

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Real-life experiences and literary works are interconnected in many aspects. Among many scholars, Purves & Beach (1972:25) highlighted that readers can be more connected to literary works when they can connect the ideas in the literary works with their personal experiences. This encompasses various forms of interpersonal communication shown in literary works, including politeness strategy. As Yule (1996:60) described, politeness refers to the considerate and respectful treatment of each other's faces. Beyond the need to be cooperative, politeness becomes the underlying principle of effective communication (Leech, 1983:17). In literary works, politeness is exemplified by the intentional use of words, gestures, and actions that aim to maintain a harmonious interpersonal environment among the characters.

Social factors significantly influence how characters apply politeness, including their relative power (P). This principle asserts that a character's power relative to the situation at hand plays a significant role in how they choose to express themselves through politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987:74). As individuals gain or lose power within a society, it becomes apparent in how they choose to interact with others. This power dynamic can significantly impact how a character approaches communication, as it influences their choice and use of politeness strategies.

This phenomenon is depicted in Taylor Jenkins Reid's novel *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*. The story follows Evelyn Hugo, an actress from a low-class family in Cuba, as she rises to be a 1950s Hollywood star. The novel illustrates how the hierarchical environment within the Hollywood film industry and Evelyn's origins significantly influence her approach in various interactions to achieve career advancement. As Evelyn navigates the highly competitive and demanding film industry, she encounters numerous situations where she must negotiate her place and maintain her position. However, due to her background and the power dynamics at play, Evelyn's approach to politeness may differ from that of her peers.

Consequently, this research examined how variations of power relative influence Evelyn's decision to employ a particular politeness strategy. The theory of politeness strategy by Brown and Levinson (1987) will be applied because it can give an overall comprehension of how politeness strategies are used to manage and navigate power dynamics to maintain professional relationships between individuals.

## **1. 2 Research Problems**

To what extent, politeness strategies applied by Evelyn in the novel, *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*, remained unknown before the completion of this project. Whether or not her politeness strategies changed throughout her various career stages was also unidentified before this project was concluded. This demands a thorough investigation regarding how she used politeness strategies with different

characters relative to power, which is required as a stepping stone to solve the problem of how real-life experiences and literary works are connected.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

1. To examine the most dominant type of politeness strategies in Evelyn Hugo's utterances throughout her various career stages as a Hollywood artist.
2. To explain the power dynamics of politeness strategy in Evelyn Hugo's utterance to selected individual interlocutors.

### **1.4 Previous Study**

This study shares the same object with a number of previous studies conducted by Albaniyyah (2023) and Roos (2022), which focused on the psychological literature perspective, and Damayanti (2023) and Rahmani (2023), which focused on gender and feminist criticism. However, no previous study has focused on the linguistic aspects of this novel, especially the use of politeness strategy and its relationship with power.

Studies by Farrokhi & Arghami (2017a), Behnam et al. (2014), Ojukwu & Dike, (2023), Farrokhi & Arghami (2017b), and Liu & Greenhill (2021) have examined politeness strategies in various contexts in literary works. Behnam et al. (2014) identified politeness strategies used by characters in a boarding house context. Ojukwu & Dike (2023) examined politeness strategies crucial for characters in the monarchy system. Furthermore, Farrokhi & Arghami (2017a), Liu & Greenhill (2021), and Farrokhi & Arghami (2017b) emphasized that

implementing politeness strategies was important in different settings of culture, such as in Farsi, English, and Chinese literature. Despite examining how crucial the implementation of politeness strategies is, these studies are limited to examining characters with the same role and career stage in a social hierarchy. Meanwhile, this current research examines a character with various career stages, Evelyn.

A number of scholars have examined how various factors affect the choice of politeness strategies in real life. While all these studies applied Brown and Levinson's politeness theory for the analysis, they identified different influencing factors. Smadi et al. (2023) and Masruddin et al. (2023) found that the age difference between the speaker and the hearer is a key factor. Kousar (2015) pointed out that social status plays a significant role, while Shigenaga (2016) and Yan (2016) found social distance to be crucial. Ryabova (2015) showed how these social factors are interconnected. However, none of the studies discussed how power relation plays as an crucial factor in applying politeness strategy.

Some scholars, such as Amalia et al. (2023), Abedi et al. (2016), and Trihartanti et al. (2023), revealed the relationship between power and politeness strategy. Despite analyzing power and its relation to politeness strategy, each study used a different supporting theory to explain the power relation between speaker and hearer; hence, the findings are varied. Amalia et al. (2023) employed Hall's representation theory and defined power by stereotypes; Abedi et al. (2016) employed Holmes' theory of social power; and Trihartanti et al. (2023) employed Thomas's theory of referent and personal power. Since these study using the other supporting theory to define the power relation between character, my thesis will be

focused to analyze the relative power factors using Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory and defining power by the differences in career stage between the speaker and hearer.

Recent studies have highlighted the importance of politeness strategies in formal settings such as academic discussions (Estaji & Nejad, 2021), workplace communications (Paramasivam & Subramaniam, 2018), and job interviews (Tan et al., 2016; Wijayanti et al., 2022). These studies show that power differences significantly affect how politeness is used. Teachers tend to use positive politeness to foster a friendly atmosphere, according to Estaji & Nejad (2021). Meanwhile, Tan et al. (2016) and Wijayanti et al. (2022) found that job applicants often use positive politeness more than interviewers. Paravisam & Subramaniam (2018) observed that superiors adjust their politeness based on whether they want to display authority or camaraderie. This stance contrasts the aforementioned studies, which focus on real-life experiences.

### **1.5 Scope of the Study**

The current research examines Evelyn Hugo's use of politeness strategies in *The Seven Husbands of Evelyn Hugo*. It analyzes how variations in her relative power (P) across different career stages impact her selection of these strategies. Moreover, the investigations will be limited to Evelyn's utterances to three selected individual interlocutors: Max Girad, Harry Cameron, and Monique Grant. These characters were selected based on Evelyn's varying career stages, thereby allowing a comprehensive depiction of the diverse dynamics of power relations between

Evelyn and the interlocutors mentioned above. In addition, these three interlocutors were selected because of the high intensity of the interaction with Evelyn. This study will exclusively focus on presenting positive politeness in detail. This is due to the page limitation and the specific research objective one, which is focused on presenting the most dominant type of politeness strategies in every stage of Evelyn's career.

## **1.6 Writing Organization**

### **CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION**

Chapter 1 comprises six sub-chapters, including the background of the study, research problems, research objectives, previous study, the scope of the study, and writing organization.

### **CHAPTER II THEORY AND METHOD**

Chapter two is divided into two sub-chapters. The first sub-chapter deals with the theoretical framework, which explains the broad explanation of Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness. The second sub-chapter focuses on research methodologies, consisting of data collection method, data analysis method, and data, population, and data.

### **CHAPTER III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Chapter 3 is divided into two parts. The first part examines how Evelyn strategically employs politeness throughout every career stage, while the second part examines how power dynamics impact her use of these strategies.

## **CHAPTER IV CONCLUSION**

This chapter presents the research conclusions and suggestions for future studies.