

Politeness Maxims In Character Interaction In *The Last Of Us 2* Video Game

Erlita Vierra Trirenata¹, Mahi M Hkikmat¹, Ice Sariyati¹

¹UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia

*Correspondence: erlitavierra13@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify politeness maxims used in the characters' dialogue in The Last of Us 2 video game. The study used Geoffrey Leech's theory of politeness maxim. This research focused on what types of politeness maxim appeared in the dialogue and how characters used those types of politeness. This study used descriptive-qualitative for its research method. The object of this research was the dialogue between characters in The Last of Us 2 video game. The result of this research showed that there were 40 data that contained maxims of politeness. There were 14 data for maxim tact, 6 data for maxim generosity, 6 data for maxim approbation, 2 data for maxim modesty, 3 data for maxim agreement, and 9 data for maxim sympathy. Maxim tact was the most frequently used by the characters in The Last of Us 2 video game. The use of these maxims plays a significant role in shaping the narrative and portraying the relationship between characters, which created efficient communication.

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1. Introduction

Video games are a medium of entertainment for some people. According to Kirriemuir (2006) video game is an interactive digital experiences played on electronic devices, which involves user interaction with visual elements. In video games it is common to include cutscenes, which are used to support the story in the video game. For instance, the video game *The Last of Us 2* is set in a post-apocalyptic background and therefore has a fascinating and suspenseful narrative.

This research aims to identify and analyze the types of politeness maxims based on Leech's theory found in the dialogue interactions of the characters in *The Last of Us 2* video game, and to examine how context influence the use of those maxims within a post-apocalyptic narrative setting. *The Last of Us 2* video game, was developed by Naughty Dog and released by Sony Interactive Entertainment on June 19, 2020 and this game explored human relationships in a post-apocalyptic setting. In this case, the game incorporates cutscenes, it is a series of cutscenes are video game as non-interactive segments that pause and interrupt gameplay (Evin et al., 2022; Mahdori et al., 2025). These cutscenes reinforce the narrative story, allowing players to engage more deeply with the storyline.

Many studies on politeness have been conducted with a real-life communication as the object of research, such as political debates (Agustini Putri, 2023) and religious interactions (Zakaria et al., 2023). Most of these studies use Brown and Levinson's theory. Meanwhile, research using Leech's (1983) theory of politeness is relatively less common and generally takes the object of a movie (Roysa et al., 2024; Pardede et al., 2019; Junaid & Andini, 2025; Rahman & Weda, 2019). The development of digital media, such as narrative video games, also presents a complex and social dialogue between characters. *The Last of Us 2*, which presents the conflict between the main characters in a post-apocalyptic situation, is one such video game that contains meaningful dialogue in an emotional context. However, not many studies have specifically analyzed how Leech's maxims of politeness are applied in the video game narrative and how the context affects characters use of those maxims. Therefore, this research aims to fill a gap by analyzing politeness maxims in character dialogue in *The Last of Us 2* using Leech's (1983) theory as the main framework.

The concept of politeness itself has long been a topic of study in pragmatics, with prominent theoreticians such as Geoffrey Leech providing a significant framework. Leech (1983) reveals six principles of politeness: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. Tact maxim suggests that requests often use indirect speech, allowing the listener to easily decline (Leech, 2014). Generosity Maxim focuses on self-sacrifice, prioritizing the benefit of others (Nasution et al., 2024). Approbation maxim suggests giving compliments and avoiding criticism (Trisnaningtyas and

Budiwaty, 2021). In order to appear humble, modesty maxim encourages not underestimating someone's achievements. Agreement maxim emphasizes finding common ground and avoiding disagreements, as they can be perceived as disrespectful (Leech, 2014). Lastly, sympathy maxim highlights the importance of empathy, especially in expressing congratulations, good wishes, or condolences during difficult times.

2. Methodology

In this research, the researcher used descriptive qualitative research. Qualitative descriptive research is a subset of qualitative research. Descriptive research is a research approach that aims to describe in deeply the events, phenomena, and life experiences of individuals or groups (Rusandi & Muhammad Rusli, 2021).

The researcher collected the data based on the cutscenes which included dialog between characters in The Last of Us 2 video game. The source of this data was from YouTube video entitled "The Last of Us 2, Remastered All Cutscenes Full Movie 4K," uploaded by GamersPrey with a video duration of 3 hours, 48 minutes, and 15 seconds, uploaded on January 16, 2024. The data were taken in the form of dialog in the narrative in the video game The Last of Us 2.

Observation techniques were used in this research. Yin (2014) states that observation is a qualitative research technique aimed at understanding the social and cultural dynamics of a phenomenon. Moleong (2018) emphasizes that observation is a crucial instrument in qualitative research, especially in an attempt to understand behavior and social interactions in their true context.

The researcher collected data through a systematic process that took place in several stages. First, the researcher made observations by repeatedly watching gameplay footage on a YouTube video entitled "The Last of Us 2, Remastered All Cutscenes Full Movie 4K" uploaded by GamersPrey. Afterwards, the researcher transcribed each dialog that contained the maxims of politeness.

The researcher conducted a comprehensive data analysis through several systematic stages. At the initial stage, the researcher identified utterances in the dialog that indicated the existence of politeness maxims. Next, the researcher classified the data into categories based on Leech's (1983) politeness maxims. In addition, the researcher explained the context why the character chose to use the type of politeness maxims. In the last step, the researcher drew conclusions from the results of the data analysis.

3. Result and Discussion

In this section, the results and discussion of the type of politeness maxims found in *The Last of Us 2* video game are presented. Leech (1983) proposes six types of politeness maxims namely, tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. Based on the analysis of *The Last of Us 2* video game, the researcher found 40 data in total including 14 data on tact maxim, 6 data on generosity maxim and approbation maxim, 2 data on modesty maxim, 3 data on agreement maxim and 9 data on sympathy maxim. The dominant maxim found in *The Last of Us 2* video game was tact maxim as a total of 12 data. For more detailed overview, the results and discussion are provided as follows:

Table 1. results of finding politeness maxim in *The Last of Us 2* video game

No.	Type of maxim	total
1.	Tact maxim	14
2.	Generosity maxim	6
3.	Approbation maxim	6
4.	Modesty maxim	2
5.	Agreement maxim	3
6.	Sympathy maxim	9
Total		40

Based on the table above, it can be concluded that tact maxim appeared most in the cutscenes of *The Last of Us 2* video game. The total data were 14 data, which included 35% of all data found. While modesty maxim was the least data that appeared with only 5% of the total data. Based on the analysis conducted, in general, the use of politeness in communicating is to maintain communication relationships with interlocutors and produce more effective communication.

The following is more detailed explanation of the findings in the type of politeness maxim based on Geoffrey Leech's theory (1983): tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy. This includes the type of maxim used and its context used. The data were collected from every cutscenes in The Last of Us 2 video game.

a. Tact maxim

Datum 1 (38:26 – 38:28)

- Tommy : Could I sit down, please?
Ellie : Yeah
Context : Tommy asked permission to sit in Ellie's room so that he could freely talk to Ellie after Joel's death.
Analysis : This dialog contains politeness tact maxim because Tommy used a polite form of request to Ellie by saying, "Could I sit down, please?" instead of immediately walking in without asking Ellie's permission. Tommy tried to minimize pressure on Ellie and maximize respect for Ellie, who was grieving after Joel's death. This conversation shows how characters maintained politeness in their interactions when in emotional situations and shows the strong relationship between Ellie as someone who was close to Joel and Tommy as Joel's younger brother.

Datum 2 (2:51:10 – 2:51:16)

- Yara : Do you mind helping me look for him? He's pretty worked up.
Abby : Sure.
Context : Yara requested Abby's help to calm down Lev, who was emotional because Yara was against Lev's desire to meet their mother back at the Scars base.
Analysis : This dialog contains tact maxim because Yara asked Abby for help in a polite way by saying, "Do you mind helping me look for him?" instead of using a direct command. Yara tried to minimize force and gave Abby the freedom to refuse her request. This conversation shows an interaction that is filled with politeness, with Yara's polite request and Abby accepting the request without any force or pressure and shows the close relationship between Yara and Abby as someone who was a stranger before getting closer.

b. Generosity maxim

Datum 3 (32:15 – 32:17)

- Tommy : Y'all should come back with us. Restock before you head out.
Woman : Appreciate it.
Context : Tommy asked Abby's friends where they were going and they mentioned that they were just stopping by for a while and would continue their journey so Tommy offered them to stop by his base (Jackson) to bring some supplies and food for them.
Analysis : This dialog contains generosity maxim because Tommy offered help by saying, "Y'all should come back with us. Restock before you head out." It shows that Tommy was trying to minimize his own benefit and maximize

the group's benefit. This conversation shows how politeness in offers and positive responses can build good interactions.

Datum 4 (1:03:45 – 1:03:53)

- Ellie : I'm gonna make sure this place is secure. You just rest.
- Context : Ellie showed her concern and worry by offering herself to ensure that the place they went to was safe from zombie attacks, and Ellie told Dina to just rest.
- Analysis : This dialog contains generosity maxim because Ellie tried to maximize the benefit for Dina by offering herself to do a risky task, while Dina was just asked to rest. This conversation shows how Ellie used politeness to express her concern for Dina in a way that avoided offending Dina.

c. Approbation maxim

Datum 5 (2:48:44 – 2:48:48)

- Abby : Can't believe she's on her feet already.
- Mel : Yeah, well. Scars are tough.
- Context : Abby praised Yara for recently getting her arm surgery but already being able to move around and Mel also praised Yara's endurance.
- Analysis : This dialog contains approbation maxim because Abby expressed her admiration by saying, "Can't believe she's on her feet already," praising Yara's endurance. Mel also supported Abby's statement by saying "Scars are tough," which strengthens the praise. This conversation illustrates the use of approbation maxim by maximizing praise for Yara.

Datum 6 (2:53:45 – 2:53:57)

- Yara : Mel's wrong, you know. You're a good person.
- Abby : You don't know me.
- Yara : I know enough.
- Context : Yara comforted Abby by saying that Abby is a good person, but Abby humbled herself by saying, "You don't know me." But Yara dismissed it by saying, "I know enough," implying that she knew Abby quite well.
- Analysis : This dialog contains approbation maxim because Yara praised Abby by saying, "You're a good person," which is a form of appreciation for Abby. Her praise aimed to convince Abby that she has a good personality, even though Abby herself doubts it. This conversation shows how Yara maximize approbation maxim to comfort Abby, who at that moment was feeling guilty and insecure.

d. Modesty maxim

Datum 7 (1:05:27 – 1:05:34)

- Joel : That's starting to sound like something.
- Ellie : Ugh, I suck.

- Joel : Nah... Just need to build up your calluses, that's all.
- Context : Ellie was learning the guitar given by Joel, Ellie felt she is not very talented in playing the guitar, but Joel comforted her by gave the reason that she has to build up her calluses.
- Analysis : This conversation illustrates that Ellie tried to be humble in responding to Joel's compliments and Joel responded Ellie's words casually to created harmonious communication.

e. Agreement maxim

Datum 8 (1:41:41 – 1:41:54)

- Ellie : It's pretty fucking far.
- Jesse : Or we use that.
- Ellie : Yeah. That's better.
- Jesse : come on, this way.
- Context : Ellie and Jesse had to cross the river to get to the enemy base. Ellie objected because it was a long way, but Jesse offered another idea to use the speedboat used by the enemy; Ellie accepted the suggestion.
- Analysis : In this conversation there is no debate or rejection, but rather Ellie's acceptance of the idea proposed by Jesse. Approbation maxim aims to maintain harmony in the conversation by showing agreement and avoiding unnecessary confrontation so as done in Ellie and Jesse's conversation.

Datum 9 (26:57 – 27:16)

- Abby : My Friends! My friends are at mansion just north of here. It's fenced in. We have the whole perimeter secure.
- Joel : It's the Baldwin place. That could work.
- Tommy : Alright. I'll get the door.
- Context : When Tommy and Joel were argued and pressured because the warehouse they came to was unable to resist the zombie attack, Abby provided a solution and invited them to stop by her base because it was close to the warehouse. Finally, they agreed.
- Analysis : This dialog contains agreement maxim because when Joel said that he recognized the place as Baldwin, Tommy finally agreed to Abby's suggestion. In the conversation, they use agreement maxim, which functions to minimize disagreement and maintain harmony in communication even in urgent situations.

f. Sympathy maxim

Datum 10 (1:49:16 – 1:49:20)

- Ellie : Thanks for coming back for me.
- Jesse : My friends' problems are my problems.

- Context : Ellie thanked Jesse for coming back for her when Ellie was at the enemy base.
- Analysis : This dialog contains sympathy maxim because Ellie recognized that Jesse had helped her in a difficult situation by expressing gratitude. Jesse also showed that he cared and saw Ellie's problem as part of his responsibility as a friend. This dialog shows that a sense of sympathy and solidarity in a friendship relationship can strengthen social bonds.
- Datum 11 (3:13:00 – 3:13:16)
- Ellie : Maria good?
- Tommy : She's fine. We, um... we're taking some time apart.
- Ellie : I'm sorry.
- Tommy : Nah, we talked about it a lot and uh, it's what we both want.
- Context : Ellie asked how Maria was doing, and Tommy replied that Maria was fine, saying that their relationship was broken.
- Analysis : Ellie showed her sympathy for Tommy and Maria's relationship by saying, "I'm sorry." Tommy responded Ellie's words by saying that they were okay to calm Ellie's worried. This conversation shows how politeness is used to maintain a balance between showing empathy and respecting someone's personal decisions.

The result of this analysis indicates that the use of politeness is influenced by several factors. Jack et al. (1987) point out that factors such as time, place, number of participants, status, power dynamics, and norms can significantly affect communication. These factors determine the reason why the characters use the politeness maxim. For example, in datum 9, in the dialog, it is stated that the situation is distressing because the place they came to will be destroyed by zombies immediately, so Abby tries to find a solution, and finally, there is an agreement between Abby, Joel, and Tommy.

The urgency of the situation places the characters in a life-threatening situation. In the middle of a chaotic situation, Abby chooses to communicate politely, trying to reach an agreement rather than escalating the tension. This interaction led to an agreement between the characters. The use of agreement maxims in this situation indicates the characters' attempts to create harmony and also the effectiveness of politeness in maintaining group harmony when under pressure. Thus, this finding highlight that even in emotionally intense situations, politeness serves as an important tool for maintaining interpersonal relationships and creating effective communication. This supports Leech's (1983) statement that politeness serves to minimize conflict and maximize communicative harmony, regardless of the situation.

4. Conclusion

The results of this research on *The Last of Us 2* video game indicated that the characters in the game used six maxims of politeness. The maxim of politeness is a strategy for communicating in a courteous manner that will accomplish clear communication and prevent the other person from feeling uncomfortable with our words. From these findings, the use of these maxims has an important function in shaping the narrative and showing the relationship between the characters, which in turn creates effective communication. However, this research focused on video games as the object; the writer hopes that future researchers can try a broader object, such as daily conversations, tourist attractions, workplace conversations, and others.

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