Pulchra Lingua: A Journal of Language Study, Literature, & Linguistics, 5(2), 2026
10.58989/plj.v5i2.90
ISSN 2963-5578

Linguistic Politeness of the Indonesian Language in Teacher-Student Interactions During Learning Activities at MA Alkhairaat Tomini

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ABSTRACT This study aims to identify forms of Indonesian linguistic politeness in teacher-student interactions during classroom learning and describe attitudes toward its implementation at Madrasah Aliyah (MA) Alkhairaat Tomini. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed. Data consisted of teachers' and students' utterances and interview responses collected through observation, non-participant listening, audio recording, note-taking, documentation, and interviews. Data analysis involved data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Based on Geoffrey Leech's politeness principle, 68 utterances were identified across six maxims: tact (38), agreement (21), generosity (4), approbation (3), modesty (1), and sympathy (1). The tact maxim was the most dominant in classroom interactions. The madrasah principal, teachers, and students demonstrated positive attitudes toward linguistic politeness across cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions. Politeness was understood as an expression of ethics, respect, and character development. Its implementation was reflected in mutual respect, consideration, polite language, seeking permission, appropriate tone of voice, and consistent teacher role modeling to promote a harmonious learning environment.

KEYWORDS
Geoffrey Leech;
Teacher–student interaction;
Linguistic politeness;
Pragmatics;
Politeness principle.

ABSTRAK Penelitian ini bertujuan mengidentifikasi bentuk kesantunan berbahasa Indonesia dalam interaksi guru dan siswa selama pembelajaran serta mendeskripsikan sikap mereka di Madrasah Aliyah (MA) Alkhairaat Tomini. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif. Data berupa tuturan guru dan siswa serta hasil wawancara dikumpulkan melalui observasi, teknik simak bebas libat cakap, perekaman, pencatatan, dokumentasi, dan wawancara. Analisis meliputi kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Berdasarkan prinsip kesantunan Geoffrey Leech, ditemukan 68 tuturan yang mencakup enam maksim: kebijaksanaan (38), kesepakatan (21), kedermawanan (4), penghargaan (3), kerendahan hati (1), dan simpati (1). Maksim kebijaksanaan paling dominan dalam interaksi pembelajaran. Kepala madrasah, guru, dan siswa menunjukkan sikap positif terhadap kesantunan berbahasa pada dimensi kognitif, afektif, dan konatif. Kesantunan dipahami sebagai wujud etika, penghormatan, dan pembentukan karakter. Penerapannya tercermin dalam sikap saling menghargai, kepedulian, penggunaan bahasa santun, kebiasaan meminta izin, pengaturan nada bicara, serta keteladanan guru yang konsisten dalam kegiatan pembelajaran sehari-hari untuk menciptakan suasana pembelajaran harmonis.

KATAKUNCI
Geoffrey Leech;
Interaksi Guru dan Siswa;
Kesantunan Berbahasa;
Pragmatik;
Prinsip Kesantunan.

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How to cite:
Muzna, M. & Suparni, S. (2026). Linguistic Politeness of the Indonesian Language in Teacher-Student Interactions During Learning Activities at MA Alkhairaat Tomini. *Pulchra Lingua: A Journal of Language Study, Literature, & Linguistics*, 5(2), 78-88. https://doi.org/10.58989/plj.v5i1.90

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1. Introduction

Language is a primary means of human communication. Beyond conveying thoughts and feelings, it enables individuals to construct meaning and exchange messages within social settings. In educational contexts, language facilitates the transmission of information, the development of understanding, and dynamic social relationships between teachers and students. As noted by Djunaidi et al. (2019), language serves both as a means of communication and an effective medium of instruction in schools and wider society. It enables people to socialize, understand ethical norms of speaking, and show respect for others through courteous language. Classroom language therefore does more than deliver subject matter: it reflects cultural values, moral standards, and communicative ethics, within which linguistic politeness is particularly important. The ability to communicate politely is consequently one indicator of successful learning processes.

An examination of polite language in classroom interaction requires a linguistic approach that explicitly considers the context of language use. Pragmatics is particularly relevant because it studies meaning in relation to the contexts in which utterances occur. According to Bala (2022), the meaning of an utterance can be fully understood and interpreted only in relation to its situational context. From a pragmatic perspective, language is examined not merely in terms of syntactic or phonological structure but also in relation to speakers' intentions, interpersonal relationships and relative status, and the sociocultural circumstances surrounding a speech event. Pragmatics thus provides an appropriate foundation for investigating teacher–student politeness, including speakers' ability to use language ethically and respectfully in accordance with local social and cultural norms.

In everyday educational settings, teachers and students need to understand and practice linguistic politeness to sustain effective instruction and a harmonious classroom climate. Respect and mutual consideration should underpin communication during the teaching and learning process. As educators and facilitators, teachers are expected to speak politely so that students feel valued, supported, psychologically comfortable, and motivated to participate. Students, in turn, are expected to demonstrate politeness toward teachers as an expression of respect for their roles and academic authority.

Politeness in Indonesian-language interactions between teachers and students is especially important because language serves both as a vehicle for knowledge and as a means of shaping students' attitudes, conduct, and character. Classroom utterances do not simply communicate academic concepts; they also influence learners' psychological comfort and the development of ethical and professional relationships at school. Verbal interaction reflects values of courtesy, empathy, and mutual recognition.

Linguistic politeness should therefore be regarded as a practical component of meaningful, human-centered learning rather than merely an optional recommendation. Nevertheless, polite language is not always consistently practiced in schools. Teachers and students may encounter communicative situations that give rise to impoliteness, such as when a teacher corrects a student's mistake, gives a firm instruction, or evaluates performance, or when a student expresses an opinion, asks a critical question, or responds to a teacher's direction. Without attention to pragmatic politeness, such interactions may cause discomfort and friction, reduce learning motivation, and undermine healthy classroom relationships.

Understanding how meanings are constructed and communicated ethically in classroom discourse therefore requires a pragmatic account of linguistic politeness. Armadani and Wijayanti (2025) describe politeness as an expression of civilized communicative conduct that reflects the values recognized within a community. Their research offers a theoretical basis for understanding politeness as a reflection of social values, but focuses primarily on general schools. The present study instead examines Madrasah Aliyah (MA) Alkhairaat Tomini, a religious educational institution that integrates Islamic teachings and moral conduct (adab) with local cultural values. Its proposed contribution is to investigate how Geoffrey Leech's pragmatic politeness principles relate to the Islamic norms of conduct cultivated at the madrasah. In doing so, the study addresses the relationship between linguistic politeness and religious character education in a formal educational setting, an area that the present research identifies as requiring further investigation.

As an institution that places considerable emphasis on religious and moral values, MA Alkhairaat Tomini is expected to foster a deeply rooted culture of linguistic politeness. However, exposure to social media, popular culture, and students' language practices outside school may influence classroom communication. Such influences may appear in word choices, intonation, or styles of address that do not fully align with the institution's preferred norms. The possible gap between institutional expectations and actual classroom practice merits critical examination. It concerns not only linguistic form but also speech strategies and participants' awareness of the norms governing interaction. Accordingly, this study investigates utterance forms and the attitudes of members of the school community to establish how politeness principles are realized in classroom interactions. Its broader educational purpose is to support a peaceful, cooperative learning environment characterized by mutual respect and students' character development. The study addresses two research questions: (1) What forms of linguistic politeness are used by teachers and students in learning interactions at MA Alkhairaat Tomini? (2) What attitudes do teachers and students exhibit toward the implementation of linguistic politeness principles during learning activities at MA Alkhairaat Tomini?.

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to describe and analyze the forms of Indonesian-language politeness occurring naturally in interactions between teachers and students at MA Alkhairaat Tomini. This design was selected to explore communicative behavior within its social context. In line with Subhaktiyasa (2024), qualitative research is informed by postpositivist perspectives and seeks to understand the meanings of participants' experiences in specific social settings. The investigation focused on naturally occurring speech without intervention or manipulation, allowing politeness strategies to be considered in context. Data were collected at MA Alkhairaat Tomini, Tomini District, Parigi Moutong Regency, from February to July 2026. The site was selected for its research accessibility and the frequent academic interactions shaped by religious norms of conduct.

The study drew on primary and secondary data. Primary data consisted of spoken exchanges between teachers and students that illustrated Indonesian-language politeness principles, together with structured and unstructured interviews exploring participants' attitudes, views, and perceptions. Secondary data included books, scholarly publications, literature on pragmatics, and visual and written documentation. Participants were recruited using purposive sampling. They comprised two educational staff members—the head of MA Alkhairaat Tomini and an Indonesian-language teacher—and 22 students enrolled in Grade XI Science. This class was selected on the assumption that its students had completed the initial adjustment period at the madrasah, had become familiar with formal school communication, and possessed sufficient pragmatic awareness for the purposes of the study.

Data collection combined complementary techniques for triangulation: (1) direct classroom observation in a passive-participant role; (2) the non-participant listening technique known as simak bebas libat cakap (SBLC), in which the researcher observes speech events without taking part in them (Sudaryanto, 1993); (3) audio recording with a smartphone to capture pauses, intonation, and details of speech; (4) note-taking to document situational information, including kinesic, paralinguistic, and gestural features not captured by audio; (5) documentation of school records and classroom photographs; and (6) in-depth interviews exploring the cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions underlying participants' linguistic behavior.

The qualitative data were processed using the interactive data analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), which consists of three interconnected activities. First, data condensation involved selecting, categorizing, and coding utterances in relation to compliance with or violations of Geoffrey Leech's politeness principles while setting aside redundant or irrelevant material. Second, data display involved organizing the condensed findings into matrices, maxim-classification tables, and descriptive

narratives covering Leech's six maxims—tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy—as well as the cognitive, affective, and conative dimensions of teachers' and students' attitudes. Third, conclusion drawing and verification involved interpreting the findings theoretically and pragmatically in relation to the research questions. Methodological triangulation was used to compare audio recordings, field observations, contextual notes, and participants' interview accounts in order to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings.

3. Results and Discussion

Classroom observations at MA Alkhairaat Tomini identified several forms of linguistic politeness in teacher–student interaction. These occurred when teachers guided activities, reinforced subject matter, or gave instructions and when students responded, discussed learning materials, or made requests. The utterances were classified using Geoffrey Leech's politeness principle, which comprises the tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy maxims. The distribution of the findings is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Linguistic Politeness Maxims

No.	Politeness maxim	Number of utterances
1	Tact maxim	38
2	Generosity maxim	4
3	Approbation maxim	3
4	Modesty maxim	1
5	Agreement maxim	21
6	Sympathy maxim	1
	Total	68

Table 1 indicates that the tact maxim was the most frequent category, accounting for 38 utterances. Its prevalence suggests that both teachers and students often framed instructions, requests for assistance, and requests for permission in ways that mitigated the force of directives and reduced potential interpersonal pressure. Agreement was the next most frequent maxim, with 21 utterances. These responses reflected students' tendency to acknowledge teachers' directions and align with classroom expectations, often within a cultural framework that values respect for teachers. Generosity (four utterances) and approbation (three utterances) demonstrated that classroom communication also included voluntary assistance and expressions of appreciation. Modesty and sympathy were represented by one utterance each. Their limited occurrence should not be interpreted as the absence of these values; rather, it may reflect the instructional contexts observed, which centered on task management and academic discussion more than personal emotional expression.

3.1. The Tact Maxim

The tact maxim emphasizes minimizing costs or burdens to others while maximizing their benefit or comfort. Teachers applied this maxim by softening directives, including those related to discipline or classroom responsibilities. For example, Teacher A said, "Bisa ustazah minta tolong?" ("Could I ask you for a favor?") and "Nurul, minta tolong ustazah, catatkan nama yang mau ikut lomba pidato di Porseni nanti" ("Nurul, please write down the names of those who want to enter the speech competition at the upcoming Porseni event"). Although both utterances functioned as directives from a person in authority, the teacher framed them as a question and a request for help rather than as blunt commands. The strategy offered students a more collaborative way of responding. Similarly, when addressing noise at the back of the classroom, Teacher A said, "Coba yang di belakang diam dulu yah" ("Those at the back, please be quiet for a moment, okay?"). The mitigating word coba ("please try") and the softening particle yah reduced the force of the instruction compared with a harsh command such as "Diam kalian!" ("Be quiet, all of you!"). This approach helped restore classroom order while protecting students from embarrassment in front of their peers, functioning as a face-saving strategy.

Students also used the tact maxim in requests for permission. Examples included Student A's "Ustazah, izin buang air besar" ("Ustazah, may I go to the toilet?"), Student B's "Ustazah, saya izin bertanya" ("Ustazah, may I ask a question?"), and Student C's "Ustazah, kalau boleh tau pidato apa saja yang diperlombakan nanti?" ("Ustazah, may I ask which speech categories will be contested?"). Expressions such as izin ("permission") and kalau boleh tahu ("if I may ask") mitigated the imposition of requests and helped students avoid interrupting the teacher abruptly. Such forms also reflected local expectations of respect during learning activities.

3.2. The Generosity Maxim

The generosity maxim involves minimizing benefit to oneself and accepting some cost or effort for another person's benefit. Teacher A demonstrated this maxim when responding to late assignments: "Oke yang belum kumpul hari ini besok Ustazah tunggu di kantor" ("Okay, for those who have not submitted today, I will wait for you in the office tomorrow") and "Makanya Ustazah kasih waktu satu minggu supaya bisa kamu selesaikan" ("That is why I gave you one week so you could finish it"). Rather than immediately imposing a penalty, the teacher made additional time available and offered flexibility for completion. A similar willingness to help was evident in Student A's statement, "Mari ustazah, saya saja yang menghapus papan tulis" ("Please, Ustazah, let me erase the board"). By volunteering to perform a task for the teacher, the student showed consideration and a willingness to expend effort for someone else.

3.3. The Approbation Maxim

The approbation maxim emphasizes praise and minimizes expressions of disapproval toward others. Teacher A used this strategy when saying, "Nanti yang belum maju hari ini bisa liat contoh sama Pahira yah, karna Pahira punya ini sudah bagus ini" ("Those who have not presented today can look at Pahira's example, because Pahira's work is already good"). The utterance openly acknowledged Pahira's performance while offering classmates an accessible model for their own work. Other examples included the teacher's "Makasih, Nurul" ("Thank you, Nurul") after Nurul completed the task of recording competition participants, and a student's "Oke makasih" ("Okay, thank you") after borrowing a pen. These expressions of appreciation helped sustain respectful and supportive relationships in the classroom.

3.4. The Agreement Maxim

The 21 utterances classified under the agreement maxim reflected the importance of acknowledgment and cooperation in classroom communication. Students frequently responded to instructions, questions, and corrections with concise, respectful affirmations such as "Ya, Ustazah" ("Yes, Ustazah"), "Oke, Ustazah" ("Okay, Ustazah"), "Siap, Ustazah" ("Understood, Ustazah"), "Baik, ustazah" ("All right, Ustazah"), "Iye, Ustazah" ("Yes, Ustazah"), and "Sudah, ustazah" ("Already, Ustazah" or "Done, Ustazah," depending on context). These agreement markers signaled acknowledgment of the teacher's directions and helped maintain the flow of lessons. From a pragmatic perspective, such responses minimized overt disagreement, although their occurrence should not by itself be taken as evidence that students always agreed privately or understood every instruction fully.

3.5. The Modesty and Sympathy Maxims

Only one utterance was classified under each of the modesty and sympathy maxims, but both remain relevant to the interpretation of classroom politeness. The modesty maxim appeared when Student B said, "Masih kurang yakin saya dengan jawaban ini" ("I am still not entirely sure about this answer") while solving an academic problem at the board. This expression of uncertainty functioned as a hedge: it moderated the student's claim to knowledge and allowed room for correction without projecting excessive self-confidence. The sympathy maxim appeared when Teacher B responded to news of a student's illness with "Semoga cepat sembuh" ("I hope you recover soon"). This short expression communicated concern and care beyond the immediate academic task, reinforcing the interpersonal dimension of the teacher–student relationship.

3.6. Teachers' and Students' Attitudes Toward Linguistic Politeness

Beyond the analysis of utterance forms, interviews were conducted to investigate attitudes toward linguistic politeness among members of the MA Alkhairaat Tomini school community. The findings were interpreted in terms of three social-psychological dimensions: cognitive, affective, and conative.

At the cognitive level (awareness and understanding), the head of the madrasah, the Indonesian-language teacher, and students shared the view that linguistic politeness was not merely a communication tool but also an important aspect of moral education and Islamic conduct (adab). Participants associated polite speech with character development and with the institution's educational values. Students also understood that respectful speech was an aspect of their behavioral development alongside academic achievement.

At the affective level (sensitivity and emotional responses), teachers reported taking care in choosing words when correcting or reprimanding students. This attention helped them avoid embarrassment, protect students' dignity, and maintain motivation. Students likewise showed awareness of classroom circumstances and teachers' emotional cues, adapting their language to the level of formality required. In more serious situations they adopted more formal expressions; in relaxed situations they used more flexible language while continuing to observe norms of respect.

At the conative level (observable actions and habitual practices), these understandings and feelings were reflected in daily routines and school practices. The institution regularly organized short religious talks (kultum) after congregational Zuhr prayers as part of character education. Teachers modeled polite standard Indonesian and discouraged expressions considered coarse in school interactions. Students implemented these expectations by lowering their voices when speaking to teachers and using expressions requesting permission before acting or asking questions.

3.7.Discussion

A granular

The discussion integrates the empirical findings with pragmatic theories of politeness in teacher–student communication at MA Alkhairaat Tomini. The results show that classroom language does more than convey instructional content: it also helps establish and maintain harmonious relationships. This interpretation is consistent with the pragmatic perspective discussed by Geraldine and Manik (2025). The principal analytical framework is Geoffrey Leech's politeness principle, which, as discussed by Apriliani (2019), links linguistic politeness with ethical norms in social interaction. In this study, those norms are examined within a religious educational context.

The identification of all six of Leech's maxims, especially the 38 utterances expressing tact and the 21 expressing agreement, suggests that classroom speech choices are shaped by situational needs and relationships of authority. The frequent use of the tact maxim by teachers is consistent with Nisa (2016), whose discussion highlights the role of linguistic strategies that mitigate the force of utterances and reduce imposition on interlocutors. Although teachers occupy an authoritative position, the observed

utterances frequently framed directions as cooperative requests rather than commands. Students' frequent requests for permission likewise demonstrated attention to the teacher's role and to the continuity of classroom activities.

The prominence of the agreement maxim also relates to the religious and educational identity of the madrasah, where respect for teachers and recognition of their knowledge are valued. Students' affirmative responses can be understood against the expectation of showing ta'zim (respect) toward a teacher or religious instructor. This finding is consistent with Agustina et al. (2024), who relate agreement to harmonious interaction, and with Farayanti (2024) and Ratnaningsih (2025), whose work is cited in connection with similar affirmative patterns in other school settings. The present study interprets agreement in the madrasah context as related to culturally and religiously grounded norms of conduct. However, the available utterances alone do not establish whether each response resulted from religious conviction rather than other possible motivations.

Although less frequent, the generosity and approbation maxims contributed to interpersonal cohesion. The teacher's willingness to make time for students and students' offers to help illustrated the concern for others discussed by Wahyuni (2018). Expressions of praise and gratitude likewise reflected the importance of appreciation emphasized by Hermaditoyo et al. (2022). The infrequency of modesty and sympathy may be associated with the formal structure of classroom interaction, where instructional tasks, evaluation, and problem-solving provide fewer opportunities for expressions of personal uncertainty or concern.

With regard to attitudes, interview findings indicate that participants' understanding of politeness was connected to character education at the cognitive level (Widyastuti, 2022; Azwar, 2016). This understanding was reinforced affectively through concern for others and efforts to avoid hurtful expressions. At the conative level, it appeared in habitual permission-seeking, courteous correction, avoidance of coarse language, teachers' role modeling, and regular religious guidance following prayer. Taken together, these practices suggest that linguistic politeness at MA Alkhairaat Tomini is supported by both classroom interaction and wider institutional routines.

4. Conclusion

The study found that interactions during learning activities at MA Alkhairaat Tomini reflected Geoffrey Leech's six politeness maxims across 68 identified utterances. The tact and agreement maxims were the most frequent, indicating the importance of mitigated instructions, polite requests, respectful acknowledgment, and cooperation in classroom communication. Teachers often formulated directions in ways that reduced pressure on students, while students frequently used permission-seeking and affirmative

responses. The six maxims together demonstrate that classroom communication serves interpersonal and character-forming purposes as well as academic ones.

The findings also indicate broadly positive attitudes toward linguistic politeness among the head of the madrasah, teachers, and students. At the cognitive level, participants linked polite language with Islamic moral conduct and character development. At the affective level, they emphasized care, sensitivity, and the avoidance of hurtful language. At the conative level, these values were expressed through teachers' speech practices, students' use of respectful forms of address and requests for permission, and institutional religious activities such as kultum. The findings thus suggest a relationship between pragmatic politeness norms and the religious values promoted within the madrasah. In practice, consistent teacher role modeling may contribute to a respectful classroom climate and help students develop courteous communication habits.

Teachers are encouraged to maintain and broaden their repertoire of polite communication strategies, while students should critically assess expressions acquired from settings outside school and consider their appropriateness in educational contexts. The madrasah could also develop more explicit institutional guidance on respectful communication. Future studies could examine pragmatic impoliteness as well as peer interaction outside formal lessons, including exchanges during breaks or in residential settings, to assess how consistently politeness norms are practiced across contexts.

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