

A Pragmatic Analysis of Leadership Style and Communication Among Universiti Malaya Student Leaders

(Analisis Pragmatik Gaya Kepimpinan dan Komunikasi Dalam Kalangan Pemimpin Pelajar Universiti Malaya)

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ABSTRACT

Leadership is vital in steering organisational success, and especially sought-after today by students aiming to enhance their soft skills or employability. This mixed-method study explores leadership through a linguistic lens, specifically how pragmatic strategies manifests in different leadership styles. Unlike previous research that links pragmatics to power in professional, political, or gender-based contexts, this study focuses on “student leadership” in Universiti Malaya. Most importantly, it introduces a new leadership framework, adapted from the models of Lewin et al. (1939) and Goleman (2000). Through a quantitative survey, 35 student leaders were classified into four leadership styles — Empowering, Facilitative, Directive, and Autonomous. Four English-speaking leaders were selected for an in-depth, qualitative analysis. Their meeting recordings were coded using the Brown and Levinson (1987) politeness strategies and the Sacks et al. (1974) turn-taking model. Findings show that the students prefer a people-oriented communication style, which is represented by the Empowering (40.0%) and Facilitative (37.1%) leadership. They frequently used mitigated strategies (>97.3%), especially positive politeness like humour, agreement-seeking, and hedging to build rapport. In contrast, the Autonomous Leader (5.7%) used more bald-on-record strategies (25.9%), reflecting a direct, task-focused style. Turn-taking patterns also reveal that Empowering Leaders took the most turns (45.9%) and spoke the most words (53.4%), indicating a more active, interventionist role. Overall, the pragmatic data reflects their respective positions on the leadership Cartesian Plane. By showing how students use language to manage power and relationships, this study offers practical insights into youth leadership, and contributes to the refinement of training modules in universities, NGOs, and government programs.

Keywords: *Student Leadership, Leadership Style, Pragmatics, Politeness Strategies, Turn-taking, Mixed-methods*

ABSTRAK

Kepimpinan memacu kejayaan sesebuah organisasi dan kini menjadi kemahiran insaniah penting bagi mahasiswa(i) untuk meningkatkan kebolehpasaran mereka. Kajian kaedah campuran ini menerokai konsep kepimpinan dari sudut linguistik, khususnya aplikasi strategi pragmatik dalam pelbagai gaya kepimpinan. Berbeza dengan penyelidikan terdahulu yang mengaitkan pragmatik dengan kuasa dalam konteks profesional, politik ataupun jantina, kajian ini memberi tumpuan kepada "kepimpinan mahasiswa(i)" di Universiti Malaya. Selain itu, ia memperkenalkan rangka kerja kepimpinan baharu berasaskan adaptasi model Lewin (1939) dan Goleman (2000). Melalui tinjauan kuantitatif, 35 pemimpin pelajar telah dikelaskan berdasarkan empat gaya kepimpinan, iaitu Pemerkasa, Fasilitator, Pengarah dan Pemimpin Berautonomi. Kemudian, empat pemimpin yang berbahasa Inggeris dipilih untuk analisis kualitatif secara mendalam. Rakaman mesyuarat dikodkan menggunakan Strategi 7) dan model Pengambilan Giliran Sacks et al. (1974). Dapatan menunjukkan kecenderungan mahasiswa(i) terhadap gaya “berorientasikan orang”, terutamanya Pemerkasa (40.0%) dan Fasilitator (37.1%), dengan penggunaan strategi mitigasi yang tinggi (>97.3%) seperti humor, persetujuan, dan bahasa halus. Pemimpin Berautonomi (5.7%) pula mengutamakan komunikasi tanpa berselindung (25.9%) yang lebih berfokuskan tugas. Dari segi giliran bertutur, Pemerkasa mendominasi sebanyak 45.9% dengan jumlah perkataan yang tertinggi (53.4%). Ini menunjukkan kecenderungan untuk berintervensi. Secara keseluruhan, data-data pragmatik ini mencerminkan

kedudukan masing-masing pada Satah Cartes kepimpinan. Dengan menunjukkan cara mahasiswa(i) mengurus kuasa dan hubungan, kajian ini memberikan wawasan praktikal tentang kepimpinan belia, dan menyumbang kepada penambahbaikan modul latihan yang berkaitan di universiti, NGO dan program kerajaan.

Kata Kunci: Kepimpinan Pelajar, Gaya Kepimpinan, Pragmatik, Strategi Kesantunan, Pengambilan Giliran, Kaedah Campuran

INTRODUCTION

Background

Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences other to reach a common goal (Northouse, 2016) like the helm steering a ship, or a shepherd guiding a flock of sheep. Malik and Azmat (2019) added the “non-coercive” element to the definition, stating that a leader creates a bond beyond surface managerial level; a bond that inspires and motivates others to collectively achieve an adaptable goal without being forced. In other words, a leader is more than just a boss, manager, or administrator. It can also be multi-person and multi-phase, where any person in a group can assume leadership role at any time based on the circumstances (Bass, 2019, as cited in Malik & Azmat, 2019).

This case is especially true for undergraduates, who actively sought after various leadership roles in university to enhance their skills and employability. The roles undertaken include student representative, president, director, vice-director, secretary, treasurer, head of bureau, or even group leader for an assignment discussion. Various research has proven the effectiveness of extracurricular activities in cultivating the sense of leadership among students, and the latter’s importance in nation-building (Ervin & Baghurst, 2017, as cited in Ahmad Aizuddin et al., 2024; Kim & Wargo, 2022).

But two key questions remain. Firstly, is there only one right way to lead? Secondly, what are some salient features that make up these student leaders? While existing leadership-linguistic studies focused mainly on professional, gendered and political contexts (Gusthini et al., 2018; Karimi & Jan, 2022; Wijayanti et al., 2022), this research addresses the gap between leadership style variability and their respective pragmatic strategies, in the scope of university students.

Leadership Style

Extensive research has been done on understanding leadership ranging from its definition, history, to theories. As an age-old concept, there have been various perceptions on the concept. In the research paper titled “Leader and Leadership: Historical Development of The Terms and Critical Review of Literature”, Malik and Azmat (2019) uncovered the progressively changing definition of leadership, throughout time and across regions. In 1975, a leader is a person who instructs and controls people in order to achieve predefined goals; this definition was inclined towards “people management” (Hicks & Gullet, 1975). Frick (2004), on the other hand, regarded a leader as someone at the most forefront, bravely leading the way in spite of uncertainties. Several other researches had a similar interpretation of a leader; that is, someone who inspires the goals, motivations and voluntary actions of others (Cuban, 1988; Bass, 2019). Soft skills like cognitive ability, ethics, flexibility, and communication skills were also added into the definition of leadership (Locke & Kirkpatrick, 1991; Javaid & Mirza, 2012; Khan et al., 2015; Stam et al., 2018, as cited in Malik & Azmat, 2019).

According to Lewin et al. (1939), there are three types of leadership, which are Autocratic, Democratic, and Laissez-faire. Bwalya (2023) defined Autocratic Leadership (also known as Authoritarian Leadership) as a single person holding absolute power without interference from others. It enables quick decision-making, making it effective in crises, but it can suppress creativity and results in lower motivation among followers. Examples include Adolf Hitler and Kim Jong-un. Democratic Leadership (Participative Leadership) encourages consensus and collective decision-making. This enhances engagement, trust, and problem-solving but it can be time-consuming and prone to conflicts. Nelson Mandela is said to be an

example of that. Laissez-faire Leadership (Delegative Leader) adopts a hands-off approach, giving followers maximum autonomy in decision-making and task execution. This promotes creativity and personal growth, but it is only suitable for highly skilled teams. Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Steve Jobs are described to demonstrate this style.

Additionally, Goleman's (2000) leadership model consists of Visionary/Authoritative, Coaching, Affiliative, Democratic, Pacesetter, and Commanding/Coercive. Based on SkillsYouNeed (n.d.), Visionary or Authoritative Leaders are driven by a clear vision and inspire others with the phrase "Come with me." They are confident and empathetic, engaging others with compelling visions, making this style especially effective when introducing new changes. Coaching Leaders, summed up by "Try it," focus on developing individuals by allowing them to experiment with different problem-solving approaches. They emphasize self-awareness and skill development, making this style ideal for long-term staff growth. Affiliative Leaders prioritize people and emotional bonds, believing in "People come first." They thrive in fostering harmony and building relationships, particularly in times of difficulty, but this style lacks a focus on tasks and goals, which can hinder performance when results are needed. Pace-setting Leaders lead by example, encapsulated by "Do as I do, now," and expect excellence and self-direction from their team. While effective with highly skilled and motivated teams, this approach can lead to burnout if sustained for too long. Commanding or Coercive Leaders, characterized by "Do what I tell you", demand immediate compliance, making them effective in crises but limiting initiative and negatively affecting team morale over time.

Bwalya (2023) included other leadership styles in his study, which are Transformational Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Charismatic Leadership, Situational Leadership, and Servant Leadership. Transformational Leadership inspires followers to exceed expectations, fostering innovation and motivation. However, it relies heavily on the leader's presence, and high expectations may cause stress. Notable transformational leaders include Nelson Mandela and Barack Obama. Transactional Leadership focuses on clear expectations and efficiency, making it effective for achieving specific goals. However, it may stifle creativity and long-term motivation. Bill Gates and Angela Merkel are said to exemplify this style. Charismatic Leadership fosters deep loyalty and enthusiasm through effective communication, yet it risks creating overreliance on the leader and potential abuse of power. Martin Luther King Jr. and Steve Jobs

are known for their charismatic leadership. Situational Leadership adapts to followers' needs, but it can be time-consuming and inconsistent. Winston Churchill and Inonge Wina are described to apply this approach. Servant Leadership heavily prioritizes followers' growth and well-being, fostering trust and engagement, but it requires significant resources and may be exploited by others. Jack Ma and Pope Francis embody this style.

While there are many existing leadership types and models, this study focuses specifically on two core dimensions that are most relevant to language use in leadership: People-Oriented vs Task-Oriented and High vs. Low Intervention. This framework helps to better capture how leaders assert or diverge power, and manage relationships through their language choices in real-time university settings.

Pragmatics & Power

The intersection between linguistics and power studies is not something new. Their convergence gave rise to famous linguistic methodologies like Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), where a rich library of research papers is based on. However, this research zooms into the pragmatic branch and studies its reflection of power. Similar research directs their attention specifically on speech acts, politeness theory, interruption, and turn-taking in gender-based, political and professional contexts.

In the realm of political debates, Presidential candidates - Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton from the USA - used speech acts to yield power (Gusthini et al., 2018). The researchers employed an interesting theoretical framework in this descriptive qualitative design, by combining speech act classifications (e.g., representatives, commissives and expressives) with Weber's Power Dimensions (1987). The latter discusses reasons for social stratification, which are class (economic position), party (power), and status (prestige). For example, the use of expressives by Trump to boast about his hotel assets (economic dimensions), and Trump's directives to push Clinton in giving the right answer about NAFTA after 30 years (power dimensions).

Besides, Karimi and Jan (2022) did research on the linguistic strategies used by women leaders in the higher learning institution settings. As qualitative research with case study design, the researchers studied 15 women leaders, such as head of departments, deputy deans, directors, and deans who concurrently hold academic reputational roles like Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor and Professor. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews to gain insight on

self-described leader characteristics and explanation on workplace incidents. It is observed that these women establish power through the use of “I-statements” in face-to-face interactions and digital communications (e.g., email and Whatsapp). For example, “I need this to be done” and “I’m the boss” which are bald and direct. Bossy languages like “As the head of department...” are also used when faced with resistance from their subordinates. Besides, deontic and obligation modals are used alongside “you” to exhibit firmness. For instance, “You cannot just say that is how you feel” and “You need to do the task”.

Furthermore, Wijayanti et al. (2022) selected six job interview videos to analyse candidates’ use of speech acts and politeness strategies. The analysis revealed that both male and female candidates mostly employed positive politeness strategies such as avoiding disagreement and seeking agreement. However, female candidates were more inclined to use negative politeness strategies like giving deference and impersonalizing the speaker, as well as more directive speech acts like asking for permission. These findings suggest subtle gendered preferences in the expression of leadership qualities where women emphasized collaboration and humility, and men more often demonstrated integrity and judgment. The quantification of politeness strategies inspired the methodology in this current research.

Njuki and Ileri (2021) investigated the use of positive and negative politeness strategies by Members of Parliament in Kenya, applying Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory. The research aimed to understand how these strategies contribute to effective interaction among members and protect their public self-image during social exchanges. Employing a descriptive qualitative method and purposive sampling of utterances from the Hansard, the study found that Members of the National Assembly utilize various positive and negative politeness strategies to mitigate threats to “face”. For example, claiming common ground and asking questions. These findings contribute to sociolinguistics and pragmatics, offering insights into effective communication strategies that foster mutual appreciation in conversations.

Interruption is used as a tool to exert dominance in conversation. Previous studies in the late 20th century focused on gender differences; that is, whether men or women interrupt more often to steer the interaction (Shaw & Sadler, 1965; Zimmerman & West, 1975; Bohn & Stutman, 1983; West & Zimmerman, 1983; Jariah Mohd. Jan, 1999, as cited in Jan & Mohajer, 2012). Jan and Mohajer diverged from gender comparison to study how Iranian women practised power over their peers through interruption. This qualitative, conversation

analysis-based research involved four participants who are professionals aged between 25 and 36, and were placed in a face-to-face group discussion at a living room with snacks. Through this setting, the researchers aimed to conduct a comfortable environment to prompt naturally occurring interactions.

The result was intriguing. The researchers employed Beattie’s interruption model (1981) and identified three main types, which are butting-in interruption (i.e., simultaneous speech that leads to unsuccessful take-over), silent interruption (i.e., successful seize of floor without simultaneous speech), and simple interruption (i.e., successful seize of floor with simultaneous overlap). Attempts to retain one’s floor included raising one’s voice and ignoring the interruption attempts. With butt-in interruptions as the most common tactic, the women are found to be quite assertive in both expressing their ideas and keeping hold of their turn.

Ghilzai and Baloch (2016) study empirically investigated gender differences in turn-taking across male-to-male, female-to-female, and cross-sex conversations in radio, TV, and casual settings. Models used to explain turn-taking are that of Sacks et al. (1974) and Garcia (1991). The research aimed to provide evidence regarding common gender difference stereotypes in language. While some past research suggested women are more talkative, other recent studies opposed this. Their findings indicate that women are indeed more likely to take turns in conversation, particularly in mixed-sex interactions, which supports the idea that women’s higher turn-taking rates are linked to interpersonal sensitivity rather than a lack of assertiveness. The study reinforces that while there’s no significant difference in turn-taking rates within same-sex conversations (male-to-male or female-to-female), a clear gender difference emerges in mixed-sex contexts where females take more turns. The calculation of conversational turns using percentage also forms the basis of our research providing real-life examples to the quantitative methodology section.

Another qualitative descriptive study analysed turn-taking strategies in an interview with Warren Edward Buffett on *Squawk Box Business News*, applying theories from Stenstrom (1994) and Sacks et al. (1974) to understand speaker shifts (Ashidiq & Sariyati, 2022). The findings identified 62 instances of turn-taking strategies, with “taking the floor” being the most frequent (45 data points), followed by “yielding the floor” (17 data points), and “holding the floor” (13 data points). In terms of turn allocation, participants more often utilized the “next speaker self-select” technique (34 data points) than the “current speaker

selects next speaker" technique (28 data points). The study concluded that these turn-taking types, especially "taking the floor" strategies, facilitate a smooth conversational flow, indicating a cooperative role among participants. However, this current research will not dive into the details of Stenstrom's (1994) turn-taking types, due to the complexity of also analysing politeness strategies, as well as more than just one transcript.

This review provides a broad overview of the types of pragmatic research done. With that, this study focuses on only two key theories which are politeness strategy and turn-taking. Thus far, there has not been any research linking Leadership Styles and Pragmatics & Power, in the context of university students. This gap can be addressed through the intersection of three pillars above with a mixed method approach.

Problem Statement

Firstly, is the overly multifaceted nature of existing leadership style models. Lewin et al. (1939) and Goleman (2000) have proposed various types of leaders, such as affiliative leader, pacesetter leader, and many more. To effectively connect the dots between the frameworks and that of pragmatics, the leadership models need to undergo integration, synthesis, and simplification. Two key dimensions are then extracted. These dimensions ought to be holistic yet still relevant to the pragmatic context; that is, to be investigable from the pragmatic perspective. Therefore, there needs to be a new, adapted leadership framework that addresses the two dimensions, by using the Brown and Levinson (1987) politeness strategies and the Sacks et al. (1974) turn-taking model. They study straightforwardness vs affectiveness, and intervention level respectively.

The selection of these two factors are more than just the researcher's observations among undergraduates. Existing research has proven that they are the main players in determining followers' willingness to engage and comply. For example, Guo et al. (2015) found that autocratic verbal communication (i.e., more assertive and argumentative) by leaders often results in low job satisfaction among employees, while a supportive verbal communication (i.e., openness and friendliness) leads to high job satisfaction. Besides that, Calluso and Devetag (2024) stated that democratic leadership is more effective in motivating employees, even when the job isn't intrinsically rewarding. This justifies the need for establishing a new leadership framework with only two variables. Naturally, how the linguistic features differ according to the variables is

also studied.

Significance of Study

This study is significant because it fills a gap in leadership research by exploring how student leaders use language to assert or diverge power and manage relationships. Students will get to understand themselves and their leaders better specifically the different types of leadership, which strategies are analysable and replicable through the help of linguistics. The research provides insights into how students (leaders or potential leaders) can communicate more effectively, balancing authority and rapport. Therefore, it will be a meaningful contribution to leadership training by the university, non-governmental organisations, or even ministries.

Limitation of Study

Firstly, it is important to note that this study is a pragmatic analysis, not conversation analysis. Therefore, focus is only given to the overarching or "macro-level" pragmatic themes. Its micro-level counterpart, such as pauses, silences, overlaps, prosody, and non-verbal cues are not studied. While interruption and speaker transition are observed, it is only used for quantifying turn-taking and the intervention level of a speaker. Secondly, this study relies exclusively on spoken text and not written text. Examples of the latter include WhatsApp, which is a common tool of communication today. However, it is excluded in this analysis due to the inherent differences between both mediums, which would lead to disparate findings.

Thirdly, the relatively small sample size, particularly in the latter part of the findings, was constrained by strict time and selection criteria. Consequently, there is a lack of representation of the Directive Leadership Style, and the overall findings might not fully represent the broader student leadership population. Nevertheless, the study still yields meaningful results and lays the groundwork for future research in the field. Fourthly, the nature of manual thematic analysis and turn counting present certain limitations, as these methods rely heavily on human judgment and are more susceptible to oversight compared to automated systems. While rigorous steps were taken to ensure accuracy, the findings are inherently shaped by the researcher's interpretation of the data.

Research Objectives & Research Questions

The purpose of this two-phase, sequential mixed methods study is to analyse how pragmatic strategies vary across different leadership styles at Universiti Malaya, specifically among students to assert or diverge power in their leadership roles. The first phase will involve a quantitative assessment using questionnaires to identify the most common leadership styles. The respondents are then filtered for the second phase, which involves a qualitative coding of the recorded leadership meetings, followed by once again, a quantitative comparison of each pragmatic strategy used. The findings from both phases will be combined to explore the relationship between leadership styles and the types of pragmatic tactics employed.

On a micro-level, this study aims to answer two research questions:

- i. What are the common leadership styles among Universiti Malaya student leaders?
- ii. How are pragmatic strategies used to negotiate authority across different leadership styles?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research is a case study that adopts a mixed method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. A case study is detailed research of the real-world characteristics of a certain subject (McCombes, 2023); in this case, it is the linguistic strategies employed by university student leaders in exerting or reducing power. The quantitative component involves the use of a questionnaire designed to classify leaders into four leadership styles. This provides a structured insight into participants' self-perceived leadership styles. The qualitative component involves pragmatic analysis of student leadership discourse to identify the strategies used. The pragmatic codes are then quantified into tables and charts to compare across different leadership styles. Integrating these two methods allows for a more comprehensive understanding of how pragmatic strategies align with varying leadership behaviours.

Theoretical Framework

Leadership Style

There are many leadership style frameworks. However, most do not directly address how language use, particularly pragmatic strategies, reflects or shapes leadership behaviour. To address this, the current

study combines and simplifies key elements from two influential leadership models Lewin et al. (1939) and Goleman (2000), along with those compiled by Bwalya (2023) into a more targeted framework. Rather than adopting their full range of categories, this study extracts the two most pragmatically relevant dimensions:

i. People-Oriented vs. Task-Oriented (X)

This dimension reflects the speaker's emphasis on interpersonal relationships and members' emotional wellbeing. People-oriented leaders may hedge their speech, show empathy, and use positive politeness strategies to maintain harmony and protect members' feelings. They may also use humour to build rapport. Task-oriented leaders, on the other hand, are more likely to focus on goal achievement and clear communication. They might use directives or imperatives and less mitigation, prioritizing efficiency and goal completion over interpersonal concerns.

ii. High Intervention vs. Low Intervention (Y)

This dimension focuses on the dominance of a leader in an interaction, as reflected in the number of turns and words spoken. For example, high-intervention leaders may frequently take over the floor to maintain control, clarify, or steer the conversation. In contrast, low-intervention leaders might take a more facilitative or autonomous approach, allowing team members more speaking time, rarely interrupting, and using minimal responses through backchanneling.

These two axes form a Cartesian Plane with four quadrants that allows for a clearer, linguistically grounded classification of leadership styles.

Pragmatic Analysis

This study applies two pragmatic theories, which are Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory and Sacks et al.'s (1974) Turn-taking Concept. This section explains further about the two theories.

i. Politeness theory

Brown and Levinson (1987) outlined four politeness strategies to save one from face-threatening acts (FTA). Firstly, they defined the concept of "face" as a public self-image that everyone wants to claim for themselves, consisting of two types:

- **Negative Face:** The desire of every competent adult member to be free in terms of their actions and free from imposition. It is a fairly familiar concept to all; the one where we traditionally and automatically think of when the word "politeness" is mentioned. Non-coercion is

TABLE 1: Description of Leadership Styles

Name	Quadrant	Description
Empowering Leader	(+X, +Y)	People-oriented and high intervention This leader actively nurtures relationships while taking a hands-on approach to guiding their team. They frequently offer support, mentorship, and direction, ensuring both individual and collective growth. While they prioritize team wellbeing, they also assert control to keep progress aligned with goals, believing that strong collaboration and personal fulfilment drive success.
Directive Leader	(-X, +Y)	Task-oriented and high intervention This leader is highly focused on task completion and achievement of goals. They ensure productivity by maintaining tight control over team processes and decisions. Their interventions are frequent and aimed at correcting or optimizing performance. While they focus on outcomes, they might overlook team relationships or emotional needs, placing emphasis on efficiency and deadlines.
Facilitative Leader	(+X, -Y)	People-oriented and low intervention This leader prioritizes team relationships and harmony. In meetings, they mostly listen and only intervene when necessary. By minimizing authority, they encourage open dialogue and foster trust, adopting a more Laissez-faire approach that grants the team autonomy.
Autonomous Leader	(-X, -Y)	Task-oriented and low intervention. This leader has high expectations on task achievement and results but adopts the Laissez-faire style. They offer low intervention, allowing team members to manage their work independently. They set clear goals but provide minimal guidance or oversight, trusting the team to execute the tasks autonomously.

key.

- Positive Face: The members' desire for others to appreciate and approve their self-image and wants. For example, to be ratified, understood, and admired. The researchers gave a good example where "Mrs B", as a passionate gardener, feels happy when visitors compliment, "What lovely roses; I wish ours looked like that! How do you do it?" This shows a shared desire and common goal.

An FTA can cause damage to either the addressee (H) or speaker (S). Some examples of the former include ordering H to do/not do something; putting pressure on H to accept or reject an offer, possibly even indebting H; expressing strong negative emotions towards H; or even S's disapproval, contempt, and accusations towards H's personal characteristics. On the other hand, FTA done towards S can be exemplified as S having to express thanks or apologies; forced acceptance of

H's apology; unwilling promises or offers; responses to H's faux pas; and S's self-humiliation, confession, and emotional leakage.

Besides avoiding FTA completely, there are several strategies in doing the FTA - which are on record or off record. Off record is the violation of several Grice's Maxims of Cooperation. For instance, being ambiguous in one's meaning when saying "Oh, it's cold in here", which may be intended to get others to turn off the fan, without explicitly stating so. An off-record strategy can also be metaphors, irony, rhetorical questions and more with a heavy emphasis on implied meaning. On record strategy (i.e., doing FTA unambiguously) can still be further divided into two types bald on and with redressive action. Bald on is direct with imperatives, due to urgency, familiarity, superiority, or simple offers that are obviously in H's interest (e.g., Do sit down). When FTA is done with redressive actions, it is called positive politeness (i.e., attending to H's positive face) and negative politeness

(i.e., attending to H's negative face). Based on these, below:
Fathi (2024) reorganised the strategies into that of higher and lower-order, forming a more simplified and clearer guideline for coding in this research.

The strategies are structured and listed as

TABLE 2: Politeness Strategies

Type	High-order strategies	Low-order strategies
Positive Politeness	Interest strategy	• Notice, attend to H (his/her interests, wants, needs, goods) • Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H) • Can intensify interest to H
	Co-identity strategy	• Use in-group identity markers
	Agreement strategy	• Seek agreement • Avoid disagreement • Presuppose/raise/assert common ground • Joke
	Empathy strategy	• Assert or presuppose S's knowledge of and concern for H's wants
	Reflexivity strategy	• Offer, promise • Be optimistic • Include both S and H in the activity • Give (or ask for) reasons
	Reciprocity strategy	• Assume or assert reciprocity
	Fulfilling H's wants	• Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)
Negative Politeness	Indirectness strategy	• Be direct / conventionally indirect
	Hedging strategy	• Questions, hedge
	Uncoercing H strategy	• Be pessimistic • Minimise the size of imposition on H • Give deference
	Apology strategy	• Apologize
	Dissociation strategy	• Impersonalise S and H: avoid pronouns 'I' and 'you' • State the FTA as a general rule • Nominalise
	Redressing other desires of H	• Go on record as incurring a debt, or as not indebting H
Off-record	Violate Maxim of Relevance	• Give hints/clues • Give association clues • Presuppose
	Violate Maxim of Quality	• Understate • Overstate • Use tautologies • Use contradictions • Be ironic • Use metaphors • Use rhetorical questions

	Violate Maxim of Manner	• Be ambiguous • Be vague • Over-generalise • Displace H • Be incomplete, use ellipsis
Bald on record	Direct imperative form	• Showing disagreement • Giving suggestion/advice • Requesting • Warning • Threatening

Turn-taking

Sacks et al. (1974) defined a turn using concepts like turn-constructural unit (TCU), transition-relevance places (TRP), and the turn-allocation component. Firstly, a turn consists of various types; in English, they can be sentential, clausal, phrasal and lexical constructions. The TCUs signify the potential completion point of a speaker's turn and hence the likely transfer of his/her turn to others this is known as Transition-relevance places (TRP). On the other hand, the turn-allocation component reveals two key techniques: (i) current speaker selects next speaker; and (ii) self-selection of turn. Besides these three key concepts, Sacks et al.'s theoretical framework outlines several other rules, which are:

- i. Speaker-change occurs at TRPs but is not guaranteed.
- ii. One party talks at a time until their turn is completed.
- iii. Overlaps are common and can happen due to competing self-selectors but are brief.
- iv. Most transitions occur without gaps or overlap.
- v. Turn order is not fixed and can vary.
- vi. Turn size is variable based on the types of units used.
- vii. Length of conversation is not predetermined.
- viii. Content of turns is not specified in advance.
- ix. Relative distribution of turns is not specified in advance.
- x. Number of parties can vary in a conversation.
- xi. Talk can be continuous or discontinuous, depending on whether another speaker takes

the turn.

- xii. Repair mechanisms exist for dealing with turn-taking errors. This includes interruption markers (e.g. "excuse me"), false starts (i.e., beginning an utterance and subsequently switching it to a new train of thought), and repeats of parts of a turn overlapped by others.

In the current research, "one party speaking at a time" is counted as a turn. Unsuccessful interruptions by the other party do not lead to a new turn, as they fail to take over the floor. On the contrary, a successful interruption even if it involves a brief overlap meets Sacks et al.'s rules (b) and (c) for turn-taking, and is therefore counted as a new turn. Backchanneling responses such as "mm-hmm" or "uh-huh" serve as supportive signals that encourage the current speaker to continue. These are considered cooperative overlaps and do not mark a transition of turns, as the original speaker retains control of the floor (Bertrand et al., 2007, as cited in Blomsma et al., 2024). These turns exhibit the student leaders' control of the conversation, regardless of whether it is topic initiation, topic maintenance, topic shift, or termination, or more. However, this study does not go deep into the classification of the topics, merely focusing on the frequency of turns to show dominance.

Analytical Approach

The diagram below summarises the methodology employed in this research, which has two phases - a quantitative questionnaire phase and pragmatic analysis respectively answering research questions 1 and 2. Details are further explained in the sections below.

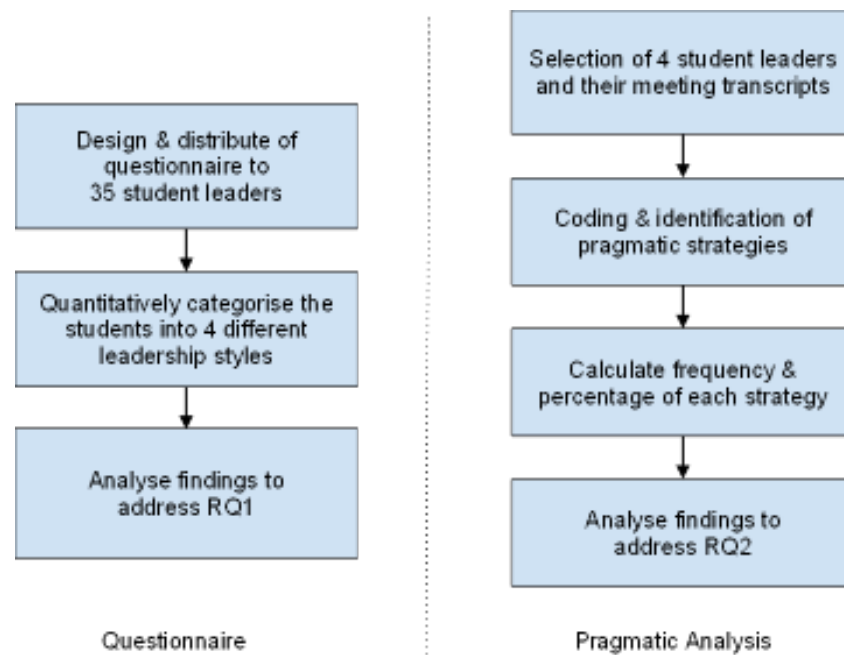


FIGURE 1: Analytical Approach

Data Collection

Sample

For the first phase focusing on leadership styles, the sample consists of 35 student leaders from Universiti Malaya. These individuals hold positions such as (vice-) presidents, (deputy-) directors, heads of departments, secretaries, student council representatives, and group assignment leaders. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique where individuals are chosen based on specific characteristics relevant to the research (Nikolopoulou, 2022). To ensure alignment with the study's second objectives, respondents were further filtered based on two criteria: (1) they predominantly use English in their meeting discussions as this is a coursework for the English Language and Linguistics; and (2) they represent a range of leadership styles. Four representatives from the Empowering, Facilitative, and Autonomous Leader groups were selected. With their consent, recordings of their meetings were obtained and examined to identify the pragmatic strategies used in their leadership discourse. However, there is no data from the Directive Leader's group, as the respondents do not fulfil condition number (1).

Instrument

Data collection involves both quantitative and

qualitative instruments. First, an online Google Forms questionnaire is distributed via WhatsApp to potential participants. The questionnaire is divided into three sections: Section A gathers demographic information such as age, gender and position; Section B contains a leadership style assessment adapted from established frameworks like Goleman's (2000) Six Leadership Styles and Lewin's (1939) Leadership Theory, with modifications to suit the research contexts; and Section C is about situational influence. Following the questionnaire, data is collected through audio or video recordings of actual leadership meetings, which will be transcribed for pragmatic analysis. Each participant will contribute one recorded online or physical meeting with an average of 45 minutes each to ensure sufficient data for a meaningful comparison. Recordings may be conducted via platforms such as Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, or using digital voice recorders, depending on the meeting format.

Data Analysis

Questionnaire

Responses from the leadership style questionnaire will be analyzed using a 5-point Likert scale, where the original 1–5 scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) is converted to a scale from -2 to 2 for better plotting on the cartesian plane. Meanwhile, some items which have reverse scores will follow the 2 to -2 scale,

as shown in Table 4 below. The importance of a reversed Likert item is to reduce straight-lining (i.e., giving the same response due to lack of engagement etc) and

acquiescence bias (i.e., blindly agreeing or disagreeing with the items without thorough consideration) (InsiderCX, n.d.).

TABLE 3: Conversion of Likert Scale to X & Y Scores

Likert Scale (1-5)	Converted Score (-2 to 2)
1 - Strongly Disagree	-2
2 - Disagree	-1
3 - Neutral	0
4 - Agree	1
5 - Strongly Agree	2

TABLE 4: Conversion of Likert Scale to X & Y Scores (Inverted Scales)

Likert Scale (1-5)	Converted Score (-2 to 2)
1 - Strongly Disagree	2
2 - Disagree	1
3 - Neutral	0
4 - Agree	-1
5 - Strongly Agree	-2

After converting and summing up the scores, the X and Y values for each respondent are then plotted against the cartesian plane, i.e., the respondents are now categorised based on leadership styles. The number of respondents in each leadership quadrant, along with their percentages, are then calculated and tabulated using Google Sheets.

Pragmatic Analysis

Meeting recordings of the selected respondents are transcribed using TurboScribe's automated transcription tool, followed by manual review and correction to ensure accuracy. From these verified transcripts, politeness strategies are identified and coded using the five-day free trial of [ATLAS.ti](#), a qualitative data analysis software. The code scheme is developed based on Fathi (2024) framework presented in Table 2 above. Separately, the number of turns taken by each respondent are counted manually on printed transcripts, following the predefined turn-taking criteria above. After both are done, the frequencies and percentages of politeness strategies and turn-taking instances are

tabulated in Google Sheets. To enhance interpretation and presentation, bar charts are generated for better visualisation. Besides the quantitative calculations, suitable examples of utterances are also quoted with elaborations.

Ethical Consideration

Respondents' participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and participants are informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without any consequences or need for justification. Prior to data collection, written consent will be obtained from each participant, outlining the purpose of the study, procedures involved, and how their data will be used. Besides that, all data collected in this study is handled with strict confidentiality. Written and recorded data will be used solely for academic purposes and will not be shared with unauthorized third parties. Participants' identities are also protected through the use of pseudonyms. These ethical measures ensure that participants' rights and privacy are respected throughout the research process.

TABLE 5: No. of Respondents in Each Leadership Style

Leadership Style	No. of respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Empowering	14	40.0
Facilitative	13	37.1
Directive	3	8.6
Autonomous	2	5.7
Others	3	8.6
Total	35	100.0



FIGURE 2: Distribution of Respondents' Leadership Styles on a Cartesian Plane

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Leadership Style

Based on the findings, the most common leadership style among UM student leaders is the Empowering Leader ($n = 14$, 40.0%), followed by Facilitative Leader ($n = 13$, 37.1%), Directive Leader and Others ($n = 3$, 8.6% respectively), and lastly Autonomous Leader ($n = 2$, 5.7%). Overall, it can be concluded that the respondents are more people-oriented than task-oriented putting more emphasis on building rapport than achieving goals. The only key difference is the intervention level; there is a relatively balanced spread between those

who consider themselves as more proactive in guiding outcomes versus those who are more Laissez-faire. With Autonomous Leaders appearing least frequently, the data suggests that most student leaders tend to avoid a highly “laid-back” leadership approach. This implies a perceived need for a minimum level of assertiveness to ensure task completion. Interestingly, three students categorized as “Others” do not fall within any of the four defined quadrants. Their placement on the coordination plot both the people/task-oriented scale ($X = 0$) and the intervention scale ($Y = 0$) - indicates a balanced or neutral leadership style. Figure 2 above provides a visual summary of these distributions and positions.

TABLE 6: Distribution of Leadership Style by Age

Age	Empowering		Facilitative		Directive		Autonomous		Other		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<18	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
18 - 20	2	5.7	1	2.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	2.9	4	11.4
21 - 23	10	28.6	8	22.9	3	8.6	1	2.9	2	5.7	24	68.6
24 - 26	2	5.7	4	11.4	0	0.0	1	2.9	0	0.0	7	20.0
> 26	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	14	40.0	13	37.1	3	8.6	2	5.7	3	8.6	35	100.0

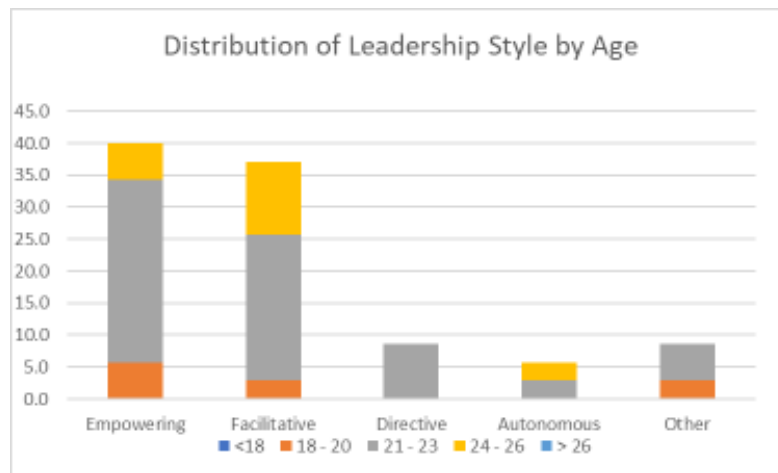


FIGURE 3: Distribution of Leadership Style by Age

Age

Having analysed the overall leadership style, this subsection dives into the possible factors affecting the outcome. Findings shown that a majority of the respondents are aged between 21 to 23 years old ($n = 24$, 68.6%), followed by the age group of 24 to 26 ($n = 7$, 20.0%); lastly, it is 18 to 20 years old ($n = 4$, 11.4%). Anbazhagan and Kotur's (2014) study on 112 South Indian factory workers revealed that age is a factor influencing leadership characteristics. They found that individuals started off with a more autocratic approach before transitioning into a more democratic style in their middle ages, and eventually adopting a Laissez-faire attitude at later stages. They explained that this is on par with existing theories of educational psychology, where one gradually becomes more understanding of their surroundings and hence more flexible as they age. This is further supported by Tomova Shakur et al. (2024), whose research proved that there is a positive relationship between age and passive-avoidant leadership.

With only a few years of age gap between respondents in the current study, the age factor does not provide prominent findings. However, the oldest age group here (i.e., 24-26 years old) yielded two results: (1) more than half of the respondents identified themselves as facilitative rather than empowering; (2) some perceive themselves as autonomous but none are directive. In other words, they intervene less than their other age group counterparts.

Leadership Experience

Respondents' leadership experience is classified into four categories, namely "less than 1 year", "1-5 years", "6-10 years", and "more than 10 years". Students with 1 to 5 years of experience constitutes the most part ($n = 19$, 54.3%), followed by 6 to 10 years ($n = 10$, 28.6%), then more than 10 years ($n = 5$, 14.3%), and finally less than one year ($n = 1$, 2.9%). According to Mushtaq and Nisa (2019) who studied 100 bank managers, those having more leadership experience were found to be more transformational and less transactional, and vice-

TABLE 7: Distribution of Leadership Style by Experience

Leadership Experience	Empowering		Facilitative		Directive		Autonomous		Others		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
< 1 year	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	2.9	1	2.9
1-5 years	10	28.6	7	20.0	0	0.0	1	2.9	1	2.9	19	54.3
6-10 years	2	5.7	5	14.3	1	2.9	1	2.9	1	2.9	10	28.6
> 10 years	2	5.7	1	2.9	2	5.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	14.3
Total	14	40	13	37.1	3	8.6	2	5.7	3	8.6	35	100.0

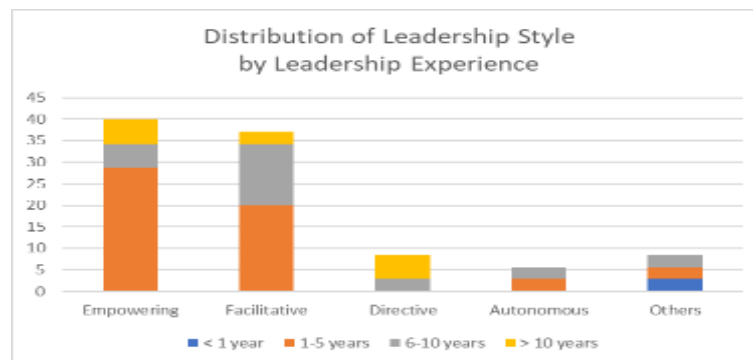


FIGURE 4: Distribution of Leadership Style by Experience

versa. Translating into the terms of this study, they are said to be more people-oriented placing emphasis on inspiring motivation and aligning with followers' values rather than a task-based approach of exchanging rewards and punishment. This is also related to the age factor mentioned above. Consequently, it was anticipated that respondents with more experience would predominantly align with the Facilitative Leadership style. However, the actual findings reveal a more dispersed pattern. To illustrate, respondents

with the most leadership experience (> 10 years) are primarily Empowering (n = 2, 5.7%), Directive (n = 2, 5.7%), and lastly Facilitative (n = 1, 2.9%); those with 1 to 5 years of practice are mainly Empowering (n = 10, 28.6%), followed by Facilitative (n = 7, 20.0%). On the other hand, students who have been leaders for 6 to 10 years are dominantly Facilitative (n = 5, 14.3%). This indicates that leadership style may not always align neatly with experience alone.

TABLE 8: Distribution of Leadership Style by Gender

Leadership Style	Male		Female		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)	(%)
Empowering	6	17.1	8	22.9	14	40.0
Facilitative	8	22.9	5	14.3	13	37.1
Directive	1	2.9	2	5.7	3	8.6
Autonomous	2	5.7	0	0.0	2	5.7
Others	0	0.0	3	8.6	3	8.6
Total	17	48.6	18	51.4	35	100.0

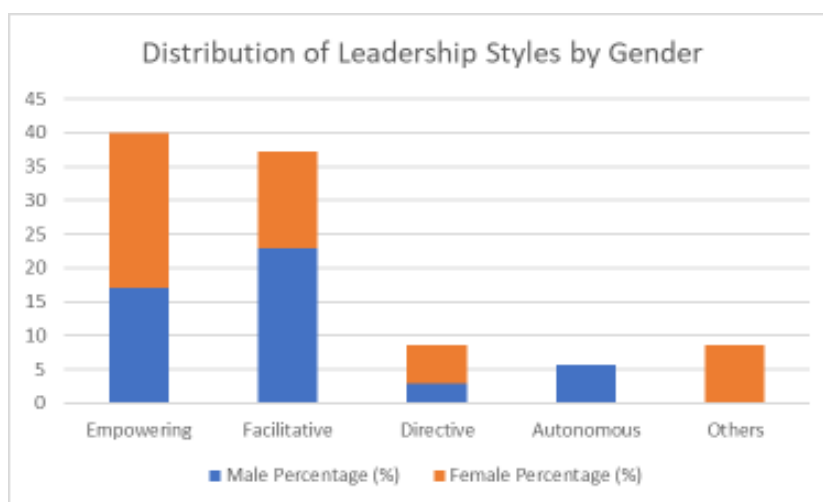


FIGURE 5: Distribution of Leadership Styles by Gender

Gender

The questionnaire was completed by 17 male (48.6%) and 18 female (51.4%) respondents, resulting in a fairly balanced gender distribution. Specifically, most male leaders are Facilitative ($n = 8$, 22.9%), followed by Empowering ($n = 6$, 17.1%), Autonomous ($n = 2$, 5.7%) and Directive ($n = 1$, 2.9%). On the other hand, female leaders are mostly Empowering ($n = 8$, 22.9%), then Facilitative ($n = 5$, 14.3%), Others ($n = 3$, 8.6%) and finally Directive ($n = 2$, 5.7%). Both groups showed the least preference for Directive Leadership, and none of the female leaders identified as Autonomous.

Although both male and female leaders in this study demonstrate a high degree of people orientation, this trend differs from patterns commonly reported in previous research. Bai (2024) found that female leaders are more inclined towards transformational leadership style (people-oriented), while male leaders are more transactional (task-oriented). However, another research revealed that 15 women leaders working in higher learning institutions can also be quite direct and bald in communicating their wants (Karimi & Jan, 2022) which is a strong sign of task-orientation. Given these differing results, it would be inappropriate to conclude that gender has a significant influence on leadership style. However, this section demonstrated an intriguing observation, where female leaders are found to be more intervening than their male counterparts. This aligns with Ghilzai and Baloch's (2016) findings where women are noticed to take more turns than men in mixed-sex conversation reflecting the frequent and supportive communication patterns of Empowering Leaders.

Pragmatic Analysis of Leadership Communication

Four respondents are selected based on the criteria that they are in a naturally conducive environment and speak mostly English in their meetings.

Politeness Strategies

Each leader demonstrates a distinct use of politeness strategies. Based on the data, Facilitative Leader 2 (FL2) employs the highest percentage of mitigated strategies (100.0%), followed by Facilitative Leader 1 (FL1) (99.4%), Empowering Leader (EL) (97.3%), and Autonomous Leader (AL) (74.1%). Among the mitigated strategies, Positive Politeness is the most prominent across all four leaders, followed by Negative Politeness, and lastly Off-record Strategy. On the other end of the spectrum, the use of bald on record is most prominent in Autonomous Leader (25.9%), followed by Empowering Leader (2.7%), Facilitative Leader 1 (0.6%), and Facilitative Leader 2 (0.0%). Both the leadership styles and their respective use of mitigation strategies align with each other people-oriented leaders (i.e., Empowering and Facilitative Leaders) are more likely to mitigate their speech, while task-oriented leaders (i.e., Autonomous Leader) are more direct when communicating.

Besides that, Empowering Leaders' ($n = 147$) lower usage of both mitigated and unmitigated strategies compared to their Facilitative counterpart ($n = 170$) might be an outlier result, or one where the leaders adapt their real-life speech based on the situation. While they do not reveal ideal synchronicities, it reflects the flexible and dynamic nature of speech. The same applies to Facilitative Leader 2's relatively lower number of

TABLE 9: Pragmatic Strategies Employed by Different Leaders

Pragmatic Strategies		Empowering Leader		Facilitative Leader 1		Facilitative Leader 2		Autonomous Leader	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Positive Politeness	Interest strategy	7	4.8	23	13.5	10	9.8	4	2.9
	Co-identity strategy	4	2.7	13	7.6	5	4.9	1	0.7
	Agreement strategy	54	36.7	41	24.1	18	17.6	27	19.4
	Empathy strategy	0	0.0	4	2.4	5	4.9	3	2.2
	Reflexivity strategy	25	17.0	18	10.6	7	6.9	10	7.2
	Reciprocity strategy	1	0.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
	Fulfilling H's wants	9	6.1	21	12.4	9	8.8	5	3.6
Total (Positive Politeness)		100	68.0	120	70.6	54	52.9	50	36.0
Negative Politeness	Indirectness strategy	9	6.1	2	1.2	5	4.9	10	7.2
	Hedging strategy	13	8.8	17	10.0	12	11.8	22	15.8
	Uncoercing H strategy	12	8.2	19	11.2	23	22.5	14	10.1
	Apology strategy	3	2.0	2	1.2	3	2.9	0	0.0
	Dissociation strategy	0	0.0	1	0.6	0	0.0	1	0.7
	Redressing other desires of H	2	1.4	2	1.2	1	1.0	0	0.0
	Total (Negative Politeness)	39	26.5	43	25.3	44	43.1	47	33.8
Off-record	Violate Maxim of Relevance	1	0.7	1	0.6	0	0.0	1	0.7
	Violate Maxim of Quality	2	1.4	5	2.9	3	2.9	4	2.9
	Violate Maxim of Manner	1	0.7	0	0.0	1	1.0	1	0.7
	Total (Off-record)	4	2.7	6	3.5	4	3.9	6	4.3
TOTAL (MITIGATED STRATEGY)		143	97.3	169	99.4	102	100.0	103	74.1
Bald on record (Unmitigated)	Direct imperative form	4	2.7	1	0.6	0	0.0	36	25.9
TOTAL (MITIGATED & UNMITIGATED STRATEGIES)		147	100.0	170	100.0	102	100.0	139	100.0

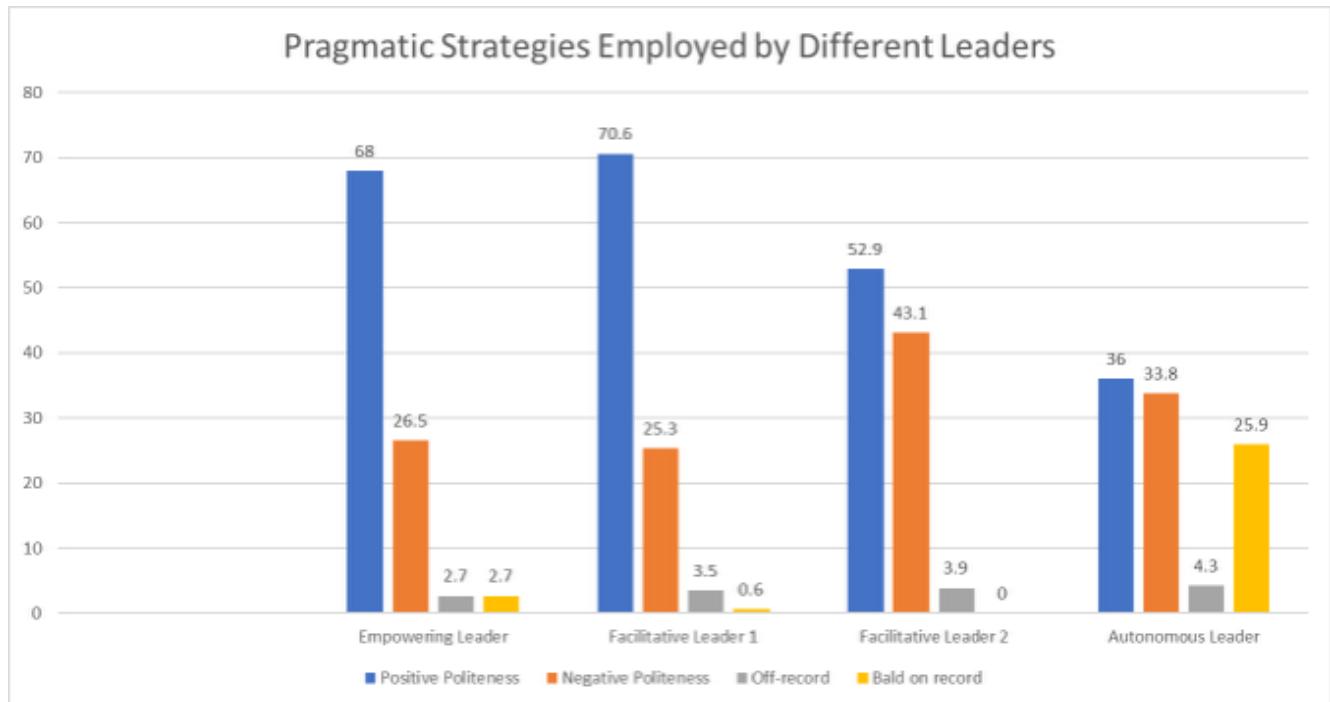


FIGURE 6: Pragmatic Strategies Employed by Different Leader

strategies employed — it might be due to the fact that he / she takes on a secondary role in the meeting with Facilitative Leader 1. However, Facilitative Leader 2 is still studied as he / she indicated strong leadership traits through his / her communication which would bring insightful results.

Positive Politeness

Having presented a broad overview of the comparisons,

the following paragraphs then delve into the categories of each mitigation strategy. Starting with Positive Politeness, Facilitative Leader 1 uses most of the strategy (70.6%), Empowering Leader comes second at 68.0%, followed by Facilitative Leader 2 (52.9%), and lastly Autonomous Leader (36.0%). Positive politeness is a tactic used to make the hearer (H) feel appreciated and approved. It consists of seven sub strategies namely Interest, Co-identity, Agreement, Empathy, Reflexivity, Reciprocity, and Fulfilling H's Wants.

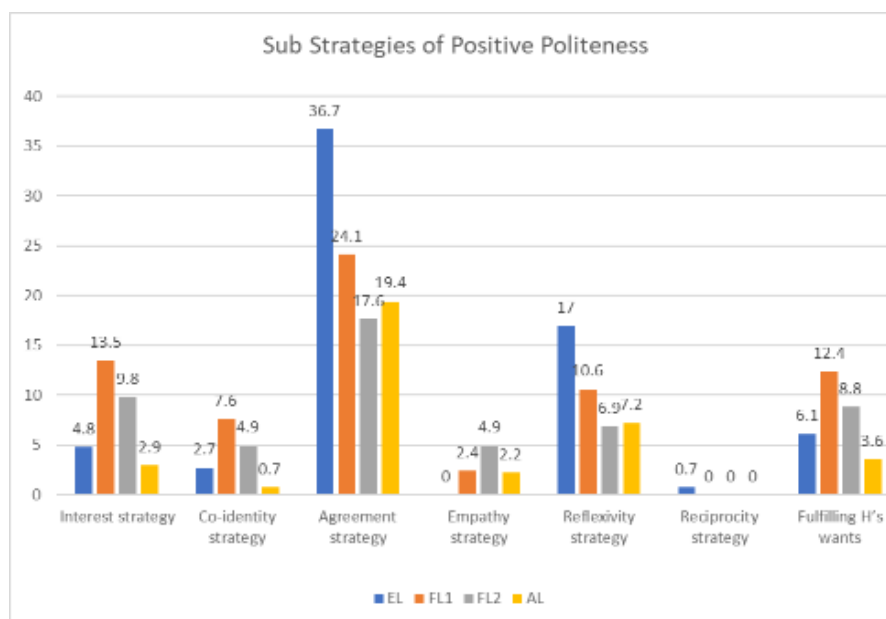


FIGURE 7: Sub Strategies of Positive Politeness

The most common sub strategy across all four leaders is the Agreement Strategy, constituting 36.7% for EL, 24.1% for FL1, 19.4% for AL, and 17.6% for FL2. These percentages include utterances in seeking agreement, avoiding disagreement, raising common ground, and jokes. The second-most common sub strategy is that of Reflexivity by EL (17.0%) and AL (7.2%); and Interest Strategy for FL1 (13.5%) and FL2 (9.8%) respectively. The former consists of offers and promises, being optimistic, including both S and H in the activity, and giving (or asking for) reasons. Meanwhile, the latter can be broken down further into noticing and attending to H's interest, wants, needs, goods; exaggerating interest, approval or sympathy with H; and intensifying interest to H. Next, all four leaders collectively share the third-most popular strategy Fulfilling H's wants. Statistically, it is 6.1% for EL, 12.4% for FL1, 8.8% for FL2, and 3.6% for AL. This strategy involves giving gifts to H, whether it be physical goods, sympathy, understanding, or cooperation.

Besides their top threes, the data also reveals their least used tactic: EL uses none of Empathy Strategy (0.0%), while FL1, FL2, and AL did not use the Reciprocity Strategy (0.0%) throughout their meeting discussions. The remaining strategy with intermediate usage is that of Co-identity, which is reflected through the use of in-group identity markers. Several extractable examples are shown below.

Agreement Strategy

Seeking Agreement

- “Yes, exactly.”
- “I mean, can I disclose about it now? I think we can, right?”
- “Yeah. What do you think? Is it fine?”

The sample utterances above illustrate how the speaker (S) both expresses agreement with the hearer (H) and actively invites mutual understanding or approval. The first utterance, “Yes, exactly,” is a direct affirmation, reinforcing common ground and rapport. Meanwhile, the second and third utterances include a tag question “...right?” and “Is it fine?” which functions as a soft prompt, encouraging the hearer to participate and agree.

Avoiding Disagreement

- “Like, okay, yeah, we did manage to solve these problems as they came along. But these are things that shouldn't have happened.”

S demonstrates partial agreement and acknowledgement of H's efforts in handling the challenges that have arisen. However, this affirmation is immediately followed by a contrasting conjunction (“but”), which introduces S's expectation for improvement. In other words, S softens the impact of potential criticism by first validating H's actions in an attempt to increase H's likeliness to accept the statements. This approach helps to maintain interpersonal harmony while still conveying constructive feedback or dissatisfaction.

Raising Common Ground

- “Yeah, you might remember me from, I don't know, various things. Most recent being the theater class you guys had”
- “It's okay. That was my first thought also.”

In the examples above, S conveys a sense of shared experience and mutual understanding with H. In the first sentence, the reference to the theatre class reflects a joint participation in a past event, reinforcing solidarity through shared context. In the second instance, S reassures H by affirming a common opinion or perspective, which emphasises interpersonal alignment.

Jokes

- “He's the former president, he can get away with it.”
- “Hit her up, don't hit her.”

Here, S employs humour as a rapport-building strategy, fostering a sense of in-group solidarity and mutual agreement with H. By jokingly claiming “exclusive rights” of the former president, S tactfully gives face to H's mistake, reducing the potential for embarrassment. The subsequent correction of another H's phrasal misuse is also delivered humorously, allowing S to address the error without appearing confrontational. This use of humour mitigates face-threatening acts and reinforces a playful and collaborative dynamic between interlocutors.

Reflexivity Strategy

Offers and Promises

- “Don’t worry, we’re going to update our IG page...”

In this context, S acknowledges H’s potential concerns about the confusion regarding club roles and job scopes, and mitigates the issue by promising an upcoming update on Instagram to provide clarification.

Being Optimistic

- “She’s gonna be okay with it.”
- “And I hope that we can replicate the same kind of aesthetics lah for our updates and things in our IG page.”

In the first example, S considered and verbally addressed another’s perspective, thereby “reflecting” on the emotional states or anticipated reactions of others involved in the interaction. He/she is also projecting an outcome where there will be no conflict or negative reaction, thus affirming a desire for continued cooperation and a smooth interaction. In the second example, S expects a positive and cooperative future action from the audience, aligning with the core idea of reflexivity that both S and H are cooperators and H will naturally respond in the desired, positive way.

Including both S and H in the activity

- “Let the third years also have an introduction about themselves”
- “Let’s make [Club Name] great again.”

S’s efforts in including H are shown here, when he/she invites a possibly neglected group into the conversation, giving them an opportunity to introduce themselves to others. S also uses the word “let’s” when talking about a future goal, thereby inviting others into sharing his/her vision. This strengthens the notion of a joint effort or common purpose.

Giving (or asking for) reasons

- “...just in case, you know, we want to know like who’s good at what job, who might be busier, stuff like that.”
- “...because we will be working together like in the future so...”

When making a request to H in this case, asking H to share about past experiences and other

commitments — S offers justifications to support the request. This makes H feel more at ease and increases the likelihood of compliance by framing the request as reasonable and necessary.

Interest Strategy

Notice, attend to H (his/her interests, wants, needs, goods)

- “I see X [Person’s Name] in this Meet. X, are you interested in...”
- “You said you got angry about on what?”
- “It’s actually quite [an] interesting point.”

In the first example, S noticed H who just joined the Google Meet, and called out to him/her before inviting H into the conversation. S is being attentive to H’s desires to be recognised and welcomed. In the second instance, S showed interest in knowing more about H’s dissatisfaction towards an issue, indicating a sensitivity to H’s emotional state and a willingness to provide space for emotional expression. In the third sentence, S complimented H’s work, reflecting awareness of H’s need for validation and positive reinforcement.

Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)

- “It’s one of the best, I’d say, that [Club Name] has put out so far.”
- “Oh my god, is that for real?”

These examples intensify S’s show of interest and approval by combining interjections (e.g., “Oh my God”) with superlative forms of adjectives (“one of the best”).

Can intensify interest to H

- “Welcome to the first meeting for our committee under [Club Name], our very fun, very laid back, very chill club...”

By portraying the club as friendly and laid-back, S increases its appeal to newcomers, encouraging H to stay and participate in future activities. When H feels emotionally engaged and included, positive politeness is successfully achieved.

Fulfilling H’s Wants

Give gifts to H (goods, sympathy, understanding, cooperation)

- “We have the potential to be as good.”
- “If we get information from X [Person’s Name] we’re going to pass it down to
- you guys.
- “So yeah, basically, our old seniors have done a lot of work.”

The examples above illustrate how S attends to H’s positive face — namely, the desire to be reassured, to stay informed, and to be acknowledged. In other words, S has given H “gifts” of affirmed collective capability, information transparency, and credit to past efforts, thereby reinforcing a sense of inclusion and closeness within the group.

Co-identity Strategy

Use in-group identity markers

- “Yo!”
- “Bro”
- “What’s up, man?”
- “Bismillah”

The use of informal address terms signal intimacy and solidarity between S and H, reducing perceived social distance. This creates a sense of shared identity or camaraderie. Similarly, the use of “Bismillah” reinforces a shared religious and cultural background, indicating that both S and H are Muslims who can easily relate to the context and values being referenced.

Empathy Strategy

Assert or presuppose S’s knowledge of and concern for H’s wants

- “...is X [Person’s Name] there? I mean, is she okay? I mean, you can type in the chat box if you can’t open your mic, it’s fine.”
- “Is there anything you’re not clear on or would like us to explain again?”
- “...maybe if you’re scared then we’ll tell her lah”

S demonstrated concern for H’s circumstances in three ways: first, by acknowledging H’s inability to speak through the microphone during the meeting; second, by addressing the possibility that H might feel confused or excluded; and third, by recognising H’s potential hesitation when approaching someone of higher seniority.

Reciprocity Strategy

Original: “Tengok mine la pulak. If you guys wanna delete anything.”

Translation: “Let’s look at mine this time. If you guys wanna delete anything.”

This strategy emphasises on “mutualism”, such as returning a favour. By offering his/her own work for scrutiny after others’ have been reviewed, S demonstrates a willingness to reciprocate and be equally vulnerable to face-threatening acts. This signals fairness and openness, helping to maintain group harmony and solidarity. In politeness theory, reciprocity can soften impositions by showing that obligations and critiques are shared, not one-sided. It also shows that S appreciates H’s feelings and opinions.

Negative Politeness

Despite his/her lesser speaking time compared to the rest, Facilitative Leader 2 uses most of Negative Politeness (Neg Pol) strategy (43.1%), followed by Autonomous Leader (33.8%), Empowering Leader (26.5%), and Facilitative Leader 1 (25.3%). To quickly recap, Negative Politeness is a strategy that ensures H is free from any imposition or coercion. It consists of six sub strategies, which are Indirectness, Hedging, Uncoercing H, Apology, Dissociation, and Redressing Other Desires of H.

The most used sub strategy for EL and AL is Hedging, with percentages of 8.8% and 15.8%, while FL1 and FL2 employ the Uncoercing H strategy — constituting 11.2% and 22.5% respectively. This pattern is then flipped for the second-most popular Neg Pol: EL and AL use 8.2% and 10.1% of Uncoercing H, while FL1 and FL2 hedge (10.0% and 11.8%). The third strategy is the same for all four leaders, where Indirectness makes up 6.1% for EL, 1.2% for FL1, 4.9% for FL2, and 7.2% for AL. Additionally, FL1 also has Apology, Dissociation, and Redressing Other Desires of H on the third place of the podium. Moving on to the least used strategy, it is the Dissociation tactic for EL (0.0%), FL1 (0.6%), and FL2 (0.0%), while AL uses none of Apology and Redressing Other Desires of H (0.0%). The subsections below provide several examples.

Indirectness Strategy

- “Uhm is X [Person’s Name] here? Does she

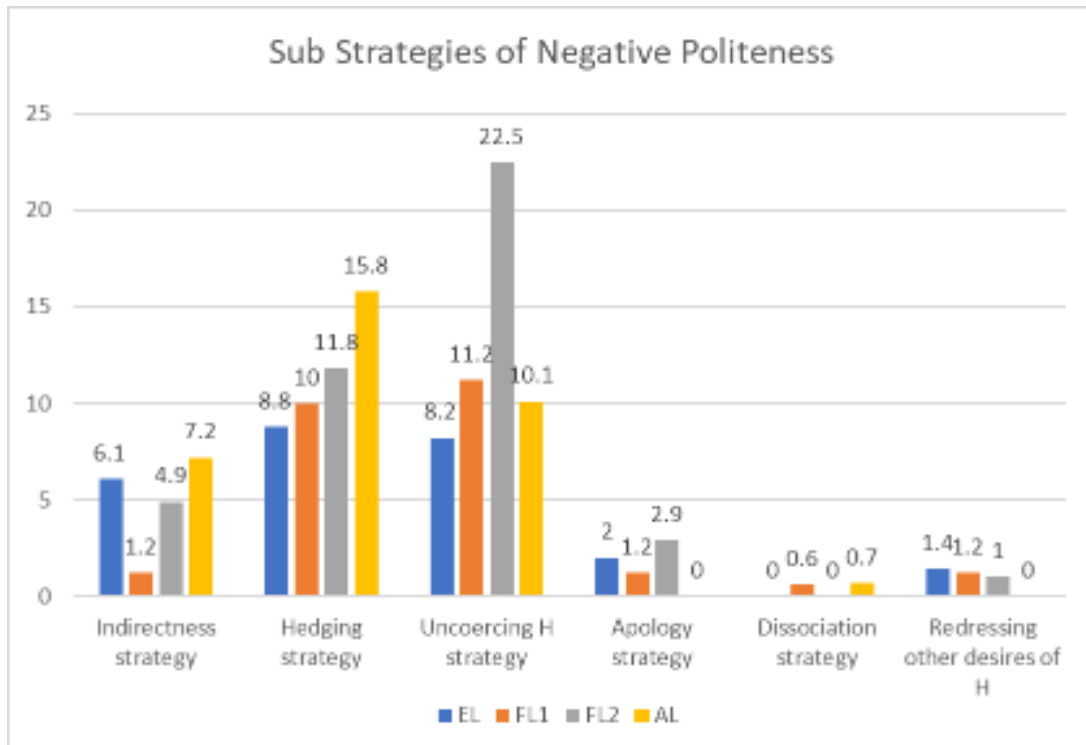


FIGURE 8: Sub Strategies of Negative Politeness

want to talk first?”

- “Do you want to like introduce yourself? There’s some like first years here.”

In the first example, “Uhm is X [Person’s Name] here? Does she want to talk first?”, S is subtly suggesting that the host should move the conversation forward to avoid an awkward silence, without directly instructing the host to do so. By posing it as a question, S gently offers an alternative, which maintains the host’s sense of agency and avoids face-threatening acts. In the second example, “Do you want to like introduce yourself? There’s some like first years here,” S implies that an introduction would be helpful since not everyone knows H. However, instead of directly telling H to introduce herself, S frames it as an option, giving H the space to accept or decline.

Hedging Strategy

- “I think she's having a problem with her mic. It's turned on but it's not saying anything. I'm not sure.”
- “Maybe in the meantime, like do any of you guys, like the members have like, you know, past experience or other commitments?”
- In the examples provided, the hedging expressions such as “I think,” “I’m not sure,” “maybe,” “like,” and “you know” serve to

soften the speaker’s statements and reduce S’s certainty potentially reducing any imposition on H too. S avoids making absolute claims, which helps to maintain politeness and minimize the risk of disagreement or face-threatening acts. Similarly, the use of “maybe” indicates that the suggestion is open to alternative views, rather than a stern directive. The fillers “like” and “you know” further contribute to the informal tone, making the conversation sound less authoritative and more collaborative.

Uncoercing H Strategy

Be Pessimistic

- “You might not hear from me that much because I'll just be doing paperwork and stuff...”
- Minimise the size of imposition on H
- “...some of you guys will be able to argue or contend for which, you guys are given a role that you guys are not interested in, or if you guys think that it's not suitable for you guys, then you can just speak up during the Q &A.”

Give deference

- “Paging for Treasurer, Madam Treasurer.”

Instead of placing expectations on the audience, S pessimistically assumes that others may not know him. By doing so, S lowers the social pressure and prevents the audience from feeling obliged or guilty for not remembering him from past activities. In the second example, S offers H the freedom to choose whether to engage in a role, rather than imposing it directly. This option-giving reflects the core of negative politeness, which prioritizes minimizing imposition.

In the third example, S demonstrates deference by addressing the peer as “Madam,” a respectful term that upholds the hearer’s social status.

Apology Strategy

- “Oh sorry sorry X {Person’s Name}”
- “Okay well, unfortunately we have no more high com positions left for you.”

In the first example, the repeated apology (“sorry sorry”) signals S’s immediate recognition of a possible offense or oversight towards X, aiming to quickly repair any social discomfort. In the second example, S softens the potentially disappointing news by starting it with “unfortunately,” which frames the situation as regrettable rather than intentional, thereby mitigating the negative impact on H’s feelings. Both instances reflect S’s effort to preserve rapport and lessen the imposition caused.

Dissociation Strategy

Impersonalize S and H: avoid pronouns ‘I’ and ‘you’

- “It’s turned on but it’s not saying anything.”
- “And there are so many problems that would have just not happened if things were dealt with earlier.”

In the first sentence, S tactfully avoids directly attributing the microphone issue to H by using a third-person pronoun “it”. This indirect phrasing softens the potential accusation and allows S to raise the issue without making H feel personally targeted or embarrassed. In the second sentence, S generalises the problem without putting blame, employing passive language to distance themselves from individual accountability. This dissociation strategy helps minimise potential face threats by making the remarks sound less personal and less confrontational.

Redressing other desires of H

- “No, it’s okay”
- “Oh It’s fine X, it’s very fine, it’s okay. But at least we know that you’re here, so yeah that’s the most important thing.”

In these examples, S actively redresses H’s possible feelings of guilt or inconvenience by reassuring H that their actions or mistakes are acceptable. In other words, S explicitly relieves H from any perceived obligation to apologise or make up for the situation thereby not indebting H. By emphasizing that H does not owe anything, S helps preserve H’s face and alleviates potential social discomfort.

Off-record Strategy

Among the four leaders, AL uses the most Off-record Strategy (4.3%), followed by FL2 (3.9%), FL1 (3.5%), and EL (2.7%). The Off-record Strategy is the most indirect approach, often leaving the speaker’s intention open to interpretation by the hearer. It involves violation of Grice’s Cooperative Principles, namely the Maxim of Relevance, Maxim of Quality, and Maxim of Manner. According to Grice (1975, as cited in Lancaster University, n.d.), the Maxim of Relevance is about the relation between conversation topics. Next, Maxim of Quality ensures the quality or “truthfulness” of information and applies the key phrase, “Do not say what you believe to be false.” Lastly, Maxim of Manner talks about “how” one conveys their message in a conversation which is clarity, concision and coherence. The violation of these maxims would be an opposite of these cooperative traits.

From the chart above, it can be observed that the most popular Off-record Strategy is Violating Maxim of Quality: 1.4% for EL, 2.9% for FL1, 2.9% for FL2, and 2.9% for AL. EL and AL share their second and third–most common sub strategies, which are Violating Maxim of Relevance and that of Manner (0.7%). Next, FL1 violates Maxim of Relevance (0.6%) but not Maxim of Manner (0.0%), while FL2 violates Maxim of Manner (1.0%) but not Maxim of Relevance. In short, all leaders have their respective stylistic choices leading to a varied result.

Violate Maxim of Relevance

- “Just give me your student number and credit

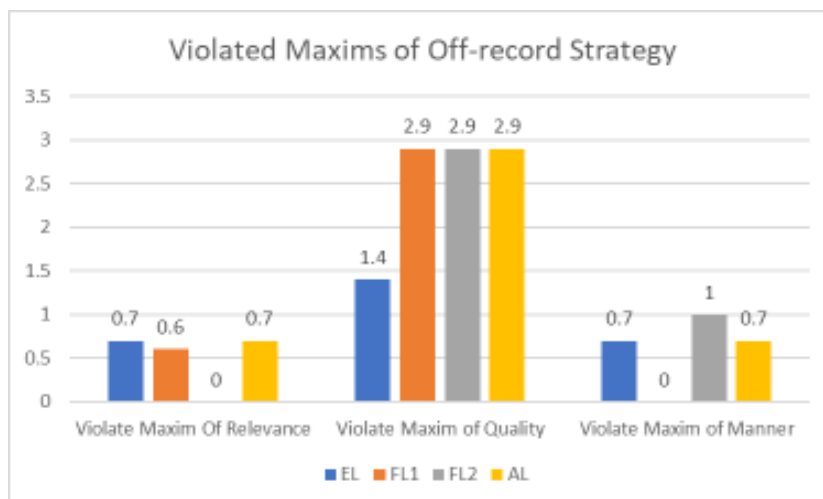


FIGURE 9: Violated Maxims of Off-record Strategy

card details.”

- ii. “Uhm girl, are you new here?”

For the first example, the request for credit card details is entirely irrelevant to the topic of student merit marks. This blatant irrelevance signals to the hearer that the utterance is not meant to be interpreted literally but rather to achieve a humorous effect. The second example implies that “You don't seem to know what we've decided” or “You're acting as if you're not aware of the established norm.” The speaker hints at the hearer's lack of knowledge through a sarcastic question, without stating it plainly.

Violate Maxim of Quality

- i. “Oh my God, what a shock. I didn't see that coming”
- ii. “All X [Programme Name] students mandatorily have to have a Discord account after this. Everyone needs to create a Discord account.”
- iii. “Oh my god, biggest fear.”

The first example, “Oh my God, what a shock. I didn't see that coming,” is clearly sarcastic. The speaker anticipated the outcome but pretends to be surprised to mock or tease the situation. The second example is an intentional exaggeration, making it seem as if members are being “forced” to create a Discord account in order to fit in, though this is not the speaker's genuine intention. The third example, “Oh my god, biggest fear,” is a playful overstatement. In all cases, these violations serve to create humour, build rapport, or manage social dynamics in a less serious, more engaging way.

Violate Maxim of Manner

- i. “Okay, sure, whatever.”

The phrase “Okay, sure, whatever.” is ambiguous because the speaker might genuinely be agreeing, or they could also be reluctant, sarcastic, or annoyed. The true intention is unclear without additional context, which makes the statement open to multiple interpretations by the hearer.

Bald-on Record

As explained above, AL uses the most bald-on record compared to EL and FL, aligning with the right-left quadrant distinction outlined in the framework. Some examples are illustrated below:

- i. “You have to remember.”
- ii. “Stop that.”
- iii. “X [Project Name] had a discipline problem. Simple.”

All the statements above are direct, clear, and make no attempt to soften the impact of the message, or even to protect H's face. The first example, “You have to remember”, is an unmitigated directive. The second example, “Stop that”, is a blunt command that leaves no room for negotiation. Similarly, “X had a discipline problem. Simple.” presents a firm and straightforward assertion, shutting down any potential discussion or rebuttal. In each case, the speaker prioritizes efficiency and clarity over politeness, which is characteristic of bald-on record communication.

TABLE 10: Leaders' Conversational Intervention

Turn-taking	Empowering Leader		Facilitative Leader 1		Facilitative Leader 2		Autonomous Leader	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Turns Spoken by Leader	183	45.9	103	38.4	79	29.5	52	30.6
Total No. of Turns	399	100.0	268	100.0	268	100.0	170	100.0
Words Spoken by Leader	2290	53.4	3760	51.8	1541	21.2	2854	43.3
Total No. of Words	4285	100.0	7264	100.0	7264	100.0	6587	100.0

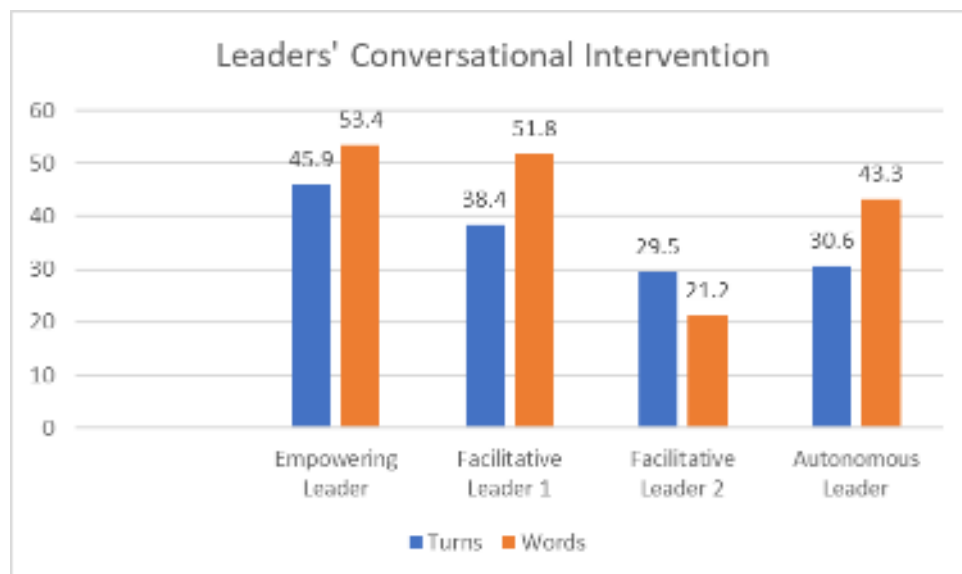


FIGURE 10: Leader's Conversational Intervention

Turn-taking

Based on the results above, EL undertook the most number of turns (45.9%), followed by FL1 (38.4%), AL (30.6%), and finally FL2 (29.5%). Similarly, EL spoke the most number of words (53.4%); secondly, FL1 (51.8%); thirdly, AL (43.3%); and fourthly, FL2 (21.2%). Both follow the same descending order, thereby reinforcing the consistency of the pattern. Overall, the real-life data of each leader corresponds

with their theorized intervention level as positioned on the Cartesian plane: EL as the top-right quadrant intervenes the most in meeting conversations, while FL and AL as the bottom-left and right quadrants intervene less. This shows that EL more frequently takes over the floor to set direction and provide guidance, while FL and AL allow members more speaking time. Once again, FL2's lower percentage of turns and words compared to AL may be attributed to FL2 not serving as the primary

host in the meeting with FL1, which likely contributed to the discrepancy in the results.

Sacks et al. (1984, as cited in Sari et al., 2023) identified ten turn-taking strategies: address term, adjacency pair, post-completor, utterance in completor, incompletion marker, interruption, possible pre-closing, overlap, repair technique, and tag questions. Although this study does not quantify the use of these strategies, selected examples are presented below to provide deeper insights into the findings.

Address Term & Adjacency Pair

This occurs when the current speaker directly addresses the next speaker using their title, first name, last name, or nickname. While it may seem like they are simply passing the turn, they are in fact steering the conversation by actively selecting who speaks next, maintaining control over the discussion's direction. In addition to direct address, adjacency pairs are used to prompt a response, typically in the form of a question-answer or an invitation followed by either acceptance or refusal.

- i. **EL:** "OK, let's go to X [Person's Name] part first. What was the main parts for your [section]?" **X:** "...On Y [Topic], like what kind of, what we want to see in Y."
- ii. **FL1:** "So, moving on, we have X [Person's Name]. X, are you there?" **X:** "Yeah, I'm here. Can you guys hear me?"
- iii. **FL2:** "Next is my vice secretary." **Vice Secretary:** "Hi guys, I'm X [Person's Name]..."

Post-completor

The speaker (S) is also observed to actively step in and fill silences by asking follow-up questions to maintain the conversational flow and prevent breakdowns. This strategy helps to sustain engagement and steer the discussion forward when no immediate response is provided.

- iv. **FL2:** "Is she [Person Z] in chat?" **Audience:** (silence) **FL2:** "Uhm is X [Person's Name] here? Does she want to talk first?"

Utterance in Completor & Incompletion Marker

S uses clause connectors like "and" and "so" to continuously add information, signaling that they are not finished speaking. Each connector introduces a

new but related point, showing an intention to keep the conversational floor. Similarly, subordinators like "if", "since", "because", "after" and "although" indicate that the speaker is not finished and will continue with additional utterances.

- i. **FL1:** "...just be aware that we're going to update like the list of our divisions and its respective members like in a day or two. So it's going to be quick lah. And we're to be updating our IG page by next week. So, yeah. And we might have another meeting next week as well."
- ii. **FL1:** "...If you guys have any questions now regarding everything that we've covered before,"

Interruption & Overlap

An interruption happens when the listener challenges or takes over the current speaker's right to speak, often aiming to redirect the conversation according to their preference. Based on Stenstrom (2014, as cited in Sari et al., 2023), interruptions can take the form of either an "alert" — a direct, attention-grabbing break — or a "meta-comment", where the interrupter politely requests permission to speak. Overlap, on the other hand, is when two speakers speak simultaneously. In this case, interruptions and overlaps initiated by the leader, as well as their efforts to protect their speaking turns from being interrupted, are observed.

- i. **X [Non-leader speaker]:** "Yeah, yeah yeah I mean —"
AL: "According to plan, if everything went to plan, yeah, I think we gotten everything..."
- ii. **FL1:** "Yeah. We haven't decided yet but also we're gonna—"
FL2: "Because —"
FL1: "We're gonna ask our batchmates who are willing to do it..."

Possible Pre-closing

A possible pre-closing is a way people signal that they are ready to end a conversation. It usually occurs when the speaker feels there is nothing more to say and checks if the other person also agrees to finish the talk. This gives the listener a chance to either agree to end the conversation or continue if they still have something to add. In this case, the leader, who is hosting the session, takes control of the turn and manages when and how the conversation comes to an end. The FL leader below

uses a more inviting and inclusive approach, as shown:

- i. **FL1:** “So anything else? Anyone want to ask anything?”

Audience: (silence)

FL1: “I’ll take five, four, three, two, one. Okay, there’s no questions.”

Repair Technique

Repair occurs when a speaker attempts to correct or clarify a previous communication error. Here, the leader is observed taking a new turn to acknowledge and address their mistake.

- i. **FL1:** (mispronounces a term)

FL2: (corrects the pronunciation)

FL1: (self-repair the pronunciation) “...my bad. Yeah, thank you guys.”

Tag Question

Tag questions may serve as turn-passing strategies, allowing speakers to invite responses or seek approval from others through prompts such as “right?” or “is it?”. Additionally, the leader may use the listener’s response as a way to prepare or build towards their next turn. The example below shows EL’s active participation in brainstorming and commenting on group work, though it is accompanied by hedging.

- i. **EL:** “X [Person’s Name], the final commentary and recommendation, is this for...still under existing law right?”

X: “Yes, true.”

EL: “Maybe instead of recommendation, maybe we can change the wording...”

In this section, several turn-taking strategies are synthesized and summarized to fit the context of this research. Based on the seven tactics discussed above, examples and explanations have been provided to show how leaders hold and pass their turns, reflecting the extent of their dominance in conversations.

TABLE 11: Situational Influence on Leadership Style

Likert Scale	n	%
1-Strongly Disagree	0	0.0
2-Disagree	0	0.0
3- Neutral	1	2.9
4-Agree	13	37.1
5-Strongly Agree	21	60.0
Total	35	100.0

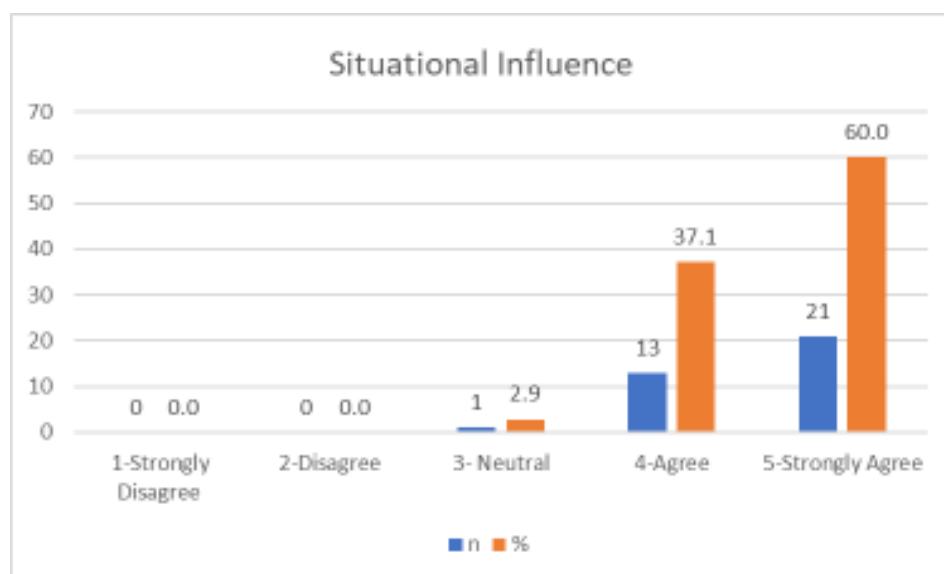


FIGURE 11: Situational Influence on Leadership Style

Situational Influence

Based on the survey results, the majority of respondents (60%, $n = 21$) strongly agreed that they often adapt their leadership approach based on the situation or settings. Additionally, 37.1% ($n = 13$) agreed with this statement, while only 2.9% ($n = 1$) provided a neutral response. Notably, no respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed.

These findings suggest that most student leaders demonstrate situational flexibility in their leadership style. This supports the notion that leadership among students at Universiti Malaya is adaptive rather than rigid, indicating that leaders are likely to shift their strategies based on context, team dynamics, and challenges faced. This flexibility aligns with the observed pragmatic strategies in the main study, where leaders adjust their politeness levels and intervention styles situationally. This is also known as Situational Leadership (Bwalya, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study explored two key research questions: the common leadership styles among Universiti Malaya student leaders, and the pragmatic strategies used to negotiate authority within these styles. The findings reveal that student leaders tend to adopt Empowering and Facilitative leadership styles, showing a stronger inclination toward people-oriented rather than task-oriented approaches. Age and gender appear to slightly influence leadership styles, where older leaders tend to be more relaxed, and female leaders exhibit a higher number of interventions and speaking turns than their male counterparts. Interestingly, while leadership experience often correlates with age, it does not consistently align with the specific leadership style demonstrated.

The analysis of pragmatic strategies further highlights how leaders negotiate authority through varying levels of politeness. Facilitative Leader used the most mitigated strategies, closely followed by Empowering Leader. On the other hand, Autonomous Leader employed a more direct, less mitigated style. Positive politeness, especially strategies such as seeking agreement and humour, was the most frequently used across all leaders. Negative politeness typically involved hedging and uncoercive strategies, while off-record strategies often manifested through overstatements and sarcasm. The pattern of turn-taking and word count further supports these distinctions, with the Empowering Leader taking the most turns and

speaking the most, consistent with their higher level of conversational intervention.

A key strength of this study is its comprehensive approach, which integrates several leadership and pragmatic theories and successfully establishes a leadership framework specifically adapted to pragmatic analysis. This tailored approach contributes valuable insights to the study of student leadership discourse. Additionally, by focusing on real-life meeting data, the study provides a practical snapshot of leadership in action which is a meaningful addition to their self-perceived survey answers.

However, the study is not without limitations. As a pragmatic rather than conversation analysis, it concentrates on macro-level strategies and does not address micro-level features such as pauses, overlaps, prosody, or non-verbal cues. Furthermore, the relatively small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings to the wider student leadership population. Manual pragmatic coding and turn counting are necessary in this study, but also prone to human biasness and error, possibly leading to a less objective result.

For implications, the findings suggest that student leaders frequently adjust their speech and strategies based on the context, demonstrating an awareness of the importance of tailoring their leadership communication to different situations. This highlights the need for leadership development programs to emphasize situational awareness and communication adaptability as essential leadership competencies. Additionally, the results underscore the importance of acknowledging the diversity in leadership communication styles, particularly within youth leadership settings where factors such as age, gender, and experience might subtly influence interaction patterns. By understanding these dynamics, leadership training can be better designed to help student leaders develop a balanced approach that incorporates both people-oriented and task-oriented communication skills.

Future research should consider expanding the sample size and studying respondents who fall under none of the four leadership categories in other words, balanced in their orientations. Furthermore, written communication platforms like WhatsApp or email can be included as another source of data to provide a more complete picture of student leadership discourse. Additionally, incorporating micro-level conversation analysis and non-verbal communication would offer a deeper understanding of leadership dynamics. It is also recommended that future studies explore team members' perceptions of leadership effectiveness, which would allow for a more holistic evaluation of

each leadership style beyond speech patterns alone. In short, there are vast research opportunities based upon this topic. By addressing these areas, future research can present an even more robust and representative model of student leadership communication.

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