

PARTICLES AS HEDGES: A CASE STUDY OF LUFFY'S NEGATIVE POLITENESS STRATEGIES IN *ONE PIECE* LIVE-ACTION SERIES

¹Irtta Fitriana*

¹Universitas Pesantren Tinggi Darul Ulum, Indonesia

¹irtafitriana@fbs.unipdu.ac.id

²Hidayatul Anggun Sari

²Universitas Pesantren Tinggi Darul Ulum, Indonesia

²hidayatulanggun26@gmail.com

*Corresponding author

Received : July 28, 2025

Revised : January 16, 2026

Accepted : June 17, 2026

Published : June 30, 2026

How to Cite (in APA Style):

Fitriana, I., & Sari, H. A. (2026). Particles as hedges: A case study of Luffy's negative politeness strategies in *One Piece* live-action series. *Pioneer: Journal of Language and Literature*, 18(1), 99-115. <https://doi.org/10.36841/pioneer.v17i1.6789>

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Abstract: This study investigates Luffy's use of Hedges Encoded in Particles (HEPs) as negative politeness strategies based on Brown and Levinson's framework. It examines their use in recruitment interactions to express intentions while minimizing imposition and avoiding threats to the interlocutor's negative face. Focusing specifically on recruitment contexts, the study analyzes how Luffy invites others to join his crew without pressure or coercion, thereby clarifying the pragmatic function of HEPs and avoiding overlapping interpretations of politeness strategies. Using a descriptive qualitative design, the data were collected through systematic transcription and note-taking of Luffy's utterances across eight episodes of the series, with particle-based hedges as the unit of analysis. The findings identify 47 instances in which HEPs are used to mitigate face-threatening acts and maintain a polite, non-imposing tone, particularly in interactions with potential crew members. These particles function as hedging devices that soften illocutionary force and signal respect for the interlocutor's autonomy. Rather than serving merely as discourse fillers, HEPs operate as pragmatic resources that shape interpersonal meaning and interactional alignment. This study contributes to pragmatic research by highlighting the functional role of particles in negative politeness strategies and by extending politeness analysis to character-driven media discourse, especially within live-action adaptations.

Keywords: *hedges encoded in particles, hedging, negative politeness, pragmatics*

INTRODUCTION

Hedging and politeness strategy are closely linked in communication, with politeness strategy being a deliberate approach to maintaining positive social relationships and mitigating conflicts with others. According to Levinson's (1983) politeness theory, hedging can be utilized as a strategy for both positive and negative

politeness. In positive politeness, hedging can be used to demonstrate politeness and awareness of others' feelings and strengthening social relationships (Yule, 2005). Meanwhile, in negative politeness strategy, hedges are used to mitigate the imposition of utterance. For example, when a speaker wants to change the topic. Changing the topic is very sensitive and can impose a negative face on the hearers (Trihartanti & Fadilah, 2022). In this case, hedging can be used to avoid conflict and mitigate the negative impact of statements or actions, thereby maintaining good social relationships. In addition, hedging in the negative politeness strategy is a modal to minimize imposition in the utterance of asking for something from the hearer. Thus, hedging can be a valuable politeness strategy in communication, particularly in contexts where social sensitivity and tact are essential.

Social sensitivity and tact are essential in maintaining effective interpersonal communication. Conversations in popular media, such as movies and television series, certainly contain this politeness strategy. Therefore, this study aims to examine hedging as a negative politeness strategy in *One Piece* (2023), one of the most acclaimed live-action series of the twenty-first century. One of the most popular series in 2023 was the Netflix series *One Piece*. Throughout the series, Luffy consistently encounters new characters and extends invitations for them to join his crew. Notably, his recruitment approach involved reassuring potential members without imposing his own ambitions. Hence, exploring Luffy's hedging strategies in negative politeness could provide valuable insights and prove to be a fascinating area of study.

Several previous studies have examined the same topic. The first study, Yolanda et al. (2022), focused on the use of negative politeness strategies by the characters in the specific context of the movie *Charlie's Angels* (2019). Additionally, Dara et al. (2022), employed the theories of Brown and Levinson (1987), Leech (1980), and Bousfield and Locher (2008) to identify and analyze politeness and impoliteness strategies from a pragmatic perspective. The third study, Listyari et al. (2022), focused on analyzing the types of pessimistic strategies used in negative politeness, such as negative, subjunctive, and remote-possibility markers.

Despite sharing similar topics, previous studies have notable gaps that warrant further investigation. Specifically, Yolanda et al. (2022) did not examine the effectiveness of negative politeness strategies, while Dara et al. (2022) did not assess the impact of

politeness and impoliteness strategies. Meanwhile, Listyari et al. (2022), although exploring a similar topic, lacked a detailed analysis of specific politeness and impoliteness strategies in *The Sleeping Beauty* Movie. These gaps highlight opportunities for this research to provide a more in-depth examination of using particles to hedge in negative politeness strategies. In other words, by exploring this topic, this research aims to provide a fresh perspective and contribute to the understanding particles to hedge in negative politeness, building on previous studies. This study provides an insight about hedging with particles in negative politeness strategy. It also provides insights into effective interpersonal communication by highlighting the importance of hedging strategies in conveying messages politely and tactfully.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Pragmatics

Words and sentences, when uttered, are not only used to describe aspects of the world but also to perform socially significant actions (Cruse, 2006). This functional use of language is the focus of pragmatics, a branch of linguistics that studies meaning as communicated by speakers or writers and interpreted by hearers or readers (Yule, 2020). Pragmatics is particularly concerned with how interlocutors make sense of each other linguistically in real communicative situations (Fitriana & Andani, 2023). Rather than relying solely on literal meaning, pragmatics takes into account contextual factors such as tone, situation, and the relationship between speakers and hearers, all of which play a crucial role in the construction of meaning (Cruse, 2006).

Pragmatics encompasses several key concepts, including deixis, implicature, presupposition, speech acts, and politeness strategies (Yule, 2019). Through the study of these concepts, pragmatics provides insight into how meaning is derived from language use in context-dependent interactions, supporting the view that pragmatics is “the study of meanings derived from usage” (Kroeger, 2018). Among these concepts, politeness strategies represent a significant area of pragmatic inquiry, as they reveal how speakers employ language to convey respect, consideration, and tact in social interaction. In this sense, pragmatics functions as a broad analytical framework within which negative politeness utterances can be examined in conversational contexts.

Politeness Strategy

Politeness strategies are linguistic methods employed by speakers to express politeness and mitigate face-threatening acts (FTAs) in communication. According to the politeness theory developed by Brown & Levinson (1987), these strategies are broadly categorized into positive politeness and negative politeness. Both strategies serve to manage social distance between speakers and hearers and to maintain harmonious interpersonal relations by addressing the hearer's face needs.

Positive politeness is oriented toward the hearer's positive face, namely the desire to be liked, appreciated, and approved of. This strategy emphasizes solidarity and friendliness and is commonly realized through acts such as complimenting, expressing interest in the hearer's well-being, or using inclusive language. Negative politeness, on the other hand, focuses on respecting the hearer's negative face, which relates to the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition. One prominent linguistic device used in negative politeness is hedging, which functions to soften statements or requests and reduce potential threats to the hearer's face. As noted by Brown and Levinson (1987), hedging can be realized through various forms to maintain social relationships and minimize conflict. Negative politeness strategies when making requests, including indirectness, mitigation, and hedging, to reduce the perceived imposition. In recruitment discourse, such as Luffy's invitations to join his crew, requests are particularly sensitive because they involve long-term commitment rather than simple, immediate actions. Therefore, the strategic use of hedging becomes crucial in framing these requests as voluntary and non-threatening, making this context especially relevant for analyzing negative politeness mechanisms in interaction. This strategy is frequently employed by Luffy in the *One Piece* Live-Action series, particularly when he recruits potential crew members without exerting pressure.

Within the framework of negative politeness, Levinson (1983) identifies four types of hedging strategies used to mitigate face-threatening acts: (1) hedges on illocutionary force, such as *I think* or *perhaps*; (2) hedges encoded in particles, including expressions like *well* or *you know*; (3) adverbial-clause hedges, such as *if you don't mind*; and (4) hedges addressed to Grice's maxims, for example *as far as I know*. Among these categories, this study specifically focuses on Hedges Encoded in Particles (HEPs) to

analyze how Luffy uses language to invite others to join his crew while minimizing face threats.

HEPs are characterized by the use of small linguistic particles that function to soften speech and reduce the force of an utterance (Levinson, 1983). Examples of such particles used by Luffy include *well*, *just*, *kind of*, *sort of*, and *you know*. Although these particles may appear simple or insignificant, they play an important pragmatic role in shaping the tone of communication, making it sound lighter, more familiar, and less confrontational. HEPs are further understood as a type of negative politeness hedging strategy that conveys uncertainty, hesitation, or tentativeness in language (Levinson, 2000). These particles can soften tone, reduce directness, and signal politeness or deference to the listener.

Hedges Encoded in Particles (HEPs)

According to Levinson (1983), one type of negative politeness strategy involves hedging encoded in particles, which are small, uninflected linguistic items that do not carry substantial lexical meaning on their own but perform important pragmatic functions in discourse. In linguistic theory, *particles* are typically defined as function words that are grammatically optional, resistant to inflection, and semantically “light,” meaning that their contribution lies not in propositional content but in managing interaction, stance, and interpersonal relations. Because of this semantic under specification, particles are particularly effective as pragmatic markers and hedges, allowing speakers to soften utterances without altering their core meaning.

Hedges Encoded in Particles (HEPs) thus refer to the strategic use of such particles to mitigate the force of an utterance and reduce potential face-threatening acts (Levinson, 2000). Examples include items such as *well*, *just*, *kind of*, *sort of*, and *you know*, which function to signal tentativeness, hesitation, or speaker accommodation. Rather than expressing uncertainty explicitly, these particles subtly adjust the illocutionary force of an utterance, making it sound less direct, less imposing, and more socially acceptable. In this study, HEPs are treated as pragmatic devices that enable the speaker, specifically Luffy in the *One Piece* live action series, to maintain politeness, create a non-coercive tone, and invite cooperation while minimizing threats to the hearer’s negative face.

HEPs may take several forms, including modal particles (*maybe*, *possibly*, *perhaps*), hedging adverbs (*kind of*, *sort of*, *a little*), discourse markers (*you know*, *I mean*,

like), and tentative expressions (*I think, I suppose, it's possible that*). When particles such as *well, you know, sort of, or kind of* are used, they often indicate that the speaker seeks to avoid sounding forceful or imposing. Through these functions, HEPs contribute to the pragmatic effectiveness of negative politeness strategies in both formal and informal communication contexts. Accordingly, because hedges function to soften the illocutionary force of utterances and reduce imposition, they constitute a primary pragmatic tool in the realization and maintenance of negative politeness strategies.

In Brown and Levinson's (1987) model of negative politeness, hedging is understood as a strategic means of reducing the imposition inherent in a speech act by mitigating its illocutionary force. More specifically, hedging is associated with negative politeness strategies such as conventional indirectness, questioning or hedging, and the minimization of imposition, all of which are oriented toward preserving the hearer's negative face, namely their freedom of action. Within this theoretical framework, hedges, especially those realized through particles, serve as linguistic signals of tentativeness and deference, allowing speakers to avoid assertiveness and lessen the potentially coercive force of requests or invitations. Positioning hedging within this clearly defined subset of negative politeness enables the present study to anchor its analysis of HEPs in a precise theoretical framework, rather than approaching hedging as a broad or merely descriptive linguistic feature.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative design to examine how Luffy employs hedging as a negative politeness strategy in the *One Piece* live-action series. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because the study aims to understand the meaning and pragmatic function of utterances within their social context, particularly how hedging is used to reduce imposition and manage interpersonal relationships. Qualitative research, with its inductive orientation, allows for context-based interpretation of linguistic behavior as it naturally appears in discourse (Taylor et al., 2016). In addition, narrative-based methods of data collection and analysis make it possible to closely examine the subtle and complex role of hedging in dialogic interaction (Kothari, 2004).

The main objective of this study is to identify HEPs as realizations of negative politeness strategies. Therefore, the data consist of all utterances produced by Luffy that

contain hedging expressions, allowing the analysis to be comprehensive rather than selective. The data were taken from the *One Piece* live-action series, a Netflix original adaptation released in 2023. All eight episodes of Season 1 were selected as the data source because they prominently feature recruitment interactions in which Luffy invites other characters to join his crew. These interactions provide a rich pragmatic context for examining the use of negative politeness strategies.

Data collection was conducted through repeated viewing of all eight episodes combined with systematic observation and textual analysis. An orthographic transcription method was applied, in which spoken dialogue was transcribed verbatim into written form without phonetic details. The official English subtitles provided by Netflix were used as the primary transcription reference and were carefully checked against the audiovisual content to ensure accuracy. During the transcription process, systematic note-taking was carried out to identify utterances that potentially contained HEPs.

Data analysis followed three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved reviewing all transcribed dialogues and selecting only those utterances in which particles functioned pragmatically to soften illocutionary force. Particular attention was given to distinguishing particles used as pragmatic hedges from those serving purely grammatical or emphatic functions. In the data display stage, the selected utterances were categorized based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) taxonomy of negative politeness strategies, especially those related to hedging and minimizing imposition. Finally, conclusion drawing focused on interpreting the pragmatic roles of HEPs within recruitment interactions by considering the situational context, participants, and communicative purposes.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, theoretical triangulation was applied by analyzing the data primarily through Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework while also referring to broader theories of pragmatics and hedging. Consistency was maintained through repeated viewing and reanalysis of the data, allowing interpretations to be reviewed and refined. These procedures help strengthen the credibility, reliability, and analytical rigor of the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Based on the analysis of eight episodes of the *One Piece* live-action series, this study finds that Luffy consistently uses HEPs as part of a negative politeness strategy when interacting with prospective crew members. This indicates that Luffy employs all forms of hedging strategies. It finds that Luffy as the main character uses HEPs 47 times. The particles found include *just*, *well*, *kind of*, *you know*, and *I think*.

These hedges fall into four functional categories. The most frequent type is minimizers, with twenty occurrences, mainly using the particle *just*. This particle is used to make requests or statements sound less forceful. The second most common category is discourse softeners, with twelve instances, mostly realized through *well*, which helps soften statements and manage the flow of conversation. Markers of tentativeness appear nine times, commonly express by *kind of*, indicating uncertainty or a lack of full commitment to what is being said. Lastly, interpersonal softeners, such as *you know* and *I think*, occur seven times and are used to create a more cooperative and less authoritative tone. Overall, this pattern shows that Luffy uses hedging particles in a consistent way to reduce the potential threat to the listener's face during interaction. A more detailed explanation of each functional category and its pragmatic role is presented in the following sections.

The use of *just* as a minimizer

The particle *just* appears frequently in Luffy's utterances and functions primarily to minimize imposition and reduce potential face threats. This particle is used in some dialogues. Across these instances, *just* consistently serves as a minimizer that frames statements as simple, non-threatening, and negotiable. In Dialogue 1 ("*I just need you to be quiet*"), *just* softens Luffy's request so that it does not sound forceful when calming Koby. Similarly, in Dialogue 9 ("*I just think it's a waste of time*"), the particle minimizes the assertiveness of Luffy's opinion when persuading Zoro. In Dialogue 15, it functions to ease tension after unintentionally offending Buggy.

Dialogue 1:

This dialogue occurs when Luffy and Koby meet for the first time on Alvida's ship. On Alvida's ship, Koby begs Luffy not to kill him when they first met. Luffy calms Koby down

by saying that he just wanted Koby to calm down. Koby is in a weak and fearful position as a subordinate under Alvida's authority, while Luffy possesses physical power.

Koby: "Please don't kill me."

Luffy: "Hey, hey, hey. I'm not gonna kill you, all right? **I just** need you to be quiet. First things first."

The particle *just* functions as a negative politeness strategy, specifically Strategy 4, "Minimize the imposition." By framing the request as "I just need you to be quiet," the utterance reduces the perceived force of the directive. The phrase *I just* is used by Luffy as a form of hedging to soften his statement. By saying, "I just need you to be quiet," Luffy sounds more polite and avoids directly imposing on Koby.

Dialogue 9:

In this interaction, Luffy and Zoro are still strangers with opposing stances. Zoro explicitly resists obligation positioning himself as independent to influence. Luffy tries to convince Zoro not to waste his life by staying attached to the Marine base.

Zoro : "I mean it. I don't owe you anything."

Luffy : "**I just** think it's a waste of time for you to be hanging out here... when there's something you want out there."

The expression *I just think* operates as a hedging particles that weakens the force of an evaluative opinion. Rather than asserting a categorical judgment, the particle frames the stance as subjective and negotiable. The phrase "I just think it's a waste of time" indicates Luffy expresses his opinion indirectly to sound politer and not patronising.

Dialogue 15:

Luffy is speaking to Buggy, a pirate captain with higher social power in this context. After unintentionally offending Buggy during a public performance, Luffy recognizes the potential threat to social harmony and personal safety. In the middle of Buggy's performance, Luffy accidentally offends Buggy with his comment.

Luffy : "I bet everyone in the East Blue knows who you are."

Clown : "What did you just say?"

Luffy : "**Just** that everyone knows who you are."

Here, *just* serves as a minimizer that reframes a potentially offensive prior utterance. The particle reduces the seriousness of the comment and mitigates the threat to the interlocutor's positive face. This linguistic adjustment functions to de-escalate tension and restore social harmony in an interaction. This is a form of hedging that serves to minimize the strong or insulting impression in his speech, making it sound lighter and more polite.

The use of *well* as a discourse softener

The particle *well* is used in some dialogues, predominantly at the beginning of utterances. Its primary function is to soften assertions, mark transitions, and reduce confrontational tone. The samples of analysis are in dialogues 4, 6, 7, 8, and 11. These data samples demonstrate that *well* systematically functions as a discourse-level hedge that keeps interactions relaxed and non-aggressive. In Dialogue 4, *well* mitigates Luffy's bold declaration of becoming the Pirate King, making it sound less boastful. In Dialogues 6 and 7, *well* precedes decisions and plans, creating a casual and light-hearted tone despite the risky context. Dialogue 8 shows *well* functioning as a polite preface to a self-introduction and recruitment attempt.

Dialogue 4:

When he first meets Alvida, Luffy introduces himself and expresses his determination to become the Pirate King. This exchange takes place during Luffy's first encounter with Alvida, a pirate captain who holds clear positional power.

Luffy : "I'm Monkey D. Luffy."

Alvida : "Never heard of you."

Luffy : "**Well**, remember the name, cause I'm gonna be King of the Pirates."

The particle *well* functions as a hedge particle that softens the transition from dismissal to self-assertion. This word sounds more relaxed and polite in front of Alvida who underestimates him. Pragmatically, it mitigates the potential boastfulness of the declaration by signaling hesitation and conversational alignment. This buffering effect reduces confrontational force without overtly challenging the interlocutor's higher social power.

Dialogue 6:

Luffy and Koby now share a cooperative but informal relationship. Although Luffy proposes the plan, he does not impose authority, maintaining an egalitarian interaction. While still on the sea journey, Luffy devises a simple plan to head to the Marine base to get a map.

Luffy: "So you plot a course to the next Marine base. I get my map... and you can join up. Yeah. All right. **Well**, I'm gonna take that nap now."

Koby: "You can't just waltz into a Marine base and ask for a map to the Grand Line!"

In this utterance, *well* operates as a marker that shifts the interaction from strategic planning to casual closure. The use of *well* is a form of hedging that serves to make his statement sound casual and not stiff. It also shows the transition from a plan that is taken

seriously to a light-hearted closure without pressure. This usage reduces interpersonal pressure despite the seriousness of the preceding plan.

Dialogue 8:

Zoro is physically restrained and socially marginalized, while Luffy holds situational power but no legitimate authority to command. Luffy meets Zoro, who is still bound, and invites him to join his crew.

Zoro : “I’m Roronoa Zoro, the pirate hunter.”

Luffy : “Well, I’m Monkey D. Luffy... and I will be the King of the Pirates. And I think you should join my crew.”

The particle *well* serves as a softening preface to a potentially face-threatening act. Combined with the epistemic hedge *I think*, the utterance signals tentativeness and respect for the interlocutor’s freedom of choice. The phrases convey the invitation in a polite way and considered Zoro’s own choice. This formulation prevents the proposal from being interpreted as coercive.

Dialogue 11:

On the ship they captured, Luffy and Nami had a discussion about believing in the One Piece legend. Luffy and Nami engage in ideological disagreement without strong social closeness.

Nami: “Every idiot dreams of finding the One Piece. People like you believe in something and you don’t even know what it is.”

Luffy: “**Well**, yeah. Don’t you?”

The discourse marker *well* mitigates ideological disagreement. This strategy reduces confrontation and maintains interactional politeness. The utterance “**Well**, yeah. Don’t you?” expresses agreement in a light tone and questioned back indirectly. This shows politeness despite the difference in opinion.

The use of *kind of* as a marker of tentativeness

The particle *kind of* appears in nine data. The functions are to express tentativeness and reduce the firmness of opinions or refusals. Dialogues 23 and 35 are taken as samples. In both cases, *kind of* allows Luffy to maintain politeness by avoiding categorical or definitive statements. In Dialogue 3 (“*It sounds kind of fun*”), Luffy responds to Koby’s serious warning without dismissing it outright, presenting his reaction as non-absolute. In Dialogue 5 (“*It’s kind of a long story*”), *kind of* softens Luffy’s refusal to provide a detailed explanation.

Dialogue 23:

On the ship, Koby warned Luffy about the great dangers on the Grand Line such as high waves and sea monsters. Koby positions himself as knowledgeable and cautious, while Luffy responds without dismissing the warning, maintaining respect within their unequal experiential relationship.

Koby: “Pirate graveyard. There are a-hundred-foot waves. And sea beasts that’ll crush your bones. Once you enter the Grand Line, you never return.”

Luffy: “It sounds **kind of** fun.”

The expression *kind of* functions as a hedge that weakens the speaker’s evaluative commitment. It maintains politeness through epistemic moderation and respect for experiential authority. He reduces the firmness of his opinion to sound lighter and more relaxed, while maintaining his politeness in response to Koby’s serious warning.

Dialogue 35:

After fighting Alvida, Koby is surprised at Luffy’s elastic body ability. Although Koby admires Luffy’s power, Luffy avoids asserting superiority.

Koby: “How did you stretch like that?”

Luffy: “It’s **kind of** a long story.”

Here, *kind of* mitigates refusal by framing the lack of explanation as provisional rather than definitive. This hedge softens the denial and prevents the utterance from sounding dismissive. The strategy preserves interpersonal harmony while allowing the speaker to withhold information without asserting superiority.

The use of *you know* and *I think* as interpersonal softeners

Particles such as *you know* and phrases like *I think* appear in seven data. These expressions function to build interpersonal closeness and reduce authority, especially in recruitment and persuasion contexts. These particles consistently indicate Luffy’s sensitivity to the interlocutor’s autonomy and emotional comfort. The samples of analysis here are Dialogue 10 and 12. In Dialogue 10, *you know* softens praise and helps establish rapport before suggesting recruitment. Dialogue 12 shows “*It’s just that...*” functioning as an explanatory hedge that avoids directly challenging Nami’s authority.

Dialogue 12:

On Nami’s ship while infiltrating the base, Luffy felt too excited for his first mission as a pirate. During the mission, Nami holds situational authority. Luffy acknowledges this temporary power shift.

Nami: “Yeah? Well, you’re gonna end up feeling watery... if I have to throw you overboard. I told you I need absolute silence.”

Luffy: “I know. I know. Absolute silence. It’s **just** that... this is my first real pirate score.”

The phrase “It’s **just** that...” is used as a form of hedging to explain the reason without directly challenging Nami’s instructions. The phrase *it’s just that* operates as an explanatory hedge. The utterance frames the explanation as circumstantial and protects the interlocutor’s negative face.

Discussion

Based on previous studies on politeness strategies, particularly positive and negative politeness, several key findings are relevant to this study. Yolanda et al. (2022) indicate that negative politeness strategies function as social mechanisms for maintaining distance between the speaker and the hearer. These strategies include being conventionally indirect, using hedges, expressing pessimism, minimizing imposition, giving deference, apologizing, impersonalizing the speaker and hearer, stating face-threatening acts (FTAs) as general rules, nominalizing, and going on record as incurring or avoiding debt. Collectively, these strategies help create respectful and comfortable interactions by preventing offense or misunderstanding. Furthermore, Listyari et al. (2022) highlight that pessimistic strategies often emerge in contexts of greater social distance, reflected in linguistic forms such as tag questions, subjunctive constructions (e.g., *would*, *should*, conditional clauses), and markers of remote possibility such as *hope*, *supposed*, *though*, and *perhaps*. In line with these findings, the present study focuses on HEPs as a specific mechanism within negative politeness to soften requests and maintain social harmony, particularly as conceptualized by Brown and Levinson (1987).

The findings of this study reveal that Luffy employs several particles as HEPs, including *just*, *well*, *kind of*, *you know*, and *sort of*. Although these particles appear simple and informal, they play a significant role in shaping the tone of communication to sound lighter, more familiar, and non-confrontational. For instance, when Luffy says, “I just need you to be quiet,” he is making a request in a polite and non-threatening way. The particle *just* functions as a minimizer, signaling that the request is not excessive but rather small and reasonable. By framing the request in this way, Luffy reduces the sense of imposition on the hearer, making the request easier to accept.

Similarly, the particle *well* functions as a discourse softener that signals hesitation or transition, thereby making statements sound less direct and less confrontational. This

can be seen when Luffy introduces himself by saying, “Well, I’m Monkey D. Luffy.” In such contexts, *well* helps prevent the speaker from appearing arrogant or domineering, especially when initiating interaction or introducing oneself. Meanwhile, the particle *kind of* is used to express tentativeness and to avoid strong or absolute claims. In the utterance “It sounds kind of fun,” Luffy presents his opinion as open-ended rather than definitive, allowing space for the hearer’s perspective.

Overall, Luffy’s use of HEPs reflects a relaxed and considerate communication style. Through particles such as *just*, *well*, and *you know*, Luffy softens his speech and reduces pressure on the interlocutor. This linguistic behavior demonstrates respect for the hearer’s negative face, particularly their freedom to act and decide without coercion. As a result, Luffy’s requests, including invitations to join his crew, are framed as polite invitations rather than commands. These findings illustrate how negative politeness strategies operate in fictional dialogue and highlight their relevance in popular media discourse. More specifically, by employing HEPs, Luffy acknowledges the hearer’s right to autonomy, making his requests more acceptable in situations involving social distance or limited familiarity.

An important point emerging from the analysis is that Luffy does not use hedging particles consistently across all situations. As a character, Luffy is generally portrayed as direct and blunt. However, HEPs tend to appear in specific interactional contexts, particularly when Luffy seeks cooperation or agreement from others. In such moments, he becomes more cautious in his word choice, using hedges to avoid sounding commanding or intimidating. This suggests that politeness in Luffy’s speech is not merely a stable personal trait, but a strategic choice shaped by his communicative goals.

Luffy’s selective use of HEPs indicates a purposeful application of negative politeness strategies. By minimizing face threats through particles such as *just*, *well*, and *you know*, he increases the likelihood of positive responses from others. These findings support the view that politeness in fictional dialogue is context-dependent and strategically employed. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that Luffy’s speech reflects a balance between his strong ambitions and his respect for others. Although he is known as an assertive character, he employs hedging particles when seeking cooperation, especially during recruitment interactions. Through these linguistic choices, Luffy maintains positive interaction, mutual trust, and respect for the interlocutor’s autonomy.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusion

The results of the analysis show that Luffy frequently uses HEPs in his speech. In conclusion, these particles *just*, *kind of*, *you know*, and *well* have a central role in negative politeness strategies by softening statements and respecting the interlocutor's autonomy. These make Luffy produce requests and invitations reflecting a careful balance between achieving his goals and maintaining positive interaction. Luffy's strategic use of particles shows how a character with assertive ambitions can still respect others' freedom through language choice. This finding reinforces the relevance of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory in analyzing modern media texts, pragmatic strategies, and audience perception of fictional characters.

This research also fills a gap in previous studies by providing a detailed analysis of HEPs. This study shows how HEPs are strategically used when a character invites others to join him, a situation that carries a higher potential threat to the hearer's negative face. Ultimately, this study highlights that linguistic politeness is not just a matter of softening speech but can be a powerful tool for leadership and fostering team harmony. Luffy's communication style shows that even ambitious and assertive individuals can achieve cooperation and trust by carefully choosing words that respect others, offering valuable lessons in interactions.

Suggestions

For future research, it is recommended to explore the use of HEPs in other characters within the *One Piece* series to examine whether similar negative politeness strategies are applied. Researchers could also conduct a comparative pragmatic analysis between the English-language live-action adaptation and the original Japanese manga or anime, to identify differences in hedging strategies due to translation and cultural context. Additionally, these findings could be useful for scriptwriters and translators who aim to maintain character consistency across adaptations. By understanding how HEPs convey politeness and soften directives, they can ensure that a character's speech preserves its intended personality and social strategies. Such studies would deepen our understanding of how hedging functions in fictional dialogue.

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