecting his concern and sense of responsibility in a life-threatening moment.

2. Approbation Maxim

Approbation maxim is the maxim that involves minimizing dispraise of others and maximizing praise toward others (Leech, 1983). There was a conversation that occurred in "Kung Fu Panda 4" in which the characters used the approbation maxim, as shown below:

Data 5

Kung Fu Panda 4 (2024). Time: 00.17.10

Po: "The peace of mind knowing you did the right thing"

Zhen: "**You're adorable.** Has anyone told you that?"

The expression from data above is absolutely Approbation Maxim. Zhen gives Po a compliment when she says "You're adorable". Zhen gives light but personal praise. This utterance is a form of Approbation Maxim, because it highlights the positive values of uniqueness of the hearer while minimizing criticism. This means she is being polite by saying something nice instead of saying something negative. In this conversation shows that Zhen put no dispraise, but really maximizes the praise for Po.

There are also two main factors that influence the politeness maxim in the data above are the relationship between the participants and the setting of the conversation. At this point in the movie, Zhen and Po demonstrate that their relationship is becoming closer, because this kind of praise is usually conveyed in informal and friendly interactions (Holmes, 1992). This utterance shows a sense of comfort and acceptance. The situation is also peaceful, not in the middle of a fight or danger, so it is the right moment for light-hearted and polite language.

Data 6

Kung Fu Panda 4 (2024). Time: 00.27.40

Po: "Wow! One of everything is my go-to order. But how you pay for this?" Zhen: "Legally. Lawfully. Fair and square."

Po: "I'm proud of you"

This data occurs after Zhen make a positive change in her behavior by choosing to pay food honestly. Previously known as a thief, Zhen now chooses to act in a lawful and responsible way. Po responds to this moment with the phrase "I'm proud of you", which is a clear example of Approbation Maxim. Po's compliment serves as a polite and supportive response that highlights Zhen's good behavior, helping to build her confidence. His expression of pride not only shows his respect for Zhen, but also strengthens their growing relationship. Rather than using harsh or judgmental language, he chooses a warm and positive tone. Po utterance shows social support and validation, which strengthens interpersonal relationships and boosts the confidence of the interlocutor. This utterance also marks the success of Zhen's character transformation, as seen from the speaker's perspective.

The factor that influences the politeness maxim in the data above is the context of situation, particularly the relation of participants. Their relation is close but Po still uses polite expression in his statement and he wants to show his support and appreciation for Zhen's positive change. This kind of praise is important in building trust and mutual respect between them, and it reflects the role of politeness in maintaining strong social bond (Holmes 1992).

Data 7



Kung Fu Panda 4 (2024). Time: 00.30.13

Po: "Watch out! Skadoosh!"

Zhen: **"Whoa. Nice move. You gotta teach me that"**

The expression from the data above is an example of the Approbation Maxim. Zhen gives Po a compliment by saying, "Whoa. Nice move" This shows she is being polite by praising Po's action instead of ignoring it or saying something negative. Her words highlight Po's skill and show admiration for what he did. This kind of compliment helps build a friendly and respectful relationship between them. Instead of being competitive or jealous, Zhen chooses to admire Po's ability, which reflects her polite and positive attitude. In addition, Zhen's utterance combines a spontaneous interjection "Whoa" with directly praise "Nice Move", followed by a request "You gotta teach me that". Zhen's utterance demonstrates the use of

Approbation Maxim, as maximizes praise while minimizing any form of criticism or self-superiority. The used of informal tone and genuine admiration contributes to build solidarity between characters.

The factor that influences this politeness is the relationship between the participants and the context of the situation. Since they are on the same side and working together as a team, Zhen wants to keep a good connection with Po. Giving compliments like this helps make their bond stronger. Also, because they are in the middle of a fight, showing support like this boosts confidence and keeps the spirit of teamwork alive. This kind of expression follows the principle of politeness by focusing on the good side of someone's action.

Data 8



Kung Fu Panda 4 (2024). Time: 00.48.28

Zhen: **“I gotta say, you’re not like the other masters I’ve met”**

Po: “Yeah, I know.” There’s not a lot panda.

Zhen: **“No, you’re, like, a good guy”.**

This data occurs when Po is training Zhen to fight in preparation for facing their enemy. During this moment, Zhen says, “I gotta say, you’re not like the other masters I’ve met,” and after Po gives a light response, she continues with, “No, you’re, like, a good guy.” Zhen’s words are a clear example of the Approbation Maxim, as she gives a direct compliment to Po. Instead of criticizing him or comparing him negatively with other masters, Zhen chooses to highlight something positive about Po’s personality. She appreciates his kindness and sincerity, which makes him different from the strict and harsh masters she might have known before. Her compliment not only shows politeness but also helps strengthen their bond. It encourages Po and shows that Zhen respects him not just as a teacher but also as a friend. The way she speaks is friendly, honest, and filled with admiration, reflecting the spirit of the Approbation Maxim, which is to avoid dispraise and focus on praise.

The factor that influences the politeness maxim in the data above is the relationship between the speakers and the emotional tone of the situation. As they spend more time together, their relationship grows closer, and Zhen starts to see Po in a different light. She feels comfortable enough to express her respect and

appreciation. This kind of communication builds trust between them and shows how politeness can support personal growth and connection during challenging times.

Data 9



Kung Fu Panda 4 (2024). Time: 01.19.55

The Chameleon: "Ha! You can't defeat me. I know all your move"

Zhen: "Not this one. Roll, Stir, Serve and Ska- blam."

Po: **"Now, that's a cool move"**

This data occurs during a critical moment in the battle when Zhen successfully defeats the enemy, The Chameleon, by using a special move that Po had previously taught her. Zhen successfully performs the move, Po responds with admiration, saying, "Now, that's a cool move." This statement reflects the Approbation Maxim, as Po gives a positive compliment to Zhen's action. Instead of claiming the success for himself or criticizing her technique, Po chooses to highlight Zhen's achievement and skill in a supportive and respectful way. His praise helps motivate Zhen and boosts her confidence, especially since she used what she learned to make a real difference in the fight. This praise was given by Po to Zhen after she successfully defeat the enemy. The utterance could strengthen Zhen's spirit and create harmony in their teamwork.

The factor that influences this use of politeness maxim is their close relationship and the situation they are facing. Since they are working together in a dangerous mission, Po's encouraging words play an important role in building trust and teamwork. Instead of focusing on himself or correcting her, he uplifts her with sincere praise. This polite behavior shows his respect and emotional intelligence, fulfilling the principles of Approbation Maxim by minimizing any negative judgment and maximizing positive appreciation. Through his simple but meaningful compliment, Po reinforces Zhen's value as a capable partner. His words not only acknowledge her progress but also strengthen their emotional connection.

Limitations

This study has certain limitations. It focused only on two politeness maxims, Generosity and Approbation, which allowed for a more detailed analysis within this scope. In addition, the analysis was limited to a single animated film, which

constrains the generalizability of the findings. Nevertheless, these limitations provide a foundation for future research to examine other politeness maxims, analyze multiple films, or conduct cross-cultural comparisons to gain a broader understanding of politeness in media discourse.

Conclusion

The analysis revealed that the main characters consistently employ the Generosity and Approbation Maxims across various interactions. These expressions not only demonstrate linguistic politeness but also convey social and emotional meanings such as empathy, solidarity, and appreciation. The Generosity Maxim is primarily realized through offers of help or assistance, while the Approbation Maxim is expressed through utterances that support and value others. Moreover, the use of these politeness maxims is influenced by social factors, including status, power, relationships, and situational context.

Based on these findings, this study highlights the relevance of Leech's (1983) politeness theory in fictional media, showing how politeness is represented and contextualized in animated films. Furthermore, it provides pedagogical implications, as educators can use these examples to teach how politeness is expressed in different contexts. The study also contributes to pragmatics research by illustrating how politeness maxims operate in fictional discourse, offering new insights into social and emotional communication. Future research is encouraged to explore all six politeness maxims, compare multiple animated films, and conduct cross-cultural analyses to achieve a broader understanding of politeness in media. Overall, this study underscores the value of examining politeness in fictional media as a means of understanding real-world communication and enriching language education.

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