

Language in Cinema: A Pragmatic Study of Violation Contexts in Disney's Animated Film Zootopia

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 2025-03-11

Revised : 2025-08-28

Accepted : 2025-08-30

KEYWORDS

Language in film

Cinematic discourse

Multimodal pragmatics

Emotional responses

Pragmatic awareness



ABSTRACT

Language in animated films serves not only as a medium for storytelling but also as a reflection of pragmatic norms that govern social interaction. Although politeness strategies have been widely studied in natural discourse, there remains a notable gap in understanding how violations of these norms are embedded within cinematic dialogues, especially in films intended for all age groups. This study investigates the violation of politeness maxims proposed by Geoffrey Leech, including the Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, and Sympathy maxims, as portrayed in the interactions involving Judy Hopps, the main character in Disney's Zootopia. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive method, the research analyzes selected utterances from the movie transcript and audiovisual scenes, focusing on the types of maxims violated and the emotional responses elicited. The results indicate that all six maxims are violated by supporting characters, with the Approbation Maxim emerging as the most frequently violated, comprising 44.4 percent of cases. These violations often lead to emotional consequences for the main character such as frustration, disappointment, and a sense of exclusion. This study contributes to the field of pragmatics by highlighting how impoliteness is constructed and perceived in fictional dialogues, providing new insights into language use in media contexts. Furthermore, it emphasizes the potential of animated films as valuable resources for teaching pragmatic awareness and promoting respectful communication. By critically examining how politeness is portrayed and breached, the study calls attention to the broader implications of media discourse in shaping audience perceptions of social interaction and linguistic behavior.

1. Introduction

Language serves not only as a medium of communication but also as a means of expressing identity, performing social roles, and sustaining relationships. Politeness plays a central role in maintaining harmony, mitigating conflict, and negotiating respect, power, and solidarity (Leech, 1983; Dessari et al., 2021). Leech's framework of six maxims provides a foundation for understanding how speakers balance face needs and relational goals, highlighting politeness as a context-sensitive resource rather than a fixed set of rules (Dessari et al., 2021). Political discourse research shows how politeness strategies frame policy, assert legitimacy, and build solidarity, particularly in electoral campaigns and public speeches where positive politeness often dominates (Patteti & Rajani, 2024; Hussain, 2021). Sociolinguistic studies further demonstrate how politeness intersects with identity and prestige, as in

Arabic-speaking communities in Australia where diglossia and code-switching signal social status and linguistic capital (AlAfnan, 2021). Together, these perspectives confirm politeness as a strategic and culturally embedded resource that structures speech practices and reinforces social hierarchies across contexts (Dessari et al., 2021; Patteti & Rajani, 2024; Hussain, 2021; AlAfnan, 2021).

With the rise of multimedia and digital storytelling, fictional narratives such as animated films have become significant for examining how language reflects and constructs social realities. These films are more than entertainment since they transmit values and pragmatic norms to wide audiences. Disney's Zootopia offers an ideal case for analyzing how characters manage or fail to manage politeness through verbal interaction. As argued by Andries, Meissl, and de Vries (2023), language and human development are interdependent and co-evolving.

Fictional representations, especially those targeting children and young adults, often encode ideologies about communication, hierarchy, and emotional response, making them essential objects of study in pragmatics.

The foundation of politeness research lies in [Leech's \(1983\)](#) Politeness Principle and six maxims: Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, and Sympathy. These maxims serve as benchmarks for identifying courteous behavior in interaction. [Yule \(2006\)](#) expanded the pedagogical aspect of pragmatics by emphasizing speaker intention, implicature, and inferencing in interpreting politeness. Later studies developed these ideas in applied contexts. For instance, [Dewi, Amin, and Qalbi \(2023\)](#) examined EFL classroom interaction and found that teachers' strategic use of politeness enhanced learner engagement and participation. Their findings highlight the importance of pragmatic awareness in education but remain focused on real-world instructional contexts.

Although politeness has been widely examined in classrooms, workplaces, and digital environments, its systematic construction and violation in fictional media, particularly animation, remains underexplored ([Musdalifah & Satriani, 2021](#); [Pratiwi et al., 2023](#)). This gap matters because children's films influence respect, empathy, and emotional regulation, functioning as implicit socializers of politeness norms ([Mustadi & Amelia, 2023](#); [Sommerfeld, 2022](#)). Media and learning studies confirm that repeated exposure to mediated discourse shapes social expectations, yet few studies have investigated how politeness maxims are enacted or breached within a protagonist's narrative arc ([Intyaswati et al., 2021](#); [Intyaswati et al., 2023](#); [Kim et al., 2021](#)). Pragmatic theory, which emphasizes context, relationships, and discourse structure, offers a lens for analyzing cinematic dialogue where character relations are central ([Ghasani, 2021](#)). Research on film-based learning also demonstrates that cinema fosters motivation for language practice and pragmatic awareness, strengthening its relevance for the study of politeness ([Musdalifah & Satriani, 2021](#); [Pratiwi et al., 2023](#)). Based on these insights, the present study investigates how a central animated character enacts politeness and impoliteness, identifies strategies emphasized or violated, and connects these patterns to potential social learning outcomes. By filling this gap, the study contributes to pragmatics and media scholarship by showing how animated cinema encodes politeness norms and how such representations may influence empathy, emotional regulation, and social cognition in young audiences ([Mustadi & Amelia, 2023](#); [Intyaswati et al., 2023](#); [Kim et al., 2021](#)).

This study offers a micro-level analysis of politeness maxim violations directed at Judy Hopps, the main character in *Zootopia* (2016). Unlike earlier research that focused primarily on the enactment of

politeness, this study explores how impoliteness is deliberately scripted, how it shapes character development, and how it structures the narrative. Using Leech's six maxims as an analytical framework, the study identifies which maxims are violated, how frequently they occur, and what emotional or dialogic responses they generate. The novelty lies in focusing on a single recurring character within a multimodal, scripted medium that mirrors real-world social dynamics while providing controlled linguistic data.

The significance of this research lies in its effort to connect theoretical pragmatics with media discourse analysis. It seeks to uncover patterns of impoliteness and their rhetorical consequences in a film consumed across cultures and age groups. The study addresses two key questions: Which politeness maxims are most frequently violated in *Zootopia*, and how does the protagonist respond to these violations? These questions extend beyond linguistic inquiry toward socio-emotional understanding, examining how repeated violations influence perceptions of legitimacy, agency, and resilience in fictional characters.

This article is organized into five sections. Following this introduction, the second section explains the methodological approach, including the qualitative descriptive design and strategies for analyzing the film's transcript and visual scenes. The third section presents the findings, including the frequency of maxim violations and the emotional responses they triggered. The fourth section provides a critical discussion that situates the findings within existing theories and scholarship. The final section concludes the study, summarizing contributions, limitations, and recommendations for further research in media pragmatics and language pedagogy.

In the broader context of English Language Teaching (ELT), the study emphasizes the role of pragmatic competence as a central component of language learning. Teachers can use its findings to design materials that move beyond grammar and vocabulary, encouraging students to analyze intention, meaning, and interpersonal effect. Animated films like *Zootopia* provide authentic and relatable resources for exploring how characters use or violate politeness norms, enabling learners to build communicative sensitivity and critical awareness. By linking fictional dialogues to real-world interactions, educators can foster reflection, empathy, and culturally responsive pedagogy in their classrooms.

2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design, which is particularly appropriate for exploring how meaning is constructed in naturalistic and contextualized settings. As noted by [Nassaji \(2020\)](#), qualitative research enables scholars to

analyze non-numerical data in order to uncover patterns, interpretations, and underlying meanings embedded in discourse. This approach aligns with the perspective of Denzin and Lincoln, as cited in [Aspers and Corte \(2019\)](#), who emphasize that qualitative researchers aim to interpret phenomena based on the meanings that individuals or communities assign to them. In the context of this study, language used in fictional dialogue is treated as meaningful social behavior that reflects implicit values and pragmatic strategies. The descriptive nature of the research facilitates a close examination of how politeness maxims are violated and how those violations are constructed within the cinematic script of *Zootopia*.

2.1 Data Collection

The data for this study were derived from both visual and textual sources associated with the animated film *Zootopia* (2016). The researchers employed multiple steps to ensure systematic and reliable data collection. First, the entire film was re-watched through the official streaming platform Disney+ in order to gain familiarity with the narrative flow and character dynamics. Second, the film script was accessed online to enable detailed textual analysis of character utterances. Third, a comprehensive timeline was constructed by noting the exact time stamps when violations of politeness maxims occurred. This step was essential to ensure the traceability and contextual understanding of each identified utterance. The collected data were then classified according to Leech's six maxims of politeness, which include the Tact, Generosity, Approbation, Modesty, Agreement, and Sympathy maxims ([Leech, 1883](#)). Particular attention was given to violations directed at the main character, Judy Hopps, since the study focuses on her role as a recipient of impolite speech. After preliminary classification, the data were reviewed and revalidated to confirm consistency and alignment with contextual interpretations.

2.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study followed a structured and rigorous qualitative process that transforms raw textual and audiovisual data into interpretable insights. According to [Moleong \(2016\)](#), the core of qualitative analysis lies in transforming unstructured material into well-grounded interpretations that can be situated within broader theoretical frameworks. To ensure analytical rigor, the researchers applied the three-step model developed by [Miles and Huberman \(1994\)](#), which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction phase, only utterances containing identifiable violations of politeness maxims were retained. During the data display stage, these utterances were categorized by maxim type, character, and context, allowing for the emergence of patterns in how and when violations occurred. Finally, in the conclusion drawing phase,

the researchers interpreted the functions and implications of each violation in light of pragmatic theory, particularly Leech's Politeness Principle. Emotional responses of the main character were also analyzed to explore how impoliteness impacts character development and narrative structure. This triangulated approach not only enhances credibility but also allows for nuanced interpretations rooted in both linguistic theory and cinematic storytelling.

3. Result

The findings of this study demonstrate that violations of politeness maxims in *Zootopia* are not randomly distributed but function systematically to construct the identity of Judy Hopps as a marginalized yet resilient character. A total of 36 violations were identified, distributed across all six maxims of politeness. However, the degree of frequency varied significantly, indicating that some maxims are more central to the narrative design than others.

The quantitative distribution of violations is presented in **Table 1**. The Approbation Maxim was the most frequently violated, accounting for 44.4 percent of the total. This was followed by violations of the Sympathy Maxim at 30.56 percent and the Tact Maxim at 16.67 percent. In contrast, the Generosity, Modesty, and Agreement Maxims each represented only 2.78 percent of the violations.

Table 1. Frequency of Politeness Maxim Violations in *Zootopia*

No	The Violations of Maxim of Politeness	Amount	Percentage
1	Approbation Maxim	16	44.4%
2	Sympathy Maxim	11	30.56%
3	Tact Maxim	6	16.67%
4	Generosity Maxim	1	2.78%
5	Modesty Maxim	1	2.78%
6	Agreement Maxim	1	2.78%
TOTAL		36	100%

The dominance of the Approbation Maxim violations suggests that ridicule, mockery, and the withdrawal of praise were the most powerful discursive tools used to challenge Judy's position. The Sympathy and Tact Maxims, while less dominant, reveal how discouragement and threats functioned as emotional triggers within the storyline. Meanwhile, the rare occurrences of Generosity, Modesty, and Agreement violations highlight critical turning points where exclusionary discourse intersected with moments of institutional or interpersonal conflict.

3.1 Approbation Maxim and the Struggle for Recognition

The violation of the Approbation Maxim appears as the most dominant pattern in the film. This maxim requires speakers to minimize dispraise and maximize praise, yet Judy Hopps repeatedly encounters utterances that ridicule her ambitions, undermine her identity, and question her competence as a police officer. These violations are found across multiple stages of her life, beginning from childhood and extending into her professional career. They also occur in varied contexts that include peers, family, and institutional authorities. Collectively, they construct Judy as an outsider whose aspirations are considered unrealistic in the eyes of others.

One early example can be seen during Judy's childhood interaction with Gideon Grey who sneers, *"Nice costume, loser. What crazy world are you living in where you think a bunny could be a cop?"* (00:04:30–00:04:50). In this scene, Judy wears a homemade police costume and is publicly mocked in front of her peers. The visual framing reinforces the insult. The camera alternates between Gideon's expression of disdain and Judy's small figure in the costume, her ears lowered and the background blurred to isolate her vulnerability. The violation of the maxim is clear. Instead of receiving encouragement, Judy is ridiculed for dreaming of becoming a police officer. Yet, rather than retreating, she chooses to defend her friends, an act that transforms the rejection into an early source of resilience.

A second example occurs within Judy's family context. After her first day as a police officer, Judy receives a video call from her parents. Upon noticing that she is assigned only as a meter maid, her father exclaims with exaggerated relief, *"Ah, she's not a real cop! Our prayers have been answered!"* (00:26:52–00:27:33). The cinematic detail heightens the violation. Judy forces a smile while her eyes shift downward, and the camera captures her strained expression in close-up. Her police vest is visible in the frame, silently affirming her true achievement yet standing in stark contrast to the dismissal voiced by her father. This violation illustrates how even within the intimate sphere of family, Judy is denied the recognition she seeks. What is framed as humor by her father in words is revealed through imagery as a painful denial of validation.

The pattern extends to Judy's professional environment. When she approaches Chief Bogo to request a more serious assignment, his reply is blunt: *"Life isn't some cartoon musical where you sing a little song and your insipid dreams magically come true. So let it go!"* (00:31:37–00:31:55). Pragmatically, the utterance dismisses Judy's request and reduces her professional ambition to childish fantasy. Visually, the hierarchy is reinforced through framing. The camera captures Bogo from a low angle,

magnifying his authority, while Judy appears in close-up with her disappointment visibly etched on her face. The violation demonstrates how institutional authority can perpetuate impoliteness, further denying Judy her professional legitimacy.

These instances illustrate that violations of the Approbation Maxim are not confined to isolated remarks but are deliberately repeated across Judy's social, familial, and institutional interactions. Each denial of praise contributes to her marginalization, while cinematic framing magnifies her vulnerability through close-ups, downward gazes, and contrasts in physical scale between her and her interlocutors. Despite these repeated acts of discrediting, Judy consistently transforms rejection into determination. Whether by defending her friends, masking her disappointment, or continuing to assert her competence, she converts ridicule into motivation for persistence.

The systematic violation of the Approbation Maxim in *Zootopia* reveals the dual role of impoliteness in character construction. On one hand, it reinforces hierarchies and exclusion by positioning Judy as inferior and unworthy of recognition. On the other hand, it functions as a narrative device that highlights her resilience and perseverance. The interplay between verbal insult and visual framing underscores how language and cinematic techniques combine to construct marginality while simultaneously preparing the ground for empowerment. Impoliteness in this sense becomes both an instrument of exclusion and a catalyst for Judy's eventual recognition, illustrating its paradoxical role in shaping the film's social and moral message.

3.2 Sympathy and Tact Maxim Violations as Emotional Triggers

The Sympathy Maxim prescribes that speakers should minimize antipathy and maximize sympathy toward others. Violations of this maxim in *Zootopia* are striking because they often occur in contexts where empathy and support are expected. Judy Hopps experiences discouraging remarks that invalidate her struggles and ambitions, not only from strangers but also from her family and colleagues. These violations are powerful because they transform moments of potential solidarity into experiences of alienation.

A revealing example occurs early in the film when Judy's father remarks, *"Right. There's never been a bunny cop"* (00:03:33–00:03:45). While delivered in a matter-of-fact tone, this statement implicitly communicates that Judy's dream is impossible. The pragmatic violation lies in its lack of sympathy for her aspiration. Cinematically, the exchange is presented in Judy's family home where her small figure is framed between her parents, visually emphasizing her marginal position. The

moment should provide reassurance but instead highlights disapproval, producing feelings of exclusion at the very heart of family interaction.

Another significant instance arises during Judy's encounter with her neighbors, the Oryx and Kudu brothers. When confronted about their disruptive behavior, one bluntly states, *"Don't expect us to apologize for it"* (00:12:57–00:13:02). This utterance minimizes sympathy for Judy's situation and reinforces indifference to the discomfort they have caused. The camera captures Judy's reaction as she momentarily hesitates, her cheerful demeanor dampened. The violation transforms what could have been a cooperative moment into a dismissal of her concerns, reinforcing her sense of being disregarded by the wider community.

A further illustration occurs in her interaction with Nick Wilde. After intentionally leading Judy to step backward into wet cement, Nick casually remarks, *"You'll never be a real cop. You're a cute meter maid though. Maybe a supervisor one day. Hang in there"* (00:25:33–00:26:00). The lack of sympathy is twofold. First, Nick refuses to assist Judy in her predicament. Second, he adds mock encouragement that trivializes her professional identity. Visually, Judy is shown embarrassed in front of bystanders, her ears lowered while Nick exits the scene without remorse. The pragmatic violation lies in Nick's choice to maximize antipathy rather than offer even minimal support, reinforcing Judy's sense of humiliation.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate that Sympathy Maxim violations in the film are not limited to isolated remarks but occur systematically across different relational contexts. The family denies encouragement, neighbors trivialize her discomfort, and colleagues dismiss her competence. Cinematic framing consistently accentuates her emotional alienation by focusing on gestures of embarrassment, downward gazes, and moments of visible hesitation. Each violation thus amplifies Judy's struggle by transforming potentially supportive spaces into arenas of rejection.

The violation of the Sympathy Maxim in *Zootopia* illustrates how the absence of empathy functions as a subtle but powerful mechanism of exclusion. Instead of fostering solidarity, interlocutors repeatedly deny Judy recognition and emotional support. These violations contribute to her sense of isolation and reinforce the perception that her goals are unattainable. Yet the narrative also uses these moments to underscore Judy's resilience. Rather than abandoning her ambition, she perseveres in spite of alienation. In this way, the film shows that impoliteness through the denial of sympathy both constrains and motivates, producing a paradoxical dynamic in which exclusion fuels determination.

3.3 The Symbolic Weight of Rare Violations

Although infrequent, the Generosity, Modesty, and Agreement Maxim violations carried significant weight. They often occurred at pivotal moments that reinforced Judy's marginalization. For instance, the violation of the Generosity Maxim by her mother symbolized self-interest disguised as parental concern, while the Modesty Maxim violation by a driver who refused accountability undermined Judy's legitimacy as an officer. The Agreement Maxim violation by her superior served as a clear marker of institutional resistance, silencing her contribution even when she was correct.

Taken together, the results show that the violation of politeness maxims is deliberately distributed to achieve narrative effects. The frequent violations of the Approbation Maxim establish Judy's struggle for recognition, while violations of Sympathy and Tact Maxims provide emotional depth and tension. The rarer violations highlight moments of symbolic conflict, functioning as turning points in her journey.

These findings suggest that impoliteness in cinematic dialogue operates as a narrative strategy. By embedding systematic violations into the script, the film guides viewers to empathize with Judy's struggles, critique exclusionary practices, and celebrate resilience against systemic prejudice. The narrative therefore transforms politeness violations from mere linguistic anomalies into meaningful devices for character development and audience engagement.

3.4 Tact Maxim and Confrontational Dynamics

The Tact Maxim prescribes that speakers should minimize costs to others and maximize benefits to others. Violations of this maxim in *Zootopia* are particularly severe because they often occur in confrontational exchanges where Judy Hopps is directly threatened, demeaned, or forced into situations that impose emotional or physical costs. Unlike the Approbation and Sympathy Maxims, which undermine recognition and empathy, the violation of the Tact Maxim functions as an instrument of intimidation. These violations play a crucial role in constructing Judy's resilience against overt hostility.

A striking example occurs in Judy's childhood encounter with Gideon Grey. He taunts her with the words, *"I want you to remember this moment, the next time you think you will ever be anything more than just a stupid, carrot farming dumb bunny"* (00:05:15–00:05:22). The insult is accompanied by physical aggression, as Gideon scratches Judy's face to reinforce his threat. Pragmatically, the utterance and the assault impose both emotional and physical costs on Judy, thereby violating the maxim. The cinematic framing intensifies the confrontation: Judy is shown

cowering in close-up while Gideon towers over her, his sharp claws filling the screen. The violation not only humiliates her but also instills fear, highlighting how impoliteness can escalate into intimidation.

A second instance occurs on Judy's first day at the police station when Clawhauser greets her with excessive enthusiasm: "*O-M goodness! They really did hire a bunny. What?! I gotta tell ya, you are even cuter than I thought you'd be*" (00:13:47–00:14:00). Although intended as admiration, the remark imposes a cost on Judy by reducing her identity to her physical appearance rather than acknowledging her professional role. Pragmatically, the utterance disregards the maxim by prioritizing Clawhauser's excitement over Judy's dignity. Cinematically, Judy's discomfort is communicated through a tight facial shot in which her forced smile contrasts with her uneasy eyes. This violation illustrates how even seemingly lighthearted comments can function as implicit intimidation by undermining professional authority.

A further example takes place in the climax of the narrative when Bellwether threatens Judy and Nick: "*I framed Lionheart, I can frame you too! It's my word against yours*" (01:32:18–01:32:22). The pragmatic violation lies in the explicit threat that imposes fear and potential ruin on Judy and her ally. The cinematic elements magnify the severity of the moment. Bellwether is framed from a low angle to accentuate her control, while Judy and Nick are positioned at a disadvantage, surrounded by darkness. The utterance exemplifies a deliberate maxim violation that is intended to coerce compliance and silence opposition.

These examples reveal that violations of the Tact Maxim in the film range from childhood bullying to professional belittlement and overt criminal threats. The common thread is the imposition of costs that target Judy's sense of security and legitimacy. Cinematic framing plays a critical role in highlighting these costs by emphasizing Judy's vulnerability through close-ups, low-angle shots of aggressors, and lighting contrasts that signal intimidation.

The violation of the Tact Maxim in *Zootopia* demonstrates how impoliteness operates as an instrument of confrontation. Unlike the more subtle forms of belittlement in the Approbation and Sympathy Maxims, these violations place Judy in situations of explicit threat and discomfort. They strip away dignity, safety, and recognition, leaving her vulnerable to domination. At the same time, they serve as key narrative devices that intensify conflict and allow Judy to demonstrate resilience in the face of direct hostility. Through these confrontational exchanges, the film underscores the dual function of impoliteness as both oppressive force and narrative mechanism that drives character growth.

3.5 Generosity Maxim and Self-Interest

The Generosity Maxim emphasizes minimizing benefit to the self and maximizing benefit to others. In *Zootopia*, only one explicit violation of this maxim was identified, yet its narrative weight is significant because it occurs in the intimate sphere of family interaction.

The violation appears when Judy's mother Bonnie remarks, "*What your father means, hon, is it's gonna be difficult, impossible even, for you to become a police officer*" (00:03:33–00:03:45). While framed as parental concern, the utterance foregrounds the parents' own interest in keeping Judy safe and close to the family farm, rather than encouraging her ambitions. Pragmatically, this self-interest violates the maxim because it prioritizes the parents' comfort over Judy's aspirations. Cinematically, the setting enhances the violation: Judy is framed in a medium shot flanked by her parents, both leaning toward her, visually surrounding her in discouragement.

This violation highlights how self-interest disguised as concern can function as impoliteness within familial discourse. By discouraging Judy in order to preserve their own peace of mind, her parents inadvertently invalidate her goals. The scene underscores how pragmatic violations can occur even in loving environments, reinforcing Judy's struggle for recognition and motivating her persistence in leaving home to pursue her dream.

3.6 Modesty Maxim and Denial of Fault

The Modesty Maxim requires speakers to minimize self-praise and maximize self-blame. In *Zootopia*, one key violation illustrates how denial of responsibility becomes a form of impoliteness directed toward Judy.

This occurs when an angry driver yells at Judy, "*Un-cool, rabbit. My tax dollars pay your salary*" (00:28:02–00:28:12). Rather than acknowledging his own traffic violation, the driver shifts blame onto Judy and justifies his own behavior by appealing to civic entitlement. Pragmatically, this utterance violates the maxim by maximizing self-praise and minimizing accountability. Cinematically, the tension is highlighted through Judy's reaction shot: she lowers her head onto the steering wheel of her vehicle, a gesture of visible frustration and despair.

This violation illustrates how denial of responsibility can operate as impoliteness in public interactions. The angry driver not only refuses to accept fault but also shifts the cost of the encounter onto Judy, thereby undermining her authority as a police officer. The violation magnifies Judy's struggle to be taken seriously in her role and reinforces the film's broader critique of how marginalized figures are discredited by those they are meant to serve.

3.7 Agreement Maxim and Institutional Resistance

The Agreement Maxim prescribes minimizing disagreement and maximizing agreement in interaction. In *Zootopia*, one critical violation illustrates how disagreement becomes a strategy of silencing within institutional hierarchies. This is seen when Chief Bogo snaps at Judy with the words, “*Shut your tiny mouth, now*” (00:31:02–00:31:27). Judy had attempted to offer a correction based on her agricultural knowledge, but Bogo interrupts her, refusing to acknowledge her contribution. Pragmatically, this constitutes a violation because it maximizes disagreement and dismisses Judy’s expertise outright. The cinematic framing reinforces the hierarchical imbalance: Bogo is shot from above Judy’s position, emphasizing dominance, while Judy is shown in partial close-up, her mouth silenced mid-expression.

This violation underscores how disagreement can function not as constructive dialogue but as a tool of institutional suppression. By silencing Judy, Chief Bogo denies her legitimacy even when her contribution is relevant and accurate. The violation is emblematic of the barriers Judy faces within structures of authority, where her knowledge is disregarded due to her perceived inferiority. At the same time, the moment sets the stage for Judy’s eventual triumph, as she later demonstrates her competence despite being silenced.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study show that all six of Leech’s politeness maxims (1983) are violated in Disney’s *Zootopia*, with the Approbation Maxim most frequently breached at 44.4 percent. These violations are strategically employed to construct Judy Hopps’ identity as an outsider persistently denied recognition by family, peers, and institutional authorities. The Sympathy and Tact Maxims also contribute significantly, functioning as emotional triggers that emphasize her alienation and struggles. Although less frequent, breaches of the Generosity, Modesty, and Agreement Maxims carry symbolic significance, particularly during moments of conflict or institutional resistance. Taken together, the findings indicate that impoliteness in *Zootopia* is not incidental but deliberately scripted to generate narrative tension and highlight resilience.

This study extends discourse-pragmatics research by showing that politeness serves as a mechanism for maintaining social harmony, while systematic violations function as discursive and narrative tools that shape meaning and character development. The analysis demonstrates that characters’ speech patterns regulate social order and create boundaries within imagined worlds, supporting the view that stance and evaluation are central to social meaning (Aspers &

Corte, 2021). Fiction thus encodes both pragmatic norms and their breaches in ways that reflect real expectations of politeness and impoliteness, offering a testing ground for theoretical inquiry beyond naturalistic interactions (Aspers & Corte, 2021). By extending qualitative inquiry into fictional dialogue, this study supports methodological arguments that qualitative approaches reveal subtle social behaviors across diverse contexts, including media and literature (Aspers & Corte, 2021; Breeze, 2023). Through interpretive coding and narrative analysis, it bridges literary pragmatics with qualitative methodology to expose the pragmatic norms embedded in dialogue (Aspers & Corte, 2021; Breeze, 2023).

Aspers and Corte (2021) emphasize that qualitative research reveals nuanced social phenomena often overlooked by quantitative approaches. This study operationalizes that claim by treating fictional dialogue as a valid site for exploring pragmatic norms through interpretive, reflexive, and context-sensitive analysis (Eakin & Gladstone, 2020). Violations observed in *Zootopia* illustrate how ridicule and mockery serve as mechanisms of exclusion while simultaneously fostering resilience and triumph, reinforcing arguments that utterances can demarcate boundaries and mobilize collective responses (Ratri et al., 2022). Reflexivity and co-construction frameworks explain how dismissive acts advance character development and plot progression (Aspers & Corte, 2021; Eakin & Gladstone, 2020). By triangulating textual analysis with reflexive methods, this study demonstrates the value of fictional media for examining pragmatic norms and supports claims that narrative discourse reveals subtle social behaviors, thereby encouraging comparative research across real-life interactions, classrooms, and media texts (Aspers & Corte, 2021; Breeze, 2023; Eakin & Gladstone, 2020).

Cinematic framing further amplifies pragmatic violations by encoding vulnerability and asymmetry through visual strategies that interact with dialogue. Films are inherently multimodal discourses where language, sound, text, and image converge to produce meaning, making visual modalities central to interpretation (Geenen et al., 2015). Close-ups highlight affective states, low-angle shots reposition characters within power hierarchies, and contrasts in scale dramatize dependence or dominance. These strategies act as visual arguments that reinforce impoliteness without requiring explicit verbal repetition (Wildfeuer, 2017). Multimodal research confirms that composition through camera work and framing intensifies perceived violations of social expectations and underscores the fragility of interpersonal stances (Geenen et al., 2015; Wildfeuer, 2017). Multimodal stance-taking effectively shapes interactional meaning, as audiences infer alignment and positioning from converging cues in film discourse (Geenen et al., 2015; Wildfeuer, 2017).

This study also links linguistic violations with visual semiotics, extending multimodal discourse analysis by showing how textual impoliteness is reinforced visually. Research on poster and film discourse highlights how composition, gesture, color, and spatial arrangement interact with dialogue to shape interpretations of stance and interactional dynamics (He, 2024; Peng, 2022). Linguistic breaches become more salient when paired with close-ups isolating emotion or camera angles encoding power differentials, thereby heightening the perceived severity of impolite acts (He, 2024; Peng, 2022). Multimodal modeling confirms that text and image jointly construct meanings exceeding those of individual semiotic resources (Zeng & Liu, 2024). Zhang Delu's four-dimensional framework of culture, context, content, and expression illustrates how visual grammar, audio, and textual translation interact to maintain coherence and pragmatic weight in multimodal communication (Zeng & Liu, 2024). This perspective situates cinematic framing and composition as integral to meaning-making, confirming that stance-taking is distributed across modalities to shape audience interpretation (Geenen et al., 2015; Wildfeuer, 2017; He, 2024; Xiao-wen, 2019; Zeng & Liu, 2024). The synthesis of linguistic and visual semiotics therefore offers a comprehensive account of how impoliteness-like discourse moves are constructed, perceived, and negotiated in film texts.

Although politeness studies are well established, few have systematically examined how violations of politeness maxims operate within cinematic narratives. Pragmatic research has primarily focused on authentic settings such as classrooms, workplaces, or digital platforms (Dewi et al., 2023; Aspers & Corte, 2019), leaving fictional media relatively underexplored. This is a critical gap, since animated films like *Zootopia* act as cultural texts that influence pragmatic awareness and social learning among diverse audiences. Moreover, much prior work emphasizes the enactment of politeness rather than the deliberate scripting of impoliteness, thereby overlooking the central role of negative speech acts in shaping character development and audience engagement.

The novelty of this study lies in its micro-level focus on Judy Hopps' narrative arc, applying both pragmatic theory and multimodal analysis to reveal that impoliteness functions as a deliberate narrative strategy with socio-emotional consequences. The findings carry two major implications: first, animated films can be used as pedagogical tools to teach pragmatic awareness by providing accessible illustrations of politeness and impoliteness; second, media plays a broader societal role in shaping perceptions of respect, empathy, and exclusion, making this research relevant for educators, analysts, and cultural critics. Future research should examine animated and live-action films across genres, cultures,

and audiences to assess whether systematic impoliteness similarly constructs marginalized characters in global cinema. Longitudinal classroom studies could also evaluate how exposure to film dialogues enhances pragmatic competence in English as a Foreign Language contexts. Finally, further exploration of the interaction between multimodal cues and scripted dialogue may deepen understanding of how fictional discourse reflects and informs social norms that guide everyday communication.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that all six of Leech's politeness maxims are systematically violated in Disney's *Zootopia*, with the Approbation Maxim most frequently breached, followed by Sympathy and Tact, thereby positioning Judy Hopps as a marginalized yet resilient character. The findings highlight that impoliteness in cinematic dialogue is not incidental but deliberately scripted to generate narrative tension, evoke emotional responses, and shape character development. The novelty of this research lies in its micro-level focus on a single protagonist through the integration of pragmatic theory and multimodal analysis, revealing that impoliteness functions as both a discursive tool and a narrative strategy with significant socio-emotional implications.

Beyond its contribution to pragmatics and media studies, this research carries pedagogical value by demonstrating how animated films can serve as authentic resources for fostering pragmatic awareness, empathy, and critical reflection in language education. The study also implies that media texts are powerful cultural instruments that shape perceptions of respect, exclusion, and resilience across diverse audiences. Future research is recommended to explore politeness and impoliteness strategies in different film genres and cultural contexts, investigate their impact on audience perception and social learning, and examine how classroom integration of cinematic dialogues can enhance pragmatic competence in English as a Foreign Language settings

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