

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Literary works often portray various aspects of human life, including social interactions such as in professional setting. One such work is *Hannibal*, an American psychological thriller television series produced by Bryan Fuller (2013) and based on Thomas Harris's novel *The Red Dragon* (1981). In this series, dr. Hannibal Lecter is a respected psychiatrist who secretly leads a double life as a cannibalistic serial killer. As part of his work, he is assigned by the FBI to treat Will Graham, one of the agency's consultants, in connection with various murder cases and other independent clients which are Franklyn Froideveaux and Bella Crawford.

The phenomenon depicted in this series emerges during therapy sessions with these three clients. Their interactions involve various forms of therapeutic communication that require psychiatrists and clients to negotiate meaning, authority, and interpersonal relationships. This creates a specific context within the series that can be used to analyze language use in professional communication. Language serves not only as a means of exchanging information but also as a resource for constructing interpersonal relationships and negotiating power throughout their relationships.

In interactions between psychiatrists and their clients, utterances that threaten the client's self-image frequently arise, as psychiatrists often have to diagnose, question, criticize, or even challenge their clients' thoughts and

behaviour. Such actions may threaten the client's positive face by challenging their self-image and their negative face by restricting their freedom of action. Therefore, politeness strategies become important not only for maintaining therapeutic relationships but also for reflecting how professional authority is exercised during interaction. Unlike many medical consultations that rely on physical examination, psychiatric consultations depend primarily on verbal interaction. Thus, language becomes the primary instrument through which diagnosis, treatment, and professional authority are exercised.

Speakers do not use language in a neutral way but adjust their expressions according to their relationship with others and the social distance involved. Pragmatics is the study of the expression of relative distance (Yule, 1996) and constantly negotiated in actual language use, particularly in common interactions. Politeness strategies in everyday conversations are needed to ensure that what was said does not threaten the face of the interlocutor (Brown and Levinson, 1987). In pragmatics, this concept cannot be separated from the concept of power because the choice of politeness strategies is greatly influenced by the power relations present in an interaction.

Interpersonal interaction shows that power can derive from three key sources: force, material resources, and knowledge (Toffler, 1990, as cited in Smith and Buetow, 2001). In line with this, Goffman (1967) asserts that power in an interaction is determined not only by social position or status but also by the knowledge a person holds. This is directly relevant to professional settings such as doctor-patient interactions, where, as Smith and Buetow (2001) note, both doctor

and patient possess their own sources of power, making politeness an important aspect of medical communication. Verlinde et al. (2012) and Li (2023) further argue that patients actively influence the direction of medical interaction through their communication skills and responses, indicating that power in a therapeutic or medical context is not held entirely by the doctor but is negotiated throughout the communication.

In this study, dynamic power relations refer to the changing and negotiable distribution of power between psychiatrist and client throughout therapeutic interaction. Although psychiatrists hold institutional and knowledge-based authority, clients may negotiate, question, or influence that authority through their responses during communication. Hannibal Lecter offers a compelling representation of these dynamics: as a psychiatrist, he reinforces both institutional and knowledge-based authority in his interactions with his clients, and as Oleson (2006) observes, Hannibal "retains the mind and manner of a physician" a statement suggesting that his professional identity shapes the knowledge-based power reflected in his speech. From a narrative perspective, language plays a central role in constructing this characterization, as Hannibal's authority and interpersonal relationships are primarily conveyed through what he says.

As a psychiatrist, Hannibal reinforces both institutional and knowledge-based authority in his interactions with his clients. As Oleson (2006) stated, Hannibal "retains the mind and manner of a physician." This statement suggests that his professional identity shapes the knowledge-based power reflected in his interactions with his clients. From a narrative perspective, language also plays an

important role in constructing Hannibal's characterization, as his authority and interpersonal relationships are primarily reflected through his speech.

Previous studies mainly focused on fixed hierarchical relationships, whereas this study focuses on relative and negotiable power relations within fictional therapeutic discourse. However, in fictional contexts such as Hannibal, the therapist-client relationship is portrayed as more dynamic, as certain clients are able to challenge, negotiate, or influence Hannibal's authority during interaction. This situation makes the use of politeness strategies more complex, particularly when power is not fixed but continually negotiated within interaction.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background above, this study raises the following research questions:

1. What types of politeness strategies does Hannibal use in his interactions with his clients?
2. How do Hannibal's politeness strategies reflect the relative power relations in his interactions with his clients?
3. How do Hannibal's choice of politeness strategies contribute to his characterization in the series?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study has three objectives, first, to identify the types of politeness strategies employed by Hannibal Lecter in his speech acts that threaten his client's face during therapy sessions in Season 1 of *Hannibal*, using Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness. Second, to analyse how Hannibal's choice of strategies

reflects power relations in his interactions with his client. Finally, to determine how the patterns of strategies employed contribute to shaping the character of Hannibal Lecter as a fictional character in the Hannibal series.

1.4 Previous Studies

Based on the background of this study, politeness strategies are required to reduce or mitigate the threat to the hearer's face. As found by Ng et al (2016), bald on record dominates in medical consultations because doctors prioritise efficiency and diagnostic clarity. Positive politeness is used to foster cooperation between doctor and patient, whilst negative politeness through hedges and questions can reduce imposition. Similar findings also shown by Yuxian and Jun (2025) that negative politeness is commonly used by doctors to reduce the power imbalance between doctors and patients.

Lodhi et al (2019) also found that bald on record is the strategy most frequently used by doctors to demonstrate their authority over their patients. These findings suggest that politeness strategies in doctor-patient interactions can serve to reduce threats to face and maintain the power relationship between them.

Similar patterns are also found in the world of fiction. Darta et al (2023) found that characters with higher social status more frequently used direct speech to dominate. Furthermore, Aziz and Hashim (2025) found that characters with lower social status more frequently use indirectness and mitigation in interactions. Amalia et al (2023) added that in situations with a high hierarchical structure, politeness strategies can function as a tool to maintain existing power dynamics between characters.

In television series, Ardianto and Setiawan (2016) found that the main character in *The Walking Dead* frequently uses positive politeness with characters with whom they have a close relationship but switches to bald on record when asserting their authority over those with whom they have a distant relationship. Kinansha and Hanidar (2023) found that in request speech acts, bald on record dominates in the series *Grey's Anatomy* because medical situations require clarity and immediacy. Meanwhile, negative politeness is frequently found in interactions between characters from different social positions. This suggests that the choice of politeness strategies in the fictional world reflects power relations and the characters' positions within an interaction.

Anjani and Putri (2025) further found that politeness strategies can serve as tools of manipulation when characters in positions of power use approbation and sympathy to influence and control other characters in the film *Wicked*. This supports Abbas and Sulaiman (2011)'s findings that the politeness strategies identified in works of fiction can contribute to the formation of a character, as a character's patterns of interaction can reveal and construct their identity within the narrative. This can be applied to the character of Hannibal Lecter, whose characterisation can be seen on his style of interaction with those he is speaking to, and in this study the focus is on his clients during therapy sessions.

A study focusing on Hannibal Lecter by Stadler (2017) found that Hannibal may possess 'cold empathy', which is the ability to empathise with others' experiences without actually caring about them emotionally. Furthermore, Yuliani et al (2025) argue that Hannibal sometimes uses obscure language with Will

Graham to avoid misunderstandings. However, this study only examines Hannibal Lecter from a psychological perspective and does not focus on his use of language.

Although previous studies have found that the use of politeness strategies reflects power, most have focused on power relations that are already established. Little attention has been paid to professional interactions involving uncertain power dynamics in fiction, such as between psychiatrists and clients who may challenge authority or exhibit defences, as seen in the series *Hannibal* (2013), and how specific patterns can serve as tools for character construction in the series.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on Hannibal Lecter's utterances during therapy scenes in the first season of the television series *Hannibal*. The data analysed is limited to Hannibal's utterances when interacting with his patients that contain Face-Threatening Acts. This research examines politeness strategies based on Brown and Levinson's theory in the utterances made by Hannibal to mitigate threats to his clients' face. Furthermore, this study also considers the relative power relations between Hannibal and each client in their therapeutic interactions.

Additionally, this study employs concepts focusing on the construction of Hannibal's character through his speech. This research does not cover all dialogue in the *Hannibal* series nor does it discuss utterances that do not threaten his clients' face. Only Hannibal's utterances containing face-threatening acts (FTAs) were selected because the analysis is based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, which explains how speakers perform potentially face-threatening acts while employing politeness strategies to minimise their impact. Utterances that did

not threaten either the clients' positive or negative face were excluded because they were not directly relevant to the objectives of the study.

Other linguistic aspects beyond speech act and politeness strategies are also not analysed. Therefore, the aim of this research is to identify patterns of politeness strategies in face-threatening utterances, as well as to explain how these strategies relate to power relations and contribute to the characterisation of Hannibal Lecter in the series.

