ETHICAL CONDUCT IN THE DIGITAL SPACE: AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' LINGUISTIC POLITENESS IN ONLINE LEARNING AT ITB STIKOM BALI (A PRAGMATIC STUDY)

Ni Putu Desy Damayanthi*

Institut Teknologi dan Bisnis STIKOM Bali, Indonesia,

desy.damayanthi91@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the level and patterns of linguistic politeness among ITB Stikom Bali students in online learning interactions, with the aim of understanding how interpersonal ethics are maintained in a fast-paced virtual environment. Using the Politeness Principle framework as a pragmatic approach, this study examines the utterances of 76 students in two general courses during one academic semester. The results of the analysis show that the level of linguistic politeness is not uniform: there is high compliance with the Maxim of Tact (89.6%), which indicates hierarchical awareness and polite lexical choices, but significant violations were found in the Maxim of Agreement (40.0%) and the Maxim of Generosity (38.4%). Thus, the level of politeness among students can be said to be relatively high in terms of respect for hierarchy, but scattered and inconsistent in terms of maintaining social relationships. This pattern reflects the influence of digital culture, which emphasizes time efficiency and speed, thereby shifting empathy and academic professionalism. This study recommends curriculum interventions to integrate humanistic digital ethics as a bridge between technical competencies and interpersonal skills in a technology-based campus ecosystem.

Keywords: linguistic politeness, pragmatics, politeness principle, online

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of higher education into a digital ecosystem has fundamentally reshaped the way students interact. Technology-based institutions such as ITB Stikom Bali have positioned online learning at the core of their academic processes. While this shift offers flexibility, it also raises a critical question: how can interpersonal ethics be preserved in a fast-paced virtual environment?

Linguistic politeness, as defined by Leech (1983), is not merely a formality but a pragmatic principle designed to maintain dignity (face) and minimize conflict. In online classrooms, however, this principle becomes vulnerable due to the absence of nonverbal cues and the demand for efficiency (Suler, 2004). Politeness patterns

in digital learning differ not only in form but also in function. Students often rely on brief, direct, and unmitigated utterances that, in face-to-face contexts, might be perceived as impolite. These patterns emerge as a response to the speed, multitasking, and expressive limitations inherent in digital communication.

Previous studies, such as those by Fitriah (2020) and Kusumajanti (2021), have highlighted tendencies toward politeness violations in text-based communication. Similarly, Sari, Susanti, and Artawa (2023) observed that the excessive use of non-standard language and emoticons blurs the boundary between professionalism and informality. More recent research strengthens this argument: Ramadhani and Yusuf (2024) found that students increasingly adopt direct strategies in online communication, which often reduce perceived politeness. Nurmayana et al. (2025) further demonstrated that English Education students employ varied politeness strategies in WhatsApp-based learning interactions, while Mayrita et al. (2025) emphasized that digital communication practices blur the line between professionalism and informality, reinforcing the urgency of addressing academic digital ethics.

Unlike earlier research that primarily emphasized forms of politeness violations, this study identifies dominant patterns and examines their implications for digital academic ethics. By analyzing students' utterances across two general courses during one academic semester, the research provides a mapping of acceptable and unacceptable politeness patterns in online learning. This contribution offers a foundation for developing a more humanistic digital communication ethic within technology-driven academic environments.

Violations of linguistic politeness most frequently occur during critical academic exchanges, particularly in virtual settings. Studies by Wahyuni and Safitri (2022) and Dewi and Santoso (2023) consistently show that utterances involving academic demands—such as negotiating deadlines, requesting permissions, or critiquing course content—are moments where students are prone to disregarding social hierarchy. Haryadi (2019) further explains that the lack of direct supervision in online environments triggers the disinhibition effect, which emboldens students to perform face-threatening acts (FTA) toward lecturers. Rather than prescribing digital ethics, this study offers insights into the patterns of acceptable and unacceptable linguistic behavior in online academic interactions. By identifying dominant tendencies in students' speech acts, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how politeness is negotiated in digital learning spaces and how these patterns reflect shifting norms of professionalism and interpersonal respect.

METHODS

Pragmatics, as a branch of linguistics, examines how meaning is shaped by context, speaker intention, and social relationships (Yule, 1996). Within this field, linguistic politeness is understood through Leech's Politeness Principle (1983), which identifies six maxims—Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, and Sympathy—as guiding strategies for maintaining interpersonal harmony. These maxims provide a lens to evaluate how utterances either preserve or threaten social dignity in communication. In academic settings, politeness is not merely a matter of courtesy but a pragmatic necessity to sustain professional respect and minimize conflict.

In digital learning environments, however, politeness patterns undergo significant transformation. Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) reduces contextual cues and accelerates exchanges, often leading to direct, unmitigated utterances that risk being interpreted as face-threatening acts (FTA) (Suler, 2004). Prior studies (Kusumajanti, 2021; Wahyuni & Safitri, 2022) have shown that violations frequently occur in maxims regulating task burden and criticism, namely Generosity and Agreement. More recent research emphasizes that digital communication ethics are increasingly recognized as professional competencies in the Industry 5.0 era (Riyadi, 2024; Zubaidah, 2024). Thus, politeness in online

academic interaction is not only a moral concern but also a skill that shapes students' readiness to collaborate effectively in technology-driven environments. This study builds on these insights by systematically mapping patterns of adherence and violation to politeness maxims, thereby clarifying which linguistic behaviors are acceptable and which are not in virtual academic contexts.

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach with Pragmatic Content Analysis. A purposive sample of 76 students from two Bahasa Indonesia courses at ITB Stikom Bali was selected. Data were drawn only from text-based interactions in instant messaging groups and LMS forums during the Odd Semester 2024/2025; synchronous virtual meetings were excluded. Analysis followed five steps: (1) data reduction, (2) classification by communication direction, (3) identification of adherence/violation of Leech's six maxims, (4) frequency quantification, and (5) pragmatic interpretation within digital culture. Unlike previous studies focusing on synchronous video classes, this research highlights politeness patterns in written academic discourse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 1/ Data Distribution of Sample and Utterances

Category	Number (n=76)	Total Number of Utterances (N=750)	Proportion of Utterances
Student to Lecturer	76	320	42.6%
Student to Student	76	430	57.4%
Total	76	750	100%

Table 1 shows that peer-to-peer communication (57.4%) dominates online discourse, while lecturer-directed utterances (42.6%) remain crucial for evaluating politeness in hierarchical contexts.

TABLE 2 Analysis of Politeness Maxim Adherence

Leech's Maxim	Frequency of Adherence	Frequency of Violation	% Adherence	% Violation
Tact	390	45	89.6%	10.4%
Generosity	185	115	61.6%	38.4%
Approbation	110	15	88.0%	12.0%

Modesty	120	25	82.7%	17.3%
Agreement	105	70	60.0%	40.0%
Sympathy	40	5	88.9%	11.1%

Table 2 indicates high adherence to the Tact maxim (89.6%), but lower adherence to Agreement (60.0%) and Generosity (61.6%), reflecting vulnerability to violations in requests and criticism.

Utterances were categorized using pragmatic markers consistent with Leech's maxims (e.g., "Could you please…" under Tact; "I agree/I disagree…" under Agreement). To ensure trustworthiness, coding was conducted by two researchers and cross-checked for consistency. These results highlight that students generally maintain politeness with lecturers but are less consistent when negotiating demands or expressing disagreement in text-based communication.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

1. **Strong Adherence to Lexical Politeness (Tact Maxim)**
   The highest adherence (89.6%) occurred in the Tact Maxim. This indicates students' awareness of the social hierarchy in the academic sphere (Kusumajanti, 2021). However, this adherence is superficial because it is only visible in formal word choices ("*Mohon maaf, Pak/Bu*" - *My apologies, Sir/Ma'am*), and not in the deeper content of the utterance.
2. **Critical Violations: Generosity and Agreement**
   The two maxims involving the allocation of cost and attitude showed the highest violation rates:
   2.1 Generosity Maxim (38.4% Breach Rate): Breaches frequently occur when students request extensions or refuse assignments by blaming external factors.
   Examples of Generosity Maxim Breaches:
   - "Ma'am, I just finished handling a campus event yesterday, so I haven't had time to do the assignment. **Please grant me a dispensation** until tomorrow night."*(Breach: Prioritizing self-gain (rest/other activities) and demanding that the lecturer change the terms/deadline.*

- "My signal is gone, Ma'am, so I can't submit. Extend it by 2 days". This represents an effort to minimize the self's cost while maximizing the cost to the addressee (the lecturer), asserting that **self-efficiency is prioritized over politeness and ethics.**
- "Ma'am, could you please re-explain the final report writing format? **I just joined** this online class." *(Breach: Disregarding the Maxims of Quantity and Generosity by demanding a repetition of information that is already available.)*
- "Which materials are for the Final Exam (UAS), Sir? **Please list them again in the group chat** because I didn't have time to check the LMS." *(Breach: Imposing the cost of effort (re-listing information) onto the lecturer due to the student's own negligence.)*

2.2 Agreement Maxim (40.0% Violation): This violation was dominant in Student. Student interactions when criticizing ideas. Criticism was delivered explicitly without a softener or positive acknowledgment, indicating a failure in *face-saving* and violating the principle of social harmony (Wahyuni & Safitri, 2022).

Examples of Agreement Maxim Breaches:

- "Your idea is wrong. The data you are using is irrelevant and it makes no sense to use it as the basis for the assignment." *(Breach: Direct and aggressive criticism without mitigation formulas or initial praise, threatening the peer's face.)*
- "Your group's presentation is uninteresting. The material looks like it was copy-pasted, there is nothing new, and the presentation template looks like a newspaper (full of text)." *(Breach: Use of language that is critical (mild ad-hominem), focusing on the quality of the presentation rather than offering constructive solutions.)*

3. **Implications of ITB Stikom Bali's Digital Culture**

This pattern of violation reinforces the thesis that the culture of digital speed has threatened empathy (Fitriah, 2020). Students fail to integrate speed with interpersonal ethics (Riyadi, 2024). They tend to

sacrifice the Generosity and Agreement Maxims (which regulate relationships) for the sake of the Tact Maxim (formality) and speed. This finding is consistent with the need for digital competency skills in the digital age (Zubaidah, 2024).

The analysis shows that students generally adhere to the Tact maxim but are more vulnerable to violations in Agreement and Generosity. This resonates with Nurmayana et al. (2025), who observed that disagreement and task-related requests often trigger politeness challenges in WhatsApp-based learning. Moreover, Ramadhan et al. (2025) argue that such patterns reflect broader shifts in student character formation in digital contexts. The blurred boundaries between professional and informal communication noted by Mayrita et al. (2025) further explain why students sometimes disregard hierarchical norms. At the institutional level, Albimawi et al. (2025) stress that embedding digital culture into campus habituation strengthens ethical awareness, while Zou et al. (2025) situate these findings within global trends of technology integration in education.

CONCLUSION

1. **Summary of Critical Findings (Pragmatic Dichotomy)**

   This study definitively concludes that there is a significant pragmatic dichotomy in the communication patterns of ITB Stikom Bali students. While awareness of Lexical Politeness (Tact Maxim) remains high (around 89.6%)—indicating a ritualistic acknowledgement of academic hierarchy—this politeness is superficial. In contrast, students show a high vulnerability to breaching the Generosity Maxim (38.4%) and the Agreement Maxim (40.0%) in online interactions. This pattern of violation strongly reflects a humanistic challenge within the digital environment, where the demands for self-efficiency and speed of communication often nullify interpersonal accountability and relational ethics.

2. **Theoretical Implications and Digital Culture**

   These breaches of ethical maxims affirm the thesis that the Culture of Digital Speed has positioned

the Maxim of Efficiency above substantive Politeness Principles. In vertical communication, students employ communicative utilitarianism, shifting the cost (time, effort) to the lecturer through strategic external justifications. Meanwhile, in horizontal communication, they sacrifice *face-saving* and social harmony for the sake of clarity and assertiveness of ideas (*clarity and speed*), which are perceived as key competencies in a technology-based ecosystem. Therefore, student politeness functions as a transactional tool—used when needed for risk mitigation, but ignored when it obstructs personal efficiency.

2.1. Implementation Recommendations and Strategic Actions

To bridge the gap between ethics and efficiency, the institution must immediately integrate an Applied Digital Pragmatic Ethics Module into the core curriculum, with training focused on the use of mitigation strategies (*softeners* and *hedges*) and contextual *face-saving* techniques. Specifically, the module's implementation must include exercises on responsible deadline negotiation for the Generosity Maxim, emphasizing the formulation of an apology followed by an offer of compensation rather than mere external justification; and Constructive Criticism training for the Agreement Maxim, which teaches students to always begin with positive acknowledgement before conveying critique to maintain social harmony. In parallel, the institution must place a Strong Emphasis on Ethically Grounded Professional Character, ensuring that professionalism in the technology sector demands the mastery of efficiency and agility rooted in humanistic ethics, such that through the inculcation of balanced values between hard skills and empathetic soft skills, the Ultimate Goal can be achieved: producing graduates who are

not only *tech-savvy* but also pragmatically responsible individuals, capable of leveraging digital speed and efficiency without sacrificing relational costs and social ethics, thereby achieving the essential ethico-pragmatic balance in the digital age.

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