

Resolute Character in Jack Reacher's *Killing Floor*: Analysis of Politeness and Impoliteness Strategies

Karakter Tegas dalam *Killing Floor* Jack Reacher: Analisis Strategi Kesantunan dan Ketidaksantunan

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doi: 10.24036/jbs.v13i3.133299

Submitted: Mar 16, 2025

Revised: May 17, 2025

Accepted: Dec 1, 2025

Abstract

This study investigates how politeness and impoliteness strategies in *Killing Floor* by Lee Child are used to navigate power dynamics, reflect Jack Reacher's moral reasoning, and shape his character development. Drawing on Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, Leech's maxims, and Culpeper's impoliteness strategies, the study explores how Reacher's language functions as a tool for asserting authority, building trust, and resolving conflict. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, with data collected through close reading and document analysis of the novel. Dialogue excerpts involving Reacher were selected based on their relevance to politeness and impoliteness strategies. Each excerpt was manually coded, categorized by strategy, and organized thematically to reveal patterns across different narrative contexts. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's (1994) model, involving data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing, to ensure systematic and credible interpretation. The findings identify three key patterns: (1) Reacher's use of impoliteness to resist authority and challenge power structures; (2) his selective use of politeness to build trust and alliances; and (3) his tactical manipulation of language for survival and control. This study fills a critical gap in pragmatic literature by offering a unified analysis of politeness and impoliteness, showing how these strategies jointly contribute to narrative progression and character transformation. Beyond literary analysis, it highlights how strategic language reflects moral decision-making and power negotiation, offering insights for pragmatics education and communication in high-stakes interactions.

Key words: *politeness; impoliteness; power dynamics; jack reacher; resolute character*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana strategi kesantunan dan ketidaksantunan dalam novel *Killing Floor* karya Lee Child digunakan untuk menavigasi dinamika kekuasaan, mencerminkan penalaran moral Jack Reacher, dan membentuk perkembangan karakternya. Mengacu pada teori kesantunan Brown dan Levinson, prinsip-prinsip Leech, dan strategi ketidaksantunan Culpeper, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana bahasa Reacher berfungsi sebagai alat untuk menegaskan otoritas, membangun kepercayaan, dan menyelesaikan konflik. Pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif digunakan, dengan data dikumpulkan melalui pembacaan mendalam dan analisis dokumen novel. Potongan dialog yang melibatkan Reacher dipilih berdasarkan relevansinya dengan strategi kesantunan dan ketidaksantunan. Setiap potongan dikodekan secara manual, dikategorikan berdasarkan strategi, dan diorganisir secara tematis untuk mengungkap pola di berbagai konteks naratif. Analisis data mengikuti model Miles dan Huberman (1994), yang melibatkan reduksi data, penyajian, dan penarikan kesimpulan, untuk memastikan interpretasi yang sistematis dan kredibel. Temuan mengidentifikasi tiga pola utama: (1) penggunaan ketidaksantunan Reacher untuk menentang otoritas dan menantang struktur kekuasaan; (2) penggunaan selektif kesantunan untuk membangun kepercayaan dan aliansi; dan (3) manipulasi taktis bahasa untuk bertahan hidup dan mengendalikan situasi. Studi ini mengisi celah kritis dalam literatur pragmatik dengan menawarkan analisis terpadu tentang kesantunan dan ketidaksantunan, menunjukkan bagaimana strategi-strategi ini secara bersama-sama berkontribusi pada perkembangan naratif dan transformasi karakter. Di luar analisis sastra, penelitian ini menyoroti bagaimana bahasa strategis mencerminkan pengambilan keputusan moral dan negosiasi kekuasaan, memberikan wawasan untuk pendidikan pragmatik dan komunikasi dalam interaksi berisiko tinggi.

Kata kunci: *kesantunan; ketidaksantunan; dinamika kekuasaan; jack reacher; karakter yang teguh*

INTRODUCTION

Language politeness in fiction plays a central role in shaping how characters assert power, respond to conflict, and evolve throughout the narrative. Pragmatic strategies such as politeness and impoliteness are not merely stylistic devices but are deeply tied to a character's moral compass, cognitive control, and social identity. Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory and Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness framework offer analytical tools to examine how characters use language not only to communicate but also to dominate, resist, build alliances, or preserve dignity. Analyzing these strategies provides insight into how authors construct character complexity through verbal conflict and cooperation.

Ginarsa (1985) argues that characters provide substance to fiction, serving as the primary vehicle through which readers engage with a story's themes and conflicts. Well-crafted characters not only enhance realism but also dictate the effectiveness of a novel's plot. Since fiction often mirrors human experience, characters must act according to human logic, ensuring their behaviors, motivations, and interactions remain both authentic and compelling.

One such figure is Jack Reacher, the protagonist of Lee Child's *Killing Floor* (1997), the first novel in the bestselling Jack Reacher series. Set in the fictional town of Margrave, Georgia, the novel unfolds against the backdrop of a quiet Southern town harboring a dark underbelly of corruption, organized crime, and counterfeiting. The social context reflects a close-knit rural community shaped by Southern hospitality, small-town dynamics, and an implicit hierarchy of power. Culturally, the novel taps into the mythology of the American South, contrasting traditional values of warmth and politeness with systemic violence and moral decay beneath the surface.

Reacher arrives in Margrave as an outsider—both socially and geographically—after retiring from the U.S. Army military police. His military background, characterized by discipline, rationality, and strategic thinking, influences his interactions with the townspeople and institutions. The plot is propelled by Reacher's discovery that the murder for which he was falsely accused was, in fact, the murder of his own brother, setting the story on a trajectory of personal vengeance intertwined with the unraveling of a criminal conspiracy. This personal stake intensifies Reacher's moral resolve and shapes his verbal and physical strategies throughout the narrative.

Killing Floor is more than a crime thriller; it is a narrative where politeness, impoliteness, and power are constantly negotiated in language and action. Reacher's linguistic choices reflect a pragmatic morality: he is polite when sincerity or strategic alliance demands it, and deliberately impolite or confrontational when resistance, assertion of dominance, or exposure of corruption are necessary. In a community that masks violence with civility, Reacher's refusal to conform to superficial politeness serves as a challenge to both social norms and systemic injustice.

The selection of *Killing Floor* and Jack Reacher as a case study is significant for both pragmatics and literary studies. From a pragmatic perspective, Reacher's speech acts, politeness strategies, and impoliteness triggers are shaped by a rich interplay of social status, institutional power, and cultural expectations within a community that outwardly values politeness but covertly upholds systemic corruption. His role as an outsider with a military background positions him uniquely: he navigates unfamiliar social hierarchies while deliberately disrupting power structures through both verbal and physical confrontation. This makes him an ideal subject for examining how impoliteness functions not merely as rudeness, but as a strategic tool of resistance, moral assertion, and social critique. His linguistic behavior reflects a balance between individual agency and institutional constraint, highlighting the ethical tensions embedded in his pragmatic choices.

From a literary standpoint, *Killing Floor* exemplifies how character construction and narrative progression are embedded in linguistic performance, with Reacher's pragmatic choices driving both plot and ethical positioning. His interactions highlight how politeness and impoliteness are not just interpersonal tactics but reflections of broader ideological conflicts between individual morality and institutional authority. By focusing on a protagonist who actively resists oppressive systems through confrontational language and behavior, the novel provides fertile ground for analyzing how linguistic strategies mediate power, resistance, and justice within both narrative and sociocultural contexts.

The importance of character and novel selection in pragmatics and literary studies has been similarly highlighted in other research. Rozak et al. (2021) and Ramadania et al. (2018) show that analyzing the psychological conflicts of a central character provides insight into universal human experiences like injustice, despair, and alienation, as seen in Febrialdi R.'s *Gitanjali* (Bagtayan and Lantowa 2022). Likewise, Saddam et al. (2024) demonstrate that pragmatic analysis of characters'

speech strategies in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* reveals evolving relational dynamics and sociocultural tensions. In the same way, the choice of *Killing Floor* and Jack Reacher is deliberate: the novel's genre, cultural backdrop, and morally complex protagonist enable a focused examination of how language functions as a tool of power, resistance, and ethical negotiation. Character and novel selection are therefore not arbitrary; they are instrumental in aligning the analysis with theoretical frameworks and ensuring that the selected data meaningfully represents the interaction between language, society, and literary art.

This focus complements studies such as *Brave the Wild Wind* (Janggur, Jayantini, and Pratiwi 2022), which highlight the link between conflict and character depth. That research identifies personal, cultural, and social conflicts as narrative drivers, resolved through creativity, integration, and cooperation. Similarly, *Killing Floor* presents conflict as a test of character, but with an added layer—language as a strategic device in navigating both physical and psychological battles.

Jack Reacher exemplifies what Sulistami & Mahdi (2006) describe as universal intelligence—a cognitive ability that integrates self-awareness, ethical reasoning, and adaptability in complex social interactions. His skill in asserting dominance while maintaining social equilibrium is closely tied to his strategic use of language, particularly in managing power, conflict, and trust. To analyze this, the study integrates three interrelated theories: Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, Leech's politeness maxims, and Culpeper's impoliteness framework.

Brown and Levinson (1987) offer a foundational framework for understanding how individuals manage Face-Threatening Acts (FTAs)—utterances that challenge a person's social identity or "face." These acts are often inevitable in communication, particularly during confrontation, conflict, or power assertion. To mitigate the social risks involved, the theory outlines four politeness strategies: (1) Bald-on-record, which involves direct speech without mitigation and is often used in close relationships but may be perceived as rude in formal contexts (Coupland, Grainger, and Coupland 1988); (2) Positive politeness, which seeks to strengthen social bonds by expressing interest, seeking agreement, or using in-group markers; (3) Negative politeness, which minimizes imposition through indirect language, hedging, or apologizing; and (4) Off-record politeness, which relies on hints, ambiguity, or humor to avoid making explicit FTAs. These strategies enable speakers to manage interpersonal risk while navigating cooperative or confrontational interactions (Hybels and Weaver 2007). Brown and Levinson emphasize that FTAs occur when speech threatens the hearer's face—for example, a direct command like "Give me that paper!" implies authority and creates imbalance, whereas "Could you pass me that paper?" reduces the threat and preserves social harmony (Yule 2010). FTAs play a crucial role in shaping discourse, as they can challenge an individual's social identity, with Goffman (1955) describing such instances as "in the wrong face," "out of face," or "shamefaced." This signals a threat not just to the hearer's face but also to the speaker's self-image, especially in high-stakes interactions (Sapoetra 2021).

Lakoff's politeness model (in Chaer, 2010) reinforces this view by emphasizing formality (avoiding coercion), hesitancy (allowing conversational choice), and camaraderie (treating interlocutors as equals). Meanwhile, Fraser (in Chaer, 2010) reminds us that politeness is judged by the listener, making perception and context crucial. In some cases, FTAs not only threaten the hearer's face but also risk the speaker's own self-image (Sapoetra 2021). Politeness strategies help mitigate these threats, reducing risks in interactions (Fukada and Asato 2004) and acting as tools for avoiding confrontation (Peng, Xie, and Cai 2014). In Thai culture, for example, indirect speech, conflict avoidance, and mediation are employed to maintain social harmony (Lakoff & Ide, 2005). Brown and Levinson's model originally proposed five politeness strategies, but later studies streamlined them into four (Supriyanta 2017), omitting the strategy of avoiding FTAs altogether. While these actions can be non-verbal, such as giving gifts or adopting a humble posture, Brown and Levinson focus primarily on linguistic expressions (Culpeper 2011). Notably, Brown and Levinson's model has extended well beyond linguistics to fields such as economics and psychology (Sapitri et al. 2020).

To deepen the analysis of social harmony and cooperative intent in dialogue, Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle supplements Brown and Levinson's theory by introducing a cost-benefit framework in which politeness is viewed as a rhetorical act that minimizes cost and maximizes benefit to the listener—an especially significant lens for analyzing fictional character development. Leech outlines seven politeness maxims that guide interpersonal communication: (1) Tact – minimize cost and maximize benefit to the listener; (2) Generosity – minimize benefit to self and maximize cost to self; (3) Approbation – minimize criticism and maximize praise; (4) Modesty – minimize self-praise and maximize acceptance of criticism; (5) Agreement – minimize disagreement and maximize agreement;

(6) Sympathy – minimize antipathy and maximize empathy; and (7) Consideration – minimize discomfort and maximize listener comfort. Leech's framework operates on both the pragmalinguistic level, which focuses on specific linguistic choices, and the sociopragmatic level, which reflects broader social norms (Fauziati 2013). His rhetorical model distinguishes between textual rhetoric (clarity, efficiency) and interpersonal rhetoric (cooperation, politeness), reinforcing the idea that politeness conveys social values and supports narrative coherence.

While politeness strategies aim to preserve face, Culpeper's impoliteness theory explores how language can intentionally damage it. Culpeper (1996;2005) defines impoliteness as communicative acts perceived as offensive within specific social contexts, making the theory especially crucial for analyzing Jack Reacher's verbal confrontations in *Killing Floor*, where mock impoliteness or bald-on-record hostility is used strategically to assert dominance or provoke reaction. Culpeper categorizes impoliteness strategies into four types: bald-on-record impoliteness, which directly attacks the hearer's face; positive impoliteness, which undermines the hearer's positive face through ridicule, exclusion, or disapproval; negative impoliteness, which threatens autonomy through commands, interruptions, or impositions; and sarcasm/mock impoliteness, which delivers insults ambiguously or playfully, allowing plausible deniability. Reacher's interactions—especially in high-stakes confrontations—frequently blend these strategies, such as using mock impoliteness to distract opponents or negative impoliteness to intimidate them, reflecting a tactical awareness of language's impact. This duality aligns with Culpeper's emphasis on intent, perception, and contextual appropriateness in understanding impoliteness. Furthermore, postmodern scholars have expanded the framework beyond fixed typologies. Watts (2003) introduces the concept of relational networks, suggesting that (im)politeness emerges dynamically through shifting interactional roles rather than static norms. Similarly, Kádár & Haugh (2013) propose that (im)politeness should be analyzed within communities of practice, emphasizing that its meanings are context-dependent, socially constructed, and culturally embedded. These perspectives reinforce the importance of situational nuance in interpreting Reacher's strategic use of impoliteness as a tool for survival, influence, and character expression.

Together, these three frameworks offer a comprehensive lens for analyzing how Jack Reacher's language in *Killing Floor* constructs power, navigates conflict, and reveals moral pragmatism. Brown and Levinson explain how Reacher manages face and asserts social control through politeness. Leech's maxims show how he tactically upholds or violates social norms to build trust or confront authority. Culpeper's impoliteness theory highlights how Reacher uses rudeness strategically—whether to intimidate, distract, or disrupt.

This synthesis reveals that politeness and impoliteness are not opposites to each other but tools Reacher applies flexibly. His speech reflects calculated decisions rather than emotional reactions, rooted in situational awareness and ethical judgment. By integrating these theories, the study not only deepens the analysis of Reacher's character but also shows how language in fiction operates as a dynamic tool of power, persuasion, and identity.

While this triangulated approach enriches the analysis of Jack Reacher's character and linguistic strategies, it also addresses a notable gap in prior research. Numerous studies have examined the role of main characters in literature and film through various analytical frameworks—such as psychoanalysis, moral values, conflict resolution, or isolated studies of politeness and impoliteness. Although these perspectives offer valuable insights into character development, they often apply a single theoretical lens, overlooking the complex interplay between politeness, impoliteness, and pragmatic reasoning in shaping fictional identities.

Previous studies have explored various dimensions of character analysis and language use in fiction, but often in isolated or partial ways. Wicaksono et al. (2023) examined the psychological conflicts of a protagonist using Freud's psychoanalytic theory, focusing on internal struggles but overlooking how linguistic strategies shape power relations and conflict resolution in dialogue. Similarly, Danial (2025) analyzed the moral and ethical values of a main character, yet did not address the role of politeness and impoliteness strategies in enacting morality through interpersonal interactions. Nisa & A'yuni (2024) investigated the process of resolving a character's inner conflict through insight theory but did not consider how linguistic strategies—particularly politeness and impoliteness—function as tools for managing conflict in conversation.

Meanwhile, Khaqqi & Pradipta (2024) applied Culpeper's impoliteness theory to film dialogue, identifying types and functions of impoliteness; however, their focus remained solely on impoliteness, without exploring its interaction with politeness strategies in constructing power dynamics. Likewise, Dewanti (2022) investigated politeness strategies in fictional narratives but did not account for the

coexistence and interplay of politeness and impoliteness in shaping character interaction or moral decision-making. Collectively, these studies offer valuable insights into psychological, moral, and pragmatic analyses, yet they tend to examine these aspects in isolation—whether focusing on psychology without language, or on politeness or impoliteness alone, without integrating their interaction within a broader narrative and ethical context.

In response to these gaps, this study offers an integrated approach that combines Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies, Leech's politeness maxims, and Culpeper's impoliteness strategies into a unified framework. By investigating the interplay between politeness and impoliteness, this research provides a deeper understanding of how language operates simultaneously as a tool of social cohesion, power negotiation, and moral positioning. Methodologically, it applies this pragmatic synthesis to *Killing Floor* to analyze how linguistic strategies contribute to character interaction, development, and conflict resolution, demonstrating how Jack Reacher's speech choices reflect cognitive and ethical decision-making. This approach bridges theoretical, methodological, and object-of-study gaps, offering new insights into the relationship between language, morality, and narrative dynamics.

Therefore, this study addresses the problem of how politeness and impoliteness strategies function beyond interpersonal interaction to serve as tools of power negotiation, moral positioning, and character construction within literary narratives. Despite growing interest in pragmatics in literary contexts, there remains limited research on how linguistic (im)politeness shapes character identity and drives narrative conflict in contemporary crime fiction. Accordingly, the objective of this research is to examine how politeness and impoliteness strategies in *Killing Floor* construct power dynamics, reflect Jack Reacher's moral reasoning, and contribute to his character development. Specifically, it seeks to First, how are politeness and impoliteness strategies used to navigate power structures in the novel? Second, in what ways do Jack Reacher's communication choices reflect his moral pragmatism? And third, how do politeness maxims and their violations contribute to character development and conflict resolution throughout the narrative?

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the use of politeness and impoliteness strategies in *Killing Floor* by Lee Child, focusing on their role in constructing power dynamics, Jack Reacher's moral pragmatism, and character development. A qualitative method allows for an in-depth, interpretive examination of linguistic strategies, aligning with the study's objective to explore how language functions as both a communicative and narrative device.

Killing Floor was selected as the research object due to the complexity of its protagonist, Jack Reacher, whose strong sense of justice and moral pragmatism are expressed through compelling interpersonal interactions. Although the novel is written in a first-person narrative style, it features significant dialogue exchanges where Reacher navigates conflict, asserts authority, and makes ethical choices. These interactions offer rich examples of politeness and impoliteness strategies as theorized by Brown and Levinson, Leech, and Culpeper. Jack Reacher's role as both narrator and central figure provides a unique opportunity to analyze pragmatic strategies in relation to power, morality, and character construction, fulfilling the research objective of examining language use within moral and social dynamics.

Data were collected through document analysis of *Killing Floor*. The novel was read in full to identify interactions containing politeness and/or impoliteness strategies relevant to power negotiation and moral positioning. Selection focused exclusively on dialogues involving Jack Reacher, excluding narration, description, and internal monologue from the final dataset to prioritize spoken interaction. However, initial readings considered narrative context and monologue to ensure accurate interpretation of the dialogue.

The primary unit of analysis consisted of full sentences and speech acts representing exchanges between Reacher and other characters. Data were chosen based on their capacity to reflect the strategic use of politeness or impoliteness in line with the theoretical frameworks. Rather than setting a predetermined number of examples per strategy, selection was driven by qualitative relevance—each excerpt chosen for its illustrative value in representing a strategy within the novel's broader themes of power, morality, and conflict.

Selected dialogues were copied into a Microsoft Word file for organization. Each excerpt was accompanied by a brief contextual note summarizing the interaction's situation and participants to support analysis without overwhelming narrative detail.

Data analysis followed the model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), involving three key stages:

1. **Data Reduction:** Relevant dialogue excerpts were identified, extracted, and coded according to politeness and impoliteness strategies, including bald-on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and violations of politeness maxims. Coding was done manually, guided by the definitions and criteria of each theoretical framework. Overlapping strategies were noted where applicable, reflecting the dynamic interplay of politeness and impoliteness within individual interactions.
2. **Data Display:** The coded excerpts were organized thematically, grouping interactions that demonstrated similar pragmatic functions or contributed to shared narrative goals (e.g., establishing authority, negotiating alliances, resisting control). This thematic organization allowed patterns of linguistic strategy use to emerge across different narrative contexts.
3. **Conclusion Drawing and Verification:** Interpretations were drawn by analyzing how each strategy contributed to Jack Reacher's character development, power negotiation, and moral positioning within the story. Interpretive findings were continually compared to the theoretical frameworks to ensure consistency and validity. Attention was given to how the interplay of politeness and impoliteness influenced narrative conflict and character dynamics.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section addresses Research Question 1: how are politeness and impoliteness strategies used to navigate power structures in the novel? Jack Reacher's interactions in the novel demonstrate a calculated use of politeness and impoliteness to assert dominance, challenge authority, and manage relationships. His linguistic choices—ranging from silence and sarcasm to direct confrontation—align with politeness theories, reinforcing how language functions as a tool for survival and influence.

Leech's politeness maxims and Culpeper's impoliteness strategies provide a framework for understanding how Reacher's communication reflects not only defiance but also moral pragmatism (RQ2). By systematically adhering to or violating these maxims, Reacher reshapes power dynamics, builds selective trust, and achieves conflict resolution—thereby contributing to his character development (RQ3).

The findings are organized into three key themes, reflecting how Reacher's linguistic strategies align with and violate politeness theories, and how these strategies operate within power struggles, alliances, and moments of survival.

1. Impoliteness as Resistance to Authority

This theme examines how Reacher employs bald-on-record impoliteness, mock impoliteness, and withholding politeness to challenge authority figures and resist institutional power. Across 12 instances of interaction with authority figures (Chief Morrison, Finlay, Teale), Reacher consistently violates Leech's Tact and Approbation Maxims to assert dominance. His resistance also reflects a moral stance against corruption and injustice, while reinforcing his role as an outsider challenging flawed institutions (RQ2, RQ3).

1.1 Morrison vs. Reacher: Resisting Control Through Withholding Politeness

Morrison uses bald-on-record impoliteness to threaten and dominate Reacher:

"Get your ass in that chair and keep your filthy mouth shut." (p. 9)

"...And then you're going to jail. And then you're going to the chair. And then I'm going to take a dump on your shitty little pauper's grave." (p. 9)

Reacher responds by remaining silent, withholding any verbal reply.

Morrison's direct, unmitigated threats exemplify Culpeper's bald-on-record impoliteness aimed at intimidation. Reacher's refusal to respond verbally violates the Tact Maxim by deliberately withholding politeness, turning silence into a face-threatening act that destabilizes Morrison's authority.

1.2 Finlay vs. Reacher: Undermining Authority Through Mock Impoliteness

Finlay uses negative politeness in his interrogation:

"No statements," he said. "I'll ask the questions and you'll answer them. You're Jack-none-Reacher. No address. No ID. What are you, a vagrant?" (p. 15)

Reacher replies with mock impoliteness: *"I'm not a vagrant, Finlay. I'm a hobo. Big difference."* (p. 15). Later, Reacher escalates to bald-on-record impoliteness: *"Do it, Finlay, you're supposed to be a damn detective."* (p. 33).

Reacher reclaims the derogatory label and injects sarcasm, violating the Agreement Maxim to destabilize Finlay's authority without overt aggression. His later blunt command directly challenges Finlay's competence, reversing the power dynamic and asserting dominance.

1.3 Teale vs. Reacher: Withholding Politeness to Reject Manipulation

Teale uses off-record politeness to minimize blame: *"We made a clumsy mistake... We're all very sorry indeed about your brother. May we just call it a mistake?"* (p. 156). Reacher responds bluntly: *"OK, Teale. But why do you assume I'm leaving?"* (p. 156).

Teale's ambiguous apology reflects an attempt to avoid confrontation through politeness. Reacher's blunt response withholds expected politeness and violates the Approbation Maxim by exposing Teale's manipulation, asserting conversational dominance.

2. Selective Politeness in Building Trust

This theme addresses how Reacher adapts his politeness strategies to build alliances. Among 8 observed interactions with allies (Roscoe and Hubble), he employs positive politeness selectively, aligned with Leech's Generosity and Reciprocity Maxims. These choices reflect his moral calculus in deciding who deserves trust, while showing an emotional evolution from detachment toward connection (RQ2, RQ3).

2.1 Reacher and Roscoe: Establishing Trust Through Positive Politeness

Roscoe initiates trust with courtesy: *"Thank you," I said. "You're welcome," she said, and she smiled, with her eyes too.*" (p. 39) Later, after Roscoe helps him escape: *"Thank you," I said. "I mean it. You worked hard to help me out."* (p. 93)

This exchange exemplifies positive politeness, reinforcing solidarity. Reacher's direct gratitude follows the Generosity Maxim, deepening trust. His phrase "I mean it" signals sincerity, marking a shift from emotional distance to connection.

2.2 Reacher and Hubble: Unequal Trust and Blunt Pragmatism

Reacher responds bluntly to Hubble's concern: *"Nothing you can do," I said. "You've been told to keep your mouth shut, so you keep it shut."* (p. 72)

Reacher's bald-on-record impoliteness and violation of the Tact Maxim reflect a pragmatic focus on control over empathy. His linguistic bluntness limits emotional investment, showing a context-driven, utilitarian approach to politeness.

3. Tactical Language Manipulation for Survival

This theme explores how Reacher and his adversaries weaponize politeness strategies for manipulation. Across 5 high-stakes confrontations, Reacher and opponents shift between politeness and impoliteness to secure survival. These exchanges highlight moral dilemmas and ethical flexibility, while resolving narrative conflicts through strategic communication.

3.1 Kliner's Manipulation: Off-Record Politeness Masking Threats

Kliner uses politeness to mask coercion: *"Let's cut the crap," he said. "You're hiding him, and we need him back. It's a matter of urgency to us."* (p. 351). Later, he escalates: *"He raised the .22 and put the tip of the silencer in Finlay's ear."* (p. 352).

Kliner's phrase "Let's cut the crap" moves from off-record politeness to direct imposition. His politeness masks a coercive demand, violating the Tact Maxim. His final silent act strips away politeness entirely, enforcing compliance through implicit threat.

3.2 Reacher's Tactical Deception: Mock Impoliteness and Misdirection

During a standoff with Picard, Reacher pretends cooperation: *"Don't shoot me, Picard," I yelled. "You won't get Hubble if you do."* (p. 362). Picard responds: *"I'm not going to shoot you, Reacher," he said. [...].* But Reacher acts: *"Then I pulled the trigger."* (p. 362)

Reacher's mock vulnerability violates the Agreement Maxim to mislead Picard. By manipulating politeness expectations, he gains a tactical advantage, using deception as a survival strategy.

Across these themes, Reacher's linguistic choices reveal a systematic, context-dependent application of politeness and impoliteness strategies. He deliberately violates or adheres to Leech's maxims and Culpeper's strategies to resist authority, foster trust, and secure survival, showing that politeness is not an ethical constant but a tactical resource shaped by power dynamics and relational needs.

These choices also reflect his moral pragmatism: Reacher's deployment of politeness is closely tied to his ethical judgments. He consistently withholds or extends politeness based on whether others uphold or betray moral standards, demonstrating that his linguistic strategies are not arbitrary but grounded in a personal moral code. This selective approach positions politeness as an extension of his moral calculus, reinforcing the alignment between his communicative style and his sense of justice.

Moreover, Reacher's strategic use of politeness and impoliteness contributes significantly to his character development and the narrative's conflict resolution. His linguistic maneuvering enables a transformation from detached drifter to morally engaged actor, as he navigates complex social hierarchies and personal loyalties. Through these strategies, he dismantles corrupt power structures, forges alliances, and neutralizes threats, using language not merely to communicate but to act, disrupt, and restore order.

These findings illuminate the multifaceted role of politeness and impoliteness in *Killing Floor*, showing how language operates both as a social tool and as a reflection of Reacher's evolving moral stance. The following discussion situates these findings within broader theoretical perspectives, exploring how politeness theories, impoliteness strategies, and narrative pragmatics intersect in Reacher's communicative practices.

Politeness and Impoliteness as Power Tools

Language in *Killing Floor* is not merely a medium of communication, but a tactical instrument used to negotiate power, navigate tense situations, and establish relationships. Reacher, as an outsider, frequently encounters resistance from law enforcement, criminal figures, and those in positions of authority. To assert dominance or protect himself, he adapts his linguistic choices—sometimes withholding politeness, other times using direct confrontation or sarcasm to undermine authority.

Such linguistic strategies align with established theories of politeness and impoliteness in pragmatics. R. Lakoff (1975) defines politeness as a strategy to reduce friction in social interactions. Politeness in language involves speaking and writing with respect and consideration. Harsh or emotional language can undermine etiquette and communication ethics. Politeness not only shapes interactions with others but also reflects self-respect. By speaking courteously and acknowledging others' feelings, whether in casual conversations or formal settings, we earn respect from our peers (Makkiyah and Nurhadi 2015), while Brown and Levinson introduce the concept of face-threatening acts (FTAs) and categorize politeness strategies into positive, negative, bald-on-record, and off-record politeness. Leech expands this framework with politeness maxims that govern cooperative communication. Meanwhile, Culpeper explores how impoliteness can be a tool for power assertion, coercion, or intimidation, particularly in adversarial contexts.

These theories suggest that politeness is not simply a matter of etiquette but a fundamental tool for shaping interactions, especially in high-stakes or adversarial exchanges. By applying these frameworks to *Killing Floor*, we can analyze how Reacher and other characters strategically use politeness and impoliteness to assert control, challenge authority, and navigate moral dilemmas. Reacher, as an outsider, frequently encounters resistance from figures of authority and organized crime. To assert dominance, characters employ different politeness and impoliteness strategies, often revealing their social position and intent.

A. Defying Authority: Language as Resistance

From the moment Reacher enters Margrave, he refuses to submit to figures of authority. His verbal exchanges with Chief Morrison, Finlay, and Teale illustrate how power is often exerted through linguistic dominance, yet Reacher systematically dismantles this control using impoliteness strategies.

Morrison, crude and aggressive, relies on bald-on-record impoliteness, issuing direct threats to intimidate Reacher:

"Get your ass in that chair and keep your filthy mouth shut." (p. 9)

"...And then you're going to jail. And then you're going to the chair. And then

I'm going to take a dump on your shitty little pauper's grave." (p. 9)

Morrison's linguistic control mirrors how dominant forces establish power hierarchies, much like isiZulu's dominance in *Generations: The Legacy* (Bornman and Álvarez-Mosquera 2018). In the soap opera, isiZulu is given prominence while other indigenous languages are marginalized, reinforcing sociolinguistic hierarchies. However, *Generations* utilizes translanguaging—the fluid mixing of multiple languages—as a form of linguistic resistance, allowing marginalized voices to push back against dominant norms (Aiseng 2022).

Similarly, Reacher's resistance functions not just as a challenge to individual authority, but as a broader rejection of imposed social expectations, including expected verbal deference. His refusal to respond to Morrison's aggression—withholding politeness entirely—parallels translanguaging's disruption of monolingual dominance. Just as translanguaging subverts rigid linguistic hierarchies by validating multiple speech forms, Reacher's impoliteness disrupts verbal hegemony by refusing to perform linguistic submission. In both cases, language becomes a tool of resistance—empowering marginalized positions to assert agency through defiance of norms.

This resistance also mirrors the characterization of Yancie Dawkins in *The Feisty Fiancée*, who remains outspoken and defiant throughout the novel (Mariana 2023). Like Yancie, Reacher's linguistic noncompliance highlights his unwavering stance against authoritarian figures. However, while Yancie's defiance is consistent, Reacher demonstrates strategic adaptability in his impoliteness. When confronting Finlay, he shifts from silence to sarcasm, altering his tactics to maintain verbal control.

Unlike Morrison, Finlay initially uses negative politeness to preserve a professional tone: "No statements," he said. "I'll ask the questions and you'll answer them. You're Jack-none-Reacher. No address. No ID. What are you, a vagrant?" (p. 15). Reacher challenges this soft authority with mock impoliteness: "I'm not a vagrant, Finlay. I'm a hobo. Big difference." (p. 15)

This sarcastic deflection mirrors how characters in *Generations* use translanguaging to destabilize power-laden speech norms. Just as the soap's multilingual dialogue resists the hegemonic status of isiZulu, Reacher's sarcasm undermines Finlay's institutional tone. Both acts signal a refusal to be defined by dominant linguistic structures, emphasizing how language—whether multilingual or impolite—can challenge imposed narratives of power and identity.

While Reacher's stance is always defiant, his evolving linguistic strategy reflects the dynamic growth of Thompson in *The Feisty Fiancée*—a character who adapts to external pressures while preserving her agency. Like Thompson, Reacher modifies his rhetorical approach when necessary. His exchange with Finlay escalates from playful mockery to bald-on-record impoliteness: "Do it, Finlay, you're supposed to be a damn detective." (p. 33)

This progression reveals how Reacher calibrates his resistance to the communicative context. He is neither erratically rebellious nor submissively polite; rather, he uses language strategically to assert dominance while rejecting hierarchy. His adaptability ensures that he remains linguistically ungovernable, echoing how *Generations* promotes speech fluidity as a counter-hegemonic tool.

In sum, *Generations: The Legacy* and *Killing Floor* both depict language as a site of social contestation—whether through translanguaging or impoliteness. Reacher's verbal defiance mirrors how multilingual characters resist linguistic hegemony, and his shifting speech strategies echo how figures like Thompson evolve in the face of structural pressure. Language, in all three works, becomes not just a medium of expression but a weapon of resistance against institutional and interpersonal control.

B. Building Trust: From Sarcasm to Sincerity

While Reacher resists institutional authority, he selectively alters his linguistic strategies to foster alliances with individuals he deems trustworthy. This adaptive use of politeness—shifting from sarcasm to sincerity—demonstrates how language becomes a mechanism not only for resistance but also for relational alignment.

Early in his relationship with Roscoe, Reacher responds to her act of goodwill with reserved politeness. When she offers him coffee and smiles warmly, he acknowledges it with minimal verbal effort:

"Thank you," I said.

"You're welcome," she said, and she smiled, with her eyes too." (p. 39)

Roscoe's approach reflects Leech's Generosity Maxim, which urges speakers to minimize self-benefit and maximize benefit to others. Her small but sincere gesture echoes the trust-building dynamics in *Secrets Forgiven* (Maharani, 2017), where characters such as Kirsten use positive politeness to build rapport. For instance, Kirsten's willingness to advocate for Kami mirrors Roscoe's support for Reacher:

"Kami, would you like me to talk to your mom with you?" (*Secrets Forgiven*, Act 1, Scene 6)

In both instances, the act of voluntarily assuming emotional labor positions the speaker as an ally, reducing the social distance between characters. These linguistic offerings are not merely courteous; they create relational safe spaces that invite reciprocal trust. In response, Reacher begins to shed his guarded demeanor, offering sincere gratitude rather than sarcasm:

"Thank you," I said. "I mean it. You worked hard to help me out." (p. 93)

This progression from neutral politeness to explicit appreciation marks a significant pragmatic shift in Reacher's interpersonal stance. His sincerity here functions like Kami's in *Secrets Forgiven*, when she demonstrates emotional vulnerability and logistical flexibility:

"Can we talk somewhere? I can meet you somewhere?" (*Secrets Forgiven*, Act 1, Scene 4)

Like Kami, who minimizes her own convenience to support another, Reacher's verbal affirmation of Roscoe's efforts reveals a calculated softening—a strategic sincerity that recognizes earned trust, not blind loyalty. In both texts, then, language becomes a negotiated space for emotional alignment, where politeness is not default but earned.

This selectiveness becomes even more pronounced when contrasted with Reacher's interaction with Hubble. Despite Hubble's visible distress, Reacher responds with bald-on-record impoliteness, offering no comfort:

"Nothing you can do," I said. "You've been told to keep your mouth shut, so you keep it shut." (p. 72)

Here, Reacher violates Leech's Tact Maxim, making no effort to minimize the imposition or emotional impact of his directive. This illustrates that for Reacher, politeness is not governed by social convention but by perceived relational value. Unlike Roscoe, whom he sees as competent and sincere, Hubble is framed as a weak and unreliable figure—a liability rather than an ally.

The contrast mirrors *Secrets Forgiven*, where characters withdraw politeness from those who fail to reciprocate emotional labor. For example, Kami becomes curt when she senses insincerity, indicating that linguistic warmth is contingent on mutual trust. Similarly, Reacher's pragmatics are context-sensitive: he grants or withholds linguistic generosity not based on social expectation but on a tactical reading of character.

Thus, *Killing Floor* and *Secrets Forgiven* both demonstrate that politeness is not merely a social lubricant—it's a selective tool for emotional investment. Where *Secrets Forgiven* uses consistent linguistic generosity to build communal trust, *Killing Floor* presents a more guarded and utilitarian model of verbal rapport. In both narratives, the strategic modulation of politeness deepens character relationships and underscores a core theme: language is not neutral—it is deeply entangled with trust, power, and moral judgment.

C. Language as a Weapon: Manipulation and Survival

Beyond trust and resistance, *Killing Floor* reveals how language becomes a tactical weapon—wielded not only by Reacher but also by his adversaries to manipulate, dominate, or survive. This weaponization of speech takes different forms, depending on the speaker's intentions, moral stance, and relationship to power.

Kliner and Picard, for instance, use politeness not as a form of civility but as a coercive mask. Kliner, ever the calculated businessman, embeds threats in veiled language that aligns with off-record politeness strategies: "Let's cut the crap," he said. "You're hiding him, and we need him back. It's a matter of urgency to us." (p. 351)

Here, Kliner frames his demand as rational discourse, allowing him to maintain plausible deniability while implying consequences. This aligns with Brown and Levinson's off-record strategies, where indirectness conceals force. However, when linguistic manipulation fails to achieve compliance, Kliner abruptly shifts tactics: "He raised the .22 and put the tip of the silencer in Finlay's ear." (p. 352)

This stark transition from calculated speech to overt violence violates the Tact Maxim and exposes the limits of polite coercion. His language, initially masked as negotiation, becomes transparent once the illusion of diplomacy collapses.

A similar pattern emerges in *Death on the Nile* (Citrasari and Rahayu 2024), where Jacqueline de Bellefort manipulates perception through emotionally charged language. Unlike Kliner's cool detachment, Jacqueline relies on emotive coercion, using vulnerability as a rhetorical device: "You don't understand." She shot him a quick look. "Simon and I loved each other." (p. 87).

Her language appeals to empathy while subtly shifting blame. In another passage, she reclaims narrative authority by casting Linnet as the interloper: "He would have loved me and me only if Linnet hadn't come along and snatched him up in her golden chariot." (p. 89)

In both Jacqueline's and Kliner's cases, the manipulation hinges on selective self-presentation—Kliner as rational negotiator, Jacqueline as tragic victim. Their speech acts conceal coercion beneath socially acceptable veneers, illustrating how politeness can become a form of strategic deceit.

Reacher, on the other hand, uses language manipulatively not to dominate others, but to neutralize threats and survive under pressure. In a standoff with Picard, he deploys mock cooperation to divert attention: "Don't shoot me, Picard," I yelled. "You won't get Hubble if you do." (p. 362)

Here, Reacher violates the Agreement Maxim, feigning alignment with Picard's interests to buy time. His final act—playing along just long enough to shoot—shows how deception can operate as a life-saving strategy:

"I'm not going to shoot you, Reacher," he said. [...] Then I pulled the trigger." (p. 362)

While Jacqueline manipulates for emotional control and Kliner for power consolidation, Reacher's use of linguistic deception is defensive and situational. His speech acts are embedded in survival contexts, not long-term domination. This aligns with his broader moral pragmatism: language is a weapon only when the stakes demand it.

As discussed in Section A, Reacher's strategic silence and blunt speech with figures like Morrison and Teale already illustrate his resistance to institutional power. This section extends that insight by demonstrating how even when he does speak, his language is never neutral—it is purposefully deployed based on threat levels, tactical advantage, and perceived justice.

In sum, *Killing Floor* and *Death on the Nile* both reveal how language functions as social camouflage, allowing characters to manipulate outcomes while appearing either reasonable or sympathetic. The key difference lies in the ethical framing: where Kliner and Jacqueline exploit speech for dominance, Reacher uses it as a shield, not a sword. This dynamic reinforces the study's central claim: politeness and impoliteness strategies are not just communicative styles—they are moral and tactical choices embedded in power relations.

Language as Adaptability: From Isolation to Strategic Engagement

Reacher's evolution in *Killing Floor* unfolds across distinct narrative phases, each marked by a shift in his use of politeness and impoliteness strategies. At the outset, his silence and bluntness function as defensive mechanisms, revealing a deep mistrust of authority. During his initial interrogation with Finlay and Roscoe, Reacher offers clipped, non-cooperative responses and withholds key information. His violations of the Agreement and Tact Maxims serve not only as displays of self-possession but also as linguistic armor—shielding him from those he does not yet trust. This defensive posture aligns with the cognitive regulation component of Martin's tripartite adaptability model (Collie and Martin 2016), signaling a survival-oriented mindset grounded in suspicion and self-containment.

However, this impoliteness is not without consequences. His early unwillingness to engage verbally intensifies Finlay's suspicion, escalating tension rather than diffusing it. This outcome underscores the dual nature of impoliteness: while it can assert control or establish boundaries, it also risks alienating potential allies. Moreover, it highlights a limitation within universal politeness frameworks, which may overlook situational and psychological nuances—such as the guarded disposition of a former soldier—thereby misinterpreting strategic reticence as hostility.

As Reacher forms a functional alliance with Roscoe and Finlay, his communicative style evolves. He gradually adopts positive politeness strategies, including humor, verbal reassurance, and expressions of mutual respect. His growing rapport with Roscoe is marked by small but deliberate linguistic overtures that foster trust and collaboration. This shift corresponds with the narrative's second phase—strategic alliance-building—and reflects enhanced emotional regulation and situational awareness.

In the novel's final arc, Reacher demonstrates advanced control over impoliteness, transforming it from a defensive posture into a strategic instrument. He deploys mock impoliteness not as overt aggression but as tactical provocation. For example, in the climactic standoff with Picard, he deliberately violates the Agreement Maxim:

"Don't shoot me, Picard. You won't get Hubble if you do." (p. 362)

To manipulate the situation, creating the illusion of negotiation and buying critical time. This moment reveals Reacher's increasing fluency in using language as a calculated tool for power negotiation, not merely as a vehicle for expression.

Nevertheless, even his most sophisticated strategies are not foolproof. His sarcastic exchanges with Teale nearly result in re-incarceration and torture, demonstrating that impoliteness, however tactical, remains a high-risk maneuver. A more perilous example emerges in his deception of Officer Baker, when Reacher fabricates a story about heading to Hubble's house to retrieve documents. While this lie successfully provokes the antagonists into action, it also triggers a deadly ambush. Reacher survives only because of his physical preparation—not his verbal strategy.

"I'm going to sleep up at Hubble's place and mail them in the morning." Baker nodded slowly. Then he flashed his friendly grin again. But it was forced." (p.314)

"Baker," I said. "He bumped into me last night. I spun him a yarn about going up to Hubble's place looking for some documentation, then I went up there and waited to see what would happen. Along came the Kliner kid and four of his pals. They came to nail me to Hubble's bedroom wall." "Christ," he said. "So what happened?" "I took them out," I said. (p.343)

This episode reveals a critical limitation in impoliteness theory: it often assumes that communicative intent yields predictable outcomes, whereas in high-stakes contexts, language can provoke unintended—and nearly fatal—consequences.

These moments of near failure complicate a simplistic arc of character mastery. They reveal that while Reacher's language becomes increasingly adaptive, it remains context-dependent and vulnerable to miscalculation. Strategic language, therefore, functions not as a guarantee of control but as a dynamic, risk-laden form of engagement.

Reacher's development, then, is communicated not through internal monologue or emotional exposition, but through linguistic transformation. His journey from silence to selective engagement mirrors Ralph's maturation in *Lord of the Flies* (Mogea 2023), and echoes Santiago's experiential wisdom in *The Old Man and the Sea* (Piscayanti 2020), where internal change is marked by strategic responses to external challenges. While Santiago's transformation stems from his respect for nature and his introspective battles, Reacher's evolution is driven by his ability to manipulate language and power structures to his advantage. This aligns with the broader concept of self-transformation (Anderson and Anderson 2010), where individuals adjust their thought patterns, communication styles, and behaviors in response to social challenges. Transformation is not merely about change but about developing a deeper self-awareness, which enhances one's ability to navigate conflicts, build relationships, and ultimately achieve personal growth. Reacher's linguistic adaptability thus illustrates how strategic communication plays a crucial role in self-evolution, enabling individuals to respond wisely to shifting social landscapes.

Comparative literary references further contextualize his progression. In *The Woman in White* (Priyatno, P, and Rahman 2024), Laura Fairlie's transformation from passivity to resilience—catalyzed by social manipulation—parallels Reacher's evolution in using positive politeness with allies and calculated impoliteness with adversaries. Similarly, Marion Halcombe's poised assertiveness finds resonance in Reacher's rhetorical control, with both characters navigating vulnerability and dominance through communicative precision.

Ultimately, violations of politeness maxims—especially those related to Tact, Agreement, and Approbation—act as linguistic inflection points in Reacher's arc. These are not arbitrary violations; they mirror the demands of each narrative phase and reveal Reacher's growing competence in adapting language to shifting social, moral, and tactical imperatives. His linguistic adaptability thus functions not only as a mechanism of survival but as a marker of psychological depth and strategic maturity, affirming that language is both a mirror and a means of transformation.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that *Killing Floor* uses politeness and impoliteness strategies as key mechanisms for navigating power dynamics, aligning with Reacher's tactical approach to authority. Throughout the novel, Reacher deliberately violates or adheres to Leech's politeness maxims and Culpeper's impoliteness strategies to assert dominance, challenge institutional power, and resist manipulation. His selective use of bald-on-record impoliteness, mock impoliteness, and withholding politeness enables him to destabilize opponents and maintain autonomy in hostile encounters. These

strategies demonstrate that politeness is not a moral absolute but a strategic resource for controlling interactions and shaping power relations in a volatile environment.

Reacher's communication also reflects a form of moral pragmatism, where politeness is extended or withheld based on ethical judgments rather than social expectations. His linguistic choices are guided by an internal moral code that prioritizes justice and loyalty over formal decorum. By rewarding trust with solidarity and punishing betrayal with impoliteness, Reacher's speech acts become an enactment of his ethical stance. This pragmatic use of politeness illustrates how language functions not only to negotiate relationships but also to signal moral alignment, reinforcing his role as a principled yet adaptable protagonist.

Finally, the interplay of politeness and impoliteness contributes significantly to Reacher's character development and the narrative's conflict resolution. His evolving rhetorical strategies—from blunt defiance to strategic collaboration—mirror his psychological growth from a detached outsider to a morally engaged actor. Politeness violations become turning points in his transformation, shaping alliances, exposing corruption, and resolving conflicts. This study thus highlights the narrative power of linguistic strategies in fiction, showing how communication serves both as a tool for survival and a reflection of character evolution. Future research might explore comparative analyses across genres or examine how different cultural norms of politeness shape fictional heroism and moral agency.

This study contributes to pragmatics and literary linguistics by demonstrating how politeness and impoliteness strategies in fiction function not only as social markers but as tools for character development, narrative progression, and moral positioning. By analyzing Jack Reacher's linguistic choices, the study extends impoliteness/politeness strategies, and politeness maxims framework, showing that violations of politeness maxims can drive character evolution and conflict resolution rather than merely signal aggression. This study emphasizes the pivotal role of dialogue in depicting character transformation, without relying on overt internal monologue or emotional exposition. Reacher's linguistic adaptability, evolving from silence to selective engagement, illustrates how language can function as both a tool for self-expression and a mechanism of self-evolution. This analysis reinforces the relevance of pragmatic theories in literary studies, showing how language operates as a dynamic force in shaping identity, moral positioning, and power relationships. By contextualizing politeness and impoliteness strategies within a broader narrative arc, this work underscores the value of pragmatic analysis in understanding the interplay between language, character, and thematic development in literature.

The findings offer practical implications for teaching pragmatics and enhancing communication in real-world power dynamics. By highlighting the strategic use of impoliteness/politeness strategies and politeness maxims in *Killing Floor*, this study underscores the role of context, intention, and consequence in interpreting language—a perspective valuable for educators, negotiators, and professionals navigating conflict or authority. This research suggests that linguistic strategies often transcend basic politeness norms, revealing that communication is an inherently dynamic process, shaped by individual goals and external pressures. As such, this study contributes not only to academic discourse but also provides a framework for understanding and applying linguistic strategies in real-world communication scenarios.

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