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Understanding Social Status through Social Deixis and Politeness Strategy in German Series *Maxton Hall: The World Between Us*

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ABSTRACT
Using Brown and Levinson's (1987) approach, this study examines how politeness and social deixis are used in the German television series Maxton Hall: The World Between Us. The study uses a qualitative descriptive methodology, collecting, classifying, and analyzing data according to the model developed by Miles and Huberman. The analysis finds 196 social deixis, including 35 politeness strategies and relational and absolute forms. Relational social deixis, which mainly expresses intimacy between speakers, seems to occur far more frequently than absolute deixis. The characters' attempts to maintain their dignity and negotiate hierarchical relationships in the affluent setting of Maxton Hall are also evident in the prevalence of Negative Politeness and Off-record strategies. The results imply that politeness strategies and social deixis serve as linguistic instruments for communicating familiarity, controlling social distance, and resolving power dynamics. All things considered, this study shows how Maxton Hall language reflects larger societal

trends in German communication, where deixis and politeness are used to strike a balance between authority and intimacy in intricate social structures.

Keywords: *Social Deixis, Politeness Strategy, Social Status, German Series*

INTRODUCTION

Language is a vital component of human interaction and idea sharing since it allows interaction and communication. Without language, humans would not have the ability to communicate or express their ideas and thoughts (Bhrata et al., 2024; Chaer & Agustina, 2010). Language is a complex system that functions as the primary tool for social interaction and a reflection of culture (Azzahro et al., 2024). Studying language is not only about grammar and vocabulary, but also about how meaning is conveyed and understood in a particular context. Language also plays a major role in conveying the narrative and characters in web series. According to Williams (2012), Web series or serials themselves take the form of programs similar to TV series that are distributed and broadcast on internet-based websites. The series aims to provide entertainment, moral messages, and a means of expressing art. In addition, the series also presents various depictions of situations and conflicts that occur between the characters, who do not always have the same backgrounds and relationships. In this case, language is used by the characters in the series to communicate.

Communication between individuals must run smoothly so that the intended meaning can be conveyed (Fitria, 2020). However, communication is not always based on the same factors, such as age, gender, level of authority, and social background, which causes differences in language use (Widayanti & Ediwan, 2025; Sukirman, 2021). In this case, pragmatics plays an important role and is often used in language, both spoken and written (Rachmanita, 2016). Every time someone speaks, they use pragmatics even without realizing it. The study of pragmatics focuses on the purpose and meaning that a speaker sends to their audience (Sebastian et al., 2019). To avoid misunderstandings between speakers, it is better if they understand the meaning of each other's words.

One of the various types of studies in pragmatics is deixis. The term "deixis" comes from the word "*deiktitos*," which originates from Ancient Greek and means something that is pointed out directly, constantly moving or changing, depending on the reference of the term (Aminuddin, 2016). This indicates that when a term alludes to anything that is impacted by the speaker's situation or upbringing, deixis reference takes place (Rahmawati & Masrur, 2022; Listyarini & Nafarin, 2020). Mulyati (2019) stated that deixis has the function of expressing successful interaction between speakers, which depends on the speaker's understanding of the deixis used. Deixis refers to words or phrases whose meaning is not fixed and varies depending on the context in which they are spoken (Laia, 2023; Safitri et al., 2021; Saifuddin, 2019). Deixis can take the form of personal pronouns, demonstratives, or markers of time and place. Deixis serves to connect utterances with the framework of space, time, and participants in a speech act. Referring to Levinson (1983), social, personal, temporal, spatial, and discourse deixis are the five categories of deixis. Among the various types of deixis, social deixis is the focus of this study. Aspects of speech that represent or are impacted by the actual social standing of the communication participants are referred to as social deixis (Kusuma et al., 2022).

Social deixis which is speech that provides an overview of social levels within a linguistic event (Spencer et al., 2021; Mulyati, 2019). Unlike other types of deixis that focus on the speaker, social deixis focuses on hierarchical relationships and levels of intimacy between participants (Rahmi Sari S et al., 2012). These deixis are often manifested in the use of pronouns, greetings, or honorific titles (Izar et al., 2023). For instance, in Indonesia, the terms "Bapak" or "Ibu" are used to show respect to older people or those with higher social status. These terms reflect the ethics and politeness in language that are influenced by culture. The appropriate use of social deixis is very important to maintain politeness and show respect to the interlocutor. Understanding how language is used to navigate social environments, communicate meaning, and form social connections requires an understanding of

social deixis (Mukhtaruddin et al., 2024).

Levinson (1983) divides social deixis into two types: relational and absolute. Absolute deixis refers to titles that are given to people with specific statuses without exception, whereas relational deixis shows the interaction between people (for instance, between the speaker and the listener) (Zulyanputri et al., 2020). Because characters in a series have varying social statuses, relationships, and levels of power, social deixis is frequently present in their discourse. This has a lot to do with the sentence components that are expressed in a certain context and make reference to the speakers. According to Cruse (2004), a speaker's social status or level in respect to the interlocutor or other persons in a particular context is reflected in the words or expressions they use in social deixis. Some languages, like German, French, and Balinese, include grammatical indications and are rich in social links in speech, signifying upper or lower social class (Cummings, 2005). Even in a cultural context, social deixis is a strong indicator (Arfianty & Mulyadi, 2024).

Levinson's (1983) theory of social deixis, although developed from English pragmatics, is widely considered conceptually universal and relevant for cross-linguistic analysis, including languages such as German. The theory distinguishes between absolute and relational deixis, focusing on how language encodes social relations, power, and hierarchy. Research confirms that these categories can be observed across languages and are not limited to English. The use of pronouns such as *Sie* and *du*, as well as honorifics in German, aligns closely with Levinson's relational deixis, reflecting social distance, intimacy, and hierarchy. Studies of German and other European languages have shown that pronominal address systems and the use of titles play a significant role in expressing social deixis, supporting the application of Levinson's theory. (Kretzenbacher et al., 2020). However, research has also highlighted that cultural conventions and pragmatic transfer can shape how these forms are used, suggesting the need to consider sociocultural context in analysis.

Noerrofia's and Bahri (2019) stated that there are three aims of social deixis, namely: (1) As an expression of politeness and respect, which is described through the use of terms or titles such as honorary titles. (2) As an expression of intimacy, which is illustrated through the use of terms or appellations that indicate kinship, familiarity, and solidarity between one another. (3) As an identification of authority, which is illustrated through the use of terms or appellations that indicate a person's duties and responsibilities in a particular organization or institution.

In addition to expressing social hierarchies and interpersonal relationships, social deixis also plays a crucial role in the realization of politeness strategies. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), politeness strategies are linguistic behaviors aimed at maintaining the social face of the speaker and listener. The use of appropriate forms of address, titles, or pronouns often reflects the speaker's efforts to show respect, avoid coercion, or create solidarity depending on the social context. In this sense, social deixis not only functions as a marker of social relationships but also serves as a pragmatic tool for expressing politeness. In German, for example, the choice between *Sie* and *du* or the use of titles such as *Herr* or *Frau* indicates the speaker's social distance and politeness orientation. Therefore, analyzing social deixis in Maxton Hall also provides insight into the politeness strategies employed by characters when negotiating power, intimacy, and respect in their interactions. Speakers can decrease the amount of FTAs by using politeness techniques (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the Face Threat Act (FTA) addresses behavior that undermines the "face" or self-esteem of the person who feels threatened. Threat in an interaction is measured by the listener's reaction, not the speaker's. The speaker does not intend to threaten the listener, but if the listener feels threatened, he or she will defend himself or herself for the sake of self-esteem (Fitri, 2022). No one likes to feel threatened by others, and vice versa. Others will uphold standards of civility, which prohibit insults and threats against others, and

everyone will take precautions to avoid them. This 'face' threat is reduced by a variety of strategies. Brown and Levinson (1987) separated the five strategies of politeness into the following categories: (1) Bald on record, utilized when the speaker can communicate directly with the listener by using the words he wishes to use to convey his meaning without lowering the FTA. (2) Positive politeness, a strategy that motivates someone to present a positive self-image to others. Positive civility is employed and required in society's social interactions. The value of politeness has surely been sustained by a society that is made up of a number of individuals who live and interact with one another in the same setting. (3) Negative politeness, is a strategy for avoiding and lowering the dangers associated with bad face speakers whose desires could burden the addressee or listener. (4) Off-record, used when someone conducts an FTA, but they don't want to do it explicitly. The speaker uses this strategy to make statements that listeners of different interpretations can comprehend. (5) Don't do the FTA, utilized by a speaker to let the addressee know something that doesn't upset them.

Although many studies have examined social deixis in various media such as films, novels, and speeches, there remains a lack of research that integrates the analysis of social deixis with politeness strategies, particularly in German-language television series such as *Maxton Hall: The World Between Us*. This series offers a unique context for exploring how German linguistic forms, especially its system of formality and address, reflect both social hierarchies and politeness orientations among characters. Through the analysis of the dialogues, this study aims to reveal not only how social deixis is used to identify social status, profession, and interpersonal relationships, but also how such linguistic choices function as strategies of politeness that negotiate respect, distance, and familiarity. The use of formal or informal greetings, titles, or honorifics can provide clues about hierarchical relationships between characters, even without explicit description (Sugianto & Muslim, 2022).

Based on the background and explanation of social deixis mentioned above, two things will be examined in this study: The social deixis types and aims found in the German series *Maxton Hall: The World Between Us*.

RESEARCH METHOD

The descriptive qualitative method was used to conduct this study. According to Taylor et al. (2016), it was associated with the broadest definition of research that produces descriptive data from people's own words, both written and spoken, as well as from their observable behavior. According to Lofland (Moleong, 2017), the primary sources in qualitative research are words or acts, with the other sources being supplementary data like documents and so on. Character utterances in the form of subtitles pertaining to the series's use of social deixis and politeness strategies make up the study's data. The social deixis types and aims, as well as the politeness strategies in all six episodes of the German series *Maxton Hall: The World Between Us*, with an average duration per episode is 44 to 53 minutes, were examined using this methodology. This series tells the love story of two high school students, Ruby Bell and James Beaufort. The data found will be analyzed using a pragmatic approach based on Stephen C. Levinson's theory.

The social deixis types and aims, as well as the politeness strategies in the German series *Maxton Hall: The World Between Us,* were explained in this study using a descriptive qualitative method. By watching the series and gathering utterances with social deixis and politeness strategies for analysis, this study used techniques to gather data. All of the data findings in this study are based on social deixis that the series' characters have used. The data are classified according to the social deixis and politeness strategies.

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach because it focuses on describing and interpreting linguistic phenomena in their natural context. The data analysis process follows the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of three concurrent phases: data reduction, data display, and

conclusion drawing or verification. The data reduction process involves selecting relevant subtitled utterances from the German series *Maxton Hall: The World Between Us* that contain elements of social deixis and politeness strategies. Each selected utterance is then analyzed in relation to its situational and social context to capture the pragmatic meaning conveyed by the speakers. The data display presents the findings systematically in tables and descriptive explanations to show patterns of social deixis and their politeness functions. The final step, conclusion drawing or verification, involves interpreting the results to formulate broader insights into how social deixis operates as a reflection of social hierarchy and politeness strategies in German interaction.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This section presents the analysis and research findings obtained from the data in the *Maxton Hall: The World Between Us* series. The research findings are classified into two main focuses, namely social deixis and politeness strategies used by the characters in their speech. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman technique, which includes three main stages: data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions or verification. Through the application of this technique, the discussion focuses on a systematic description of the types and aims of social deixis, also politeness strategies that appear in interactions between characters, thus providing a deeper understanding of the relationship between language use and the social context that underlies the conversations in *Maxton Hall: The World Between Us*.

Social Deixis

The study found that there are 196 social deixis in the German series *Maxton Hall: The World Between Us*. Of the total 196 social deixis found, there are 153 relational social deixis and 43 absolute social deixis. From those 196 social deixis, 153 relational social deixis were found to be expressions of intimacy, 41 absolute social deixis were expressions of politeness and respect, and 2 absolute social deixis

were expressions of authority. The frequency of findings is demonstrated in the following table.

Table 1. Types and aims of social deixis found in the German series
Maxton Hall: The World Between Us.

Types of Social Deixis	Total	Expression Politeness and Respect	Expression of Intimacy	Identification of Authority
Relational Social Deixis	153	0	153	0
Absolute Social Deixis	43	41	0	2

The sociological and narrative background of *Maxton Hall: The World Between Us* has a significant impact on the use of social deixis, which is not just a linguistic occurrence. There are obvious class differences and hierarchical interactions between pupils and teachers in the upscale private school setting where the novel is set. The characters' language choices are influenced by these differences. For example, when speaking with authoritative individuals, students from affluent backgrounds frequently utilize titles like Herr Direktor or formal address phrases like *Sie*, which imply both institutional hierarchy and social distance. Conversely, the informal *du*, which denotes equality and closeness, is commonly used in interactions between peers of comparable social status or in personal relationships. The usage of absolute social deixis, in which younger characters address mentors or adults with respectful forms, is another example of how generational differences influence this practice. As a result, the social deixis found in this study reflects the class structure, power dynamics, and interpersonal dynamics present in the Maxton Hall story in addition to linguistically marking relational and absolute distinctions. The following are some of the social deixis found in the German series *Maxton Hall: The World Between Us.*

Relational Social Deixis

Deixis that is related to the relative rank spoken between the speaker and the listener, the speaker and the backdrop, or the reference or reference point is

known as relational social deixis (Levinson, 1983). Relational social deixis shows relative social differences in speech interaction, such as how the speaker adjusts their speech based on their social relationship with the person being referred to or other participants in the speech. In addition, because they describe the personal relationships or blood ties between conversation participants, kinship phrases are often utilized. The speaker and the item being referred to, as well as the speaker and the listener, determine relationship expressions, such as kinship terms (Archer et al., 2012).

Episode 3 / 00:01:05
> Hey, **Schatz**. *Du hast gar nichts von deinem Ausflug nach London erzählt.*
> (Hey, honey. You haven't told me anything about your trip to London.)

This utterance was spoken by Helen to Ruby when she heard about Ruby's plan to go to London, but she had not been informed beforehand. In German, *"Schatz"* has the meaning "dear". In German culture, this term is commonly used as an affectionate greeting between family members or couples. In this context, the term *"Schatz"* addressed to Ruby is a relational social deixis indicating emotional closeness between mother and child.

From a sociocultural perspective, the use of "*Schatz*" reflects the values of family affection in German society, which balances emotional warmth with a respected family hierarchical structure. Although Mrs. Helen holds a higher position as a parent, the use of this gentle term of address signifies that their relationship is based on closeness and affection, not simply power. Furthermore, the use of the pronoun *"du"* in this utterance also strengthens the social relationship between the speaker and the addressee. In German, *"du"* is used to indicate informal and close relationships, such as between family members or friends. Mrs. Helen's use of *"du"* to Ruby emphasizes that their relationship is personal and intimate, rather than formal or distant as would be indicated by the use of *"Sie"*. The combination of the greeting *"Schatz"* and the pronoun *"du"* indicates both emotional closeness and

intimate relational status within a family context. Mrs. Helen used the term *"Schatz"* so that Ruby knows that her mother is close to her and loves her, without her mother saying it explicitly. It also illustrates how hierarchical relationships within a family can be conveyed through familiar and empathetic language. Thus, this social deixis aims to express intimacy.

Absolute Social Deixis

Absolute social deixis is a particular kind of social deixis that is established for particular speakers according to their social standing or level of power (Levinson, 1983). For instance, authoritative speakers and authoritative recipients. These deixis are sometimes associated with the absolute lower or higher social status of a person. The idea of honorifics is inextricably linked to the deixis words of absolute social deixis. They are frequently used to demonstrate the disparity in social standing between the speaker and the recipient. As Huang explained, forms restricted for authorized recipients can serve as an example of absolute information in social deixis, such as Your Majesty or Mr. President (Bergmann et al., 2007).

Episode 5 / 00:11:42
> *Oh, **Captain**, mein Captain. Ist Elaine bissig geworden oder hat Alistair dich fertiggemacht?*
> (Oh, Captain, my Captain. Has Elaine become snappy, or has Alistair worn you down?)

This utterance was spoken by Wren to James after he rejoined the Lacrosse team. Previously, James had been kicked from the lacrosse team and received temporary punishment, and after that, he rejoined the team. The term *"Captain"* is taken from English. In this context, *"Captain"* is an absolute social deixis because it indicates a certain social status or position that is formally attached to the individual, regardless of who the speaker is.

From a sociocultural perspective, the term *"Captain"* reflects the hierarchical system prevalent in Western school sports, especially in Germany, where the

position of captain signifies not only responsibility for game strategy but also a symbol of authority and social leadership within the group. By addressing James as *"Captain,"* Wren acknowledges the team's hierarchical structure and affirms James's leadership position, despite his previous loss of status. In terms of social relations, the use of this greeting also contains nuances of respect and solidarity. This absolute social deixis not only marks formal authority, but also reflects symbolic recognition of James's social role in his community. Furthermore, it also implicitly illustrates the dynamics of power and solidarity within the social structure of the lacrosse team. Thus, the primary aim of this social deixis is to identify authority.

Episode 6 / 00:05:30
> ***Miss*** *Bell, schön, dass Sie unsere Einladung angenommen haben.*
> (Miss Bell, we are delighted that you accepted our invitation.)

This utterance was spoken by an Oxford professor to Ruby as she opened the new student admission interview session. *"Miss"* is a title taken from English and refers to Ruby. The use of the address *"Miss"* followed by Ruby's surname *"Bell"* indicates a certain social status or position that is conventional and independent of the personal relationship between the speaker and the addressee. In this context, *"Miss"* serves as a sign of politeness and respect for Ruby as a prospective student for Oxford University. Thus, the term *"Miss"* in the utterance is an absolute social deixis.

From a sociocultural perspective, the use of titles such as *"Miss"* is common in German academic cultures, which emphasize the importance of formality and polite social distance in professional interactions, especially between parties of differing social or institutional status. Although the professor holds a higher academic standing, she chooses a form of address that lowers power distance and enhances the impression of equality in the interview situation. Furthermore, the pronoun *"Sie"* in the utterance also plays a crucial role in constructing social distance and the formality of the interaction. In German, *"Sie"* is used to address an interlocutor in

formal situations, as a sign of respect for a person's social or professional status. Unlike *"du"* which is used in familiar or equal contexts, *"Sie"* reflects a deliberate boundary of politeness and social distance between the speaker and the addressee. Use of the title *"Miss"* reflects cultural politeness values, which emphasize reciprocal respect in formal communication. It signifies formal respect and also illustrates how politeness and academic social structures are represented through language choices that conform to German cultural norms. Thus, the absolute social deixis of *"Miss"* in this utterance aims to express politeness and respect.

The number of findings differs significantly because relational social deixis is shown to be more common than absolute social deixis. This is in contrast to a prior study by Noerrofi'a and Bahri, which indicated that although the difference is not statistically significant, relational social deixis is in fact more common than absolute social deixis. This is also consistent with the number of social deixis aims as identification of authority, which was found to be much fewer than in previous studies.

Relational social deixis is dominated by greetings in the form of the speaker's name, including familiar greetings that are not widely used by other people or even greetings in the form of teasing. Meanwhile, absolute social deixis is dominated by greetings such as Sir, Mr., and Miss, which indicate politeness and respect. It can be seen that relational social deixis and the aim of expressing intimacy have a strong connection with one another, which means that they are inseparable. Meanwhile, absolute social deixis could have the aim of expressing politeness and respect or as an identification of authority.

Politeness Strategies

The study found that there are in total of 35 politeness strategies used in the German series *Maxton Hall: The World Between Us*. Of the total 35 politeness strategies found, the types are 1 *Bald-on Record*, 10 *Positive Politeness*, 14 *Negative Politeness*, 9 *Off-record*, and 1 *Don't do FTA*. The frequency of findings is

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demonstrated in the following table.

Table 2. Types of politeness strategies found in the German series
Maxton Hall: The World Between Us.

Types of Politeness Strategies	Amount Found
Bald-on Record	1
Positive Politeness	10
Negative Politeness	14
Off-record	9
Don't do FTA	1

The sociocultural and narrative context of *Maxton Hall: The World Between Us* significantly influences the application of politeness strategies, which serve as both linguistic expressions and reflections of power dynamics and social class distinctions within the story. Situated within an elite private school marked by hierarchical relationships between students and teachers, the characters' use of language reflects the tension among formality, authority, and emotional closeness. The study identified a total of 35 politeness strategies, consisting of 1 *Bald-on Record*, 10 P*ositive Politeness*, 14 *Negative Politeness*, 9 *Off-record*, and 1 *Don't do FTA*. This distribution shows that indirect and mitigated forms of communication, especially *Negative Politeness* and *Off-record* strategies, are dominant, demonstrating the characters' attempts to preserve face and maneuver through Maxton Hall's strict social order without direct confrontation.

The series illustrates how language serves as a means of managing status, distance, and emotion in a socially stratified environment through the patterns of politeness it exhibits. Lower-status characters usually depend on *Negative Politeness* to demonstrate respect and maintain institutional decorum, whereas peers or close friends use positive politeness to convey solidarity and foster emotional bonds. Politeness in *Maxton Hall: The World Between Us*, therefore, goes

beyond mere courtesy; it serves as a narrative device that reveals the power dynamics, class consciousness, and relational sensitivity that shape the social world of the series. The following are some of the politeness strategies found in the German series *Maxton Hall: The World Between Us*.

Bald-on Record

Typically, the opening statement is given by the speaker. When trying to carry out FTA (Face Threatening Acts) with the greatest impact against the hearer's face, the *Bald-on Record* approach was used. This strategy unnerves the listener. According to Brown & Levinson (1987) in Tetenaung & Heryono (2022), there are two sub-strategies within this technique: the FTA strategy focused on *Bald-on Record* usage, which refers to circumstances where the speaker has more power than the hearer, and the sub-strategy of non-minimization of the threat used in emergencies (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Episode 1 / 00:11:48
> James : *Du weißt, wer ich bin.*
> Ruby   : ***Ich kenne deinen Namen, wenn du das meinst.***
> James : *Ich bin Lydias Bruder.*
>
> James : You know who I am.
> Ruby   : I know your name, if that's what you mean.
> James : I'm Lydia's brother.

Ruby's response in this conversation, by doing the FTA directly and not reducing it, was intended to satisfy James's question. Ruby showed that she did not "really" know James other than his name. James understood this, so he said that he was Lydia's brother. Thus, the strategy used by Ruby in this conversation was *Bald-on Record*. This utterance appears in the context of an initial meeting between Ruby, a student from a modest economic background, and James, an elite student who is accustomed to being respected. When James asserts his status through his question, Ruby responds and directly shows the FTA, with the intention of satisfying James's

question and using the *Bald-on Record* strategy.

In terms of power relations, there is an imbalance of power between James and Ruby, but Ruby chooses a style of speech that affirms her egalitarian position by rejecting the social structure offered by James through the FTA. The social distance between the two is still big, but Ruby's speech ignores that distance as a form of symbolic resistance to social superiority. Narratively, this strategy marks Ruby's independence and courage, and becomes the starting point for a change in the power relationship between the two.

Positive Politeness

This strategy is employed when we wish to speak with someone we don't know well but still want to come across as friendly or familiar (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Speakers attempt to make the audience feel as though they have similar desires in order to make the engagement flow easily and avoid awkwardness. This approach seeks to support the listener's optimistic façade, wherein the speaker's desires are perceived as a mutual goal. This strategy seeks to promote more seamless social connections (Sari & Sutopo, 2024). By using it, the speaker shows that they are willing to get to know the other person better, which will result in a closer bond and improved group cohesiveness. By demonstrating concern and companionship, the technique aims to close the gap between the speaker and the interlocutor, which in turn lowers the probability of FTA.

Episode 3 / 00:02:21
> *Ruby : Ist es wahr, dass King Charles sich bei euch seine Anzüge machen lässt?*
> *James : **Ja. Vielleicht treffen wir ihn heute, dann musst du knicksen. Das weißt du, oder?***
> *Ruby : Äh...*
> *James : Du solltest nicht alles glauben, was man dir erzählt.*
>
> Ruby : Is it true that King Charles has his suits made by you?
> James : Yes. We might meet him today, so you'll have to curtsey. You know

that, right?
Ruby : *Äh...*
James : You shouldn't believe everything you're told.

In the conversation above, James responded with a joke. In the conversation, James joked with Ruby to give the impression that he was polite and not too stiff, as well as to show his openness to getting closer to Ruby and breaking the previously awkward atmosphere. Thus, the strategy James used in the conversation above was *Positive Politeness* with sub-strategy "Joke." This Positive Politeness strategy was used with the intention of creating closeness between the speakers.

Ruby is from a lower-middle-class family, but James is a student from the elite class with a superior social rank. James's charisma and social standing in the school setting give him symbolic strength. He does, however, momentarily give up his dominance and project a more equal image in front of Ruby by using humor. This lessens social distance and creates a place for familiarity that was previously blocked by reputation and class distinctions. In other words, the joke serves as a social strategy to negotiate power dynamics and establish an emotional bond with Ruby, in addition to being a rhetorical device to lighten the mood.

Negative Politeness

A negative politeness approach is a way to avoid and lessen the danger of negative-face speakers whose demands could be too much for the addressee or listener to handle (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Episode 4 / 00:11:56
Kieran : Wir könnten sie selbst schlachten.
*Ruby   : **Du willst 150 Rebhühner schlachten, in der Schulküche?***
Kieran : Nein, natürlich nicht.

Kieran : We could slaughter them ourselves.
Ruby : You want to slaughter 150 partridges in the school kitchen?
Kieran : No, of course not.

In response to Kieran's statement, Ruby responded with a question implying that Kieran's idea was unreasonable. As context, Kieran misunderstood Ruby's request for him to order "the freshest ingredients possible." Instead of bringing fresh slaughtered partridges, Kieran ordered 150 live partridges and took the initiative to slaughter them themself. Of course, this sounded very stupid and impossible. Even so, Ruby did not say it explicitly. Instead of saying "that idea is stupid," Ruby asked a question to make Kieran think twice about his idea. Ruby's question served as a form of politeness to soften her meaning, preventing Kieran's negative face. Thus, the strategy used by Ruby was *Negative Politeness* with sub-strategy *"The question, hedge"*. In speaking, this sub-strategy is employed to avoid getting to the heart of the issue. A threat to the hearer's unfavorable face can be avoided by using a hedge. It aims to soften the effects of criticism and avoid direct confrontation.

Ruby is the head of the student organization in Maxton Hall, while Kieran is a member. Hierarchically, Ruby has more power within the organizational structure, but their relationship is still friendly. In this case, Ruby is expected to be firm while maintaining group harmony. By using rhetorical questions instead of direct criticism, Ruby balances authority and politeness, maintaining her role as a rational leader without undermining her subordinates' self-esteem. This strategy also indicates Ruby's social intelligence in managing internal hierarchies. She demonstrates assertive yet empathetic leadership, saving Kieran's face while asserting professional boundaries. Ruby demonstrates her communication style as a leader in an elite environment that demands politeness and self-control. She does not use her authority in an authoritarian manner, but strategically uses language to reprimand without creating open conflict.

Off-record

When someone is conducting an FTA, but they don't wish to do it overtly, they employ the off-record strategy (Brown & Levinson 1987). The speaker uses this

strategy to make statements that listeners of different interpretations can comprehend.

Episode 2 / 00:08:01

> *Ruby : Wir haben keine Zeit, die ganze Party umzuplanen. Wir haben Dekomuster angefordert, uns auf 'n Menü geeinigt. Das Plakat muss in drei Tagen in Druck.*
>
> *James : **Sorry, mein Fehler. Ich dachte, hier geht's darum, die bestmöglichste Party zu organisieren.***

> Ruby : We don't have time to reschedule the whole party. We've requested decoration samples and agreed on a menu. The poster has to go to print in three days.
>
> James : Sorry, my mistake. I thought this was about organizing the best party possible.

In the conversation above, James responds to the ideas of the school gala committee by making a statement that could raise various questions among the committee members. His statement could be interpreted in different ways by different listeners. In this statement, he may have meant that he was afraid of appearing to interfere too much in the affairs of the core committee because he was only an additional committee member, or he may have meant that he had a better idea, or he may have had other intentions, in which case everyone could interpret his meaning differently. This is an FTA hidden as a form of politeness when James disagrees with the event committee's idea. In this case, James uses the Off-record strategy, which is to do an FTA without being too obvious about it.

James was not a core member of the committee, but rather an additional committee member assigned by the principal as a form of academic punishment. In this case, structurally, James had low authority in the meeting, while Ruby, as chair of the committee, had greater control over the group's decisions. In this context, the use of the *Off-record* strategy became a way for James to voice his disagreement without violating hierarchical norms. He avoids direct confrontation, which could be considered disrespectful to the group leader, while maintaining his self-image

and intellectuality by slipping in a smart statement. This statement reflects the dynamic between symbolic domination and subtle resistance. Ruby represents the legitimate organizational structure, while James, despite his lower status in the committee, still comes from an elite and charismatic social background. Thus, James' statement becomes a form of interpersonal power negotiation, in which he uses language not only to communicate, but also to negotiate his social position within the group. Narratively, this strategy reveals James' competitive, confident character, accustomed to questioning authority without explicitly opposing it.

Don't do FTA

This strategy is employed by speakers to get their point over without offending the listener (Brown & Levinson, 1987). It indicates that the speaker does not use any FTA that would bring shame to the hearer when communicating.

Episode 6 / 00:08:16

> *Cyril :* *Ich würd auch so gucken, wenn mir jemand nach so 'nem Tag 'n Wasser hinstellt. Hier, das musst du probieren. Whisky, 18 Jahre alt.*

> Cyril : I'd look the same way if someone put a glass of water in front of me after a day like that. Here, you have to try this. Whiskey, 18 years old.

In the situation above, Cyril noticed that Lydia looked gloomy, which was also noticed by others, so Cyril wanted to do something to cheer Lydia up. Instead of directly addressing Lydia's emotional state, which could potentially become an FTA against Lydia's positive face, Cyril cheered Lydia up by making a statement that implied himself, joking, and also offered Lydia a drink. He did this so that Lydia would not feel embarrassed in front of her many friends and other strangers. Thus, Cyril's strategy towards Lydia was Don't do FTA.

In their relationship, Cyril and Lydia are social equals as school friends, and they share a high level of emotional closeness because they often interact in the same social circle, where Cyril is a friend of James, Lydia's brother. In this context,

Cyril shows social and emotional sensitivity, which is a sign of a close relationship. He is aware of Lydia's feelings without embarrassing her, showing empathy, and trying to comfort her without making the situation awkward. This action confirms that the closer the interpersonal relationship, the more subtle the form of politeness chosen. Not through formal polite words, but through self-control and sensitivity to the other person's feelings. Cyril's choice to restrain himself and switch to non-verbal actions by offering a drink shows a high level of politeness rooted in empathy and solidarity. He not only saves Lydia's face, but also strengthens the social bond between them.

CONCLUSION

The study's conclusions show that the sociocultural and hierarchical setting of *Maxton Hall: The World Between Us* has a significant influence on the show's social deixis and politeness strategies. Language is not only a tool for communication in the affluent setting of Maxton Hall, but it also functions as a symbol of class differentiation, power, and interpersonal standing. There were 196 social deixis in all, including relational and absolute versions; relational social deixis were significantly more common. The characters' ongoing negotiation of hierarchy, intimacy, and respect in their interpersonal interactions is reflected in this predominance. The characters manage power, show familiarity across class divisions, and establish or soften social boundaries using the language mechanisms of address terms and forms of reference.

The characters use indirectness and mitigation to negotiate a socially stratified environment, as evidenced by the examination of 35 politeness strategies, with the prevalence of *Off-record* strategies and *Negative Politeness* indicating a persistent awareness of the institutional hierarchy, where upholding decorum and protecting one's own and others' faces is essential. These strategies are tools of

social negotiation that enable people to subtly challenge or comply with power institutions; they are not just expressions of personal civility.

Taken together, the use of social deixis and politeness strategies in Maxton Hall reflects the intricate interplay between language, hierarchy, and intimacy. Relational deixis and indirect strategies co-occur as linguistic responses to unequal power relations, but revealing that the expression of closeness is often intertwined with the careful management of social distance and authority. While these findings are rooted in a specific fictional context, they provide valuable insight into how language functions to mediate social relationships in German-speaking contexts marked by formality and class awareness. Future research could expand this analysis to other German-language media or authentic conversational data to assess whether these patterns are consistent beyond the narrative confines of *Maxton Hall: The World Between Us*.

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