

LEECH'S POLITENESS PRINCIPLE IN KPU OFFICIALS' PUBLIC SPEECH: A PRAGMATIC STUDY

(Penerapan Prinsip Kesantunan Leech dalam Tuturan Pejabat Publik KPU: Kajian Pragmatik)

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the application of Geoffrey Leech's Politeness Principle in the public speeches of officials from the General Elections Commission (KPU) and to explain the pragmatic functions of politeness in institutional public communication. This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach within a pragmatic framework. The data consisted of utterances produced by KPU officials obtained from official press conference transcripts from 2019–2025. Data were collected through documentation and note-taking techniques. The data were analyzed using content analysis through data reduction, categorization based on Leech's politeness maxims, and pragmatic interpretation of the speech context. The findings reveal that the speeches of KPU officials were predominantly characterized by the tact maxim, approbation maxim, and modesty maxim. In addition, the study identified the use of indirectness strategies and politeness implicatures to reduce conflict, maintain social relations, and strengthen public trust. The utterances of KPU officials also demonstrate the interrelationship between politeness principles, speech acts, and facework strategies in maintaining institutional image and legitimacy. Therefore, Leech's Politeness Principle proves to be relevant as a pragmatic framework for understanding ethical, persuasive, and legitimacy-oriented institutional communication.

Keywords: facework, linguistic politeness, Leech's principle, pragmatics, speech act

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis penerapan prinsip kesantunan Geoffrey Leech dalam tuturan pejabat Komisi Pemilihan Umum (KPU) pada konferensi pers resmi serta menjelaskan fungsi pragmatik kesantunan dalam komunikasi institusional publik. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan kajian pragmatik. Data penelitian berupa tuturan pejabat KPU yang diperoleh dari transkrip konferensi pers resmi KPU Periode 2019-2025. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui dokumentasi dan pencatatan tuturan. Teknik analisis data menggunakan analisis isi melalui tahapan reduksi data, kategorisasi berdasarkan maksim kesantunan Leech, dan interpretasi pragmatik terhadap konteks tuturan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tuturan pejabat KPU didominasi oleh maksim kearifan (tact maxim), maksim penghargaan (approbation maxim), dan maksim kerendahan hati (modesty maxim). Selain itu, ditemukan penggunaan strategi ketidaklangsungan (indirectness) dan implikatur kesantunan untuk meredam konflik, menjaga hubungan sosial, serta membangun kepercayaan publik. Tuturan pejabat KPU juga memperlihatkan keterkaitan antara prinsip kesantunan, tindak tutur, dan strategi facework dalam mempertahankan citra kelembagaan. Dengan demikian, prinsip kesantunan Leech terbukti relevan sebagai kerangka pragmatik untuk memahami komunikasi institusional yang etis, persuasif, dan berorientasi pada legitimasi publik.

Kata-kata Kunci: facework, kesantunan berbahasa, prinsip Leech, pragmatik, tindak tutur

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, public discourse regarding the election process in Indonesia has shown strong dynamics, both in the intensity of public discussion and in the totality of statements by political actors and institutional officials. An analysis of public comments on the platform and digital and corpus-based research on the 2024 Election event shows that YouTube and social media have become the main arenas for quickly projecting and measuring emotional reactions (anger, trust, joy, etc.). A natural language processing study of debate comments shows that the public's emotional profile fluctuates around certain moments during the election process. It confirms that platforms like YouTube become a central data source for understanding public sentiment. (Ma'aly et al., 2024).

This phenomenon of the intensity of digital discourse is often paired with the emergence of utterances that do not always comply with politeness norms, particularly from non-governmental actors.

Both netizens and political actors. Recent international political communication research has emphasized that impoliteness or incivility in online public spaces is not merely a matter of communication ethics. Still, it has a real impact on political participation behavior: triggering polarization, reducing engagement intentions, and even encouraging the practice of political manipulation and silencing (efforts to silence other opinions) in online environments (Lu & Liang, 2024a). In this context, institutional speech, such as official statements by KPU, has both symbolic and practical power: the words of election officials can either diminish or strengthen the perceived legitimacy of the election process. The researcher's interest in this topic stems from observations of the communicative practices employed by KPU officials during press conferences and

official public statements. In various critical political situations, KPU officials tend to utilize formal, cautious, and persuasive language when responding to public criticism, electoral disputes, and media inquiries. This phenomenon suggests that politeness principles play a pivotal role in shaping institutional communication discourse within the public sphere.

Theoretically, Geoffrey Leech's principle of politeness (*tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, sympathy, etc.*) offers a systematic framework for assessing whether institutional speech mediates conflict, dampens tensions, or even exacerbates potential public strife. In the political realm, the application of politeness theory has been used to evaluate politicians' speeches, debates, and statements, demonstrating patterns of application and violation of politeness maxims that have implications for the image and effectiveness of political communication (Ariani & Kunthara Anindita, 2024). However, while there are numerous studies on politicians and political debates, studies focusing on pragmatic analysis of the speech of election officials (specifically, KPU officials) are relatively limited.

The practical impact of impolite institutional speech deserves attention: statements by officials that appear defensive, blame others, or use language that provokes public resistance can increase skepticism about institutional independence, deepen polarization, and trigger aggressive online reactions, thereby hindering healthy public deliberation. International empirical studies show that content deemed "uncivil" tends to prompt users to suppress or censor opposing discourse, leading to the escalation of impolite speech in the public sphere and the fragmentation of democratic discourse (Lu & Liang, 2024a).

Several previous studies have examined the principles of politeness within political, institutional, and digital

media communications. Corpus-base studies and sentiment analysis on platform public discourse (e.g., YouTube comments related to the debate) show the distribution of emotions and the intensity of public interaction during the 2024 election period (Ma'aly et al., 2024). Kádár and House argue that politeness and impoliteness in public communication function as interaction rituals employed to maintain social order and prevent the escalation of conflict (Kádár & House, 2021a; Spencer-Oatey & Kádár, 2021). Similarly, research by Ogiermann and Blitvich demonstrates that politeness strategies in speech acts play a vital role in maintaining interpersonal relationships and mitigating face-threatening acts (FTAs) in public discourse (Leontovich & Nikitina, 2024a). Furthermore, Terkourafi asserts that politeness implicatures emerge through indirect strategies, allowing speakers to preserve the interlocutor's "face" without instigating direct confrontation (Terkourafi, 2021a).

In the context of digital political communication, Lu and Liang found that impoliteness in online political discussions can intensify polarization, trigger intolerance, and diminish democratic participation (Lu & Liang, 2024b). These findings underscore the importance of polite language usage by public institutions to ensure that political communication remains conducive and does not exacerbate social conflict. Fatmawati and Ningsih in their study of expressive speech acts on social media, also indicate that politeness of politeness maxims by KPU officials; (b) link these patterns with public reactions (from analysis of online comments/issues); and (c) formulate practical recommendations for KPU institutional communication management.

The novelty of this research lies in the integration of three elements: the use of Leech's Politeness Principle as the primary framework for assessing institutional speech; the application of a corpus + pragmatics approach to the KPU's official

strategies are utilized to reduce potential interpersonal conflict and foster harmonious social relations within digital spaces (Fatmawati & Ningsih, 2024a).

This perspective is reinforced by Leontovich and Nikitina, who suggest that politeness-based monitoring of digital communication has become a crucial strategy for maintaining social bonds in the new media era (Leontovich & Nikitina, 2024a). Meanwhile, Wardani, Mayangsari, and Afkar found that Leech's politeness principles are predominantly used in village government WhatsApp groups as a tool for communicative diplomacy between government officials and the public to sustain harmonious relations (Wardani et al., 2025a).

However, most studies focus on political actors and public interactions; direct analytical focus on election organizers KPU officials in the corpus of official speech (press conferences, public statements, speeches) remains minimal.

Given this gap, this research is urgent: the KPU, as a central institution in upholding the democratic process, requires an institutional communication strategy that accounts for the pragmatic dimension.

Politeness to maintain legitimacy and public tranquility. By adopting Leech's perspective and combining it with corpus analysis methods and qualitative pragmatic analysis (illocutionary functions, context of statement implementation, and implicature patterns), this study is expected to be able to: (a) map patterns of compliance/violation

corpus (press conferences, press releases, speech transcripts) during a critical period (2019–2025); and the attempt to link linguistic findings with institutional indicators (public legitimacy, risk of polarization). Thus, this research not only adds to the theoretical literature on politeness in political discourse but also provides evidence-based practical recommendations for improving institutional communication strategies in the social media era.

In short, considering the shift in communication styles in public spaces and Political consequences, pragmatic research exploring Leech's Principle of Politeness in the speech of KPU officials is a significant contribution, both to the development of political communication/pragmatics science and to improving the practice of democratic institutional communication.

This study aims to analyze the application of the principle of politeness in the speech of KPU officials, with a focus on pragmatic strategies and social values contained in institutional discourse.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study employs Geoffrey Leech's (2014) Politeness Principle as the primary framework for analyzing the utterances of KPU officials within the context of institutional communication. Leech conceptualizes politeness as a social mechanism that maintains interactional balance through language that takes into account the interests and feelings of others. Accordingly, politeness not only reflects linguistic etiquette but also represents the speaker's moral and social responsibility in public communication.

Politeness Maxim

Leech (2014) proposes six politeness maxims, namely tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy, which have been reaffirmed in various recent studies (Anggita et al., 2025; Farayanti et al., 2024; Jawas et al., 2025). These maxims function as an analytical framework for assessing the extent to which an utterance minimizes conflict and maximizes social harmony (Fitriana & Pratama, 2023; Nuraini et al., 2024).

Alba-Juez & Haugh (2025a) argue that this principle remains relevant in distinguishing between absolute and relative politeness in contemporary contexts. In both digital and institutional communication, these maxims continue to be employed to maintain social relationships (Bolander & Locher, 2020).

In the context of KPU as a public institution, these maxims are reflected in the use of appreciative, empathetic, and reflective utterances, such as expressing gratitude for public participation or issuing apologies for emerging issues. Such politeness strategies are commonly used in institutional communication to maintain social harmony and build public trust (Kádár & House, 2021b). Therefore, the politeness maxims in this study serve as a tool to identify patterns of politeness in the utterances of KPU officials.

These six maxims serve as a reference for assessing the extent to which a speech act can be considered polite. *Tact* emphasizes the importance of minimizing harm to the interlocutor, while maxims of approbation require the speaker to maximize praise for the other party. (Alba-Juez & Haugh, 2025b; Chang & Haugh, 2011) assert that Leech's principle remains a vital analytical framework for distinguishing "absolute politeness" and "relative politeness" in modern linguistics. Recent studies have shown that this maxim is still relevant in the context of digital and institutional communications.

Locher highlights that, despite the informal character of social media, users still adopt variants of Leech's maxims to carry out relational *work* or relationship maintenance (Bolander & Locher, 2020b; Locher et al., 2019). This aligns with the findings of Wardani, Mayangsari, and Afkar, who stated that communication in government groups employs politeness strategies to maintain social harmony and uphold institutional ethical values (Dania Kusuma Wardani et al., 2025). Furthermore, in Digital Study Politeness, maxim approbation is often managed through the "likes" feature and positive comments as a new digital politeness strategy (Leontovich & Nikitina, 2024; Locher et al., 2019; Ogiermann & Blitvich, 2019). In line with this, Fatmawati and Ningsih emphasized that the use of maxim and *approbation* dominates expressive speech on social media because it serves to reduce the potential for interpersonal conflict (Fatmawati & Ningsih, 2024b;

Taulani Sandi et al., 2025). This is reinforced by Kádár and House's research, which defines politeness as a "ritual"; that is, adherence to maxims is not merely politeness but a ritual mechanism that must be carried out to maintain moral order and prevent the escalation of conflict.

Politeness Implicature

Leech's politeness theory is rooted in Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle; however, in practice, politeness is often achieved through controlled violations of this principle. Such violations give rise to politeness implicatures, where meaning is conveyed indirectly in order to preserve the interlocutor's face (Terkourafi, 2021).

Research indicates that across various communicative contexts, including digital and institutional settings, indirectness is frequently employed as a strategy to maintain social relations and avoid conflict (Risdianto et al., 2023). In the utterances of KPU officials, this strategy is evident in the use of non-confrontational and cautious expressions, particularly in delivering evaluations or responding to public criticism. Thus, indirectness should not be viewed as a communicative weakness but rather as a politeness strategy aimed at maintaining social (Kádár & House, 2021; Kazemian, 2024; Scott, 2023).

Empirical studies by Haugh and Chang also reinforce the fact that, in cross-cultural interactions, deviations from Grice's maxims of quality or quantity are often necessary to meet social and moral standards (Chang & Haugh, 2011). This supports the findings of Risdianto et al. (2023), which shows that lecturers and students in online interactions frequently use indirect and euphemistic strategies to maintain social relationships. Dynel (2014) added that in computer-mediated communication, indirectness serves as a "cushion" (buffer) to avoid verbal aggression that can easily occur due to the lack of non-verbal cues. This shows that politeness can be understood as a "controlled violation" of Grice's principles, in which clarity of information is sacrificed

to maintain social face (*face-saving*).

Politeness Scale

To measure the degree of politeness, Leech (2014) introduced five scales: *cost-benefit*, *optionality*, *indirectness*, *authority*, and *social distance*. These scales suggest that politeness levels are influenced by power relations and social distance between speakers and interlocutors (Deppermann, 2021; Terkourafi, 2021b).

Kádár & House (2021b) emphasize that in contemporary contexts, authority is not solely determined by structural position but also by social legitimacy. Furthermore, studies indicate that the greater the benefit provided to the interlocutor and the higher the degree of indirectness, the higher the level of politeness (Nooraldeen & Amin, 2023; Ogiermann & Blitvich, 2019b).

In the KPU context, the use of formal, indirect, and non-imposing language reflects an awareness of institutional authority and social distance from the public.

The Relationship between Maxims and Speech Acts

Speech act theory (Austin & Searle) provides a functional dimension for analyzing politeness, as every utterance carries a specific illocutionary force. In contemporary pragmatics, politeness is understood to operate at the level of illocution, meaning that the realization and type of speech acts determine the variation of politeness strategies employed (Kádár & House, 2021b; Leech, 2016; Liu & Wang, 2023).

Recent studies also demonstrate that basic speech act types—such as requests, questions, and assertions—are inherently linked to the principle of maximizing politeness in social interaction (Trotzke, 2024), and that politeness strategies can be directly analyzed through illocutionary classifications (Ramadhani et al., 2026).

Expressive speech acts, such as appreciation and apology, are generally associated with the approbation and modesty maxims (Fatmawati & Ningsih, 2024c). Meanwhile, directive speech acts

tend to employ the tact maxim to reduce imposition in interaction (Kádár & House, 2021b; Liu & Wang, 2023). Commissive speech acts, on the other hand, represent the speaker's commitment, which is closely related to social responsibility and trust maintenance, often realized through politeness strategies such as the generosity maxim (Mulyono et al., 2025).

In the context of KPU discourse, integrating politeness maxims with speech act types enables a more comprehensive analysis, encompassing not only linguistic forms but also their communicative functions in building public relationships.

Cost–Benefit Balance and Facework

A key aspect of Leech's politeness theory is the cost–benefit balance, which is conceptually related to the notion of facework as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987). In contemporary pragmatics, politeness is understood as part of relational work involving the management of one's own and others' interests in social interaction.

In communicative practice, speakers often incur social costs—such as admitting mistakes or issuing apologies—in order to provide psychological benefits to interlocutors, including a sense of appreciation and maintained trust (Kalay, 2023).

Research shows that such strategies are widely used in institutional communication to maintain image and legitimacy Click or tap here to enter text.. In the Indonesian cultural context, the modesty maxim also plays a significant role in sustaining social relationships (Saifudin, 2021)

In KPU discourse, these strategies are reflected in expressions of commitment, appreciation toward the public, and acknowledgment of limitations. This indicates that politeness functions as a communication strategy that integrates moral, social, and institutional dimensions.

Application of the Theoretical Framework

Based on this framework, the present study analyzes the utterances of KPU officials by: (1) identifying politeness maxims in each utterance; (2) analyzing politeness implicatures through indirectness; (3) measuring the level of politeness based on politeness scales; and (4) interpreting communicative functions through speech act types.

Through this approach, politeness is understood not merely as a linguistic phenomenon but as a pragmatic strategy for maintaining institutional legitimacy, mitigating conflict, and fostering public trust.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method with a pragmatic approach within an interpretive paradigm. The selection of this method was based on the research objective of exploring and interpreting the use of politeness strategies in institutional discourse, particularly in the speech of KPU officials during press conferences. A qualitative pragmatic approach enables an in-depth understanding of meaning, intention, and contextual interpretation, which cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement.

The data of this study consisted of transcripts of press conference speeches delivered by KPU officials, obtained from official institutional sources such as the KPU website and verified public broadcasts (e.g., the official YouTube channel). The dataset includes a number of selected press conference sessions conducted within a specified time frame, involving several KPU officials in their official capacities, such as chairpersons and commissioners. The selection of data was conducted purposively, focusing on speeches that represent formal public communication and contain significant pragmatic features related to politeness.

The data collection process was carried out systematically to ensure transparency and replicability. Initially, the

researcher identified and accessed relevant press conference recordings from official sources. The recordings were then transcribed into written form, including time markers to preserve contextual accuracy. After transcription, the data were carefully reviewed and selected to identify utterances containing directive, assertive, and evaluative elements relevant to politeness analysis. These utterances were subsequently organized into structured analytical units to facilitate coding and interpretation.

Data analysis was conducted using qualitative content analysis integrated with a pragmatic framework. The process began with data reduction, in which irrelevant or non-analytical segments were excluded. The selected utterances were then coded and categorized based on Leech's politeness maxims, types of speech acts, and contextual indicators such as participant roles and communicative intentions. Following this, the data were analyzed through multiple analytical dimensions, including the application of politeness maxims, the cooperative principle and implicature, politeness scales, the relationship between speech acts and maxims, and the balance between cost-benefit considerations and facework. The interpretation stage involved linking linguistic patterns with the broader social and institutional context of the speech events. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on recurring patterns and verified through continuous comparison and reinterpretation.

To provide a clearer overview of the analytical procedure, the flow of data analysis in this study is illustrated as follows:

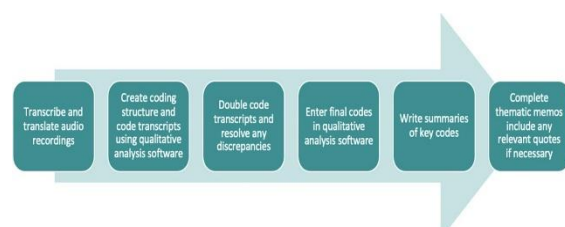


Image 1. Figure of Data Analysis Workflow

The figure above represents the

sequential stages of analysis, starting from data collection, transcription, and organization, followed by coding and categorization, pragmatic analysis, interpretation, and ending with validation. This structured workflow ensures that the analytical process is transparent, systematic, and replicable by other researchers.

Ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, this study applied several strategies. The use of theoretical triangulation allowed the researcher to examine the data through multiple pragmatic perspectives. In addition, inter-rater reliability was employed by involving an additional coder to cross-check the consistency of data categorization. Peer debriefing was also conducted through discussions with fellow researchers in the field of pragmatics to refine interpretations. Furthermore, an audit trail was maintained to document each stage of the analytical process, ensuring transparency and accountability. The analysis was primarily conducted by the researcher, with validation support from collaborators to minimize subjectivity.

DISCUSSION

The research results show the following.

Data code	Time and Speaker's	Speech/Utterance	Analysis (Maxim Leech)
U-01	00:48, Agus (KPU)	"Hari ini kami sudah melakukan pleno... mengapresiasi respons dan kritik masyarakat."	Tact Maxim & Sympathy Maxim
U-02	01:11, Agus (KPU)	"Meski demikian, kami tetap berkomitmen menjalankan tugas sesuai prinsip transparan dan terbuka."	Maxims of Generosity & Agreement
U-03	1:32, Agus (KPU)	"Kami juga mengapresiasi respons, catatan, dan kritik dari masyarakat."	Maxim of Appreciation
U-04	01:36, Agus (KPU)	"Mohon maaf kami juga harus jaga komunikasi... tidak	Maxim Modesty & Sympathy

Data code	Time and Speaker's	Speech/Utterance	Analysis (Maxim Leech)
U-05	01:49, Agus (KPU)	kami sediakan doorstep.” “Tentu kami sebagai lembaga tetap menjaga komitmen menjalankan tugas dan fungsi kami.”	Maxim Modesty
U-06	01:58, Afifuddin (Chairman KPU)	“Assalamualaikum... salam sejahtera... salam kebajikan.”	Maxim Sympathy
U-07	02:15, Afifuddin (Chairman KPU)	“KPU sebagai lembaga publik berkomitmen untuk senantiasa terbuka, inklusif...”	Maxims Modesty
U-08	02:34, Afifuddin (Chairman KPU)	“Mengapresiasi partisipasi publik, masukan, dan kritik...”	Maksim Appreciation
U-09	04:27, Afifuddin (Chairman KPU)	“Pada dasarnya publik berhak memperoleh seluruh informasi dari KPU hari ini sejalan dengan UU No. 14/2008.”	Maxim Agreement
U-10	05:39, Afifuddin (Chairman KPU)	“Kami memutuskan untuk membatalkan keputusan KPU nomor 731 tahun 2025...”	Maxim Agreement
U-11	06:50, Afifuddin (Chairman KPU)	“Kami menerima masukan dari masyarakat.”	Maxim Generosity & Agreement
U-12	11:44, Afifuddin (Chairman KPU)	“hal-hal yang berkait kekurangan dan lain-lain itu kami ingin segera perbaiki”	Maksim Modesty
U-13	11:58, Afifuddin (Chairman KPU)	“Kami dari KPU juga memohon maaf atas situasi keriuhan yang sama sekali tidak ada pretensi sedikitpun di KPU untuk melakukan hal-hal yang dianggap menguntungkan pihak-pihak tertentu.”	Maxim Sympathy, Generosity & Modesty
U-14	17:05, Afifuddin (Chairman KPU)	“KPU sebagai lembaga publik berkomitmen untuk senantiasa terbuka inklusif dalam tata kelola informasi”	Maxim Agreement, Sympathy & Maxim Generosity
U-15	18:34, Afifuddin (Chairman KPU)	“Keputusan KPU tersebut didasari sama sekali bukan karena untuk melindungi siapapun”	Maxim Modesty & Agreement
U-16	19:43, Afifuddin (Chairman KPU)	“Kami memohon maaf atas situasi keriuhan yang tidak ada pretensi menguntungkan pihak tertentu.”	Maxim Sympathy
U-17	20:31, Afifuddin (Chairman KPU)	“Terima kasih teman-teman jurnalis yang senantiasa kebersamai KPU...”	Maxim Sympathy
U-18	25:41, Afifuddin (Chairman KPU)	“Seluruh peraturan KPU yang kita buat berlaku umum, berlaku untuk siapapun tanpa pengecualian.”	Maxim Tact & Agreement
U-19	26:00, Afifuddin (Chairman KPU)	“Mohon maaf ada kekurangan dan kealfaan.”	Maxim Modesty

Data code	Time and Speaker's	Speech/Utterance	Analysis (Maxim Leech)
U-20	26:12, Afifuddin (Chairman KPU)	“Wassalamualaikum warahmatullah wabarakatuh. Matur suwun.”	Maxim Sympathy & Approbation

Based on Table 1, the analysis of the KPU press conference speech using Leech's politeness theory yields the following results.

1. The most dominant maxims are the Maxim of Agreement, the Maxim of Sympathy, and the Maxim of Modesty.
2. The Maxim of Tact and Approbation also appears in several vital parts.
3. The Maxim of Generosity is present when the KPU shows that the public and the media are matters.
4. No speech violates the principles of politeness.
5. The KPU's communication strategy aims to maintain the institution's legitimacy, reduce conflict, and build public trust.

The analysis shows that KPU officials consistently apply Leech's politeness maxim in various official utterances. Overall, Leech's politeness principles prove relevant as a pragmatic framework for explaining how public institutions use language to balance power and ethics. Politeness is not only a symbol of morality but also an effective facework tool in building a credible and civilized public image. The KPU attempted to maintain institutional legitimacy while minimizing social conflict. The officials repeatedly appreciated public criticism, emphasized openness, and apologized for the controversy surrounding the regulation. By not breaking principles of politeness, such communicative strategies indicate that the institution prioritized democratic accountability and public trust. Recent research supports this finding. Wardani, Mayangsari, & Afkar found that Leech's maxim was predominantly used in village government communications, reinforcing the view that politeness is a diplomatic tool between officials and the public (Dania Kusuma Wardani et al., 2025). Furthermore, Fatmawati & Ningsih (2024) emphasized that violating Grice's maxims

can function to produce politeness implicatures that reduce the potential for conflict in digital spaces.

Risdianto et al. explain that politeness scales, such as indirectness and authority, significantly influence hierarchical communication. In the context of KPU, the use of indirect and formal language demonstrates an awareness of social distance and the institution's authoritative position (Risdianto et al., 2023). Rahmawati & Nisa, Rosyidha et al. also highlight the importance of the tact maxim in educational communication as a means of instilling character values and empathy, which parallel the moral role of public officials (Rahmawati & Nisa, 2024; Rosyidha et al., 2019).

Analysis Based on the Politeness Maxim

As explained previously, KPU's utterances demonstrate a strong application of Leech's five main maxims: *tact*, *approbation*, *modesty*, *agreement*, and *sympathy*.

Politeness in this context is not only a form of linguistic morality, but also a strategy for managing institutional image (*institutional face management*). Through by using appreciative diction “U-03 *kami mengapresiasi*” (we appreciate), empathetic “U-16 *kami memohon maaf*” (we sincerely apologize), and reflective “U-19 *mohon maaf ada kekurangan dan kealpaan*” (We sincerely apologize for our inadequacies and lapses.), the KPU demonstrates a high level of pragmatic awareness, balancing institutional power with respect for the public.

The application of this politeness principle results in restorative discourse that restores public trust rather than simply conveying administrative information. This finding aligns with Darmawan, who stated that Indonesian leaders generally apply Leech's politeness maxims optimally, particularly the sympathy maxim, resulting in a positive public response and increased effectiveness in institutional image management (*institutional face management*)

(Darmawan, 2021).

The analysis shows that KPU officials' speech consistently applies the politeness maxims proposed by Leech (1983), particularly those of *tact*, *approbation*, *modesty*, and *sympathy*. This politeness strategy is clearly evident in the use of subtle, appreciative, and empathetic diction, as in the expressions “U-08 *Mengapresiasi partisipasi publik, masukan, dan kritik...*” (we Appreciating public participation, feedback, and criticism) and “U-19 *mohon maaf ada kekurangan dan kealpaan.*” (We sincerely apologize for our inadequacies and lapses.)

This finding aligns with the findings of Wardani, Mayangsari, & Afkar, who found that Leech's maxim is also predominantly used in institutional communication, especially in groups. *WhatsApp* village government. They concluded that politeness serves as a diplomatic medium to maintain harmonious relations between officials and the community. Thus, politeness is not merely linguistic but also a social mechanism that reflects the moral responsibility of public institutions (Dania Kusuma Wardani et al., 2025; Lu & Liang, 2024c; Maíz-Arévalo, 2018).

Analysis Based on Implicature

Leech argues that politeness often operates by implicitly violating Grice's Cooperative Principle to maintain social harmony. In the context of the KPU, this violation is evident in the use of indirect and euphemistic statements that soften the message.

Application Examples:

Statements such as “U-08 *Mengapresiasi partisipasi publik, masukan, dan kritik...*” (we appreciate public participation, feedback, and criticism) do not explicitly state a policy change but imply that the institution is open to revising or correcting it. In the next utterance “U-10 *Kami memutuskan untuk membatalkan keputusan KPU nomor 731 tahun 2025...*” (We have decided to revoke KPU Decision Number 731 of 2025), it shows that the KPU annulled the decision.

Through this strategy, the speaker (KPU) deliberately achieves a polite effect.

Thus, implicature analysis can show that the KPU's statement contains a double meaning:

Literal meaning: procedural affirmation;
 Implicature meaning: moral recognition and commitment to self-improvement.

Theoretically, this shows that politeness in an institutional context prioritizes social harmony over communication efficiency, in accordance with Leech's idea that politeness functions *to maintain social equilibrium*.

Pea notes explicitly that politeness principles are more prevalent in institutional communication, underscoring the theoretical argument that social harmony takes precedence over pure communicative efficiency (Pea & Armia, 2022). Pragmatic analysis shows that KPU officials consciously violated Grice's cooperative principle, particularly the maxims of quantity and relevance, to generate politeness implicatures. Statements such as “U-08 *Mengapresiasi partisipasi publik, masukan, dan kritik...*” (we appreciate public participation, feedback, and criticism) are a form of indirectness that actually demonstrates caution and respect for the audience.

A similar phenomenon was explained by Fatmawati & Ningsih (2024), who studied politeness in expressive speech on social media. They found the form.

Violating maxims often reduces the potential for conflict and strengthens empathetic meaning in digital spaces. This means that violating the cooperative principle can be viewed not as a pragmatic error but as a social strategy to maintain face and public trust, a face-saving strategy.

In the context of institutional communication, the politeness strategies employed by public officials serve not only as stylistic choices but also as values of moral legitimacy. Public officials deliberately choose a polite approach, despite its inefficiency, to maintain social stability and public trust. This finding aligns with Lian & Niron's research, which shows that violations of the principle of

cooperation in digital communication often have strategic intent (Lian & Langkelang Niron, 2024). Therefore, in the institutional realm, politeness can be understood as a conscious, measured effort to affirm the institution's moral legitimacy and to ensure that the relationship between the institution and the public remains harmonious.

Analysis Based on Politeness Scales

Leech introduced several scales to measure the level of politeness of an utterance. This scale helps assess the relative degree of politeness between utterances. Its application to KPU data can be explained as follows:

1. *Cost-Benefit Scale*. The greater the benefit to the interlocutor, the higher the politeness. For example, the KPU's statement: “U-03 *Kami juga mengapresiasi respons, catatan, dan kritik dari masyarakat.*” (We also appreciate the responses, notes, and criticism from the public) This statement provides psychological benefits to the public and demonstrates high politeness.
2. *Optionality Scale*. The greater the space of choice for the interlocutor, the more polite the utterance. Example of KPU's utterance: “U-08 *Mengapresiasi partisipasi publik, masukan, dan kritik...*” (we appreciate public participation, feedback, and criticism). Demonstrates giving freedom of acceptance without coercion; a high level of politeness.
3. *Indirectness Scale*. The more indirect the speech, the more polite it is. Example of KPU's speech: “U-07 *KPU sebagai lembaga publik berkomitmen untuk senantiasa terbuka, inklusif...*” (KPU, in its capacity as a public institution, is committed to continuously being open and inclusive...). Indirect speech indicates caution and respect for the audience.
4. *Authority Scale* Politeness increases with the hierarchical distance between speaker and listener. Example: KPU's statement: “U-19 *mohon maaf ada*

kekurangan dan kealfaan.” (We sincerely apologize for our inadequacies and lapses). From an authoritative institution to the public, a form of polite vertical politeness.

5. *Social Distance Scale* The more distant the social relationship, the greater the demand for politeness. For example, the KPU's statement: “U-17 *Kami berterima kasih kepada rekan-rekan jurnalis yang senantiasa kebersamai KPU.*” (We express our gratitude to our fellow journalists who have continuously accompanied the KPU) Acknowledging the role of external parties without losing professional distance.

When viewed through Leech's five politeness scales (*cost–benefit, optionality, indirectness, authority, and social distance*), the KPU official's speech falls at a high level of politeness. The use of indirect and formal sentences shows awareness of social distance and differences in authority between institutions and society.

This overlaps with the research findings of (Risdianto et al., 2023), who examined communication between lecturers and students in the context of cyberpragmatic chats. They found that politeness increased as social distance widened, and indirect strategies (*indirectness scale*) are the primary choice for maintaining relational balance. These findings support this analysis, which suggests that public officials use high levels of politeness to adapt to social hierarchies and societal moral expectations.

Analysis Based on Communicative Purpose (Goal-Oriented Pragmatics)

Table 2. Communicative Purpose Analysis

Communicative purpose	Utterance	Politeness Strategy	Social Effects
Constructing institutional legitimacy	U-05 “Tentu kami sebagai lembaga tetap menjaga komitmen menjalankan tugas dan fungsi kami.”	Maxim Generosity	Reinforcing moral responsibility and public trust

Defusing public tension	U-19 “Mohon maaf ada kekurangan dan kealfaan.”	Maxim Modesty & Sympathy	Showing social empathy; alleviating negative public sentiment.
Encouraging participation and collaboration	U-11 “Kami menerima masukan dari masyarakat.”	Maxim Generosity & Agreement	Fostering solidarity between the institution and the public.
Rebuilding institutional reputation	U-12 “hal-hal yang berkait kekurangan dan lain-lain itu kami ingin segera perbaiki.”	Maxim Modesty	Displaying institutional integrity; strengthening ethical reputation

Table 3. Combine Analysis of the Illocutionary Act and Politeness Principle

Type of Speech Act	Example from Data	Related Maxim	Pragmatic Function
Representative (statements of fact, clarification)	U-02 “Meski demikian, kami tetap berkomitmen menjalankan tugas sesuai prinsip transparan dan terbuka.”	Maxim Generosity & Agreement	Conveying certainty without arrogance; reinforcing moral authority.
	U-03 “Kami juga mengapresiasi respons, catatan, dan kritik dari masyarakat.”	Maxim Approbation & Modesty	Expressing a positive and humble attitude.
Directive (invitations, requests)	U-04 “Mohon maaf kami juga harus komunikasi... tidak kami sediakan doorstep.”	Maxim Modesty & Sympathy	Directing action without coercion; maintaining positive relationships.
Commissive (promises, commitments)	U-14 “KPU sebagai lembaga publik berkomitmen untuk senantiasa terbuka inklusif dalam tata kelola informasi”	Maxim Agreement, Sympathy & Maxim Generosity	Demonstrating goodwill and moral responsibility.
Declarative (assertion of decisions)	U-10 “Kami memutuskan untuk membatalkan keputusan KPU nomor 731 tahun 2025...”	Maxim Agreement	Maxim/Announcing decisions while maintaining institutional politeness.

Leech emphasized that politeness is always oriented toward specific social goals. According to KPU data, politeness is used strategically to achieve four main goals like shown on Table 2. This analysis of communicative intent confirms that

politeness is not only moral in nature but also instrumental in achieving the goals of trust restoration and public reassurance. In line with this thinking, in political discourse, language is used strategically not only for moral purposes but also to manage perceptions, protect self-image, and navigate complex social interactions (Edyvane, 2025; Gibson et al., 2020).

In the context of public communication, this demonstrates a high level of awareness of discursive ethics and of institutions' social responsibility.

The application of politeness principles in KPU statements has a clear communicative orientation: strengthening institutional legitimacy, calming public opinion, and presenting an image of moral responsibility.

This finding affirms Leech's (2014) theory, which states that politeness is always goal-oriented, i.e., directed towards achieving social balance and communicative acceptance. In the Indonesian context, research by Rahmawati & Nisa (2023) shows that the maxim of tact also dominates in teachers' speech to students, as it serves to educate without lecturing and to reprimand without hurting feelings. The same pattern can be observed in the speech of KPU officials, who prioritise an empathetic and reflective approach to politely educating the political public.

Thus, politeness strategies in institutional discourse not only reflect compliance with linguistic norms but also embody the practice of institutional ethics grounded in social responsibility. Analysis of the Relationship between Leech's Maxims and Speech Acts (Speech Act Integration) Leech combines the concept of politeness with speech act theory (Austin & Searle). As demonstrated Nisa et al., analysing LinkedIn job posting comments revealed that while the Tact Maxim was the most frequently employed linguistic strategy, a deeper cost-benefit analysis exposed a prevalent lack of genuine politeness, as most interactions primarily focused on personal gain rather than providing mutual benefit to the interlocutor

or company (Nisa et al., 2025). Ultimately, Leech's principles—from maxims and politeness scales to cost-benefit principles—can be applied integratively to explore the implied meaning, discursive strategies, and ethical values behind institutional communication, highlighting how strategic linguistic choices ultimately shape career networking and corporate engagement.

In the KPU data, each type of speech act can be associated with a specific maxim, as shown in Table 3. This combined analysis shows that politeness not only appears at the level of speech form, but is inherent in the illocutionary function of each speech act. A combined analysis of Leech's maxims and speech act theory shows that each type of illocutionary act in KPU speech involves specific principles of politeness.

Representative speech acts, such as clarifications, are coloured by the maxim of agreement to avoid giving the impression of dominance.

Expressive speech acts, such as apologies and expressions of gratitude, contain modesty and approbation to reduce the psychological distance with the public.

Directive speech acts, such as invitations or appeals, are packaged through the maxim of tact so as not to appear forceful.

Commissive speech acts, such as promises to improve the system, involve sympathy and tact as forms of moral responsibility.

These findings align with Wardani et al.'s (2024) observations that speech acts in government communication tend to be oriented towards collective politeness, in which institutions position themselves as servants of the people rather than rulers. In other words, polite speech strategies function as instruments of moral power that build the ethical image of institutions.

Thus, the KPU uses politeness as a 'pragmatic packaging' for all its official illocutionary acts.

Analysis Based on Cost–Benefit Balance and Facework

Leech associates politeness with two primary considerations:

Cost–benefit considerations between the speaker and the addressee. Social face considerations, namely, how speech maintains the image of both parties.

Application to KPU data:

When the KPU says, “U-19 *mohon maaf ada kekurangan dan kealfaan.*” (We sincerely apologize for our inadequacies and lapses), the institution bears the social “cost” of admitting its mistakes to provide the emotional ‘benefit’ of satisfaction and a sense of appreciation to the public.

In statements such as “U-17 *Kami berterima kasih kepada rekan-rekan jurnalis yang senantiasa membersamai KPU.*” (We express our gratitude to our fellow journalists who have continuously accompanied the KPU), the KPU maintains a positive face toward the public and the media, ensuring they continue to feel important and recognised.

This balance shows that politeness is not only a moral expression but also a face management strategy.

The KPU has succeeded in presenting symmetrical and humanistic communication, in which the interests of the institution and the public are placed on an equal footing.

Overall, a comprehensive analysis based on Leech's theory reveals that: 1) Politeness functions on multiple levels: linguistic, social, and ideological, 2) Institutional discourse not only contains informative messages but also has a social function to maintain legitimacy and public trust, 3) Leech's principles — from maxims, politeness scales, to cost–benefit principles — can be applied integratively to explore the implied meaning, discursive strategies, and ethical values behind institutional communication.

In Leech's perspective, politeness operates on two main dimensions: cost–benefit and facework. KPU officials in the research data often bear social costs by acknowledging the institution's shortcomings to provide moral benefits to

the public, such as a sense of being valued and trusted.

This phenomenon is also explained by Risdianto et al. (2023), who assert that polite speech acts in the context of education and institutions function as a mechanism of face management, simultaneously maintaining the honour of the speaker and the addressee.

Thus, the statements of KPU officials are not only a reflection of politeness, but also a form of strategic communication that contains reciprocal morality — mutual respect within an asymmetrical power structure.

Thus, Leech's theory provides a comprehensive and flexible analytical framework for understanding how language is used as a tool of ethics, diplomacy, and public image management in modern institutions such as the KPU.

CONCLUSION

The results of a pragmatic analysis of KPU officials' speech, based on Leech's (1983) Principle of Politeness, show that politeness functions as both a rhetorical and a moral strategy in institutional communication. Polite language is used not only to maintain the institution's image and legitimacy, but also to demonstrate social responsibility and empathy toward the public.

Politeness in the KPU discourse is evident through the dominance of maxims of tact, praise, and humility, as well as the use of indirect speech forms that reduce the potential for conflict. Violations of Grice's cooperative principle are instead used to soften messages and maintain social face. Thus, politeness serves as an indicator of social sensitivity and institutional ethics in public communication.

Furthermore, research can expand the scope of study to other institutions, integrate Leech's theory with Brown and Levinson's facework model or Culpeper's impoliteness, and apply a quantitative-pragmatic approach. Practically, these results serve as a basis for developing public communication guidelines and pragmatic literacy training for state

officials to improve institutional communication practices and enhance ethical and civilized behavior.

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