

A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF POLITENESS MAXIMS IN INDONESIAN ONLINE CUSTOMER SERVICE INTERACTIONS

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: April 2025 Revised: June 2025 Accepted: September 2025 Published: October 2025	<i>This study aims to analyze the application of Leech's politeness principles (1983) in conversations between customer service agents and customers at a property rental company, TRV (company initials), conducted via live chat. Using a qualitative approach, the research identifies and classifies the politeness maxims used in 12 selected chat interactions over a three-month period. The findings reveal that all six of Leech's politeness maxims—tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy—are present in the data. Among them, the modesty and sympathy maxims are the most frequently used found during the searching for the sources, highlighting the importance of humility and empathy in customer service communication. The agreement maxim also plays a significant role in facilitating mutual understanding, particularly regarding scheduling and service costs. Overall, the study demonstrates that the application of politeness principles contributes to improving communication quality, fostering harmonious relationships, and enhancing the overall customer experience. This implication provides for further recommendation in online customer service replies to be standardized by the company in terms of politeness.</i>
Keywords Politeness; Leech's principles; Customer service; Live chat; Pragmatics;	
How to cite: Jawas, E.C., Yanti, D., & Hizbullah, N. (2025). A Pragmatic Analysis of Politeness Maxims in Indonesian Online Customer Service Interactions. <i>JOLLT Journal of Languages and Language Teaching</i> , 13(4), 2173-2183. Doi: https://doi.org/10.33394/joltt.v13i4.15258	

INTRODUCTION

Language can be used as a medium to convey feelings, thoughts, knowledge, and ideas both in written and oral messages. According to Chaer (in Azella & Rosalina, 2022), there are five functions of language, namely as a means of expression, information, exploration, persuasion, and entertainment. Language is used to communicate with others, especially through verbal and written communication (Kholifah & Ekawati, 2024). The use of polite language both verbally and in writing is expected to maintain smooth interactions between individuals and groups, and avoid misunderstandings in communication. Compliance with cultural norms is very important, which requires more than just the expression of thoughts. Deviations from cultural norms in language use can lead to negative evaluations, including perceptions of arrogance, cultural insensitivity, egocentrism, and lack of politeness (Riswanti et al., 2019).

In pragmatics, social context is an element that is often analyzed. In addition to conveying information and ideas, speakers also need to pay attention to cultural norms when speaking. The use of language must be adjusted to the social context, which includes variations in the level of formality, closeness, and social status. Therefore, politeness needs to be reflected in the language used. Politeness can affect both what is said and how actions are carried out in a conversation. This shows that the speaker has high moral values. Yule (2022) defines "politeness" as a way of interacting that reflects awareness of the "face" of others. This concept describes how the speaker behaves when aware of the presence and feelings of the other person. Salsabila & Rahayu (2023) state that politeness is related to the way individuals express

themselves to protect the feelings of others. In addition, because the listener is considered more important than the speaker, the speaker will always speak carefully and respectfully. Leech (2016) explains that politeness is behavior that facilitates social interaction in a generally peaceful and harmonious environment.

In the professional world, this is also seen in the interaction between customer service officers who are tasked with providing the best service and conveying accurate information to customers. According to Shankman (2010), the role of customer service staff is crucial for companies operating on social media platforms, because they function as "the front line in communicating with customers". Then, Yoeti (2013) divides the two functions of customer service: first, as a marketing tool to attract more customers, and second, as an evaluation tool to provide better service. Overall, customer service will put customers as the main priority.

Furthermore, in the current trend, companies provide online customer service through live chat and identifying the key elements that shape customers' online shopping experiences is essential, as these factors significantly influence customer satisfaction, purchase intentions, and creating positive engagement through communication (Singh & Söderlund, 2020). According to Graeme McLean and Kofi Osei-Frimpong (2017), while customers are handled by live chat agents, reliability and empathy, also information quality influences satisfaction with the experience of the customers.

Therefore, customer service officers, as speakers, are required to have language skills, especially verbal and written depending on the services provided by the company to its customers. Thus, communication competence by using appropriate and easily understood language both verbally and in writing is important for customer service officers to master. According to Leech (in Putri et al., 2024) speech acts and written acts are termed interpersonal rhetoric. This interpersonal rhetoric has several principles and is supported by several maxims. One of these principles is the principle of politeness with its maxims being wisdom, generosity, appreciation, simplicity, agreement, and sympathy.

Previous research that examined politeness using Leech's (Leech, 2016) principles entitled "Leech's Politeness Principle Used by Teachers in English Language Teaching" was studied by (Santoso et al., 2021). The results of this study indicate that there are types of Leech's politeness principles: namely the maxim of tact, the maxim of generosity, the maxim of appreciation, the maxim of simplicity, the maxim of agreement and the maxim of sympathy, S's obligation to O, and O's obligation to S. Meanwhile, the forms of Leech's politeness principles found in this study are declarative, interrogative, and imperative. Research has explored politeness from various angles, including linguistic features, cultural differences, and its role in shaping discourse (Ambady et al., 1996 in Li et al., 2020).

In another study that also used the approach of Leech's politeness theory entitled "Students' Politeness to Lecturers in WhatsApp Application Measured Using Leech Maxim" studied by Nurdiani & Sasongko (2022). The findings of this study reveal that not all of Leech's politeness maxims are utilized by students when communicating with lecturers via WhatsApp. Out of the six maxims proposed by Leech, five were identified in the students' messages: the maxim of agreement, the maxim of approbation, the maxim of modesty, the maxim of generosity, and the maxim of sympathy. Among these, the maxim of modesty emerged as the most frequently employed. This indicates that students tend to express politeness primarily through humility, suggesting that modesty is the most dominant politeness strategy in their digital academic communication.

From the previous studies, this study will enlarge the use of Leech's politeness strategies in non-academic context and its application for written online communication which follows the present trend in customer service. The source of this research is from customer service conversations with customers at a property rental company, TRV. which handles guests through online chat (live chat) in Indonesian language conversations. In this company, handling through

online chat is divided into 2 customer service teams, namely, L1 (level 1) which focuses on answering questions and L2 (level 2) to handle complaints and harder complaints.

The reason researchers are interested in studying the politeness of customer service officers is because they have Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and are assessed by the Quality Assurance (QA) team. If one of the procedures is not followed by the CS agent, there will be sanctions in the form of coaching by supervisors. Customer service officers are required to be responsive, fast, polite, friendly, and provide appropriate solutions in accordance with the applicable SOPs. Every conversation between officers and customers can be checked and monitored either directly or viewed from the conversation history. Based on this explanation, researchers are interested in figuring out what and how Leech's politeness principles applied Indonesian online customer service interactions. This would contribute in expanding the application of Leech's politeness principle beyond academic and instructional contexts into a professional, non-academic, and institutional digital environment—specifically within online customer service communication in the property rental industry. While previous studies have explored politeness strategies in educational settings or general digital platforms, this research focuses on real-time, Indonesian-language live chat interactions between customer service officers and customers. Moreover, it examines how politeness maxims are operationalized within a framework regulated by Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and monitored by Quality Assurance (QA), providing insight into the intersection between linguistic politeness and institutional expectations. By analyzing authentic service dialogues from two distinct service levels (L1 and L2), the study also highlights how politeness is contextually adapted to varying customer needs—ranging from general inquiries to complaint resolution—thus offering a comprehensive view of relational work in customer service discourse.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design aimed at identifying and classifying metadiscourse markers within spoken interactions, focusing on conversational features that reveal underlying pragmatic functions. Qualitative research, as defined by Moleong (2005), involves collecting descriptive data from written or spoken language based on observed behaviors and attitudes. This approach is well-suited for examining naturally occurring communication, as it provides rich, context-specific insights into how speakers navigate social and interpersonal dynamics through language. By analyzing spoken interactions, the study explores how speakers utilize various metadiscourse markers, particularly those linked to politeness maxims. According to Leech (1983), there are six key politeness maxims: the maxim of tact, maxim of generosity, maxim of approbation, maxim of modesty, maxim of agreement, and maxim of sympathy. These maxims guide how speakers manage social relationships and maintain politeness in communication. The study highlights how these maxims are applied in everyday conversations, offering valuable insights into the pragmatic functions of language in social contexts.

Respondents

The respondents in this study consist of customer service agents and customers involved in online live chat interactions. A total of 12 chat samples were carefully selected for analysis, with each sample representing a different customer service agent. Despite the diversity in agents, all conversations were sourced from the same live chat platform, ensuring consistency and relevance in the data. These samples provide an authentic representation of real-world interactions, offering valuable insights into the language used in actual customer service scenarios. The selected customer service agents include both L1 (native) and L2 (non-native) agents, all of whom have been with the company for over three months or have successfully

passed their probation period. This selection was made to ensure that the agents have sufficient experience to handle customer interactions effectively. The samples encompass a range of scenarios, including standard question-and-answer exchanges and conversations involving customer complaints, ensuring a comprehensive analysis of agent-customer communication.

Instruments

The primary data source for this study consists of online live chat transcripts, which are essential for examining the presence and function of metadiscourse markers and conversational maxims within customer service interactions. These chat transcripts, serving as the main research instrument, provide a rich source of real-life language data, reflecting the natural flow of conversations between customer service agents and customers. To ensure confidentiality and comply with the company's agreement, both the customer's and agent's names have been anonymized in the presented samples. Additionally, the conversations are presented in Indonesian, with translations that maintain the original meaning of the script without altering or omitting any content. One specific translation choice is the substitution of the word "Kak" (a gender-neutral, informal term used in Indonesian) with "Customer" in the English translation, ensuring clarity and avoiding any potential gender confusion. The study includes samples from both L1 (native) and L2 (non-native) agents, selected to capture a more complex range of interactions, including standard question-and-answer exchanges and those involving customer complaints. These transcripts were specifically chosen from live chat interactions occurring between November 2024 and January 2025, providing recent and relevant data to analyze agent-customer communication dynamics in a contemporary context.

The data collection process for this study focused on selecting live chat transcripts from a three-month period—November, December, and January. This specific timeframe was chosen to ensure the data reflected recent and relevant customer service interactions. Once the transcripts were collected, they underwent a multi-stage analysis to examine the presence and role of metadiscourse markers within the conversations. In the first stage, each chat was carefully reviewed to identify instances of metadiscourse, which are elements that help manage communication flow and guide the listener's understanding. Following this, the identified metadiscourse markers were categorized according to their alignment with the conversational maxims derived from Grice's Cooperative Principle. Grice's maxims—maxim of relevance, manner, quality, and quantity—provide a framework for understanding how conversational exchanges maintain clarity, relevance, and mutual understanding. By applying these maxims to the chat data, the study aimed to analyze how customer service agents use metadiscourse to navigate communication and enhance the effectiveness of interactions with customers.

Data analysis

The qualitative analysis of this study was conducted through a systematic interpretation of the selected live chat transcripts, focusing on linguistic patterns and pragmatic functions that are associated with metadiscourse markers and conversational maxims. The analysis specifically aimed to uncover how customer service agents employed conversational maxims to manage communication, ensuring clarity and mutual understanding, while also adhering to or deviating from Grice's Cooperative Principle. Each interaction was closely examined to identify instances of the four conversational maxims: quantity, quality, relation, and manner. These maxims were used as a framework for analyzing how the communication between customer service agents (L1 and L2) and customers adhered to expectations of cooperative communication. The findings were then organized and interpreted according to these classifications, providing insights into how effective the communication strategies were in maintaining clarity, relevance, and politeness.

The data collection focused on the most recent three-month period—November 2024, December 2024, and January 2025. These months were chosen because they represented the

peak season for customer inquiries, according to the company, thus ensuring a high volume of interactions for analysis. Additionally, the sample was taken from the top ten most common inquiry categories, sourced from the customer service system named ZD. This allowed the study to focus on typical, high-frequency interactions. The samples were identified by referring to a previous study on the application of politeness principles, and keywords associated with different maxims were searched within the customer service system for the targeted period. For example, the word "maaf" was used to represent the maxim of sympathy. Two samples for each of the maxims—quantity, quality, relation, and manner—were selected for discussion in the Findings and Discussion section. These samples were considered representative of the application of conversational maxims in real-world customer service interactions, providing a detailed analysis of how these principles were enacted in practice.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study is based on Leech's (1983) principles of politeness, which categorize politeness in language into six key maxims. These are the maxim of tact, which involves minimizing imposition on others; the maxim of generosity, which encourages offering benefits to others; the maxim of approbation, focusing on expressing positive evaluations of others; the maxim of modesty, which involves downplaying one's own contributions or merits; the maxim of agreement, which promotes harmony by agreeing with others; and the maxim of sympathy, which fosters expressions of empathy and understanding. These maxims serve as a framework for analyzing politeness in communication.

Table 1
Politeness Maxims Frequency in Customer Service Interactions

No.	Types of Politeness Maxims	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	The Maxim of Tact	220	17.96 %
2.	The Maxim of Generosity	145	11.84%
3.	The Maxim of Approbation	138	11.26%
4.	The Maxim of Modesty	243	19.84%
5.	The Maxim of Agreement	214	17.47%
6.	The Maxim of Sympathy	265	21.63%
Total		1225	100%

The Maxim of Tact

This is related to directive speech. Usually used in the form of commands or requests, such as "Open the door, please!" or "Can you read this article, please?" (Santoso, D., et al., 2021). In this study, this maxim was found when customer service agents gave directions to guests or customers to send photos of the problems they experienced, the data is as follows:

[1] *"Halo Kak, mengenai kendala yang Kakak informasikan untuk saat ini bisa dibantu Kak untuk fotokan kendalanya?"* [Hello Customer, regarding the problem you informed me about, could you please take a photo of the problem?]

[2] *"Mohon maaf atas ketidaknyamanannya Kak, perihal kendala internetnya mohon dibantu lampirkan untuk foto routernya depan dan belakang, agar kami bantu pengecekan Kak."* [Sorry for the inconvenience, Customer, regarding the internet problem, please kindly help to attach a photo of the front and back of the router, so that we can help you to check further.]

The sample [1] above was sent via live chat by the L2 team to ask the guest to send a photo of the problem because previously the guest reported a problem with the apartment unit he rented in the water heater section and in data [2] the customer was requested to take a photo of the front and back of the router by the L1 agent. In the samples above, agents use the word

“dibantu” or “please help to...” as a sign of politeness asking the guest to take a photo of the problem so that it can be checked after the CS team receives further information from the guest.

The Maxim of Generosity

The maxim of generosity is a maxim that aims to reduce personal gain and increase personal loss (Tewal, et al., 2022). This is often found in statements that are in the form of commands or promises. There is a clear difference between the maxim of wisdom and the maxim of generosity. In statements that use the maxim of generosity, the interlocutor may reject an offer from the speaker that actually benefits the interlocutor. In conversations with customer service, this can be used when it is necessary to provide compensation to customers.

[3] *“Baik Kak, kami cek untuk pengajuan refund internetnya sudah disampaikan ke tim terkait dan mohon ditunggu untuk refund internet estimasinya adalah 7-14 hari kerja, namun tidak menutup kemungkinan bisa lebih cepat ya Kak.”* [Okay Customer, we checked that the internet refund application has been submitted to the relevant team and please wait for the internet refund, the estimate is 7-14 working days, but it is possible that it could be faster, Customer.]

[4] *“Hai kak, terkait pemesanan Kakak, kami bantu cek untuk pemesanan tersebut tidak avail, yang dimana untuk pemesanan Kakak akan kami bantu relokasi ke unit lainnya.”* [Hi Customer, regarding your order, we will help you check that the order is not available, where for your order we will help you relocate to another unit.]

In the two samples above, the customer service team tried to provide compensation by providing a refund or moving location (relocation) for the inconvenience experienced by the guest. This causes losses in revenue from the CS side as the representative of the company but is done as a special gift or compensation to avoid unpleasant experiences experienced by customers. This shows that there is loss from the speaker side for the customer in which the maxim of generosity is applied.

The Maxim of Approbation

This approbation maxim emphasizes the importance of giving praise to others and suggests limiting criticism. This maxim can be found when there is respect by giving full benefits to others (Leech, 2016). Conversations between customer service and guests do not use this type of maxim much when compared to other maxims.

[5] *“Baik Kak, terima kasih atas kesediaan melengkapi formulir dan kami informasikan mohon untuk mengirimkan data berikut:”* [Okay Customer, thank you for your willingness to complete the form and we inform you to send the following data:]

[6] *“Halo Kak, terima kasih atas pesan yang sudah disampaikan.”* [Hello Customer, thank you for the message that has been delivered.]

Data [5] and [6] show that the customer service team appreciates customers for their cooperation with their willingness to complete the data requested by the agent and gives awards to guests for delivering complete messages so that it is easier for the CS team to handle their problems.

The Maxim of Modesty

According to Rama (2017), the maxim of modesty generally appears in illocutionary or expressive and assertive speech. This maxim emphasizes that the speaker shows humility by reducing self-praise. In conversations between CS and customers, this is usually used to ask guests to wait or ask for permission, with the following examples:

[7] *“Baik Kak, mohon kesediaannya menunggu ya Kak.”* [Alright Customer, please kindly wait.]

[8] *“Baik Kak terima kasih atas konfirmasinya, kami izin menghubungi tamu yang akan stay untuk informasikan proses check-in ya Kak.”* [Alright Customer, thank you for your

confirmation, we would like to get your permission to contact the guest who will stay to inform them of the check-in process.]

The two data above, [7] and [8] from customer service asking guests with humility, can be seen in data [7] which uses "please" as a marker to urge guests politely. Then, in example [8], the CS team uses the word "permission" because the agent asks for permission from the customer to contact the relatives of the connected guest. The word "permission" is often used by customer service in the context of asking for approval, permission, especially if it is with guest customer data.

The Maxim of Agreement

The maxim of agreement is essential in ensuring that both customer service agents and customers come to a mutual understanding and agreement. This maxim is used to facilitate polite negotiations and confirm details between the two parties, leading to an optimal and respectful agreement. The agreement maxim is often expressed through polite language, which not only fosters cooperation but also ensures clarity in the communication process. For instance, in the example [9], "Baik Kak, kami akan bantu penjadwalan di estimasi tersebut, mohon berkenan menunggu Kak" ("Okay, Customer, we will help schedule the estimate, please kindly wait"), the agent respectfully seeks the customer's confirmation of their availability and willingness to wait for the scheduled estimate. Similarly, example [10], "Jika berkenan dengan adanya biaya pengecekan dan perbaikan, mohon lampirkan foto masing-masing kendalanya agar bisa kami buat laporan perbaikannya" ("If you agree with the cost of checking and repairing, please attach a photo of each problem so that we can make a repair report") illustrates how the agent uses polite phrasing to confirm the customer's agreement to the proposed costs and actions.

These examples demonstrate the use of the agreement maxim in the context of service interactions, where customer service agents seek confirmation from the customer regarding the proposed time, costs, or actions. The maxim is particularly important in online chat interactions, where efficient communication is essential. During the data collection process, conversations involving the agreement maxim were frequently encountered in both L1 and L2 interactions, particularly when agents needed customer confirmation on issues like scheduling repairs, confirming costs, and managing check-in/check-out procedures. This maxim is often detected in scenarios where the agent is organizing appointments, ensuring that both parties agree on the details.

The Maxim of Sympathy

The sympathy maxim, as outlined by Santoso et al. (2021), emphasizes the importance of showing empathy and reducing any negative feelings or antipathy between the speaker and the interlocutor. In communication, this maxim plays a crucial role in fostering mutual trust and improving the overall quality of interpersonal relationships. By showing sympathy, speakers acknowledge the emotions of others, creating an atmosphere of understanding and respect. In the context of customer service, this maxim is particularly important, as it can directly impact the customer's experience and perception of the service they are receiving. This principle aligns with the Quality Assurance (QA) Customer Service team's evaluation at TRV, where agents are assessed based on their ability to express sympathy or empathy, especially in situations where it is required. Failure to demonstrate empathy can negatively affect the agent's performance assessment.

For example, in data [11], the agent uses the phrase "We apologize for the inconvenience you experienced," which is a direct expression of sympathy for the difficulties the guest encountered. The use of "sorry" here not only serves as a polite response but also functions to acknowledge the guest's negative experience and demonstrate the company's commitment to customer satisfaction (Budiwati, 2017). In data [12], the customer service agent takes a slightly

different approach by stating, “We understand your concerns,” which conveys empathy. This expression shows that the agent is acknowledging the guest’s feelings and demonstrating an understanding of the situation, specifically regarding the deposit refund that is still under review. Both expressions highlight the agent’s effort to manage the customer’s emotional state and maintain a positive relationship, which is crucial in customer service interactions.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that all six of Leech’s politeness maxims—tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy—are effectively reflected in the interactions between customer service agents and customers in the digital communication context. These maxims function as pragmatic strategies that help maintain politeness, foster cooperation, and create a positive service experience for customers. As digital communication platforms increasingly replace face-to-face interactions, understanding how these maxims are applied becomes crucial in providing high-quality customer service that meets both practical and emotional needs.

The maxim of tact emerged as the most commonly applied principle in customer service interactions. It is particularly prevalent in directive speech acts, where customer service agents ask customers to take specific actions, such as submitting photos or following up on certain procedures. Polite phrases like “bisa dibantu kak” (can you help...) were used to soften the directive nature of these requests. By doing so, customer service agents reduce the potential imposition on the customer, thereby maintaining a respectful and considerate tone in their communications. This strategy aligns with the idea that politeness in communication is not merely about reducing face-threatening acts but also about creating an atmosphere in which the listener has the freedom to accept or decline the offer. As Hamzah et al. (2011) highlight, the expression “can I help you?” opens up space for the interlocutor to make a choice without feeling forced or pressured, reflecting an essential feature of tact. The maxim of tact thus plays an important role in maintaining customer satisfaction by balancing the need for efficiency in solving customer issues with the necessity of politeness in communication.

Furthermore, this maxim is especially important within the Indonesian cultural context. As Himawan et al. (2018) assert, Indonesian society places high value on religiosity and social norms, which heavily influence communication styles. These cultural aspects shape how language is used to uphold social harmony and prevent confrontation, as evident in the frequent use of tactful expressions during customer service interactions.

The maxim of generosity also plays a significant role in customer service interactions, particularly when agents offer compensation or alternative solutions, such as refunds or the relocation of a customer to another unit. This maxim reflects the company’s effort to prioritize customer satisfaction and enhance the customer experience, even at the potential expense of internal resources. For instance, customer service agents might offer solutions that go beyond what is necessary, such as offering additional services or benefits without expecting anything in return. By reducing self-benefit and increasing the benefit for the customer, agents help build goodwill and foster customer loyalty. This behavior aligns with Tewal et al. (2022), who emphasize the importance of reducing self-benefit to maximize benefits for the interlocutor. The generosity maxim ultimately fosters a positive relationship between the customer and the company, ensuring that customers feel valued and appreciated throughout the service interaction.

The maxim of approbation was also observed in the customer service interactions, although it was used less frequently than the other maxims. This maxim appeared primarily in expressions of gratitude, such as thanking customers for their cooperation or for completing certain actions, such as submitting required forms. Despite its rarity, the use of approbation helps convey respect and appreciation in the communication process. As customer service is generally more focused on solving problems and providing efficient solutions, expressions of

praise or approval tend to be less emphasized compared to other politeness maxims that facilitate issue resolution. Nevertheless, when used, the approbation maxim contributes to a respectful and positive tone in interactions, ensuring that customers feel recognized for their cooperation and contributions to the process.

The maxim of modesty was applied by customer service agents in ways that downplayed their own authority or role, particularly when asking for patience or permission. Phrases such as “mohon kesediaannya” (we kindly ask for your availability) and “kami izin...” (we ask for permission...) were frequently used to show respect for the customer’s autonomy and to convey a sense of humility. This form of modesty fosters an atmosphere of equality in the conversation, ensuring that customers do not feel as though they are being dominated or controlled by the agent. This approach is essential in creating a professional and respectful relationship, particularly in service scenarios where customers may already be frustrated or dissatisfied. The use of modesty in customer service interactions helps to mitigate potential conflicts and minimize customer frustration. As Asdar et al. (2019) suggest, the term “mohon” is a linguistic marker of politeness that softens requests and conveys humility, which is crucial in maintaining a courteous and respectful tone throughout the conversation.

The maxim of agreement was most prominently observed when customer service agents sought customer confirmation on matters related to time, costs, or procedures. Agents used conditional politeness and cooperative language to ensure mutual understanding and agreement between the agent and the customer. Phrases such as “jika berkenan...” (if you’re willing...) were often used to request the customer’s confirmation or agreement on specific actions or steps to be taken. The use of agreement maxim highlights the importance of consent in service transactions, where customer validation is needed to proceed with certain actions. This is especially significant in transactional or technical processes, where customers must agree to specific terms or procedures. Pranowo (2009 in Abid, 2019) notes that careful lexical choices, such as the use of the term “berkenan,” reflect polite speech and are an effective means of fostering cooperation and ensuring clarity in the service process.

Finally, the maxim of sympathy was widely applied in customer service interactions, particularly in instances where agents needed to apologize or express empathy. Phrases such as “mohon maaf atas ketidaknyamanannya” (we apologize for the inconvenience) or “kami memahami kekhawatiran Kakak” (we understand your concerns) were used to show empathy and address customer frustrations. This maxim was critical in meeting customer expectations for emotional support, especially during service failures or delays. The application of sympathy not only fulfills politeness strategies but also aligns with corporate standards set by internal Quality Assurance (QA) assessments, which emphasize empathy as a core competency in customer interactions. As Hamzah et al. (2011) observe, the use of “maaf” (sorry) is one of the most common ways to express politeness, and its usage in this study reflects its role as a key strategy for managing customer dissatisfaction and maintaining a positive service environment.

The study indicates that politeness in digital service communication is strategically used and contextually adapted to suit the nature of the interaction. Customer service agents apply different maxims based on the specific context—whether giving instructions, handling complaints, offering compensation, or seeking confirmation. Among the six maxims, the most frequently used are the maxim of tact, modesty, and sympathy, suggesting that these principles play a central role in live chat interactions, where politeness must be conveyed efficiently and effectively within limited text-based exchanges. The consistent use of polite markers such as “mohon,” “terima kasih” (thank you), and “kami bantu” (we help) illustrates the linguistic patterns that customer service agents rely on to maintain a courteous and respectful tone. These findings support Leech’s theory of politeness, demonstrating how these principles are operationalized in a practical, digital communication setting, where expressions like “please,”

“sorry,” and “thank you” significantly contribute to fostering a harmonious interaction and cultivating positive relationships between agents and customers.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the use of Leech’s (2016) politeness maxims in live chat interactions between customer service agents and customers at TRV, a property rental company. The analysis revealed that all six maxims—tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy—were reflected in the conversations analyzed, with each maxim supported by at least two representative samples with a total twelve samples taken from L1 and L2 interactions. The findings highlight that customer service agents consistently apply politeness strategies to foster effective and courteous communication. Among the six maxims, the modesty maxim and sympathy maxim appeared more frequently when searching for the sample, indicating the importance of humility and empathy in addressing customer concerns. The agreement maxim was also commonly used to reach mutual understanding regarding service issues, such as scheduling or repair costs.

Overall, the application of these politeness principles contributes to building positive interpersonal relationships, enhancing customer satisfaction, and improving communication effectiveness. The presence of these maxims not only reflects the professionalism of the agents but also aligns with company goals in maintaining service quality and customer trust. Furthermore, this study reinforces the role of pragmatic principles in real-world communication contexts, particularly in the digital service industry. Further, the politeness strategies aligned with company quality standard, this could be a further reference for similar companies to also have politeness maxims applied as a policy in customer service. Future research with a larger and more varied dataset, possibly covering longer periods or including other communication platforms (e.g., phone, email), could yield deeper insights into the dynamics of politeness in customer service and further validate the findings of this study.

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