

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Sociolinguistics examines the relationship between language and society, focusing on how social factors such as gender, status, and social roles influence language use in interaction (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). Language is not used in isolation, but is shaped by who is speaking, to whom, and in what social context, making communication a reflection of social identity and interpersonal relations (Trudgill, 1995). Through a sociolinguistic perspective, everyday interaction is understood as a space where speakers negotiate their social position, weigh differences in power, and manage what is conventionally expected of them in a given situation (Meyerhoff, 2018). One important aspect of sociolinguistic interactions is how speakers manage relationships and avoid conflict through appropriate language choices. In social encounters, speakers are expected to adjust their language in order to maintain harmony and mutual respect (Holmes & Wilson, 2022). This adjustment often appears in the form of politeness, which functions as a social mechanism to regulate interaction. As language reflects social norms and identities, politeness becomes an essential element in understanding how speakers interact in different contexts. Therefore, sociolinguistics provides a foundational framework for examining politeness strategies as socially situated language practices.

Politeness strategies play a crucial role in communication because they help speakers manage face and minimize potential conflict during interaction

(Brown & Levinson, 1987). According to Brown and Levinson, politeness is a strategic use of language to protect both the speaker's and the hearer's public self-image, known as face, which consists of positive and negative dimensions. They classify politeness strategies into four types: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record strategies, each serving different communicative purposes depending on context (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 2014). For example, positive politeness is used to express solidarity and closeness, while negative politeness is employed to show respect and reduce imposition through indirectness or hedging (Thomas, 1995). The appropriate use of politeness strategies allows communication to proceed smoothly and cooperatively. Conversely, the absence or misuse of politeness strategies can result in misunderstanding, discomfort, or even conflict between interlocutors (Watts, 2003). This demonstrates that politeness is not merely a matter of courtesy, but a fundamental component of effective social interaction. However, the way politeness strategies are realized in communication may vary depending on social factors such as gender, which influence how speaker express authority, solidarity, and interpersonal meaning.

Gender is one of the most influential social variables in shaping language use, as men and women tend to employ different linguistic styles to construct identity and social roles (Coates, 2013; Holmes, 2013). In studies of language and gender, masculinity is often associated with more direct and authoritative linguistic styles, in contrast to the tentative, mitigated forms attributed to women's speech (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). Male

speakers are frequently described as using language to display confidence, independence, and dominance, particularly in institutional or task-oriented contexts (Coates, 2013). This does not mean that all men speak in the same way, but rather that masculine communication styles are socially constructed and shaped by cultural expectations (Connell, 2005). Through language, masculinity is performed and reinforced as speakers align themselves with socially recognized male roles. In many contexts, men are expected to sound decisive and emotionally controlled, which influences their linguistic choices. These characteristics highlight how masculinity is not only a social identity but also a communicative practice. Therefore, understanding masculine language features is essential for analyzing how male speakers construct meaning and identity through interaction.

Although masculinity is often associated with directness and authority, male speakers still employ politeness strategies to manage interaction and maintain social balance. In practice, masculinity does not exclude politeness, but rather shapes how politeness is expressed and negotiated in communication (Holmes, 2013). Male speakers may use politeness strategies selectively, combining assertiveness with indirectness to maintain control without appearing confrontational. Negative politeness allows speakers to show respect by minimizing imposition on the hearer's freedom of action, while off-record strategies allow speakers to avoid direct responsibility for a face-threatening act (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Watts, 2003). This combination enables men to perform masculinity while still adhering to social norms of cooperation and

face-saving. In certain contexts, politeness becomes a strategic resource that supports masculine identity rather than weakens it. As a result, politeness strategies can function as tools through which masculinity is constructed and displayed in interaction. Therefore, examining politeness strategies from a gender perspective reveals how masculine identities are communicated through language use. Despite the theoretical recognition that masculinity can shape the realization of politeness strategies, this relationship has not been extensively explored in empirical studies, particularly within film discourse.

Although previous studies have investigated politeness strategies and language use in film discourse, there is still limited research that specifically connects politeness strategies with masculinity in male characters' speech. For example, some studies focus on politeness strategies in films generally, identifying types of strategies used by characters without considering gender differences (Permadi et al., 2022; Prazilia et al., 2024). Other research in film discourse explores linguistic features in movies but centers on pragmatic phenomena such as speech acts rather than gendered politeness behavior (Dyner, 2011). Furthermore, studies in language and gender often examine differences in male and female communication styles in everyday or institutional interaction, but they rarely investigate how masculinity is constructed through politeness strategies in media contexts like film (Coates, 2013). Research that combines masculinity and politeness strategies, particularly in film discourse, remains limited. Moreover, studies focusing on detective films often prioritize speech acts or narrative functions rather than

gendered politeness practices (Dianita & Sofyan, 2023). This suggest that there is a gap in the literature regarding the relationship between masculinity and politeness strategies within male characters' dialogue in films. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap by examining how politeness strategies reflect masculinity in the speech of a male detective character in *Knives Out*.

In response to the identified research gap, this study aims to analyze the politeness strategies used by Detective Benoit Blanc in the film *Knives Out*. The study focuses on identifying the types of politeness strategies employed by the character and examining how these strategies reflect masculinity in investigative discourse. By applying Brown and Levinson's politeness theory alongside concepts of masculinity proposed by R.W. Connell, this study seeks to reveal the relationship between language use, gender identity, and communicative goals. The character of Detective Benoit Blanc is selected because of his distinctive linguistic style, which combines authority, indirectness, and politeness. Through qualitative analysis of his utterances, this research explores how masculinity is constructed and maintained through polite language use. The findings are expected to contribute to sociolinguistic by offering insight into gendered politeness in film discourse. Ultimately, this study highlights the role of politeness strategies as a means of constructing masculine identity in fictional investigative communication.

B. Research Focus

This study focuses on the analysis of politeness strategies used by Detective Benoit Blanc as the main character in the film *Knives Out*. The research specifically examines Blanc's spoken utterances to identify the types of politeness strategies he employs in interaction with other characters. In addition, this study emphasizes how these politeness strategies reflect masculinity in the context of investigative discourse. The analysis is limited to verbal language and does not include paralinguistic features such as intonation, facial expressions, or body language. The study applies a sociolinguistic perspective by relating politeness strategies to gendered language use. By narrowing the focus to one male character, this research aims to provide a detailed and in-depth analysis rather than a broad comparison between characters. Therefore, the research concentrates on the intersection between politeness strategies, masculinity, and film discourse as represented through Detective Benoit Blanc's language.

C. Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this study are as follows:

1. to identify the types and the most frequently used politeness strategies employed by Detective Benoit Blanc in the film *Knives Out* based on Brown and Levinson's theory.
2. to analyze how masculinity is reflected through the politeness strategies used by Detective Benoit Blanc in the film *Knives Out*.

D. Significance of the Study

This study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, the study contributes to the fields of sociolinguistics by expanding the discussion of politeness strategies through a gender perspective, particularly masculinity in film discourse. By examining how politeness strategies reflect masculine identity, this research offers a deeper understanding of the relationship between language, gender, and social interaction. Practically, the findings of this study are expected to be useful for students and researchers of English language education who are interested in sociolinguistics and language and gender. The study may also serve as a reference for future research that explores gendered language use in media texts. In addition, this research can help readers develop greater awareness of how language functions as a strategic tool in constructing identity and managing interaction. Therefore, this study provides meaningful insights into the role of politeness strategies in representing masculinity within film communication.

E. Definition of Key Terms

1. Politeness strategies: Refers to the linguistic strategies proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), including bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record strategies, which are used to manage face and maintain social harmony in communication.

2. Masculinity: Refers to socially constructed characteristics, behaviors, and identities associated with men, which are expressed and performed through social practices, including language use.
3. Language and Gender: Refers to the study how language use is influenced by gender differences and how speakers construct and perform gender identities through communication.
4. Detective Benoit Blanc: The fictional private detective character in the film *Knives Out* (2019), known for his distinctive Southern accent, methodical reasoning, and strategic use of language during investigations.
5. Film dialogue: The scripted verbal interactions between characters in a film. In this study, the focus is on Benoit Blanc's spoken utterances and the contexts in which they occur during the investigation.