The Comparison of Politeness Strategies Used by Male and Female Main Character in Mundruczó's *Pieces Of A Woman* Movie

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Abstract. This research discusses the comparison of the politeness strategies used by male and female characters in the *Pieces of a Woman*'s movie (2020), focusing on how gender and power affect their language choices. The study uses Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory as the main theory with Sara Mills's (2003) gender and politeness theory as the support theory and applies a descriptive qualitative method. A total of 428 utterances from the two main characters, Sean (male) and Martha (female), were analyzed and grouped into four types of politeness strategies: Bald on Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, and Off the Record. The results show that Sean used all four strategies, with Positive Politeness being the most common (121 utterances), followed by Bald on Record (46), Off the Record (22), and Negative Politeness (10). This means Sean often tries to build closeness and familiarity but also speaks directly when needed. Martha, on the other hand, produced 229 utterances, with Positive Politeness being the most frequent (161), showing she focuses more on emotional closeness and maintaining good relationships. She also used Off the Record (28), Bald on Record (31), and Negative Politeness (9). Martha's choices show a more careful and emotionally sensitive way of speaking. Overall, the study finds that gender and power influence how people choose politeness strategies. The female character used more polite and indirect language, while the male character combined closeness to gather empathy to get what he wants.

INTRODUCTION

Language plays a crucial role in social interaction, not only through the words spoken but also through the implied meanings behind them. This is the focus of pragmatics, which, as Yule (1996) explains, explores how speakers convey meaning beyond the literal interpretation of their words. One key aspect of pragmatics is politeness, which helps maintain social harmony and protect individuals' self-image or "face." The Politeness

Theory proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) outlines four politeness strategies which are bald on-record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record. These politeness strategies are used depending on factors such as power, and gender.

Politeness strategies are often shaped by gender roles and social expectations. Research shows that men and women may choose different strategies based on how they navigate societal power structures. Men are often expected to act assertively or even aggressively to maintain status, while women are typically encouraged to adopt more polite and indirect forms of communication. Scholars such as Lakoff (2008) support the idea that politeness reflects cultural values about gender, authority, and social norms. Moreover, Emma Watson's (2014) advocacy for gender equality highlights how social perceptions of masculinity and power can lead men to use language differently in order to conform or resist stereotypes.

While several studies have investigated politeness in media, including research by Isabella (2022), Dara et al. (2022), and Probosini (2020), many of these works focus on identifying politeness expressions or strategies without critically analyzing the role of gender and power dynamics. This presents a gap in the literature, as gender significantly influences language choices, especially in interactions involving requests, apologies, or expressions of disagreement.

To address this gap, this study focuses on the film "Pieces of a Woman", which features complex dialogues between male and female main characters. This film provides a relevant context to explore how gender roles and social power affect the choice and function of politeness strategies. Using the framework of Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987) and Sara Mills's Gender and Politeness Theory (2003), this research aims to compare the types of politeness strategies used by male and female characters and examine how gender privilege influences their communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have investigated politeness in media, including research by Isabella (2022), Dara et al. (2022), and Probosini (2020), many of these works focus on identifying politeness expressions or strategies without critically analyzing the role of gender and power dynamics. This presents a gap in the literature, as gender significantly influences language choices, especially in interactions involving requests, apologies, or expressions of disagreement. These ten previous studies used Brown & Levinson's theory (1988) as their main theoretical framework. According to these previous studies, the previous studies share similarities in their narrow focus such as emphasizing the frequency of politeness strategies, the role of interpersonal dynamics, cultural and situational contexts, specific strategy types, or character-based analysis, they differ in the particular aspects they prioritize researchers only show how to identify the level of politeness strategies, how to identify compliments and expressions of gratitude, how to identify apologies and expressions of regret, and how to identify the politeness strategies based on the culture or only mention which gender was more dominant. While e but all collectively reveal a significant gap in failing to integrate gender as a determining factor in the selection and use of politeness strategies, thereby limiting a comprehensive understanding of how

gendered communication patterns may influence or reflect broader social hierarchies, power dynamics and the construction of gender privilege in discourse. Based on the gaps that have been revealed, the reason used by the researcher to research this topic is that the researcher wants to identify politeness strategies applied by male and female main characters in this *Pieces of a Woman* movie.

METHOD

A movie entitled *Pieces of A Woman* was selected because it contains utterances that can be used to identify the pattern of different politeness strategies performed by the main characters of this movie. This film is readily accessible for viewing on the Netflix streaming platform, ensuring the availability of the source for further analysis or verification. The data of this research was taken from the utterances of female main character, Martha, and male main characters, Sean, which clearly provides many utterances of the main characters that relate to politeness strategies. A study can be said to use qualitative methods if the procedures of qualitative research emerging qualitative approaches to inquiry, then collect the data in a natural setting to the people and places under the study, and analyze the data to establish the patterns based on the complex description and interpretation of the problem (Cresswell, 2022). This research adopts a qualitative research approach, specifically in the field of pragmatics.

This study aims to examine the impact of politeness strategies on gender relations and how these strategies may contribute to the emergence of gender privilege in communication under Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. By using a qualitative method, the study draws its data from the movie *Pieces of a Woman*, focusing specifically on the utterances of the main male and female characters. The data collection process was conducted through a structured approach, beginning with watching a movie titled *Pieces of a Woman* and the identification of utterances spoken by both the male and female main characters that exhibited politeness strategies. These utterances were carefully noted and recorded for further analysis. Following this, each utterance was classified based on the gender of the speaker, distinguishing whether it was produced by the male or female main character.

Once categorized by interlocutor, the utterances were then sorted according to the specific type of politeness strategy they exemplified, based on Levinson theory. This method enabled a focused examination of the ways in which politeness strategies differ across gender lines and allowed for exploration into how these differences may influence gender dynamics within the narrative context of the film. The data analysis began with quantifying the frequency of each type of politeness strategy used. Subsequently, the analysis described the identified strategies in terms of their communicative functions. Finally, the study explored the role of gender in shaping the use of these politeness strategies, highlighting how gender influences the interlocutor's choice of strategy and how this may reflect broader patterns of gendered interaction and privilege.

The methodology outlined in the description involves analysing politeness strategies in the context of a movie, focusing on the utterances from male and female main characters in this movie. Here's a breakdown of the steps involved in this analysis:

1. Categorizing the utterances under politeness strategies types of each gender

    The first step is to categorize the utterances of female and male main characters from the movie into different types of politeness strategies according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory. These categories typically include:

- **Bald on Record**: Direct and unambiguous speech without politeness markers.
- **Positive Strategies**: Strategies that enhance politeness, such as compliments or expressions of friendliness.
- **Negative Strategies**: Strategies that mitigate potential face-threatening acts, such as hedges or indirect language.
- **Off-record**: Strategies that involve indirect communication, like hints or indirect requests.

No	Characters	Politeness Strategies Code	Total
1		PP	
2	Sean (Male Character)	NP	
3		BoR	
4		OTR	
5		PP	
6	Martha (Female Character)	NP	
7		BoR	
8		OTR	

This amount provides an overview of how often each politeness strategy is used by the main characters to establish patterns in their language use throughout the movie. By calculating the frequency, the dominant of politeness strategies is able to be determined based on the characters' utterances.

2. Describing the politeness strategies according to the function

The second step focuses on describing each identified politeness strategy based on its specific communicative function within the context of the interaction. After categorizing the utterances, the researcher analyzes how the strategy functions in mitigating face threatening acts (FTA), such as making requests, offering criticism, giving command, or giving advice. For instance, a positive politeness strategy may be used to show solidarity or approval, while a negative politeness strategy might aim to show deference or minimize imposition. Each utterance is examined in light of its situational context, including the relationship between interlocutors and the hearer. This step allows for a deeper understanding of the pragmatic choices made by the characters and how those choices serve their interpersonal goals.

3. Describing how gender contribute as the factor of applying the politeness strategies

that used by Sean and Martha

The next step of the analysis involves examining the influence of gender on the use of politeness strategies, with a particular focus on comparing the speech patterns of Sean and Martha. Gender is considered as a sociolinguistic factor that may shape the way individuals use language to express politeness, manage face, and negotiate power relations. For example, the main character may use positive politeness strategies to build rapport with others, assert their authority, or protect their own positive self-image. The analysis explores whether Sean and Martha exhibit differing preferences for certain politeness strategies, and how these differences may reflect broader gendered communicative tendencies. By interpreting the results in relation to gender, the study aims to uncover how male privilege and female privilege are linguistically constructed and maintained through politeness in the film's dialogue.

4. Drawing a conclusion from the analysis

Drawing a conclusion from the analysis means summarizing the main findings to answer the research questions. After analyzing the politeness strategies used by the male and female main characters, the researcher looks at how these strategies are influenced by gender. The researcher also considers how often each strategy is used and what function it serves in the conversation. By linking these findings to the theory used in the study, the conclusion shows what the results mean and why they are important. This process helps to explain how gender can affect the way people use language and politeness in communication. In the end, the conclusion gives a clear summary of the results and what they tell us about politeness and gender.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following table presents the findings of the study by categorizing the utterances of the main characters, Sean (male main character) and Martha (female main character, based on the types of politeness strategies they used according to Levinson's theory. By comparing the number of occurrences for each strategy, the study is able to determine which type of politeness strategy is most dominantly used by Sean and Martha. This data serves as the basis for analyzing how gender influences the choice of politeness strategies in the film *Pieces of a Woman*.

Based on the data, Sean employed all four types of politeness strategies, with a total of 199 utterances analyzed. The most frequently used strategy by Sean was Positive Politeness, with 121 utterances, indicating a tendency to appeal to solidarity, familiarity, and mutual understanding in his communication. This was followed by the Bald-on-Record strategy, used in 46 utterances, which reflects a more direct and unmitigated form of speech. Sean also utilized the Off-the-Record strategy in 22 utterances, and Negative Politeness in 10 utterances, the latter two showing a relatively lower preference for indirectness and formality.

In contrast, Martha produced a total of 229 utterances across all categories. Her most dominant strategy was also Positive Politeness, with 161 utterances, significantly higher than Sean's usage of the same strategy. This suggests that Martha places a strong emphasis on maintaining emotional closeness, empathy, and interpersonal harmony in her interactions. The next most frequent strategy used by Martha was Off-the-Record, with 28 utterances, followed by Bald-on-Record at 31 utterances, and Negative Politeness at 9 utterances.

No	Speaker	Type of Politeness Strategies	Total Utterances	A. Bald-on-Record Strategy (BoR)
1	Sean	BoR	46	This strategy is used when the
		PP	121	
		NP	10	
		OTR	22	
	Total Sean		**199**	
2	Martha	BoR	31	
		PP	161	
		NP	9	
		OTR	28	
	Total Martha		**229**	
	Total Data		**428**	

interlocutor expresses themselves directly, without minimizing the threat to the hearer's face. The characteristic of this strategy is direct and unambiguous speech without politeness markers.

Sean (male main character)

Data: S1BOR1

Sean: Tommy, <u>take it up</u>! He's big-dealing the fuck out of every lift, Bob. The phrase *"<u>take it up</u>"* is a direct command without any form of softening or hedging expressions. It represents an unmitigated directive, which is a key characteristic of the Bald-on-Record (BoR) strategy. As a male main character, Sean uses this strategy because he is in a workplace where power hierarchy exists in which Sean is in a superior position and Tommy is his subordinate. Sean's use of this strategy reflects a straightforward assertion of power, shaped both by situational urgency and his gendered role within the interaction.

Martha (female main character)

Data: M19BOR8

Martha: "<u>Distract me with something.</u>"

Martha uses BOR politeness strategy in this utterance because the function

of the utterance is to express her discomfort clearly and directly, and to request help without softening her words. The keywords "distract me" shows that she is not trying to soften her words, instead, she speaks honestly and urgently due to the pain she is experiencing during labor. This directness is typical in situations of physical stress or emergency, where clarity is more important than politeness. The power in this moment shifts toward Martha, as she is the one in labor and her needs take priority. From a gender perspective, although women are often expected to speak politely, in this situation Martha chooses direct speech, showing that context and urgency can override social expectations. This reflects how power and gender affect her choice of BOR politeness strategy.

B. Positive Politeness Strategy (PP)

Positive politeness strategies are used to express friendliness and show that the interlocutor wants to be accepted and liked. The characteristic strategy is to enhance politeness, such as compliments or expressions of friendliness.

Sean (male main character)
Data: S116PP63

Sean:"*Martha, there's something. I know you're worried*"
In this scene, Martha is emotionally distressed because of their daughter's death case. Sean responds not with command but recognizing her emotion, his utterance "*I know you're worried*" reflects empathy and shared concern to maintain intimacy. The word "I know" shows recognition of Martha's feeling and the word "you're worried" appeals to Martha's desire to be understood and validated. Sean avoids positioning himself as a decision-maker by asking Martha's respond to her thoughts by showing his empathy and shared concern to maintain social balance. Sean uses positive politeness in this case to show a gendered shift of language use that is often used by women associated with empathetic talk. This indicates that gender expectations can influence the choosing of politeness strategies.

Martha (female main character)
Data: M40PP33

Martha:"*You look very handsome. You also look super scared*"
The utterance "you look very handsome" is an explicit compliment which is a marker of positive politeness. Martha is in vulnerable labor and in pain, but she recognizes Sean's fear and attempts to ease his anxiety with humor and affection. By complimenting him before pointing out his fear, she shows empathy and makes the situation feel less threatening to strengthen their bond in a stressful moment. Although Martha is the one physically suffering, she does not assert power or demand attention but comforting Sean and validating his feelings using humor. Traditionally, women are expected to manage others' emotions. Even though Martha is in pain, she supports Sean emotionally and this reflects how gender roles can affect strategy choice, with women more often expected to prioritize connection and care even under stress.

C. Negative Politeness Strategy (NP)

Negative politeness is used to show respect and avoid intruding, often using

indirectness or formality. This strategy is to mitigate potential face-threatening acts, such as hedges or indirect language.

Sean (male main character)
Data: S127NP5

Sean: "*Uhh sorry. I'm gonna go outside. Sorry*"

Sean's repeated apology and softened explanation for leaving reflect an attempt to repair the face threat caused by his earlier emotional outburst and rude interruptions to a doctor after hearing the explanation that the cause of their baby's death is still unknown. The keywords "sorry" is a marker of apology that used to acknowledge that he has overstepped. Sean asserts emotional dominance by interrupting and he admits that his behavior may have crossed a line. However, his use of "sorry" indicates that Sean adopted a softer style which is often associated with female language style like apologizing and avoiding conflict.

Martha (female main character)
Data: M192NP9

Martha:"*Could I just have a word with the judge?*"

Martha says this utterance in a courtroom and requests permission to speak in front of others to explain her reason and truth behind her decision to close the civil case regarding her daughter's death. The keyword "Could I" is a modal question form which makes the request less direct to avoid threatening the hearer's freedom. Martha is a civilian speaking to a judge who holds formal institutional authority and seks permission to respect court protocol while making her voice heard. Even though Martha is emotionally driven to speak, she frames her request with soft and respectful language reflecting how women assert themselves to enter a formal space and express her voice meaningfully.

D. Off-Record Strategy (OR)

Off-record strategy relies on implication and ambiguity, allowing the hearer to infer meaning. These strategies used to show the involvement of indirect communication, like hints or indirect requests.

Sean (male main character)
Data: S18OR5

Sean: "*so we're having six-minute contractions now*"

Sean says this utterance to Barbara (the midwife) because Martha's contractions are progressing faster than expected and Barbara still hasn't arrived. The utterance "*we're having six-minute contractions now*" implied urgency because the six-minute contraction interval is medically known to signal imminent labor and the implication is clear which Barbara needs to hurry. Sean, as the partner of the woman in labor, avoids directly challenging Barbara's authority as the medical professional to reflect Sean's awareness of professional hierarchy. From a gender perspective, Sean's choice reflects a male language style using facts and implication to express urgency.

Martha (female main character)
Data: M203OR28

Martha:"*Lucy, hey baby, <u>it's dinner</u>*"

In the sentence "Lucy, hey baby, it's dinner," Martha uses an off-record politeness strategy by softly getting Lucy's attention without a direct order because she is playing and climbing the tree. Instead of commanding, she gives a gentle reminder, letting Lucy decide when to respond. This indirect way of speaking respects Lucy's freedom and avoids pressure. From a power view, Martha's tone lowers the sense of authority and keeps the interaction warm and loving. Regarding gender, this example shows how women often use caring and indirect language to connect with others while keeping things calm and friendly.

The results of this study show both similarities and differences when compared to Brown and Levinson's and Sara Mills's theories. The similarities of these findings are use of multiple strategies, influence of power, and female uses PP strategies. While the differences show male using PP strategies, fluidity in strategy use in both male and female characters switch strategies, empathy as a strategic tool for male characters to get what he wants. In line with Brown and Levinson's theory, the data shows that all four politeness strategies which are Bald on Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, and Off Record, are used by the characters depending on the situation, which supports the idea that context influences strategy choice. The findings also partly support Sara Mills's theory, especially in the case of the female character, Martha, who mostly uses Positive Politeness to maintain relationships and show empathy. However, a key difference is seen in the male character, Sean, who often uses Positive Politeness instead of the expected Bald on Record strategy. This challenges Mills's claim that men are usually more direct and less emotionally expressive. Therefore, the study suggests that politeness is shaped not only by gender but also by emotional intention, power balance, and the need to maintain social harmony.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the politeness strategies used by Sean and Martha in the film *Pieces of a Woman*, using Levinson's politeness framework. The findings show that both characters employ all four types of politeness strategies, but their choices differ in ways that reflect gender differences. Martha tends to use positive politeness more frequently, aiming to build emotional connection and maintain harmony, while Sean uses a higher proportion of bald-on-record strategies, showing a more direct communication style.

When these results are compared with Sarah Mills's theory on gender and politeness, it shows both similarities and differences when compared to Brown and Levinson's and Sara Mills's theories. The similarities of these findings are use of multiple strategies, influence of power, and female uses PP strategies. While the differences show male using PP strategies, fluidity in strategy use in both male and female characters switch strategies, empathy as a strategic tool for male characters to get what he wants. In line with Brown and Levinson's theory, the data shows that all four politeness strategies which are Bald on Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, and Off Record, are used by the characters depending on the situation, which supports the idea that context influences strategy choice. The findings also partly support Sara Mills's theory, especially in the case of the female character, Martha, who mostly uses Positive Politeness to maintain

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Furthermore, Mills highlights how politeness strategies are influenced not only by gender but also by the power relations between interlocutors. This study confirms that power dynamics also affect politeness choices, as Sean's directness can be seen as an attempt to assert control, while Martha's politeness strategies function to negotiate emotional power and preserve social harmony. The interplay between gender and power creates different communicative approaches, shaped by social expectations and gender privilege, as Mills discusses.

In conclusion, this research supports Sarah Mills's theory by showing that gender plays a significant role in how politeness strategies are selected and used to achieve interpersonal goals. Both Sean and Martha's communication styles reflect gendered patterns that serve their needs and reflect their positions within the power dynamics of their relationship. This study contributes to a better understanding of how gender and power interact in everyday communication, especially in emotionally charged contexts.

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