Menegosiasikan Kekuasaan dan Keintiman Melalui Strategi Kesopanan: Analisis Interaksional Sophie dan Benedict dalam Serial Netflix Bridgerton Musim 4

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini membahas bagaimana strategi kesopanan dipakai untuk menegosiasikan kuasa sekaligus membangun kedekatan dalam interaksi antara Sophie dan Benedict dalam serial Netflix Bridgerton musim keempat. Walaupun keduanya terlibat dalam hubungan romantis, perbedaan dalam status sosial Sophie sebagai pelayan dan Benedict sebagai bangsawan membuat cara mereka berbicara tidak pernah benar-benar netral. Perbedaan posisi ini mempengaruhi pilihan ujaran, bagaimana mereka menjaga jarak, menunjukkan rasa hormat, hingga perlahan untuk membangun keakraban. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan pragmatik dengan teori kesopanan dan *face* dari Brown dan Levinson (1987). Metode yang digunakan yaitu penelitian deskriptif kualitatif dengan data berupa dialog-dialog dari antara Sophie dan Benedict. Penelitian ini akan berfokus pada strategi-strategi kesopanan yang muncul ketika Sophie dan Benedict berinteraksi. **Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat pergeseran strategi kesopanan dari *Negative Politeness* yang kaku dan defensif di awal hubungan (akibat perbedaan kasta) menjadi *Positive Politeness* yang simetris dan akrab di fase akhir, seiring dengan terungkapnya identitas asli Sophie dan pulihnya status hukumnya.** Tujuan penelitian ini untuk menunjukkan bahwa strategi kesopanan tidak hanya yang mencerminkan norma sosial, tetapi juga berperan dalam merundingkan ulang relasi dan membangun keintiman di antara kedua tokoh dengan strata sosial yang berbeda.

Kata Kunci: *Face,* Dialog Tokoh, Pragmatik, Strategi Kesopanan.

INTRODUCTION

In social life, speakers never truly speak in a neutral manner. The way a person conveys their meaning is influenced by various factors, such as who their interlocutor is, the nature of the relationship between the speaker and the listener, and their respective social positions (Brown et al., 2022; Haugh & Culpeper, 2021).

Factors such as differences in social status, the closeness of the relationship, and cultural norms require speakers to adjust their speech so that communication between the speaker and the listener proceeds smoothly and does not lead to conflict (Purnomo, 2025). In such situations, speakers typically employ politeness strategies. Politeness is not merely understood as linguistic etiquette but as a means of preserving the listener's feelings, managing social distance, or even indirectly fostering closeness (Culpeper & Tantucci, 2021). This phenomenon is explored in pragmatic studies, particularly through the theory of politeness formulated by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson (1987). This theory explains that every utterance has the potential to threaten the addressee's "face" (social self-esteem), so speakers need to use specific strategies to ensure their intended meaning is conveyed without damaging social relationships. Thus, studying politeness means examining how speakers manage social relationships through language, not merely how they speak politely.

Numerous studies on politeness have been conducted on various subjects, such as films (Budiartini et al., 2025; Fridolini et al., 2021), television series (Nurlayli & Widyastuti, 2022), and cartoons (Alia & Mulatsih). Although dialogue in audiovisual media is scripted, it still reflects the dynamics of everyday communication, which are relevant to study from a pragmatic perspective (Napoli & Tantucci, 2022). One television series particularly rich in sociolinguistic dynamics is the Netflix series *Bridgerton*. Khoo (2025) argues that *Bridgerton* crucially utilizes dialogue to reconstruct social relationships, race, gender, and social class within the setting of a modernized English Regency era. Nevertheless, Khoo's (2025) study tends to focus on the macro-level representation of social discourse and class structures. An unexplored knowledge gap remains: how micro-pragmatic mechanisms specifically politeness strategies are interactionally employed by individuals to manipulate and renegotiate these class boundaries within interpersonal relationships. In the fourth season, these dynamics culminate in the interactions between Sophie, a domestic servant, and Benedict, an aristocrat. Their stark class differences force them to navigate politeness strategies bound by the rules

of etiquette, despite the growing romantic intimacy between them. Unlike previous research, which generally examines politeness strategies solely as forms of compliance with social norms, In the fourth season, these dynamics reach their peak through the interaction between Sophie, a domestic servant, and Benedict, a nobleman. The sharp caste divide forces them to navigate strategies of politeness bound by the rules of etiquette, despite the growing romantic intimacy between them. Unlike previous studies, which generally examined politeness strategies merely as a form of compliance with etiquette or as a means of saving face, this study explores how politeness strategies are actively employed as a dual instrument: negotiating power while simultaneously building intimacy. Thus, this study contributes to demonstrating how language not only reflects existing social hierarchies but also serves as a discursive means to reconstruct and balance power relations between the characters.

Literature Review

2.1 Pragmatics and Politeness Theory

In linguistics, pragmatics is the branch of the discipline that studies how the meaning of utterances is understood based on the context in which language is used. Pragmatics examines not only what the speaker says, but also how, to whom, in what situation, and for what purpose the speaker communicates. In other words, pragmatics focuses on the relationship between language, meaning, and the speaker's social context.

In addition, pragmatic studies emphasize that the interpretation of utterances depends heavily on the context of the speech situation, such as the speaker-listener relationship, the purpose of communication, and the social conditions under which the utterance is made. This study shows that meaning cannot always be understood literally because social and situational contexts play a crucial role in the interpretation of utterances (Saifudin, 2021; Abdurrahman, 2006). This makes pragmatic research highly relevant for analyzing dialogue in films or television series, as such dialogue represents context-rich communication practices.

One of the key areas of study in pragmatics is politeness theory. This theory emerged from the need to explain how speakers strive to maintain social relationships through language. Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson (1987)

argued that every individual has “face,” which is the social self-image they wish to preserve. In every conversation, utterances have the potential to threaten the interlocutor’s face (Face-Threatening Acts/FTA). Therefore, speakers use politeness strategies such as “on record,” “positive politeness,” “negative politeness,” and “off record” to ensure that their intended meaning is conveyed without damaging social relationships.

Even though this theory has faced criticism for being too universal and failing to account for cultural factors, many modern pragmatists, such as Michael Haugh and Jonathan Culpeper, assert that Brown & Levinson’s theory remains relevant as an initial analytical framework for interpreting politeness strategies in social interactions, provided that the analysis takes into account the speakers’ relational and cultural contexts (Culpeper & Tantucci, 2021; Haugh & Culpeper, 2021). In the context of the Bridgerton series, this theory is crucial for dissecting interactions bound by the highly hierarchical sociocultural norms of the British Regency era. The rules of propriety during that era rigidly distinguished between the aristocracy and the domestic servant class. Thus, the application of Brown & Levinson’s theory in this study is grounded in an understanding of this structural context, in which the speech choices of Sophie as a servant and Benedict as an aristocrat not only serve to preserve individual face but also reflect and negotiate the norms of power and social distance associated with their respective social classes.

Thus, the significance and strong relevance of Brown & Levinson’s politeness theory in this study lie not merely in its ability to identify differences in speech patterns resulting from differing social statuses. More than that, this theory provides a precise analytical framework through the variables of power and social distance to dissect the paradoxical dynamics in Sophie and Benedict’s interactions. This theory allows researchers to trace how rigid caste etiquette norms clash with the gradual development of romantic intimacy. Through this lens, politeness strategies are shown to function not merely passively as tools for saving face or maintaining hierarchical compliance, but rather to actively operate as discursive means for renegotiating power asymmetries and expanding the space for intimacy between the two characters.

2.2 Previous Research

Studies on politeness strategies in film and television dialogues have been extensively conducted in the field of pragmatics. One relevant study analyzed politeness strategies in the film Onward and found that the characters employed various strategies such as positive politeness, negative politeness, and “off the record”

to regulate social relationships and preserve face in emotionally and socially complex conversations. These findings demonstrate how politeness strategies are selected based on the characters' social relationships in the film (Cantika & Thamrin, 2022)

Kabeer et al. (2025) analyzed the dialogue in the film *The Social Network* and found that the use of politeness strategies was dominated by off-record and negative politeness strategies aimed at saving face and maintaining interpersonal relationships amid a tense business competition. Nevertheless, this study was limited to peer-to-peer relationship dynamics in a modern professional context without considering the influence of rigid social class stratification. An unexplored knowledge gap is how politeness strategies operate when extreme social caste differences directly clash with the development of romantic intimacy a space where power and social distance are constantly and dynamically negotiated.

In the meantime, *Castle* (2025) examines strategies of politeness in the animated film *Barbie and the Diamond Castle*, where dialogue between characters reflects the sociocultural context of a fictional court society that values closeness and solidarity. In this context, positive politeness strategies such as the use of warm greetings and claims of togetherness are predominantly employed to strengthen friendships among the characters. However, the interactions in the film take place within homogeneous and symmetrical social relationships. This differs significantly from the *Bridgerton* series, which depicts the highly hierarchical sociocultural context of the British Regency era, where norms of propriety and class boundaries dictate how the nobility and servants speak to one another.

A study of animated dialogue also shows that the choice of politeness strategies is not only dictated by social hierarchy but is also intimately tied to the management of emotions in character interactions. Research by (Ananda & Rosnija, 2025) on the film *Onward* found that positive and negative politeness strategies are used to mitigate potential threats to face when characters interact in emotionally charged situations. These findings underscore that the speaker's emotional state plays a crucial role in linguistic dynamics. In the context of Sophie and Benedict's relationship, emotional aspects such as the turbulence of love, wounded pride resulting from the trauma of being offered as a concubine, and anxiety about social class serve as the primary drivers that trigger shifts in politeness strategies. Language and politeness strategies not only reflect caste rules but also serve as a means to express, contain, and regulate complex emotions between the two characters.

In a broader pragmatic context, (Saifudin, A. 2021) asserts that politeness strategies are closely related to the concept of "face" and how speakers negotiate

interpersonal relationships through speech. This study emphasizes the importance of interpreting politeness strategies not merely as a form of courtesy, but as a means of building and maintaining social relationships.

Overall, previous studies have shown that politeness strategies are used to manage power relations within a variety of sociocultural structures: ranging from patriarchal family hierarchies (Encanto) and competition for professional authority in the modern world (The Social Network) to the symmetrical norms of courtly friendship (Barbie). Nevertheless, most of these studies still focus on identifying a taxonomy of strategies without delving deeply into how politeness operates within the highly rigid sociocultural context of the English Regency era—a historical landscape where power is determined by asymmetrical feudal caste systems and class differentiation between the nobility and domestic servants. Therefore, this study fills that gap by exploring, from an interactional perspective, how strategies of politeness are dynamically employed by Sophie and Benedict to renegotiate tensions between social caste, emotional burdens, and the adjustment of romantic intimacy.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach because the data analyzed are not numbers, but rather utterances or dialogues that convey social and pragmatic meaning. This approach is suitable for examining how the meaning of politeness emerges from the context of the participants' interactions, rather than merely counting the frequency of a strategy's occurrence. In pragmatic studies, qualitative methods are indeed often used to analyze how language functions within the social context of speakers (Saifudin, A. 2021).

3.1 Data Sources

The data source for this study consists of the dialogue between Sophie Baek and Benedict Bridgerton in Season 4 (Episodes 1–8) of the Netflix series *Bridgerton*. The data was drawn from scenes depicting direct interactions between the two characters, obtained from the official series broadcasts and the English-

language dialogue transcripts (subtitles) to ensure the accuracy of the speech transcripts. The selection of these two characters is based on a sharp asymmetry in social status Sophie as a domestic servant and Benedict as an aristocrat which makes their communication dynamics fraught with considerations of etiquette and power negotiations.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

Data collection was conducted using the note-taking technique. The researcher carefully watched all scenes depicting interactions between Sophie and Benedict, then recorded and sorted utterances that indicated the use of politeness strategies. The collected data was cross-referenced with the official subtitle script and coded based on data number, episode number, and scene context to facilitate sequential tracking during the analysis process.

3.3 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using the theory of politeness and the concept of "face" proposed by Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levinson (1987), integrated with a sequential/chronological contextual reading. The stages of data analysis included:

1. Identification & Categorization: Identifying potentially face-threatening acts (FTA) and classifying politeness strategies into the categories of Bald On-Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, and Off-Record.
2. Parameter Contextual Analysis: Analyzing changes in the weight of politeness variables namely Social Distance (D), Asymmetric Power (P), and Rank of Imposition (R) in each dialogue fragment.
3. Sequential Relationship Phases Analysis: Correlating shifts in politeness strategies with the developmental trajectory of the relationship between the two characters, which is divided into four main phases: (a) Initial Phase/Rigid Caste, (b) Liminal

Phase, (c) Crisis Phase/Linguistic Retreat, and (d) Resolution Phase/Class Transformation.

4. Interpretive Negotiation Analysis: Revealing how these shifts in speech strategies function as discursive instruments to negotiate power (+P to -P), reduce social distance (+D to -D), and legitimize symmetrical intimacy within the caste constraints of the Regency era.

3.4 Data Validity

Data validity was ensured through theoretical triangulation and interactional context triangulation. Theoretical triangulation was conducted by integrating Brown & Levinson's (1987) concepts of "face" and politeness strategies with the modern relational pragmatics perspective (Culpeper & Tantucci, 2021). Meanwhile, contextual triangulation is conducted by analyzing the dialogues in their entirety within their sequential scenes, taking into account the development of relationships, social class positions, and the emotional trauma of the characters, so that the interpretation of pragmatic meaning is not isolated from the dynamics of relational transformation and the social structures established in Chapter 4.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Classification of Politeness Strategy Findings

Based on an interactional analysis of all dialogue fragments between Sophie Baek and Benedict Bridgerton from Episode 1 through Episode 8, 26 instances of speech context were identified that represent fluctuations in politeness strategies. The macro-distribution of these strategy findings is presented in the following table:

Table 4.1 Distribution and Strategic Functions of Politeness in Sophie and Benedict's Speech Acts

No	Politeness Strategies (Brown & Levinson)	Dominant Patterns of Occurrence	Strategic Functions in Interaction

1.	*Negative Politeness* (Kesopanan Negatif)	Episodes 1–3, Episodes 6–7	Reinforcing caste distinctions, preserving one's reputation (autonomy), and adhering to class protocols.
2.	*Positive Politeness* (Kesopanan Positif)	Episodes 4–5, Episodes 8	Reducing social distance, building intimacy, and expressing emotional equality.
3.	*Off-Record* (Strategi Tidak Langsung)	Episodes 1, Episodes 6	Concealing secret identities and conveying sensitive messages through metaphors or innuendo.

4.2 Analysis of the Use of Politeness Strategies in Character Dialogue

4.2.1 Use of Negative Politeness Strategies

Speakers use negative politeness to respect the negative face of their conversation partner (the right not to be disturbed or coerced) while simultaneously affirming social distance. In the corpus, this strategy is predominantly used by Sophie when her status shifts to that of a domestic servant, a role in which she is bound by etiquette obligations to mitigate speech acts (FTA) directed at Benedict, who holds higher power (+Power).

Data 3 (Episode 2 – House Corridor): Benedict: "Could you bring this tea to my office right now?" Sophie: "Of course, My Lord. I apologize if I happened to get in your way in the hallway earlier."

Dialogue Analysis:

In the data above, Sophie's utterance ("I'm sorry if I bothered you...") pragmatically employs the sixth sub-strategy of Negative Politeness from Brown & Levinson (1987), namely "Apologize" (specifically the tactics "indicate reluctance" and "beg forgiveness"), combined with the use of hedging through the conditional word ("if").

Through this mechanism, Sophie explicitly acknowledges that her presence has the potential to threaten Benedict's negative face by violating the nobleman's personal space (territory). This acknowledgment of the potential for such an imposition is reinforced by the "Give Deference" sub-strategy (the fifth sub-strategy) through the insertion of the honorific vocative ("My Lord"). Thus, Sophie deliberately reconstructs a wide social distance (+Distance) and affirms the asymmetrical power dynamic (+Power in Benedict's favor) in order to comply with the propriety protocols of the Regency-era social class, while simultaneously minimizing the potential for social sanctions resulting from a servant's impertinence.

This pattern of negative politeness once again serves as a psychological defense mechanism when their relationship hits a crisis in Episode 6, following Benedict's offer, which undermined Sophie's self-esteem.

Data 18 (Episode 6 John's Funeral Parlor):

Benedict: "Sophie, please listen to my explanation of what happened that night..."

Sophie: "I'm here solely to fulfill Mrs. Mondrich's last request, sir. It's none of my business to listen to your personal affairs."

Dialogue Analysis: Sophie's utterance ("That's beyond my capabilities...") constitutes a pragmatic refusal that manifests the 8th sub-strategy of Negative Politeness identified by Brown & Levinson (1987)—namely, "State the FTA as a General Rule"—combined with the 5th sub-strategy ("Give Deference") through the reuse of the formal vocative "Sir." This shift in linguistic orientation occurs as a causal response to the fracturing dynamics of their social relationship following the offer of the concubine position. This fracture in their interpersonal relationship prompts Sophie to engage in a sociolinguistic retreat. By framing her refusal as an institutional obligation ("carry out funeral duties"), this choice of a negative politeness strategy serves as a form of self-defense to safeguard her wounded positive face (self-dignity). In this case, Sophie's linguistic shift does not directly alter the macro-caste structure but serves as a tangible marker of the renewed strain

in their social relationship and the increased personal distance (+Distance) between the two characters.

4.2.2 The Application of Positive Politeness Strategies

Positive politeness is applied to satisfy the interlocutor's need for positive face that is, the desire to be liked, acknowledged, and regarded as part of the same group (solidarity). This strategy predominates when the social distance between the two characters decreases (-Distance), particularly in the isolated setting of a rural cabin (Episodes 4–5) and during the final resolution phase (Episode 8).

Data 13 (Episode 4 - Country Cottage): Benedict: "You don't have to be so stiff here, Sophie. Just think of us as two ordinary people weathering a storm. Let's sit by the fireplace." Sophie: "All right… If you insist. This fireplace is definitely much warmer than our stiff atmosphere in London."

Dialogue Analysis: Benedict's statement ("Let's just say we're two ordinary people") is an application of the seventh sub-strategy of Positive Politeness from Brown & Levinson (1987), namely "Assert/Presuppose Common Ground." Benedict explicitly establishes a shared background to reduce Sophie's social anxiety stemming from their caste differences. Sophie's humorous response ("warmer than our stiff demeanor in London") utilizes the 8th Positive Politeness sub-strategy (Use Jokes). In this liminal space (the isolated cabin), the shift in the dynamics of their interaction—which becomes warmer and more fluid—reflects a temporary shift in their interpersonal relationship. Sophie's decision to drop the formal vocative "Sir" and use the casual pronoun "you" is not evidence of the collapse of the caste structure or the resolution of class conflict between them, since Sophie's legal and social status objectively remains that of a servant. This shedding of linguistic formality is a sociolinguistic reflection of the loosening of social distance in a private setting, allowing romantic intimacy to flourish behind the wall of status differences that still looms in the background.

The culmination of a fully symmetrical unification of identity is realized in Episode 8, where all caste barriers are dissolved through a declaration of love and the restoration of Sophie's legal status.

Data 23 (Episode 8 - Benedict's Room):

Sophie: "...I love you, Benedict."

Benedict: "Sophie. Of course I love you. Do you believe me now? I was wrong, too. I shouldn't have asked you to be my mistress. I'm sorry..."

Dialogue Analysis:

Sophie's statement ("a midnight dream that will fade away") is pragmatically classified as an Off-Record strategy because it employs the 9th sub-strategy (Use Metaphor) and the 11th sub-strategy (Be Ambiguous/Vague) in Brown & Levinson's (1987) taxonomy. The use of the metaphor "a midnight dream" serves to obscure Sophie's sociological identity as a domestic worker within a figurative proposition that carries ambiguity of meaning (indefinite intention). Mechanically, this Off-Record strategy allows Sophie to convey the limited duration of her presence without having to engage in direct discourse (Bald On-Record), which risks increasing the "Rank of Imposition" (R) due to the caste divide. By keeping her communication at the level of pragmatic implicature, Sophie leaves the interpretation of meaning entirely up to Benedict (the Hearer), thereby successfully concealing her true identity while avoiding explicit social rejection amid the Masquerade Ball setting.

Sophie also uses this pattern of veiled sarcasm in Episode 6 to criticize Benedict's insensitivity without having to provoke an open conflict that would be dangerous to her position as a domestic worker.

Data 17 (Episode 6 - The Office):

Sophie: "For the aristocracy, life's choices may be as simple as picking out the color of a suit in the morning. But for many others, life's choices are simply a matter of making sure there's bread on the table tomorrow."

Dialogue Analysis:

Sophie's statement above is a concrete application of an "off-the-record" strategy that employs the tactic of over-generalization to subtly criticize Benedict's offer of a concubine. Sophie does not attack Benedict personally, but rather uses the contrast of a class dichotomy ("the nobility" vs. "everyone else"). Through this structure of sarcasm, Sophie successfully conveys sharp criticism of Benedict's insensitivity to power (+Power) without directly violating verbal ethics. This allows Sophie to continue voicing her moral objections while safeguarding her position at work from potential arbitrary actions by her employer.

4.3 Discussion: Pragmatic Shifts and Reflections on Interpersonal Relationships

A sequential analysis of the speech data reveals that the variations and shifts in Brown & Levinson's (1987) politeness strategies function as pragmatic reflections of the shifting dynamics of the social relationship between Sophie and Benedict. In the early phase of the interaction (Phase I), the dominance of Negative Politeness such as the use of deference and formal vocatives ("My Lord") as well as apologizing sociolinguistically reflects an asymmetrical power relationship (with Benedict holding the power) and a wide social distance resulting from social-class etiquette conventions. As the interaction shifts to a private setting (Phase II), the discourse orientation gives rise to Positive Politeness through joking and claiming common ground, marking a temporary push toward intimacy and a reduction in interpersonal distance (-Distance).

A pragmatic analysis also confirms that politeness is dynamic and sensitive to relational crises. In Phase III, Sophie's linguistic retreat back to rigid Negative Politeness (stating "FTA" as a general rule) reflects the language's adaptability in response to a rupture in the interpersonal relationship caused by a threat to face (the offer of the mistress position). In the resolution phase (Phase IV), the revelation of Sophie's true background materially reduces the power variable (P=0). This is

reflected in the dominance of reciprocal Positive Politeness (such as in-group identity markers and direct expressions of affection). The choice of politeness strategies at the end of the interaction no longer serves a defensive function to protect the waitress's face but is reflected as a linguistic marker of the realization of a symmetrical interpersonal relationship between the two characters.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the interactional pragmatic analysis of the dialogues between Sophie Baek and Benedict Bridgerton in *Bridgerton* Season 4, this study concludes that politeness strategies operate dynamically alongside the fluctuations of contextual parameters, namely Power (P), Social Distance (D), and Rank of Imposition (R). *Negative Politeness* is employed as a defensive shield to comply with Regency etiquette while safeguarding negative face, whereas *Off-Record* strategies utilize metaphors and vagueness to disguise hidden identities and convey implicit social critiques regarding class inequality. Furthermore, the pragmatic shift from rigid *Negative Politeness* to reciprocal *Positive Politeness* marked by the abandonment of formal honorifics in favor of mutual first-name address serves as an active sociolinguistic marker reflecting the collapse of power asymmetries ($P = 0$) and the extreme reduction of social distance ($-Distance$). Ultimately, politeness strategies in period dramas do not merely reflect passive compliance with macro-etiquette rules, but function as active discursive instruments negotiating the tension between class boundaries and symmetrical romantic intimacy.

Regarding recommendations for future research, scholars are encouraged to expand upon these findings by integrating Brown and Levinson's model with modern relational frameworks, such as Impoliteness Theory or Conversation Analysis (CA), to better examine multimodal cues, silence, and turn-taking dynamics in screen interactions. Additionally, comparative cross-media studies between historical period dramas and contemporary romantic narratives could

offer deeper insights into how the pragmatic negotiation of class, power, and intimacy evolves across diverse socio-historical film contexts.

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