

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

People tend to make linguistic choices that reflect their intentions, attitudes, and social norms governing interaction in every communicative act. From Leech's perspective, politeness functions as an interpersonal principle that regulates social behavior through language. Rather than focusing on face management, Leech (1983) argues that politeness is a way of balancing cost and benefit, praise and dispraise, and agreement and disagreement in interaction. Therefore, politeness is not only a matter of being polite in the conventional sense, but also concerns how speakers manage their utterances toward the hearer's social well-being.

In an intercultural context, politeness reflects cultural values that differ across cultures. What is considered polite in a certain culture may be considered impolite in another (Kecskés, 2014). This can lead to varied interpretations among speakers (Bowe & Martin, 2007). This diversity demonstrates the importance of context awareness in intercultural communication. Fang (2024) revealed that politeness is engaged in non-native English interactions in such settings. As Kecskés (2014) observed, there are different perspectives on how speakers and interlocutors consider something polite or impolite. Specifically in intercultural communication, an English L2 speaker might not recognize the politeness or impoliteness in an English L1 speaker's utterances due to cultural differences or a

language barrier. This may lead to misunderstandings and cause the speakers to lose track of the interaction.

Such a setting is found in the Korean-American TV Series *XO, Kitty* (2023), which provides an international school setting in Seoul where students come from different countries and cultural backgrounds. It portrays Korean characters engaging in a peer environment and using English as their non-native language to communicate with their friends across countries. Within this context, Yuri and Dae play an important role as the Korean students who frequently engage in peer English interactions throughout the series. Their English utterances provide an interesting corpus for revealing how politeness is realized by Korean characters, who speak English as their non-native language in an intercultural context, and how gender differences between Yuri and Dae manifest in their choice of politeness strategies throughout the series.

Studies on gender and politeness have drawn scholarly attention. Every individual has a different strategy to deliver their ideas effectively. Holmes (1995) argues that women build and maintain solidarity through language, while men use language to convey information and seek authority. Moreover, gender differences in speech patterns might be found among Koreans. Wang (2006) mentioned that the Korean language is gender-preferential, meaning that certain speech patterns are more commonly associated with one gender without being used exclusively by one gender. However, this raises the question of whether gender differences carry on to their L2 English politeness behavior, particularly in an intercultural peer environment.

Many studies on politeness strategies focused mainly on interactions among native speakers, while the representation of non-native speakers has received limited attention. XO, Kitty Season 1 provides a phenomenon where the Korean characters use English as their non-native language in their interactions throughout the series. It is relevant because L2 speakers in multicultural environments need to communicate while considering their cultural backgrounds. This raises questions about how their politeness strategies are shaped during L2 communication. Leech's Politeness Principle provides six maxims, which illustrate a specific polite behavior that is well-suited to informal peer interaction found in XO, Kitty Season 1. However, no study has yet connected Leech's framework to the field of gender studies, especially in Korean L2 English speakers. Moreover, this study uses Holmes' framework on women, men, and politeness to reveal how gender differences influence the choice of politeness maxims in Yuri and Dae's English utterances.

1.2 Research Problems

Based on existing phenomena, the researcher formulated several research questions, such as the following:

1. What kinds of politeness maxims are employed by Yuri and Dae during their English interaction in XO, Kitty Season 1?
2. How do gender differences manifest in the use of politeness maxims by Yuri and Dae?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

By answering the research questions, this study aims to:

1. To describe the type of politeness maxims used by Yuri and Dae during their English interaction in XO, Kitty Season 1
2. To describe how gender differences manifest in the use of politeness maxims between Yuri and Dae

1.4 Previous Studies

Studies on politeness strategies have been conducted using various approaches, especially in media such as films and TV series. This section reviews previous studies on politeness, particularly Leech's politeness strategies and their connection to gender in peer intercultural settings.

Several studies have applied Leech's politeness strategy to films and TV series as a corpus. Nuraini et al. (2024) analyzed the movie Emma and found that the character used high approbation and sympathy to maintain face due to her high social status. In addition, Firdaus & Simatupang (2022) applied Leech's politeness strategy in the Squid Game and noticed that the characters tended to use Leech's politeness principle more than they violated the maxim. All maxims were found, except for the agreement maxim. They argued that politeness maxims are used to reveal the characters' dynamics in the film. Furthermore, Saskara et al. (2022) discussed the politeness maxim in the film Victoria and Abdul, which provides an intercultural interaction between the characters, Victoria from Britain and Abdul from India. All types of politeness maxims were found, with the approbation maxim

being the most frequently used, as Victoria and Abdul have a close relationship. These studies demonstrate that Leech's politeness strategy can be identified in film and TV series corpora. However, these studies focused more on speakers' first language. None of these studies specifically examined Korean speakers, nor did they connect the findings through a gender lens.

On the other hand, several studies explored gender differences in politeness behavior. Muhammad & Diannurdianti (2024) explored gender differences in the Harry Potter movie through the Brown and Levinson framework. It was found that the bald-on records strategy is used more frequently by male characters than by female characters. The study stated that the different strategies used by male and female characters are proven in the use of exaggeration, hedging, and the strategy of noticing the hearer. Therefore, this study had imbalanced data with 20 male subjects and only eight female subjects. In addition, Nurrosida (2024) analyzed gender differences through positive politeness and Leech's maxim in Not Cinderella's Type. She discovered that males tend to use more generosity, while females tend to use modesty and agreement maxims. Moreover, Nihayati (2018) observed politeness and gender in the movie Independence Day through the Brown and Levinson framework. She found that female characters employed more off-record strategies than male characters because of the social context. These studies make significant contributions to politeness and gender discourse. However, they predominantly use Brown and Levinson's framework to reveal gender differences rather than Leech's maxim as the analytical tool to identify the strategies. This shows that gender differences in politeness behavior have not been explored

through Leech's politeness strategy. Additionally, none of these studies focused on L2 speakers or intercultural peer settings.

Furthermore, several studies have investigated how Korean speakers realize politeness strategies when using English as their non-native language in their interactions. Lutfiah (2022) addressed politeness strategies in the context of second languages. She analyzed politeness strategies through Brown and Levinson's framework of guests who speak English as their non-native language on the K-Pop Daebak Show program. Guests tend to use positive politeness more than negative politeness. It also found that negative politeness is used only when the imposition gets higher. Moreover, Noh (2022) discussed refusal strategies in both L1 Korean and L2 English among Korean students. The method used was DCT, with social status, social distance, and social proficiency as variables. The findings show that indirect strategies were the most frequently used in both languages. The strategy is more indirect with unfamiliar equals and more direct with people of higher status. She also argued that the pattern of the findings fit Wolfson's Bulge more than Brown and Levinson. Wolfson stated that politeness is influenced by intimacy, which could explain why Korean learners refuse requests from unfamiliar friends. Similarly, Song (2014) investigated the choice of request strategy by native English speakers and Korean English as a second language learners in terms of politeness to reveal how cultural background affects their strategies. The findings show that Koreans use direct strategies significantly more than Americans do. The directness of Korean L2 speakers results from their cultural background and language barriers. In contrast, Fang (2024) found that Chinese English speakers used indirect

strategies with explanations, alternatives, and apologies as high strategies. This study also revealed that cultural and contextual factors matter in EFL interpersonal contexts.

Politeness strategies have been discussed in many approaches and contexts in previous studies. However, studies combining politeness, gender, and intercultural settings remain unexplored. This study fills this gap by exploring politeness strategies employed by Yuri and Dae, Korean characters who engage in intercultural settings in English as their non-native language. Specifically, using Leech's politeness strategy, this study explores the use of the politeness maxim in close-distance interactions and interprets the findings through Holmes' framework on women, men, and politeness.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on Yuri and Dae's English utterance, who are the Korean characters from the first season of XO, Kitty Series. This study examined the use of politeness maxims through verbal interactions. Moreover, only English utterances in peer interactions, including Korean and non-Korean interlocutors, were analyzed using Leech's politeness strategies. Therefore, as the data were scripted, the utterances may not fully reflect natural spoken interactions. The findings cannot be generalized to Korean English speakers as a whole, as this study focuses only on two characters. The mixed interlocutors' backgrounds, native and non-native English, indicate that the intercultural aspects of each utterance vary across the dataset.