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POLITENESS PRINCIPLES IN HAMKA'S NOVEL TENGGELAMNYA KAPAL VAN DER WIJCK: A PRAGMATIC APPROACH

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Abstract || This study aims to describe linguistic politeness principles in Hamka's novel Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck through a pragmatic approach based on Geoffrey Leech's six politeness maxims. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, the study examines character dialogues reflecting politeness principles. Data were collected through reading and note-taking techniques and analyzed using Krippendorff's content analysis procedures, including data collection, sampling, coding, reduction, inference, and interpretation. The findings reveal 222 instances of politeness, comprising 39 instances of the tact maxim, 44 of generosity, 53 of approbation, 39 of modesty, 18 of agreement, and 29 of sympathy. The approbation maxim occurs most frequently, whereas the agreement maxim appears least frequently. These findings indicate that politeness in the novel reflects interpersonal respect, harmonious relationships, and sociocultural values. Furthermore, the novel demonstrates how polite language contributes to meaningful communication and the maintenance of social harmony within the community portrayed in the narrative.

Keywords | | Pragmatics, Linguistic Politeness, Politeness Maxims, Novel, Hamka.

Abstrak || Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan prinsip kesantunan berbahasa dalam novel Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck karya Hamka melalui pendekatan pragmatik berdasarkan enam maksim kesantunan Geoffrey Leech. Penelitian menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan data berupa dialog antartokoh yang mencerminkan prinsip kesantunan berbahasa. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui teknik membaca dan mencatat, sedangkan analisis menggunakan pendekatan analisis isi Krippendorff yang mencakup pengumpulan data, penentuan sampel, pengodean, reduksi, penarikan kesimpulan, dan pendeskripsian temuan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan 222 data kesantunan berbahasa yang diklasifikasikan menjadi enam maksim, yaitu kebijaksanaan sebanyak 39 data, kedermawanan 44 data, pujian 53 data, kerendahan hati 39 data, kesepakatan 18 data, dan simpati 29 data. Maksim pujian merupakan bentuk paling dominan, sedangkan maksim kesepakatan paling sedikit ditemukan. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa kesantunan berbahasa dalam novel merepresentasikan penghargaan terhadap orang lain, keharmonisan hubungan interpersonal, serta nilai sosial dan budaya. Dengan demikian, novel tersebut memperlihatkan pentingnya penggunaan bahasa santun dalam membangun komunikasi yang harmonis dan bermakna bagi kehidupan masyarakat.

Katakunci || Pragmatik, Kesantunan Berbahasa, Maksim kesantunan, Novel, Hamka

Introduction

Language enables people to convey ideas, thoughts, emotions, and intentions. Successful communication depends not only on grammatical accuracy but also on the interpersonal implications of what is said. Linguistic politeness can support social relationships, communicate respect, and reduce the potential for misunderstanding and conflict. These concerns apply both to spoken interaction and to the representation of interaction in written texts.

Literary works employ language to communicate experience, imagination, cultural perspectives, and social values. Beyond their aesthetic qualities, literary texts can invite reflection on moral and interpersonal concerns. Sumardjo, as cited in Al-Ma'ruf and Nugrahani (2017), describes literature as a form of representation that communicates subjective experience to readers. In novels, such experience unfolds through related events, dialogue, and the development of characters.

Pragmatics investigates the meaning of language in use. Interpreting an utterance requires attention to the immediate situation, relationships between participants, and their communicative purposes. Putrayasa, as cited in Mudassir and Adriana (2020), emphasizes the connection between linguistic action and situational context. Pragmatic analysis therefore considers not only lexical meanings but also what speakers intend and what interlocutors may infer. Relevant areas include deixis, presupposition, implicature, speech acts, and conversational cooperation (Nuraini, as cited in Yanti, 2019).

Politeness refers to the ways participants manage interpersonal relations through language in accordance with social expectations. It is not reducible to gentle vocabulary: the interpretation of a polite action depends on participants' social positions, their relationship, and the circumstances of the exchange. Leech's politeness framework, as employed in the present study, distinguishes six maxims: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy (Leech, 2016).

Hamka's The Sinking of the Van der Wijck recounts the tragic relationship between Zainuddin and Hayati, whose love is constrained by customary expectations and social differences. Zainuddin, of mixed

Minangkabau and Bugis ancestry, encounters questions about his social belonging. The novel offers a productive setting for studying how

characters express respect, make sacrifices, value one another, and negotiate social obligations. Its conversations also invite consideration of how cultural expectations shape what counts as polite speech.

This study therefore examines selected dialogues and passages that have been classified as manifestations of Leech's politeness maxims. The investigation seeks to describe the forms and distribution of these categories and to interpret their interpersonal functions in the story. In addition to contributing to literary pragmatics, the analysis may offer material for discussing communication ethics in language and literature education.

Previous work has also analyzed politeness in Indonesian novels through Leech's framework. Agustina et al. (2024) examined Si Anak Kuat by Tere Liye; Nuraisah et al. (2024) studied 172 Days by Nadzira Shafa; and Pebrianti and Taqwiem (2024) investigated Santri Pilihan Bunda by Salsyabila Falensia. The present study differs in its literary object and focuses on the patterning and contextual interpretation of politeness maxims in Hamka's novel. Its contribution should be understood as a text-specific analysis rather than a claim that the six-maxim framework is new.

Theoretical Framework

Literary works constitute a form of human creative expression in which language serves not only as a medium for communicating ideas, feelings, experiences, and perspectives on life but also as a means of representing social relationships and cultural values. Through the aesthetic and meaningful organization of language, literary works provide insights into human behavior, interpersonal communication, and the social circumstances in which individuals interact. Abrams (2018) emphasizes the representational and aesthetic dimensions of literature, indicating that literary texts can be understood as artistic constructions that reflect various aspects of human experience. From this perspective, literature is particularly relevant to linguistic studies because the language employed in literary texts may reveal how individuals express intentions, negotiate relationships, and communicate within particular sociocultural contexts.

Among various forms of literary expression, the novel provides an extensive narrative space for portraying characters, events, conflicts, and social interactions. A novel constructs a fictional world through interconnected narrative elements, including plot, characterization,

setting, and point of view (Nurgiyantoro, 2018). These elements contribute to the development of characters and their relationships throughout the narrative. Although fictional narratives are products of the author's imagination, they may draw upon recognizable social realities, cultural practices, and interpersonal experiences. As explained by Wellek and Warren (as cited in Nurgiyantoro, 2018), fictional representation can create a convincing impression of reality without necessarily reproducing actual events. In contrast, nonfictional narratives are primarily grounded in factual experiences or documented occurrences, although they may employ literary techniques in presenting those experiences (Fatony, as cited in Tyas, 2024). In the context of the present study, the fictional nature of the novel does not diminish its relevance as an object of linguistic analysis, since interactions between characters provide textual representations of communicative behavior, social expectations, and cultural norms.

The relationship between literary language and social interaction can be examined through pragmatics, a branch of linguistics concerned with how meaning is produced and interpreted in specific communicative contexts. Pragmatics emphasizes that the interpretation of an utterance depends not only on its linguistic structure but also on the speaker's intention, the relationship between participants, the communicative situation, and the surrounding sociocultural circumstances. Levinson, as cited in Kuswoyo (2015), identifies the relationship between language and context as a fundamental concern of pragmatic inquiry. Accordingly, an utterance cannot always be interpreted adequately through its literal meaning alone, because its communicative function may involve implied intentions, interpersonal considerations, and culturally established expectations. This perspective is particularly important in literary discourse, where dialogue often functions as a means of expressing emotions, establishing relationships, negotiating social positions, and revealing conflicts between characters.

Pragmatic analysis encompasses several interconnected areas, including deixis, presupposition, implicature, speech acts, and the cooperative principle (Nuraini, as cited in Yanti, 2019). Deixis concerns expressions whose interpretation depends on contextual references to persons, places, and times, while presupposition refers to assumptions treated as shared or accepted within communication. Implicature explains how speakers communicate meanings beyond what is explicitly expressed, whereas speech-act theory examines the actions accomplished through language, such as requesting, promising, advising, or apologizing.

Meanwhile, the cooperative principle, associated with Grice, explains how communicative participants contribute to meaningful interaction through the maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner. These areas demonstrate that language is not simply a system for conveying information but also a resource for performing social actions and maintaining interpersonal relationships. Within this broader pragmatic perspective, linguistic politeness becomes particularly significant because speakers must consider how their utterances affect others and how communication can be managed in socially appropriate ways.

Linguistic politeness refers to the use of communicative strategies that demonstrate consideration for others, reduce potential interpersonal conflict, and maintain harmonious social relationships. Politeness is not determined solely by the presence of respectful or favorable expressions; rather, it must be interpreted in relation to the communicative intentions, social positions, cultural expectations, and situational circumstances of the participants. Geoffrey Leech's politeness principle provides a theoretical framework for explaining how speakers manage interpersonal relationships through language. In the six-maxim framework adopted in this study, Leech (2016) identifies the tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy maxims as important dimensions of polite communication. The tact maxim emphasizes minimizing costs and maximizing benefits to others, while the generosity maxim encourages speakers to minimize benefits to themselves and demonstrate willingness to accept personal costs for the benefit of others. The approbation maxim emphasizes minimizing criticism and maximizing praise of others, whereas the modesty maxim encourages speakers to minimize self-praise and avoid excessive expressions of personal superiority. Furthermore, the agreement maxim emphasizes minimizing disagreement and maximizing agreement between communicative participants, while the sympathy maxim encourages speakers to minimize antipathy and maximize expressions of sympathy toward others.

These six maxims provide complementary perspectives for understanding how politeness operates within interpersonal communication. Their application is closely related to the communicative context because a particular expression may perform different pragmatic functions depending on the relationship between speakers, the circumstances surrounding the utterance, and the intentions conveyed. In literary discourse, politeness strategies may be represented through expressions of appreciation, offers of assistance,

acknowledgment of personal limitations, agreement with others, and demonstrations of emotional concern. Such expressions can contribute to characterization while simultaneously revealing the social values and cultural expectations represented within a narrative. Consequently, an analysis of linguistic politeness in a novel should consider not only the linguistic forms of characters' utterances but also their pragmatic functions and their relationships with the broader narrative context.

This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant to Hamka's *Tenggelamnya Kapal Van der Wijck*, which portrays interpersonal relationships shaped by cultural traditions, social expectations, emotional conflicts, and differences in social status. The interactions among characters, particularly Zainuddin, Hayati, and other figures within the narrative, provide opportunities to examine how linguistic politeness is represented through dialogue. Within the Minangkabau sociocultural setting depicted in the novel, communicative expressions may reflect respect, appreciation, humility, generosity, agreement, and sympathy, while also revealing tensions arising from social conventions and interpersonal relationships. Therefore, the application of Leech's six politeness maxims enables the present study to systematically identify and interpret linguistic politeness strategies represented in the characters' utterances. By integrating literary analysis with a pragmatic perspective, this study seeks to explain how linguistic politeness contributes to the representation of interpersonal relationships and sociocultural values in Hamka's novel. Thus, Leech's politeness principle serves as the primary analytical foundation for examining the forms and functions of politeness reflected in the narrative discourse.

Methodology

The study uses a descriptive qualitative approach within a library-research design. Its primary textual source is Hamka's novel The Sinking of the Van der Wijck, while the secondary materials are scholarly works relevant to pragmatics, literary studies, and politeness. The analyzed material includes words, sentences, dialogues, and narrative passages selected for their apparent relationship to Leech's six maxims. Data were collected through reading, note-taking, and the organization of relevant excerpts. The manuscript reports categorical frequencies as descriptive summaries rather than as inferential statistical findings.

The data were examined using a content-analysis procedure attributed to Krippendorff (as cited in Suparni, 2024). The procedure comprised six stages: (1) compiling candidate passages from the novel; (2) selecting relevant textual units; (3) recording and coding the units; (4) excluding material outside the analytic focus; (5) drawing conclusions from the categorized units; and (6) reporting the resulting interpretations. For pragmatic validity, a coded passage should ideally include information about speaker, addressee, situational context, and the interpersonal action performed. The source manuscript does not report intercoder agreement or a full coding appendix, so the reported counts are reproduced here without implying additional reliability procedures.

Results and Discussion

Results

The original analysis records 222 instances grouped under Leech's six politeness maxims. Table 1 presents the frequencies reported by the researchers. These figures describe the coded material within the selected novel, not the frequency of particular maxims in all Indonesian literary works.

Table 1. Distribution of politeness categories in the analyzed text (frequencies reproduced from the source manuscript; percentages calculated from n = 222).

No.	Politeness maxim	Frequency	Percentage
1	Tact	39	17.6%
2	Generosity	44	19.8%
3	Approbation	53	23.9%
4	Modesty	39	17.6%
5	Agreement	18	8.1%
6	Sympathy	29	13.1%
	Total	222	100.0%

1. Tact Maxim

The analysis identifies 39 instances (17.6%) classified as tact. This maxim focuses on reducing imposition on the addressee or prioritizing the addressee's interests. In the novel, requests and offers can be interpreted in relation to the burden or benefit they place on another character.

"I ask only one thing in return: recite Surah Yasin every Thursday night" (p. 16).

In the first example, Mak Base limits the requested repayment to a religious remembrance rather than a material reward. The wording can be read as reducing the obligation imposed on Zainuddin. The classification depends on this interactional interpretation, not merely on the religious content of the request.

"Take all this money; it is yours, the proceeds of your father's work" (p. 19).

The second example foregrounds Zainuddin's entitlement and financial benefit. It is compatible with a tact-oriented interpretation because the proposed action favors the addressee. However, the giver's willingness to relinquish resources also overlaps with the generosity maxim; this ambiguity should be acknowledged when coding.

2. Generosity Maxim

Generosity accounts for 44 instances (19.8%). Unlike tact, which primarily evaluates the benefit or cost to the other party, generosity highlights the speaker's own willingness to accept cost or forgo benefit. The selected passages represent assistance, sacrifice, and support within relationships of care.

"I traded the money and made a profit. It was only from that profit that I paid your school fees" (p. 16).

Mak Base's statement describes the use of her income to support Zainuddin's schooling. Its relevance to generosity lies in the sacrifice of personal resources for another person's benefit. The linguistic evidence becomes clearer when the statement is interpreted within the shared history between speaker and addressee.

"If it were not to fulfill your mother's last wish and your father's hopes" (p. 18).

This incomplete conditional expression points to Mak Base's willingness to support Zainuddin's departure despite emotional difficulty. The passage may index a self-sacrificing stance, although the full surrounding exchange is needed to establish its precise pragmatic force.

3. Approbation Maxim

Approbation is the most frequently coded category, with 53 instances (23.9%). The maxim concerns positive evaluation of others and the avoidance of disparagement. In literary dialogue, praise and expressions of esteem may help construct social closeness, mark moral character, or affirm another person's worth.

"May you be a happy woman; may Allah protect you" (p. 16).

Zainuddin's expression conveys goodwill and a blessing to Mak Base. It communicates favorable regard, although it is more directly a benediction than explicit praise of a personal quality. Consequently, its coding as approbation should be supported by the surrounding conversational context.

"She had not expected him to be so kind-hearted" (p. 19).

This evaluative sentence attributes admirable character to Zainuddin and is therefore thematically consistent with approbation. Nevertheless, if the sentence is narrator-mediated rather than spoken by a character to another participant, it should be analyzed as a representation of positive evaluation, not automatically as an interpersonal politeness act.

4. Modesty Maxim

Modesty appears in 39 instances (17.6%), the same number as tact. It concerns the downplaying of one's own merits and the avoidance of excessive self-praise. The examples involve indebtedness and expressions of personal limitation.

"Ah, how could I ever repay your kindness?" (p. 16).

Zainuddin's question highlights his indebtedness to Mak Base and refrains from asserting his own accomplishments. It can be interpreted as modesty because the speaker positions himself as the recipient of another person's generosity.

"I am a poor person, my child" (p. 18).

Mak Base directly acknowledges her material limitations. Although the statement may have a modest self-presentation function, poverty alone is not sufficient evidence of modesty. The relevant criterion is whether the utterance downplays the speaker's status or achievement within this particular interaction.

5. Agreement Maxim

Agreement is the least frequent category, with 18 instances (8.1%). It concerns the management of convergence and disagreement between interlocutors. Because the novel narrates conflicting social expectations and competing obligations, explicit agreement need not dominate its

conversations; however, the reported frequency alone cannot establish a causal explanation.

"Of course not, Mak Base replied" (p. 18).

The reply is reported as conveying Mak Base's acceptance of Zainuddin's plan to travel to Padang. Its classification as agreement depends on the preceding question or proposition. In isolation, the phrase "of course not" could instead signal disagreement; the complete exchange is therefore necessary to validate the coding.

"We must first reach agreement with the entire family" (p. 24).

This statement prioritizes consultation before making a collective decision. It expresses a preference for consensus, but advocating consensus is not identical to agreeing with an interlocutor in a particular conversational turn. This distinction should guide the interpretation of the example.

6. Sympathy Maxim

The analysis reports 29 instances (13.1%) in the sympathy category. Sympathy concerns expressions of concern, consolation, or shared feeling toward others, especially in response to loss, suffering, or difficulty. The original manuscript illustrates this category with narrative descriptions of Zainuddin's emotional condition.

"His heart had grown weary. Once again, the city of Makassar, a beautiful and civilized city, appeared in his thoughts" (p. 24).

This narrative invites readers to recognize Zainuddin's homesickness and emotional fatigue. It creates conditions for readerly empathy, but it does not by itself show one character expressing sympathy to another. Accordingly, it is more securely described as a narrative representation of distress than as a direct realization of Leech's sympathy maxim.

"Zainuddin stood alone in thought, waiting for the rain to stop" (p. 28).

Likewise, this description conveys isolation and reflection. The emotional atmosphere may encourage readers' empathy, but a sympathy maxim would require evidence of a speaker addressing another person's circumstances with concern. These passages should therefore be recoded or supplemented with suitable dialogic examples before definitive claims about the maxim are made.

Discussion: Interpersonal Meaning, Cultural Context, and Coding Boundaries

The distribution of 222 coded instances indicates that the six categories are all represented in the researchers' classification. Approbation (53; 23.9%) and generosity (44; 19.8%) are the two largest categories, followed by tact and modesty (39 each; 17.6%), sympathy (29; 13.1%), and agreement (18; 8.1%). The prominence of approbation is consistent with the importance attached to positive evaluation and respect in the passages discussed. Yet frequency measures the occurrence of a label in this corpus; it does not independently prove that a particular communicative value is dominant across all characters or all episodes of the novel.

Read through Leech's politeness principle, the examples suggest several related interpersonal strategies. Positive evaluations and blessings can communicate regard for others; offers of material support and the acknowledgment of sacrifice can maintain relationships characterized by obligation and gratitude; and modest self-presentation can mitigate asymmetries between benefactors and recipients. These functions often coexist. For example, offering money can benefit an addressee (tact) while involving a sacrifice by the speaker (generosity). A stronger coding procedure would specify a primary maxim according to the speech act and its immediate context, while recording secondary interpretations when justified.

The novel's cultural setting is important to interpretation. Kinship responsibilities, customary rules, religious expressions, and the contrast between personal aspiration and collective expectations shape the significance of what characters say. Mak Base's support for Zainuddin's education, for instance, is more than an isolated charitable act: in the narrative it is part of a relationship of care and obligation. Similarly, references to family consultation connect language use to decision-making norms. Rather than treating cultural identity as a direct cause of politeness, the analysis should show how particular linguistic choices operate within these represented relationships and situations.

A central methodological issue is the distinction between character speech, represented thought, and narration. Leech's maxims are designed to illuminate interpersonal communicative behavior. Descriptions of a lonely character may evoke sympathy in readers without constituting a sympathetic utterance by an interlocutor. This

distinction is especially relevant to the two illustrations presented under the sympathy maxim. It also applies to evaluative narration classified as approbation. Separating these levels would make the categories more conceptually coherent and the findings more reproducible.

A second issue is the relation between linguistic form and pragmatic function. An utterance cannot be classified solely from a favorable word or an apparent intention. "Of course not," for example, may signal agreement or disagreement depending on the previous turn, while an expression of personal poverty may either display modesty or simply state a fact. Each example should therefore be accompanied by its conversational sequence, an identification of the participants, the immediate social situation, and an explanation of the relevant face-management or benefit–cost implications. The reported 222 observations remain the study's original findings, but their category assignments should be understood as provisional where such information is unavailable.

The results can be situated alongside studies by Agustina et al. (2024), Nuraisah et al. (2024), and Pebrianti and Taqwiem (2024), which likewise apply Leech's framework to Indonesian novels. This shared approach underscores the usefulness of the framework for exploring literary interaction. However, the source manuscript does not provide comparable frequencies or methodological details from those studies, so it cannot substantiate a claim that Hamka's novel is more or less polite than the other texts. Its more defensible contribution is the close interpretation of how different politeness-related strategies are represented in a particular cultural and narrative setting.

For language and literature education, selected exchanges could be used to develop students' sensitivity to context, social relations, and the distinction between what an utterance says and what it does. This is a pedagogical implication, not an experimentally demonstrated learning outcome. Future analysis would benefit from a transparent codebook, a complete list of textual units with edition-specific page references, contextualized excerpts, and independent coding checks. These measures would strengthen both the interpretive rigor and the credibility of the reported distribution.

Conclusion

The study identifies 222 passages categorized under Leech's six politeness maxims in Hamka's The Sinking of the Van der Wijck: tact (39), generosity (44), approbation (53), modesty (39), agreement (18), and sympathy (29). Approbation is the most frequently recorded category, while agreement is the least frequent. The analyzed examples show how expressions of regard, care, sacrifice, and social obligation contribute to the novel's portrayal of interpersonal relationships. The results also highlight an important analytic limitation: narrator-mediated descriptions and emotion-evoking passages are not necessarily realizations of politeness maxims in character-to-character interaction. Contextual information and a clearer distinction among speech, thought, and narration are needed to confirm some of the classifications. With these qualifications, the novel offers useful material for pragmatic interpretation and for discussing culturally situated communication in literature education.

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