

Conversational Analysis of Politeness Strategies in Tom Lembong's Political Podcast Interview

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how politeness strategies and conversational structures shape Tom Lembong's political communication style in the *What Is Up, Indonesia?* podcast. Integrating Leech's (2014) Politeness Principle and Yule's (1996) Conversational Analysis (CA), the research aims to identify the types of politeness maxims employed and examine how conversational features contribute to constructing Tom's political persona. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the data were drawn from Tom Lembong's utterances in a 40-minute YouTube interview. The analysis identified seven politeness maxims, with the Agreement Maxim occurring most frequently (22), followed by Approbation (11), Opinion Reticence (11), Tact (10), Modesty (10), Sympathy (5), and Feeling Reticence (4). Conversational features were also found throughout the interaction, dominated by Feedback (12), Turn-Taking (8), Repair (8), Sequence (6), and Action Formation (5). The findings reveal that Tom's political persona is constructed through the synergy of politeness and conversational organization. His frequent use of agreement, praise, humility, and cautious opinion expression, combined with smooth turn-taking, responsive feedback, and effective repair, produces an image of a calm, respectful, and approachable political figure. This study contributes to digital political discourse research by demonstrating that politeness is not only reflected in lexical choices but also embedded in interactional structure. It further shows how political identities are strategically shaped in contemporary online media, suggesting opportunities for future comparative studies across different political actors and platforms.

Keywords: Conversational Analysis; Politenes; Political Communication; Digital Discourse; Tom Lembong

INTRODUCTION

In the realm of political communication, language serves not merely as a vehicle for conveying information but as a strategic tool for shaping public perception, building credibility, and negotiating power (Chilton, 2004; Fairclough, 1995). In Indonesia's political landscape, where debates are often charged with emotion and confrontation, some political figures stand out through their ability to communicate with calmness, respect, and rhetorical precision. One such figure is Tom Lembong, an economist and former minister renowned for his composed and thoughtful speaking style, as reflected in multiple public interviews and podcast appearances (Saputra & Hilyatunisa, 2025). Rather than engaging in aggressive or confrontational exchanges, Tom Lembong frequently demonstrates a balanced and diplomatic approach; he listens attentively, responds carefully, and chooses expressions that reflect both intelligence and politeness, aligning with the principles of politeness theory and face management (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 2014). His conversations often reveal a pattern of linguistic control and strategic sensitivity that maintains harmony without diminishing the persuasive force of his arguments, a communicative strategy commonly found in effective political discourse (Wodak, 2015).

Over the past decade, YouTube has transformed the landscape of political communication and public discourse. Unlike traditional broadcast media that tend to be formal and time-bound, the platform offers greater flexibility and spontaneity, allowing speakers to engage directly with interviewers or audiences in a conversational and often unscripted manner (Burgess & Green, 2018). This digital space provides a wealth of naturally occurring linguistic data that reveals how politicians construct their public personas and manage social relationships through language (Molyneux & Holton, 2015). In Indonesia, YouTube podcasts and talk shows have become influential forums where political figures, including Tom Lembong, express their views and address public concerns in ways that blend professionalism with personal authenticity, reflecting the broader rise of digital political engagement in the country. Because these online exchanges resemble everyday conversation, they serve as valuable material for examining how communication operates within contemporary political contexts (Lim, 2017; Tapsell, 2018).

Communication is the act of sharing information from one individual to another, and it can occur in several forms, one of which is verbal communication that involves the use of words. The choice of words in any interaction depends on the specific context in which the communication takes place, as meaning is not only conveyed through language but also influenced by the situation and participants involved (Pramaidana & Gunawan, 2022). In linguistic terms, communication is viewed as an oral or written exchange between a sender and a receiver that uses linguistic symbols to express meaning. The speaker conveys a message shaped by their intention, which may carry either a literal or an implied meaning. However, the listener's interpretation does not always align with the speaker's intended

message. Therefore, both participants must consider the context and situational factors to ensure mutual understanding. This interrelation between meaning, intention, and interpretation highlights the importance of pragmatics in analyzing how communication effectively takes place (Santoso et al., 2021).

Building upon the pragmatic nature of communication, Conversational Analysis (henceforth CA) offers a systematic framework to examine how meaning is constructed through interaction. Rather than focusing solely on linguistic forms or grammatical structures, CA investigates how conversation is organized and managed in real time. It looks closely at patterns such as turn-taking, sequencing, repair, action formation, preference organization, and feedback (Yule, 1996). These mechanisms reveal how participants negotiate understanding, manage alignment, and maintain social order through talk. In this way, CA provides the methodological foundation for this research, as it enables the analysis of not only what Tom Lembong says, but how he says it; how his choices of timing, response, and phrasing shape the interpersonal dynamics of political communication.

Within this conversational framework, politeness emerges as an essential pragmatic component. Pragmatics plays a vital role in language as it extends beyond simply transferring information between a speaker and a listener. As stated by Dey (2023), pragmatics concerns how meaning is interpreted within a specific context, considering elements such as the speaker's purpose, the listener's assumptions, and the social and cultural conventions of the communicative setting. Thus, pragmatics can be understood as an active and interactive process shaped by both linguistic and non-linguistic factors. Leech describes pragmatics as the study of problem-solving within communication. According to him, pragmatics deals with two primary types of problems. The first concerns the speaker, who aims to express their intention or purpose through an utterance. Often, this intention is conveyed indirectly and implicitly. From the speaker's perspective, the main challenge lies in finding an effective and appropriate way to communicate with the listener (Leech, 2014).

Furthermore, the challenges within pragmatics are closely connected to the behaviors and habits that occur during communicative interactions. In such exchanges, the speaker's goal is to achieve their intended purpose through their utterances, while the listener focuses on interpreting and responding appropriately. The purpose of communication includes the necessity for individuals to engage in polite interactions (Zhao & Lai, 2023). To accomplish this, speakers employ certain strategies that promote respectful and effective exchanges. These strategies help ensure that conversations flow smoothly and are positively received by others. Politeness principles commonly appear in both formal and informal communication settings (Mambetniyazova et al., 2024). As a subfield of pragmatics, politeness examines appropriate behavior and speech according to the social norms of a community. It serves as a crucial aspect of daily social life, reflecting and maintaining the socio-cultural values of a society. Moreover, politeness functions as a social norm established by the community. Ginting & Pasaribu (2023) emphasize that studying politeness strategies is essential, as they guide individuals

in social interactions helping them understand what to say, how to say it, when to say it, and how to appropriately engage with others.

Building upon this understanding of politeness in pragmatic interaction, Leech (2014) developed ten politeness maxims to capture the diverse ways in which politeness operates across social contexts. The Tact Maxim emphasizes minimizing cost and maximizing benefit to others, while the Generosity Maxim focuses on doing the opposite, reducing self-benefit and showing willingness to sacrifice for others. The Approbation Maxim encourages speakers to praise others and avoid dispraise, and the Modesty Maxim advises minimizing self-praise to appear humble. The Agreement Maxim promotes finding common ground and reducing disagreement, whereas the Sympathy Maxim involves expressing concern or empathy toward others. In addition, the Feeling Reticence Maxim and Opinion Reticence Maxim both highlight restraint, one in expressing strong emotions and the other in sharing controversial opinions. Finally, the Obligation of Speaker to Other Maxim and the Obligation of Other to Speaker Maxim reflect mutual responsibility in communication, reminding speakers to balance respect, gratitude, and social duty within the exchange. These maxims provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how politeness is realized in actual communication. The significance of these maxims extends to political discourse, where speakers must navigate between authority and approachability.

Several previous studies have explored politeness strategies and political discourse from various perspectives. Khasanah et al. (2024) investigated Leech's Politeness Principles in the short film *Ibu* from the Bakar Production YouTube channel. Their study, using a qualitative descriptive approach, identified six politeness maxims; tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy within scripted dialogues. The findings revealed that the film successfully models polite language for its viewers, particularly for teenagers learning appropriate communication. Similarly, Lestaria et al. (2024) analyzed the presence of politeness and impoliteness in *Mata Najwa's* YouTube interview with Prabowo Subianto. Their research examined how conversational strategies conform to or deviate from social norms of politeness, thereby illustrating the role of politeness and impoliteness in shaping public perception and power relations in political talk. Meanwhile, Prayogi & Rahma (2024) conducted a framing analysis of *Tempo's* editorial titled "*Politisasi Penahanan Tom Lembong*", focusing on how the media constructs narratives about law and politics through Entman's framing framework rather than a linguistic approach.

While these previous studies have provided valuable insights into the use of politeness strategies in various contexts, they primarily focus on either scripted or media-mediated interactions. Most previous research, such as those examining short films or television interviews, tends to analyze politeness at the level of utterance or lexical choice (Locher & Watts, 2005), without paying sufficient attention to the structural organization of conversation itself. Consequently, the dynamic and interactive nature of spoken discourse how politeness is manifested

through turn-taking, repair, and sequential organization remains underexplored. Moreover, previous analyses of political discourse often highlight the ideological or rhetorical dimensions of language (Chilton, 2004; Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2015) but rarely investigate how CA can reveal the underlying mechanics of politeness in real-time interaction.

In this regard, the present study seeks to fill this research gap by examining Tom Lembong's political conversation through the combined lens of Yule's (1996) Conversational Analysis and Leech's (2014) Politeness Principle. This present study explores the types of politeness maxims and conversational features that appear throughout the interaction and further examines how these two elements work together to construct Tom Lembong's political persona on the *What Is Up, Indonesia?* podcast. By integrating Leech's Politeness Principle with Yule's Conversational Analysis, this research seeks to reveal the ways in which linguistic politeness and conversational organization intersect to shape the image of a political figure in a digital media setting.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to bridging pragmatics and Conversation Analysis within Indonesian political discourse. While previous research often examines politeness or political rhetoric separately, this study demonstrates how politeness is performed through interactional structures in real-time communication. By revealing how politeness maxims and conversational organization jointly construct a political persona in digital media, the findings enrich scholarship in pragmatics, political communication, and digital discourse studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political Communication and Language Use

Scholars of political communication argue that language is a strategic instrument used to construct credibility, negotiate power, and influence public perception (Chilton, 2004; Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2015). Political discourse involves managing impressions, maintaining authority, and aligning with audience expectations. With the rise of digital platforms, particularly YouTube, political actors increasingly engage in conversational formats that reveal spontaneous and authentic linguistic behavior. Research indicates that such online interactions provide valuable data for studying identity construction and audience engagement in contemporary political communication (Burgess & Green, 2018; Molyneux & Holton, 2015; Lim, 2017; Tapsell, 2018).

Pragmatics and Meaning in Interaction

Pragmatics examines how meaning is shaped by context, intention, and interpretation, emphasizing that communication is not limited to literal word meanings but is negotiated between participants (Pramaidana & Gunawan, 2022;

Santoso et al., 2021). A key concern in pragmatics is how speakers convey intentions often implicitly and how listeners infer these meanings within social and cultural settings (Dey, 2023). This field underscores the importance of contextually appropriate communication, particularly in settings where politeness, social norms, and interpersonal relationships are central.

Politeness Theory and Leech's Politeness Principle

Politeness studies focus on how individuals maintain social harmony through language use. As a pragmatic phenomenon, politeness reflects norms of appropriate behavior within a community and helps speakers navigate sensitive or potentially face-threatening situations (Zhao & Lai, 2023; Mambetnyazova et al., 2024). Leech's (2014) Politeness Principle outlines ten maxims including tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, and sympathy that describe how speakers minimize conflict and enhance interpersonal rapport. These maxims function as guidelines for selecting expressions that create positive social impressions and maintain harmonious interaction. In political communication, such strategies are particularly important for balancing authority with approachability.

Conversation Analysis (CA)

Conversation Analysis provides a structural approach to understanding spoken interaction. Instead of examining grammar or vocabulary alone, CA focuses on how conversation is organized through turn-taking, sequencing, repair, adjacency pairs, and preference organization (Yule, 1996). These mechanisms show how speakers negotiate understanding, display alignment, and construct actions in real time. CA is valuable for uncovering interactional patterns that reveal subtle aspects of social behavior including politeness that may not be obvious through lexical analysis alone.

Previous Related Study

A number of previous studies have examined conversational dynamics, politeness, and pragmatic strategies in Indonesian digital media, providing important foundations for the present research. Bernando et al. (2024) conducted a conversation analysis of turn-taking in Najwa Shihab's YouTube interview with Prabowo Subianto. Using Stenstrom's framework, their study identified several turn-taking strategies such as starting up, prompting, interrupting, overlapping, silent pauses, taking over, and filled pauses, with filled pauses emerging as the most dominant. Their findings emphasize that turn-taking strategies naturally arise in authentic communication and highlight the necessity of understanding conversational structures to improve both theoretical and practical awareness of spoken interaction. While this study offers valuable insight into turn-taking behavior, it focuses solely on the mechanics of speech exchange without examining how politeness operates within these conversational patterns.

A second relevant study was conducted by Lestaria et al. (2024), who analyzed politeness and impoliteness in the *Mata Najwa* episode “Prabowo Subianto Bicara Gagasan.” Their research explored how verbal interactions in the program adhered to or deviated from social norms of politeness, revealing how face-saving and face-threatening acts shape public discourse. Their work underscores the importance of politeness theory in understanding communicative power relations within media settings. However, the study focuses primarily on the pragmatic surface of politeness and impoliteness, with little attention to how these strategies interact with the structural organization of conversation. Thus, the relationship between politeness and conversational mechanisms remains underexplored.

The study by Rahmayanti et al. (2025) also contributes significantly to the body of research by examining pragmatic strategies used by Indonesian YouTube influencers across six popular channels. Their findings show that influencers employ various speech acts, politeness strategies, and cooperative principle violations to create engaging discourse and strengthen relational ties with their audiences. Although the study utilizes a pragmatic and conversation analysis orientation, its focus is broader, emphasizing general speech strategies rather than deeper structural features such as turn-taking organization, repair, or sequencing. Moreover, the study analyzes relational communication aimed at audience engagement, which differs from the political and interview-based context examined in the present research.

METHOD

Design and Sample

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive design because it aims to describe and interpret naturally occurring language in its social context. The qualitative descriptive method enables the researcher to interpret linguistic phenomena within their social and contextual settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Flick, 2018). Through descriptive analysis, this study seeks to uncover how Tom Lembong employs politeness strategies as reflected in the structure of his spoken discourse. The analysis does not manipulate variables but instead observes and interprets conversational phenomena as they occur in authentic communication.

The data of this research consist of spoken utterances produced by Tom Lembong in a YouTube podcast titled Tom Lembong Answers Internet’s Burning Questions (Part 2) uploaded by the channel What Is Up, Indonesia? (WIUI). The video has a total duration of 40 minutes and 44 seconds and presents an interview format in which Tom Lembong discusses various political and economic issues in response to questions from the host. This source was selected because it provides spontaneous and unscripted interaction, reflecting the natural use of language in a public political context. Only Tom Lembong’s utterances were analyzed, as they offer insight into his linguistic strategies in expressing politeness and maintaining interpersonal relations during political discourse.

Instruments and Procedures

The primary instrument of this study was the researcher, who functioned as the key instrument in collecting, selecting, and interpreting the data. In addition, supporting instruments included the YouTube video as the main data source and the transcription document as the analytical basis. These instruments enabled the researcher to systematically examine the spoken discourse and identify relevant linguistic features related to politeness strategies. The data were collected through several procedures. First, the YouTube video was downloaded to ensure stable and repeated access during the analysis process. Second, the video was transcribed verbatim to capture the complete spoken interaction, including pauses, fillers, and emphasis. Third, the transcript was reviewed multiple times while replaying the video to ensure accuracy and to maintain the authenticity of the original speech. Fourth, each utterance produced by Tom Lembong was segmented into analyzable units based on conversational turns. Nonverbal elements, such as laughter, hesitation, and intonation, were also noted when they contributed to the interpretation of politeness strategies. The final verified transcript served as the primary data for further analysis.

Data Analysis

The data analysis began with identifying and interpreting politeness strategies based on Leech's (2014) Politeness Principle. The analysis focused on how Tom Lembong's utterances reflected the ten maxims of politeness, namely tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, sympathy, feeling reticence, opinion reticence, obligation of speaker to other, and obligation of other to speaker. Each utterance was carefully examined to determine which maxim was applied and how it functioned within the interaction. Following this, Yule's (1996) Conversational Analysis framework was applied to examine how these politeness strategies were realized through the structural organization of conversation. This included analyzing features such as turn-taking, sequencing, repair, action formation, preference organization, and feedback. Through this combined analytical approach, the study demonstrates that politeness is not only reflected in lexical choice and pragmatic intention but is also embedded within the dynamic structure of interaction. This reveals the close relationship between politeness strategies and conversational organization in shaping effective political communication.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results on Tom Lembong's spoken interaction in the *What Is Up, Indonesia?* podcast. The results are organized into two main parts: (A) the Identification of politeness maxims based on Leech's (2014) Politeness Principle, and (B) the Identification of conversational features based on Yule's (1996) Conversational Analysis framework. The analysis focused on Tom Lembong's utterances to examine types and how politeness and interactional organization shape his political persona during the interview.

Politeness Principles in Tom Lembong's Political Conversation

Table 1. Occurrences of Politeness in Tom Lembong's Utterances

Types of Politeness Maxim	Amount
Tact	10
Approbation	11
Modesty	10
Agreement	22
Sympathy	5
Feeling Reticence	4
Opinion Reticence	11

The table shows that the Agreement Maxim (22 occurrences) appears most frequently, showing Tom Lembong's strong tendency to maintain conversational harmony and align with the interviewer whenever possible. This is followed by the Approbation Maxim (11 occurrences) and Opinion Reticence (11 occurrences), indicating his preference for validating the interviewer's stance while expressing his own views with caution. The Tact and Modesty Maxims (10 occurrences each) also appear prominently, reflecting his consistent effort to minimize imposition and avoid self-praise. Meanwhile, less frequent maxims such as Sympathy (5 occurrences) and Feeling Reticence (4 occurrences) still play a role in shaping the interaction by contributing to an overall tone of sensitivity, respect, and emotional awareness. Collectively, these frequencies illustrate a communication style that values interpersonal balance, cooperation, and strategic politeness in political conversation. Below is the sample data illustrating how the politeness maxims appear in the interaction:

1. Tact Maxim

Leech (2014) defines the Tact Maxim as the principle that directs speakers to minimize cost to others and maximize benefit to others in conversation. This maxim is central to maintaining harmonious interaction because it reflects the speaker's sensitivity to the interlocutor's comfort and autonomy. In this study, the Tact Maxim appeared ten times, showing that Tom Lembong frequently employs subtle strategies to express politeness by avoiding imposition and maintaining cooperation with his interlocutors. An example can be seen in (16:37–16:42):

Abigail: "Any other book that finish you?"

Tom: "Aaa how many? Uh"

Abigail: "Maybe one more"

In this excerpt, Tom's utterance "Aaa how many? Uh" represents a polite hesitation before providing his answer. His response shows awareness of the interviewer's question but avoids answering immediately or asserting himself. The hesitation marker "Aaa" and filler "uh" serve as softeners, expressing attentiveness and

respect toward the interviewer's communicative intention. By responding in this manner, Tom minimizes potential imposition and gives the interviewer the opportunity to specify her request. This subtle act reflects Leech's (2014) notion that tact involves protecting the interlocutor's "face" by allowing space for their preferences and comfort. Instead of treating the question as a demand, Tom frames his response as an invitation for clarification, which maintains politeness and cooperation in the exchange. This finding illustrates how tactful language functions not merely as linguistic politeness, but as a social strategy that upholds mutual respect and harmony between speakers.

2. Approbation Maxim

Leech (2014) defines the Approbation Maxim as the principle that directs speakers to minimize dispraise of others and maximize praise of others. In relation to Tom Lembong, this maxim is reflected in his tendency to highlight positive aspects of his interlocutors' ideas or contributions rather than criticizing them directly. In this study, the Approbation Maxim appeared eleven times, showing that he maintains a respectful and collaborative tone, which aligns with the principle of expressing approval and appreciation to sustain politeness and harmony in conversation. An example can be seen in (1:43-2:21):

Tom: "So contrary to some AI generated images that are floating around out there of me. Uh I was actually exactly what AI images you're talking about. I was actually a super nerdy young person. Like I had like Coca-Cola bottle glasses"

Abigail: "Noo..."

Andovi: "If you have pictures, please send us so we can put it online. We can put this online."

Tom: "Yeah. I think that's the uh ultimate deterrent like that my wife has in her back pocket. She can always threaten to leak uh old photos of me when I was a kid. Oh my god. Uh I was I was a a nerd. Um you know, very awkward. Uh very I was terrible with the girls frankly."

In this excerpt, Tom's utterance "*So we met up for our first date technically, right.*" initiates a personal narrative in a friendly and open tone. However, when he admits, "*Uh and I was like two hours late,*" the interlocutors' responses Andovi's "*That's a red flag*" and Abigail's "*That's actually terrible,*" illustrate a clear violation of Leech's (2014) Approbation Maxim, which encourages speakers to *minimize dispraise of others and maximize praise of others*. Instead of softening their reactions or offering understanding, both Andovi and Abigail employ evaluative language that emphasizes Tom's fault. Their use of direct criticism increases *dispraise* rather than mitigating it, which contrasts with the principle of maintaining harmony and respect in conversation. However, this breach does not necessarily indicate impoliteness in a social sense. Given the lighthearted and humorous tone of the interaction, the apparent violation functions as playful teasing, a form of mock impoliteness used to strengthen rapport among close interlocutors.

This finding illustrates that the Approbation Maxim can be contextually flexible. While Tom becomes the target of humorous criticism, the shared laughter and casual tone signal mutual understanding and social closeness. In this way, even though the maxim is violated linguistically, it still contributes to maintaining solidarity and friendly interaction, showing how politeness can operate through both adherence to and playful subversion of conversational norms.

3. Modesty Maxim

According to Leech (2014), the Modesty Maxim refers to the principle of minimizing praise of self and maximizing dispraise of self. It reflects humility and self-awareness in communication, helping the speaker to avoid self-glorification and maintain social harmony. In this study, the Modesty Maxim appeared ten times, indicating that Tom Lembong consistently used humility as a politeness strategy when discussing his personal experiences, opinions, or achievements. An example can be seen in (12:18–12:31):

Andovi: "That's a very philosophical question, I have to be honest. What's a book that finished you, sir, with the emoji? There's a hormat emoji".

Tom: "That's a That's a really tough question for book for book lover, because, you know, I have so many favorite books."

In this excerpt, Tom demonstrates modesty by avoiding any self-praise when responding to a question that could have allowed him to display intellectual authority or taste. Instead of immediately mentioning a title or claiming expertise, he begins by admitting that it is a *"really tough question."* This expression serves as a politeness marker, minimizing self-importance and emphasizing the difficulty of choosing among his many favorite books. The utterance *"because, you know, I have so many favorite books"* further reinforces modesty. Although it acknowledges his interest in reading, Tom frames it as a challenge rather than a point of pride. By doing so, he mitigates the potential impression of arrogance and presents himself as approachable and thoughtful. This use of the Modesty Maxim reflects Leech's (2014) view that humility helps maintain social equilibrium by softening self-reference and promoting equality between interlocutors. In this case, Tom's linguistic restraint establishes a respectful and balanced interaction, aligning with the norms of polite discourse expected in public communication.

4. Agreement Maxim

According to Leech (2014), the Agreement Maxim directs speakers to minimize disagreement and maximize agreement with others in conversation. This maxim encourages participants to find common ground, express concurrence, or at least soften disagreement to maintain harmony and cooperation. By emphasizing agreement and downplaying conflict, speakers show respect for their interlocutor's opinions and contribute to a more positive and polite interaction. In this study, the Agreement Maxim appeared twenty-two times, indicating that Tom Lembong

frequently sought to maintain harmony and positive rapport with his interlocutors by emphasizing agreement or minimizing disagreement. His use of this maxim reflects his cooperative communication style and his effort to show respect and alignment with others' viewpoints during the conversation. An example can be seen in (7:25-9:53):

Abigail: "This is a serious question, but it's actually really funny. Right. Do you maybe I'll read it. I'll read it. So, this is from Energy Potential. Was implementing your "saya tidak punya waktu untuk mendendam" for two weeks and end up crashing out real bad. How do you manage to have such a pure heart and not mendendam? Please turning 25 next month and I want to be wiser like you."

Tom: "We're we're Catholic, right? And uh what's tough about our religion is uh not only are you not supposed to hate your enemy, you're supposed to love your enemy, right? To to not hate my enemies and that we're supposed to love our enemies and even pray for them, right? But look, I think when that sinks in, it's probably a matter of God's will and God's plan for you and your destiny, right? I mean, it finally sunk in probably when I was in jail, right?"

Andovi: "Wow!"

Tom: "Uhm... it took that much."

Andovi: "It took that long."

Abigail: "And what extreme circumstances for that too."

Tom: "But you know something, I believe everybody will have their moment, and that's when the character that you built over years and decades will decide."

Abigail: "Right."

Tom: "Whether you let go of your hate or you go deeper into it."

In this excerpt, the Agreement Maxim proposed by Leech (2014), which emphasizes *minimizing disagreement and maximizing agreement* to maintain harmony in interaction, is clearly observed. Throughout the exchange, Tom shares a reflective and faith-based explanation about forgiveness and personal growth, while both Andovi and Abigail respond in ways that reinforce his statements rather than challenge them. For instance, Andovi's interjections such as "Wow!" and "It took that long," along with Abigail's "And what extreme circumstances for that too" and later "Right," function as supportive acknowledgments that align with Tom's perspective. Their responses signal active listening and emotional validation, demonstrating agreement and appreciation toward Tom's experience. By echoing his sentiments and avoiding contradiction, the interlocutors uphold conversational harmony and show respect for Tom's moral insight. This exchange illustrates how the Agreement Maxim operates as a politeness strategy, fostering empathy, understanding, and solidarity within the conversation.

5. Sympathy Maxim

Leech (2014) defines the Sympathy Maxim as the principle that encourages speakers to minimize antipathy and maximize sympathy toward others. This maxim is realized through expressions of concern, empathy, compassion, or emotional

solidarity that promote a sense of shared humanity between interlocutors. In this study, the Sympathy Maxim appeared five times, showing that Tom Lembong occasionally used empathy as a form of linguistic politeness to maintain warmth and positivity during the conversation. An example can be seen in (16:28–16:35):

Tom: "Uh because it will really make you realize wow uh humanity is not so bad you know we actually do help each other. We do uh uh spread uh innovation for the common good and so on yeah."
Abigail: "Right"

In this excerpt, Tom expresses a sympathetic and optimistic view of humanity. His statement *"humanity is not so bad"* and *"we actually do help each other"* emphasizes shared human goodness and collective cooperation. By highlighting positive aspects of people's behavior, Tom minimizes negativity and reinforces empathy toward others. The use of inclusive pronouns such as *"we"* further strengthens this effect by positioning both speaker and listeners as part of the same moral community. This expression of empathy aligns with Leech's (2014) notion of the Sympathy Maxim, where politeness involves emotional sensitivity and the promotion of goodwill. Rather than focusing on flaws or conflicts, Tom uses affirming language that uplifts and connects. His words convey optimism and compassion, two essential qualities of sympathy that maintain interpersonal harmony and social respect. Through this maxim, Tom not only demonstrates linguistic politeness but also moral politeness, reinforcing positive social values through his empathetic and inclusive way of speaking.

6. Feeling Reticence Maxim

According to Leech (2014), the Feeling Reticence Maxim concerns the speaker's effort to avoid expressing strong emotions that might make others uncomfortable. This maxim encourages emotional control, restraint, and sensitivity toward the listener's feelings, allowing interaction to remain comfortable and respectful. In this study, the Feeling Reticence Maxim was identified four times, reflecting Tom Lembong's ability to maintain composure and politeness even when faced with personal or unexpected topics. An example can be seen in (24:00–24:16):

Abigail: "Oh my god. Yeah, she knows. She knows. She knows exactly. Pak Tom, I'm sorry to tell you your daughter knows something she's not supposed to know."
Andovi: "Yeah, she knows something. Yeah. Yeah."
Tom: "Yeah. My real daughter. Um, yeah. That's a tough question. That's a tough question. Like, what would be the message from Indonesia to the world?"
Andovi: "Right"

In this excerpt, Tom responds to a teasing comment about his daughter with calmness and self-control. Instead of showing discomfort, embarrassment, or irritation, he gives a brief acknowledgment (*"Yeah. My real daughter."*) and quickly redirects the topic back to the main question. The repetition of *"That's a*

tough question” serves as a soft transitional phrase, allowing him to shift the conversation naturally without appearing defensive. This restrained reaction exemplifies Leech’s Feeling Reticence Maxim, as Tom avoids emotional overreaction and maintains the interaction’s positive atmosphere. His choice to downplay the personal remark preserves mutual comfort and prevents potential awkwardness. By showing emotional moderation, he protects both his own face and that of the interviewers. Tom’s behavior here illustrates how emotional restraint can serve as a subtle yet powerful form of politeness. Through calm acknowledgment and smooth redirection, he upholds respect, composure, and conversational harmony hallmarks of Leech’s (2014) concept of feeling reticence in polite discourse.

7. Opinion Reticence Maxim

Leech (2014) defines the Opinion Reticence Maxim as the principle that encourages speakers to avoid asserting strong personal opinions or controversial views. This maxim promotes politeness through caution, humility, and openness, allowing the listener to interpret or respond without feeling pressured by the speaker’s beliefs. In this study, the Opinion Reticence Maxim appeared eleven times, making it the most frequently employed strategy in Tom Lembong’s speech. It reflects his careful, reflective approach to expressing personal or ideological views. An example can be seen in (18:06–18:44):

Tom: “Uh a little bit on that, right? Uh from what I understand, uh J.R. Tolkien, the author uh was essentially painting an analogy of uh the rise of Hitler and the rise of fascism. And uh and you know how ironically like Frodo, right, the weakest of all the you know, he's not a knight in training armor. He's not, you know, an elf with magical powers. He's actually little guy, right? But he's the one who's most trusted to to be the ring bearer, to hold the ring that rules them all, right?”

Abigail: “Yak yak”

In this excerpt, Tom presents an interpretation of *The Lord of the Rings* with notable caution and intellectual humility. His frequent use of hedging phrases such as “*from what I understand*”, “*essentially*”, and “*you know*” mitigates the strength of his assertion, framing his statement as a personal observation rather than an authoritative claim. This linguistic restraint aligns with Leech’s description of the Opinion Reticence Maxim, which values the avoidance of imposing one’s viewpoint on others. By using hedges and softeners, Tom maintains respect for differing interpretations while still contributing meaningfully to the discussion. His tone is exploratory rather than declarative, signaling openness to alternative perspectives. This strategy minimizes potential disagreement and maintains harmony between participants. Tom’s delivery demonstrates that politeness in intellectual discourse can be achieved not through avoidance of opinion, but through its careful presentation. His restrained manner of expression exemplifies how speakers can remain persuasive while still upholding the principles of modesty,

consideration, and respect, the essence of Leech's (2014) Opinion Reticence Maxim.

Conversational Features in Tom Lembong's Political Conversation

Table 2. Occurrences of Conversational Features in Tom Lembong's Utterances

Types of Conversational Features	Amount
Turn-Taking	8
Sequence	6
Repair	8
Action Formation	5
Feedback	12

The table shows that Feedback (12 occurrences) appears most frequently, indicating Tom Lembong's consistent use of acknowledgment tokens, confirmations, and listener-oriented responses to maintain conversational flow and signal active engagement. Turn-taking (8 occurrences) and Repair (8 occurrences) also occur prominently, reflecting his ability to manage speech exchange smoothly while correcting or clarifying information when necessary to avoid misunderstanding. Meanwhile, Sequence organization (6 occurrences) demonstrates how he structures responses in a logically connected and contextually relevant manner, ensuring coherence throughout the interaction. The least frequent feature, Action Formation (5 occurrences), nonetheless plays an important role in shaping how he performs communicative actions such as explaining, justifying, or responding to prompts. Overall, these frequencies illustrate a conversational style characterized by attentiveness, clarity, and interactional control, contributing to the construction of a thoughtful and cooperative political persona. Below is the sample data illustrating how the conversation features appear in the interaction:

1. Turn-Taking

Yule (1996) defines Turn-Taking as a fundamental conversational mechanism that regulates how speakers and listeners manage the exchange of speaking turns in interaction. It plays a vital role in maintaining the natural flow and coherence of conversation by ensuring that participants speak one at a time in an organized and cooperative manner. Through turn-taking, speakers signal when their turn is coming to an end and listeners indicate their readiness to take the next turn, allowing smooth transitions and minimizing overlap. In this study, the Turn-Taking feature appeared eight times in Tom Lembong's speech, reflecting his ability to manage conversational order effectively and his attentiveness to the dynamics of speaker-listener interaction. An example can be seen in (7:25-9:53):

Abigail: "This is a serious question, but it's actually really funny. Right. Do you maybe I'll read it. I'll read it. So, this is from Energy Potential. Was implementing your "saya tidak punya waktu untuk mendendam" for two weeks and end up

crashing out real bad. How do you manage to have such a pure heart and not mendendam? Please turning 25 next month and I want to be wiser like you.”

Tom: “We’re we’re Catholic, right? And uh what’s tough about our religion is uh not only are you not supposed to hate your enemy, you’re supposed to love your enemy, right? To to not hate my enemies and that we’re supposed to love our enemies and even pray for them, right? But look, I think when that sinks in, it’s probably a matter of God’s will and God’s plan for you and your destiny, right? I mean, it finally sunk in probably when I was in jail, right?”

Andovi: “Wow!”

Tom: “Uhm... it took that much.”

Andovi: “It took that long.”

Abigail: “And what extreme circumstances for that too.”

Tom: “But you know something, I believe everybody will have their moment, and that’s when the character that you built over years and decades will decide.”

Abigail: “Right.”

In this excerpt, the interaction unfolds as a storytelling sequence, with Tom as the primary narrator and the hosts as active listeners providing continuers and backchannels (“Wow!”, “Right.”). The turn-taking is highly cooperative, as each listener waits for the appropriate transition-relevance place before responding, ensuring that Tom’s reflective story remains uninterrupted. The hosts’ minimal responses function as affiliative signals that encourage Tom to elaborate, while their evaluative turns (“It took that long.” “What extreme circumstances...”) act as second pair parts (SPPs) that display understanding and empathy.

2. Sequence

Sequence concerns how conversational actions follow one another in coherent patterns, such as question–answer, assessment–agreement, or proposal–acceptance (Yule, 1996). In Tom’s conversation, many sequences follow predictable formats, especially when the hosts introduce media (videos or photos) for Tom to react to. Sequence appeared six times, forming structured exchanges such as question–answer and introduction–reaction patterns. An example can be seen in (38:30–39:00):

Abigail: “So, the first one I’m gonna show you is actually made by an account called tomlembong’sfanpage.”

Andovi: “Yes. Tom Lembong’s fan page.”

Andovi: “Amazing account.”

Tom: “Okay.”

Andovi: “Amazing account.”

Abigail: “Okay, wait. Hold up. Hold up.”

Andovi: “Okay.”

Abigail: “All right.”

Abigail: “Okay, I need to ask. Is this real or is this AI?”

Andovi: “AI.”

Abigail: "Am I seeing an illusion or is this Tom Lembong?(laughs)"

Andovi: "It's AI. Ah!"

Abigail: "Okay. Okay."

Tom: "Yeah. I'm sorry to disappoint you, whoever you are. Like, if you're

Abigail: "Oh, sorry. It's tomlembong92."

Andovi: "Yes."

This sequence follows a clear structure: introduction of content, evaluation, question, and answer + explanation. Yule (1996) notes that organized sequences guide participants through coherent conversational stages. In this interaction, the hosts create a structured sequence that leads naturally into Tom's reflective explanation. The smooth transitions indicate a shared understanding of conversational roles, reinforcing cohesion and maintaining an orderly discussion flow.

3. Repair

Yule (1996) defines Repair as a fundamental conversational mechanism that allows speakers to identify and resolve problems in speaking, hearing, or understanding during interaction. It plays a crucial role in sustaining the coherence and flow of conversation by enabling participants to correct themselves or clarify meaning in response to possible misunderstandings. Repairs can be *self-initiated* when the speaker recognizes and fixes their own utterance or *other-initiated*, prompted by the listener's reaction. In this study, the Repair feature appeared eight times in Tom Lembong's speech, indicating his consistent awareness of conversational clarity and his sensitivity to the listener's comprehension. An example can be seen in (12:49–12:55):

Tom: "Um, I got to say, uh, my wife and I are both huge fans of, uh, Pope Francis. Yeah."

Andovi: "The Pope?"

Tom: "The late Pope passed away."

In this excerpt, Tom's utterance demonstrates a self-initiated self-repair triggered by the listener's signal of uncertainty. His initial reference to "Pope Francis" produces a moment of ambiguity, prompting him to immediately revise the statement to "*The late Pope passed away.*" This correction reflects the speaker's monitoring of the conversational flow and his quick adaptation to restore understanding. The repair sequence occurs smoothly without interrupting the rhythm of the dialogue, aligning with Yule's (1996) observation that repair is an inherent, self-organizing aspect of conversation. Through this process, Tom maintains the coherence of the exchange, resolves the temporary misunderstanding, and preserves the natural progression of turns within the interaction.

4. Action Formation

Action formation refers to how speakers design their turns to perform specific social actions such as explaining, praising, joking, or storytelling (Yule, 1996). In Tom's conversation, action formation is particularly visible in Tom's long reflective narratives and the hosts' humorous framing. Action formation appeared five times, reflecting the varied social actions performed through humor, reflection, and reassurance. An example can be seen in (27:20–27:40):

Andovi: "While he's thinking, I'm going to think of jokes."

Abigail: "I, I, I know you're distracting him. He can't think because you kept on, like-(laughs)"

Tom: "That's all right."

Here, the hosts engage in humor to create a light-hearted atmosphere. Their turns are designed as playful actions, which help soften the transition into Tom's upcoming deep explanation about the heart and soul. Tom's response "That's all right" performs the action of reassurance, affirming that he is comfortable and not distracted.

5. Feedback

Yule (1996) describes Feedback as a key feature of conversational organization that allows participants to display understanding, agreement, or engagement during interaction. Feedback can be produced by either the listener or the speaker. While *listener feedback* (such as "yeah," "right," "uh-huh") signals attention and comprehension, *speaker-initiated feedback* (such as "right?" or "you know") invites the listener's response and helps maintain conversational alignment. In this study, the Feedback feature appeared twelve times in Tom Lembong's speech, indicating his frequent use of subtle interactional cues to sustain the rhythm and mutual involvement in conversation. An example can be seen in (15:28–15:47):

Tom: "Majority of people would be surprised, right?"

Abigail: "Ya ya ya"

Andovi: "Aaa ya ya"

Tom: "Guess maybe 50% because there's so many poor countries, right? Like how could it be that things are so good, right? At best they would guess 70%. But very few people would guess uh 90% plus. Yeah. Uh and it's interesting. Uh he's got this sort of 20 question quiz, right?"

In this excerpt, Tom's repeated use of "right?" and "yeah" exemplifies speaker-initiated feedback, a strategy used to monitor the listener's engagement and comprehension. Each "right?" functions as a checking device that invites minimal responses and encourages the interlocutors to remain involved. The immediate replies from Abigail and Andovi ("ya ya ya") act as listener feedback, confirming their understanding and maintaining conversational flow. This back-and-forth

exchange reflects Yule's (1996) view of feedback as a cooperative mechanism that sustains interactional balance. Rather than signaling a pause or closure, feedback in this sequence reinforces the speaker's continuity and strengthens the cohesion of the dialogue, ensuring that the conversational rhythm remains natural and dynamic.

The findings of this study reveal that Tom Lembong's political communication style is strongly shaped by his strategic use of politeness maxims, which work collectively to construct an image of composure, respectfulness, and relational awareness. The predominance of the Agreement Maxim demonstrates his inclination to validate the interviewer's viewpoints, fostering a collaborative conversational environment. Approbation and Opinion Reticence further reinforce this dynamic, suggesting that Tom supports positive alignment while maintaining cautious self-expression. Meanwhile, the frequent presence of Tact and Modesty Maxims reflects his tendency to minimize imposition and avoid self-praise, traits that contribute to a political persona grounded in humility, balance, and interpersonal sensitivity. Even the less frequent Sympathy and Feeling Reticence Maxims add nuance to his interaction by signaling emotional awareness and empathy.

The analysis of conversational features strengthens this interpretation by showing how Tom Lembong structures and manages the flow of interaction. Feedback emerges as the most prominent feature, indicating his consistent use of acknowledgment tokens, confirmations, and supportive responses to maintain alignment with the interviewer. Turn-taking and repair also occur frequently, demonstrating his attentiveness to conversational timing and his commitment to preventing or resolving misunderstandings. Sequence organization, although less dominant, illustrates how he logically constructs his responses to ensure coherence, while action formation reveals how he performs communicative acts such as explaining, evaluating, or clarifying key points. Collectively, these features highlight a communication style marked by clarity, responsiveness, and interactional control.

When examined together, politeness maxims and conversational features operate synergistically to construct Tom Lembong's political persona. Politeness regulates the interpersonal tone of the exchange, while conversational structures manage its organization and clarity. This combination results in a communicative identity that is persuasive yet nonconfrontational, authoritative yet approachable, and strategic yet sincere. Through his consistent adherence to cooperative politeness principles and his careful orchestration of interactional mechanics, Tom projects an image of a political figure who balances expertise with relational sensitivity, aligning with contemporary expectations of political discourse in digital media environments. These findings directly address the second research question by demonstrating how politeness and conversational organization jointly contribute to persona construction.

The results of this study align with and extend previous research on politeness and conversational dynamics in Indonesian media contexts. Rahmayanti et al. (2025) found that Indonesian YouTube influencers employ similar politeness maxims such as Tact, Approbation, Agreement, Sympathy, Feeling Reticence, and Opinion Reticence to foster supportive and empathetic interactions. This parallels the present findings, indicating that public figures across different genres strategically use politeness to establish harmonious, audience-oriented discourse. Likewise, Candra & Maharani (2024) reported that the Agreement Maxim was the most dominant strategy in the *Close the Door* podcast, reflecting communicative efforts to maintain concord and reduce conflict. This mirrors the current study's observation that agreement is central to Tom's politeness style.

However, the present study also diverges from previous political discourse analyses. Bernardo et al. (2024) focused solely on turn-taking behaviors such as filled pauses, verbal fillers, and silent pauses without integrating broader conversational features or politeness principles. By contrast, this research incorporates multiple conversational mechanisms and links them with politeness strategies to present a more holistic understanding of interaction. Similarly, Lestaria et al. (2024) documented both politeness and impoliteness strategies in interviews with Prabowo Subianto, revealing a more confrontational dynamic. In contrast, Tom Lembong's interaction is characterized by a complete absence of impoliteness, highlighting a distinctly diplomatic style. Overall, this study contributes to the literature by showing how politeness maxims and conversational organization interact to shape a consistently respectful and collaborative political persona in digital interview settings.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how Tom Lembong constructs his political communication style through the integration of Leech's (2014) Politeness Principle and Yule's (1996) Conversational Analysis in the *What Is Up, Indonesia?* podcast. The findings show that the Agreement Maxim appears most frequently (22 occurrences), reflecting Tom's strong tendency to maintain harmony and align with the interviewer. This is followed by the Approbation Maxim (11), Opinion Reticence (11), Tact (10), and Modesty (10), which together portray him as respectful, humble, and careful in expressing opinions. Less frequent strategies such as Sympathy (5) and Feeling Reticence (4) also contribute to an empathetic and emotionally aware tone. Meanwhile, the analysis of conversational features shows that Feedback is the most dominant (12 occurrences), followed by Turn-Taking (8), Repair (8), Sequence (6), and Action Formation (5), indicating Tom's ability to maintain engagement, ensure clarity, and organize the flow of interaction effectively.

Taken together, these politeness maxims and conversational features work synergistically to construct a political persona that is approachable yet

knowledgeable, persuasive yet nonconfrontational, and strategic yet sincere. The high frequency of agreement, positive alignment, and cautious expression, combined with smooth turn management and continuous listener engagement, demonstrates how politeness operates not only through linguistic choices but also through interactional structure. This study contributes to digital political discourse research by showing that political personas in online media are shaped through both pragmatic strategies and conversational organization. Future research may expand this approach by comparing different political figures or exploring how audiences interpret these politeness-driven interactional patterns across various digital platforms.

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