

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Politeness strategies are used by speakers to show respect, reduce potential conflict, and maintain social harmony in interaction. From a sociolinguistic perspective, politeness is fundamentally related to the concept of “face,” which refers to an individual’s public self-image that speakers seek to maintain during interaction. Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that politeness strategies are employed to minimize face-threatening acts (FTAs) and to manage social relationships by considering power, social distance, and the degree of imposition. Politeness strategies, as introduced by Brown and Levinson, involve the use of various linguistic forms, such as formal terms of address and indirect speech acts, to facilitate interaction and achieve particular communicative goals while reducing potential threats to the addressee’s face (Siddiqui, 2018). However, politeness is not merely a linguistic tool for being courteous or well-mannered. In many social contexts, particularly those involving hierarchy, politeness also functions as a means of expressing authority, controlling interaction, and reinforcing social roles. Speakers select politeness strategies based on their social position, their relationship with the interlocutor, and the level of imposition involved in the interaction (Brown & Levinson, 1987). As a result, politeness is closely connected to power relations within communication. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the choice of politeness strategies is

influenced by three social variables: power relations between interlocutors, social distance, and the rank of imposition. Speakers with greater social power tend to control interactional norms, while those with lower power are more likely to employ deferential politeness strategies to protect the addressee's face

These power relations become increasingly complex when examined through the lens of gender. Female speakers are frequently associated with stereotypes of being polite, emotional, or indirect in their communication. However, such characteristics should not be automatically interpreted as indicators of communicative weakness. Rather, politeness can operate as a deliberate and strategic linguistic resource through which women exercise influence, maintain authority, and navigate social expectations within hierarchical settings. This perspective is supported by empirical findings which demonstrate that women in leadership positions continue to employ politeness strategies not due to a lack of power, but as a means of managing interpersonal relationships and authority. As demonstrated by Zunaidah (2020), even the community founder despite "being in the highest position in the community"—"applied convergence quite frequently when she communicates in informal contexts," a pattern interpreted as a deliberate effort to "maintain closeness and friendliness with her members". In this sense, politeness may be understood as an alternative form of power, particularly for women operating within structured and hierarchical environments.

These dynamics are particularly evident in institutional and hierarchical contexts, where linguistic behavior is tightly regulated by formal social

conventions. Royal settings, in particular, exemplify explicit power hierarchies, rigid interactional norms, and strict expectations regarding appropriate language use. In highly stratified contexts such as royal institutions, power asymmetry intensifies the potential threat to face, making politeness strategies a crucial linguistic resource. Brown and Levinson (1987) further note that negative politeness the strategy most closely associated with formal, hierarchical interaction—is characterized by self-effacement, formality, and restraint, realized through apology, linguistic deference, hedges, and other softening mechanisms that protect the addressee's face. Within such environments, language functions not merely as a means of communication but also as a marker of authority, legitimacy, and social order. For female rulers, leadership is further complicated by gendered expectations that associate authority with masculinity, requiring them to carefully balance displays of power with socially acceptable forms of femininity. Research on gender and leadership communication challenges the assumption that female leaders are inherently more compassionate and relationship-oriented; findings instead suggest that women do not necessarily rely on stereotypically feminine communication styles, and that their leadership potential should not be judged according to such presumed styles but rather recognized through their adaptability to changing institutional circumstances (Tench et al., 2017). As a result, politeness strategies often become a crucial communicative resource, enabling women in positions of authority to assert control and dominance while simultaneously maintaining harmony and institutional stability.

Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story (2023) is a historical fiction series that depicts the early reign of Queen Charlotte. As a female monarch, Queen Charlotte occupies the highest position within the social hierarchy while confronting personal relationships and emotional challenges. Her interactions with other characters illustrate how politeness strategies are used not only to maintain harmony but also to assert authority, control situations, and display leadership. This depiction aligns with critical sociolinguistic perspectives which view the discourse of politeness as inseparable from social status and power, particularly given that individuals with high social standing are associated with high levels of politeness a condition with clear implications for social hierarchy (Suparno et al., 2023). The series therefore provides a rich context for examining how politeness operates as a form of female power within a royal setting. Previous studies have examined politeness strategies in various films and series, such as *Wonder* (Julianti & Rahmani, 2024), *Frozen 2* (Kustianingsih & Firharmawan, 2025), *Green Book* (Mustofa et al., 2025), and *Glass Onion* (Ramlee et al., 2025). More specifically related to *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story*, previous research has focused on directive speech acts, language style, and sociocultural issues such as race, class, and gender (Yohana et al., 2025).

However, these studies mostly look at politeness and gender issues separately, and none of them are set in a royal or historical hierarchy. Most take place in modern, family, or fantasy settings. Because of this, it is still unclear how women use politeness to hold on to power in a very formal and hierarchical

setting, such as a royal court. This study aims to fill that gap by examining how female characters in *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story* (2023) use politeness strategies to reflect their power within a royal context.

B. Research Focus

This study focuses on the analysis of politeness strategies used by female characters in *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story* (2023), with particular emphasis on Queen Charlotte as the central figure of power. The research examines how politeness strategies are employed in interactions that involve hierarchical relationships, social distance, and varying degrees of authority within the royal setting.

Specifically, this study investigates how different politeness strategies reflect female power and leadership in the series. By analyzing the characters' utterances, the research explores how language choices function to assert authority, maintain control, and manage interpersonal relationships in a highly structured social environment. Through this focus, the study seeks to highlight the role of politeness as a strategic linguistic resource in representing female power in historical drama.

C. Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this study are:

1. to identify the types of politeness strategies used by female characters in *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story* (2023).
2. to analyze how politeness strategies reflect female power in the series.

D. Significance of the Study

Theoretically, this study contributes to the field of sociolinguistics by deepening the understanding of how language reflects and constructs social hierarchies, authority, and gendered power relations. By examining politeness strategies within *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story* (2023), the research highlights how female characters, particularly Queen Charlotte, employ language strategically to assert authority, manage interactions, and negotiate their positions within hierarchical social structures. This approach emphasizes the social functions of language as a mechanism for establishing and maintaining power in institutional and royal contexts.

Practically, the study provides insights into the sociolinguistic representation of female authority in historical media narratives. It demonstrates how interactions and politeness choices encode social norms, gender expectations, and leadership strategies in a royal setting. These findings are relevant for scholars and students in sociolinguistics, gender studies, media studies, and discourse analysis. Additionally, the study offers audiences a framework for understanding how linguistic behavior in fictional narratives reflects broader social and cultural constructions of female power.

E. Definition of Key Terms

1. Politeness Strategies

Politeness strategies refer to linguistic choices used by speakers to show respect, manage social relationships, and minimize conflict in communication.

2. Female Power

Female power refers to the ability of female characters to exercise authority, influence decisions, and control social interactions through language and behavior.

3. Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story (2023)

Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story is a historical fiction television series that portrays the early reign of Queen Charlotte and serves as the main data source for this study.