



Language Use between Parents and Daughter: Speech Styles and Politeness Strategies in *When Life Gives You Tangerines*

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ABSTRACT

This study set out to determine which speech style appear in the conversations between Geum-myeong and her parents in the Korean drama *When Life Gives You Tangerines*, using Joo's (1967) theory, and to examine the politeness strategies that emerge in those exchanges through Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. The data were drawn from the drama's official Netflix release (2025), with the English subtitle transcript as the main source. Only conversations between Geum-myeong and her parents were sampled, provide 28 conversation data sets made up of 338 dialogue lines, and each line was treated as a single unit of analysis. The researchers themselves were the main instrument, aided by the subtitle transcript, and the study followed a descriptive qualitative approach. For the analysis, the conversations were first transcribed. Each utterance was then classified according to Joos's five speech styles and Brown and Levinson's four politeness strategies, and the percentages were calculated using the formula $P = F/N \times 100\%$. Only two were found out of the five speech styles, such as casual style (191 lines, 56.51%) and intimate style (147 lines, 43.49%). Frozen, formal, and consultative styles did not occur. As for politeness, positive politeness was used most often (151 lines, 44.67%), followed by off record (129 lines, 38.17%), bald on record (42 lines, 12.43%), and negative politeness (16 lines, 4.73%). Familiarity and emotional closeness shape the way Geum-myeong and her parents talk to each other and that speaking style and politeness complement each other in family communication shows the results of the study. In addition, closeness did not remove indirectness, because sensitive matters such as financial worries and emotional needs were often expressed through off-record expressions.

Keywords: language, parents and daughter, speech styles, politeness strategies

INTRODUCTION

Language plays an important role in human cognition, helping individuals express their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in both spoken and written language (Wiltshko, 2022). Language serves more than a communicative purpose, language also reflects the social identity of its speakers, since differences in age, gender, region and social background affect how individuals use language during everyday communication (Huang & Wu, 2023). This phenomenon, referred to as language variation, shows that language use does not have one fixed form. Instead, as circumstances

change, speakers may adapt their language use depending on the context, interlocutor and topic.

Among the common forms of language variation is language style, which refers to how individuals adjust their language use according to the situation and the person they are talking to (Rahmi & Fanami, 2024). Martin Joss (1967) identified five categories of language style: frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate, arranged along a spectrum from the most formal to the most relaxed of language use. Joos's framework has been employed by several recent sociolinguistic

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studies of language use in film dialogues, such as analyses of language style in *Barbie* (Rahmi & Fanami, 2024), *Uglies* (Daulay et al., 2025), *Green Book* (Humaira et al., 2022), and *The Great Debaters* (Indahsari et al., 2023). These studies found that the casual style tends to dominate everyday conversation in film, followed by the consultative and intimate style, with the formal and frozen styles occurring less frequently.

Scripted dialogue in film and television dramas have become increasingly valuable sources of linguistic data, representing patterns of language use that resemble real-life social interactions while remaining easy to access, transcribe and analyze (Daulay et al., 2025). Netflix dramas in particular provide scripted/constructed dialogue that represent interactions that occur in social context, enabling researchers to examine how language styles are used in different interpersonal relationships, situations, and levels of formality.

When Life Gives You Tangerines (2025), a Korean drama set on Jeju Island across several decades, offers a suitable context of examining language style in interpersonal interaction. The conversations between Geum-myeong and her parents reveal different forms of language within various family and intergenerational interactions portrayed in the drama. Different issues have been addressed in earlier research on the drama. Fadhillah et al. (2025) use semiotic approach to explore patriarchal culture, whereas Mufida and Budiwati (2025) examined gender inequality by analyzing the characters' language use through the sociolinguistic perspectives of Holmes (2013) and Trudgill (2000). However, no previous study has specifically examined Geum-myeong's conversations with her parents in terms of speech styles and politeness strategies. The present study addresses this by applying Joos's (1967) and Brown and Levinson's (1987) frameworks.

This research gap becomes more evident in recent studies that use Joos's speech style framework (Rahmi & Fanani, 2024; Daulay et al., 2025; Humaira et al., 2022; Yoon, 2023), which

have examined speech style in various audiovisual and conversational contexts. However, those studies have not specifically examined speech style in *When Life Gives You Tangerines*, particularly in the conversations between Geum-myeong and her parents, nor have they combined Joos's (1967) speech style framework with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory to examine how speech style is applied in parent-child interaction.

To further explore the interpersonal dimension of speech style, this study also employs Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, particularly the concepts of positive face and negative face. Positive face refers to a person's desire to be valued, accepted, and approved of by others, whereas negative face refers to the desire for autonomy and freedom from imposition or interference (Arundale, 2006; Zhang, 2021). These concepts provide a basis for understanding how speakers manage interpersonal relationships through their use of language. Brown and Levinson's framework has also been applied in earlier film-based research on language style and politeness. For example, Hartika and Ardianto (2024) examined the relationship between language style, politeness, and social context in film dialogue, demonstrating the relevance of politeness theory to the analysis of characters' language use.

Therefore, this study aims (1) to identify the speech styles used in conversations between Geum-myeong and her parents in *When Life Gives You Tangerines* based on Martin Joos's (1967) theory, and (2) to identify and analyze the politeness strategies realized in those conversations based on Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory."

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method to examine the speech styles and politeness strategies found in the Korean drama *When Life Gives You Tangerines* (Kim, 2025). Qualitative



research was chosen because it is well suited to exploring meaning, process, and interpretation embedded in language use rather than measuring it numerically (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The study focused on identifying and categorizing selected utterances from the conversations between Geum-myeong and her parents based on Martin Joos's (1967) five speech styles, as well as identifying and analyzing the politeness strategies manifested in these interactions using Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory.

The data was obtained from the official drama broadcast on Netflix, directed by Kim Won-seok, entitled *When Life Gives You Tangerines*, using English as the main source of the text. This drama was chosen because it depicts family relationships and intergenerational interactions, especially through Geum-myeong's conversations with his parents, thus providing relevant data for studying speech styles and politeness in parent-child interactions.

The data collection and analysis process contained of several step: (1) transcribe relevant conversations between Geum-myeong and his parents by watching episodes of selected dramas using the official Netflix website; (2) categorize and identify selected utterances according to the five speech styles according to Joos (1967); (3) identifying and analyzing the politeness strategies manifested in the selected utterances based on Brown & Levinson's (1987) framework, particularly positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on record, and off record strategies; and (4) showing representative examples of each speech style and politeness strategy together with their conversational context and interpretation.

RESULTS

1. Speech Styles Used in *When Life Gives You Tangerines*

Two of the five speech styles proposed by Martin Joos (1967), namely the casual style and the intimate style, were found after analyzing 28 selected conversation data between Geum-myeong

and her parents. Table 1 presents the distribution of these speech styles.

2. Speech Styles Based on Joos's Theory

The analysis involved 338 dialogue lines taken from 28 selected data sets containing conversations between Geum-myeong and her parents. Each dialogue line was treated as one unit of analysis. The data were classified based on Joos's (1967) five speech styles: frozen, formal, consultative, casual, and intimate. The classification was based on the linguistic form of each utterance and the context in which the conversation occurred.

The percentage of each speech style was calculated using the following formula: $p = f/N \times 100\%$.

The percentage of each speech style was calculated using the following formula, where P represents the percentage, F represents the frequency of a particular speech style, and N represents the total number of analyzed dialogue lines. In this study, $N = 338$.

Table-1
Distribution of Speech Styles

Speech style	Frequency	Percentage
Frozen	0	0%
Formal	0	0%
Consultative	0	0%
Casual	191	56,51%
Intimate	147	43,49%
Total	338	100%

Table 1 shows the distribution of the speech styles identified in the selected data. Casual style appeared in 191 dialogue lines (56.51%), while intimate style occurred in 147 dialogue lines (43.49%). No examples of frozen, formal, or consultative styles were identified in the selected data. This distribution shows that the conversations between Geum-myeong (GM), mother (M), and father (F) were mainly characterized by informal and close interpersonal communication.

2.1 Intimate Style

Intimate style was identified in 147 dialogue lines (43.49%) in the data. This style was mainly found in conversations involving personal matters, emotional attachment, family relationships, and expressions of affection or reassurance.

For example, in Episode 13, Geum-myeong and her mother have an emotionally personal conversation before Geum-myeong's wedding:

- Geum-myeong : *"Mom, don't do that."*
Geum-myeong : *"Let's all get along. Okay?"*
Geum-myeong : *"You'll still be my mom."*
Geum-myeong : *"I'm still your daughter."*
Mother : *"You're still our daughter."*
Geum-myeong : *"So don't cry."*

The utterances show a highly personal interaction between a parent and child. Expressions such as "You'll still be my mom" and "I'm still your daughter" directly emphasize the continuing emotional relationship between Geum-myeong and her mother. Therefore, the exchange represents the intimate nature of their communication.

Another example can be found in Episode 16, when Geum-myeong's mother expresses her wish to spend more time with her daughter:

- Mother : *"I want to see my busy daughter at least a hundred more times before I go."*
Geum-myeong : *"Why would you say that?"*
Mother : *"I get to see you maybe ten times a ten year."*
Mother : *"So I'd like to see you a hundred times a year."*

The conversation focuses on the emotional relationship between the mother and daughter.

The mother's desire to see Geum-myeong more often shows the personal and emotionally close nature of their interaction, which supports its classification as intimate style.

A similar example appears in Episode 16, when Geum-myeong reassures her mother about her father's medical condition:

- Geum-myeong : *"No matter how sick he may be, I'll make sure he gets treated."*
Mother : *"Yeah, I believe you."*
Mother : *"I believe you."*
Geum-myeong : *"So don't cry in front of Dad."*

The exchange contains reassurance and emotional support between family members. This shows the close interpersonal relationship underlying the interaction and supports its classification as intimate style.

2.2 Casual Style

Casual style was identified in 191 dialogue lines (56.51%), making it the most frequently occurring speech style in the data. The casual style was mainly found in direct, spontaneous, and informal interactions between Geum-myeong and her parents.

One example can be found in Episode 8:

- Geum-myeong : *"Come on, Mom."*
Geum-myeong : *"I told you to stop street vending."*
Geum-myeong : *"Why don't you ever have any money?"*
Mother : *"I know, right? Oh, why don't I ever have money, huh?"*

The use of direct expressions such as "Come on, Mom" and "Why don't you ever have any money?" shows spontaneous and everyday communication. The conversational expression "huh?" in the mother's response also contributes to the informal nature of the interaction.

Another example occurs in Episode 4:

- Mother : *"You have more shoes that I've ever worn in my life."*
Mother : *"Goodness, you make money to use like this?"*
Mother : *"Why did you buy so many shoes, huh?"*



These utterances contain direct questions and spontaneous expressions such as “Goodness” and “huh?”. The speaker expresses her reaction openly without using formal or socially distant language. Therefore, the interaction can be classified as casual speech style.

A further example appears in Episode 13:

Geum-myeong : “*Mom, hurry!*”
Mother : “*What, is she your boss now?*”
Geum-myeong : “*Come on, we have to cross.*”
Mother : “*I’m not going.*”
Geum-myeong : “*Mom, come on.*”

The short and direct expressions, such as “Mom, hurry!” and “Come on,” show spontaneous interaction between the characters. The exchange is informal and occurs immediately in the situation, which is consistent with casual speech style.

The absence of frozen, formal, and consultative styles indicates that the selected conversations mainly focused on close family interaction rather than formal, institutional, or ritualized communication.

3. Politeness Strategies Based on Brown and Levinson’s Theory

After identifying the speech styles using Joos’s (1967) framework, the same dialogue data were further analyzed using Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory. The analysis focused on four politeness strategies: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record. Each dialogue line was examined based on its communicative function, the relationship between the speakers, and the face needs involved in the interaction.

The percentage of each politeness strategy was calculated using the following formula, where P represents the percentage, F represents the frequency of a particular

politeness strategy, and N represents the total number of dialogue lines identified as containing a politeness strategy.

Table-2
Distribution of Politeness Strategies

Politeness Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Bald on record	42	12.43%
Positive politeness	151	44.67%
Negative politeness	16	4.73%
Off record	129	38.17%
Total	338	100%

The findings show that positive politeness was the most frequently identified strategy, occurring in 151 dialogue lines (44.67%). It was followed by an off-record strategy, which appeared in 129 lines (38.17%). Bald-on-record strategy occurred in 42 lines (12.43%), while negative politeness was identified in 16 lines (4.73%).

3.1 Positive Politeness

Positive politeness represented the largest proportion of the data, with 151 dialogue lines (44.67%). This strategy was often shown through expressions of affection, concern, reassurance, shared feelings, and recognition of the relationship between Geum-myeong and her parents.

For example:

Geum-myeong: “*I’m still your daughter*”

Mother: “*I know that. You’re still our daughter.*”

The exchange directly reinforces the relationship between the mother and daughter. By emphasizing their continuing family relationship, the speakers show attention to each other’s positive face and strengthen their sense of closeness.

Another example is:

Father: “*I guess I lucked out with you as my daughter.*”

The mother’s statement expresses appreciation and affection toward Geum-myeong, which reinforces their positive interpersonal relationship.

3.2 Off-Record Strategy

Off-record strategy accounted for 129 dialogue lines (38.17%), making it the second most frequently identified strategy. These utterances communicate meaning indirectly, so the hearer needs to infer the speaker's intended meaning from the context of the conversation.

For example:

Mother : *"When you're pinching pennies, fruit is always the first thing to go."*

Instead of directly saying that the family should reduce their spending or that their financial situation is difficult, the mother expresses the concern indirectly through a general statement.

Another example is:

Mother : *"I want to see my busy daughter at least a hundred more times before I go."*

The statement indirectly expresses the mother's concern about the limited time she has with Geum-myeong and her emotional desire to spend more time with her daughter.

3.3 Bald-on-Record Strategy

Bald-on-record strategy was identified in 42 dialogue lines (12.43%). This strategy was mainly found in direct commands, instructions, and statements expressed without much mitigation.

For example:

Geum-myeong: *"Mom, hurry!"*

Geum-myeong: *"Come on, we have to cross."*

The utterances directly tell the mother what to do. The speaker does not use additional mitigating expressions, so the intended action is immediately clear.

Another example is:

Geum-myeong : *"Go rest. You said you're off today."*

The imperative expression "Go rest" directly communicates what the speaker wants the hearer to do, which represents a bald-on-record strategy.

3.4 Negative Politeness

Negative politeness occurred in 16 dialogue lines (4.73%), making it the least frequently

identified strategy. This strategy was mainly found in utterances that softened requests, reduced imposition, or gave the hearer more freedom to respond or act.

For example:

Geum-myeong : *"Then can you please go a little easier on him?"*

The expression "can you please" softens the request and reduces the force of the imposition placed on the hearer. Instead of directly commanding her father, Geum-myeong expresses the intended action as a polite request.

Another example is:

Geum-myeong : *"Can you at least pretend you want something?"*

The use of "Can you" presents the desired action as a request rather than a direct command, giving the hearer some degree of choice.

Overall, the findings show that positive politeness was the dominant strategy in the selected conversations, followed by off-record, bald-on-record, and negative-politeness strategies. The relatively frequent use of positive politeness reflects the close interpersonal relationship between Geum-myeong and her parents, while the substantial use of off-record expressions shows that the speakers also communicated meanings indirectly in their family interactions.

DISCUSSION

From the findings, we can see that Geum-myeong and her parents' conversation in *When Life Gives You Tangerines* are mostly used informal form, and that the politeness strategies used show how much the family close to each other. From the 338 dialogue lines analyzed with Joos's (1967) speech style framework, 191 lines (56.51%) were indicated as casual style and 147 lines (43.49%) were indicated as intimate style. Frozen, formal, or consultative styles cannot be found in the data selected. The conversations take place in a familiar or personal setting where the speakers, which Geum-yeong and her parents do not need to keep a formal linguistic distance when they talk to each other.



The dominance of casual style suggests that everyday conversation between Geum-myeong and her parents are mostly informal and spontaneous. Direct expressions, short expressions, and conversational forms are often used by the speakers, which suit communication between members in the family. Intimate style also occurs primarily, so the conversations are not restricted to ordinary informal exchanges. Mostly, it is visible when the dialogue involves reassurance, emotional attachment, family identity, and also personal concerns. The difference can be understood as a difference in how much interpersonal and emotional involvement the conversation carries between the two styles found in findings. This fits Joos's (1967) view, that the relationship between interlocutors and the context in which communication takes place is influenced by the speech style. Because the selected data focus only on interactions between Geum-myeong and her parents, the absence of formal, consultative, and frozen styles is understandable. It does not mean these styles are missing from the drama as a whole. It only reflects which conversations were selected for analysis.

The politeness analysis brings another perspective on the same interactions. By using Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework, the data shows that the most frequent strategy was positive politeness, which was found in 151 dialogue lines (44.67%). Off-record strategy followed next with 129 lines (38.17%), bald-on-record came next with 42 lines (12.43%) and lastly, negative politeness with 16 lines (4.73%). Geum-myeong and her parents manage their relationships through solidarity, emotional connection, and indirect communication, not through highly formal or distant social interactions.

The selected scenes show the consistent dominance of positive politeness with the close child-parents relationship. The concept of positive face by Brown and Levinson (1987) refers to a person's desire to be recognized, appreciated, and accepted by others. In the analyzed conversations,

this type of need is often met through expressions of affection, reassurance, concern, agreement, and acknowledgement of family bonds. One example is the exchange in which Geum-myeong states, "I'm still your daughter," and her mother responds, "You are still our daughter." This exchange strengthens their shared family identity. Since they reaffirm the speakers' sense of belonging and connection emotionally, the utterances do more than convey information.

The high frequent occurrence of off-record strategy (129 lines, 38.17%) indicates that the characters do not always directly state their intentions thoroughly. Off-record communication lets speakers convey meaning indirectly, so the viewer has to find out the intended message from the context. In family interactions, concern, disappointment, affection, and emotional expectations may be communicated through questions, implications, or statements whose intended meaning goes beyond their literal form. The frequency of this strategy shows that closeness does not always lead to completely direct communication. Family members may still rely on contextual inference when discussing sensitive or emotionally meaningful matters.

Bald-on-record strategy, which occurred in 42 dialogue lines (12.43%), is another characteristic of these conversations. Direct commands and instructions come naturally when speakers have an established, familiar relationship. An expression such as "Mom, hurry!" shows how Geum-myeong can communicate an immediate intention without much mitigation. Here, directness does not necessarily signal conflict or social distance. It can be seen as a result of familiarity and the immediate demands of the situation.

Negative politeness was the least frequent strategy, occurring in only 16 dialogue lines (4.73%). This low frequency can also be linked to the family context. Negative politeness is generally associated with reducing imposition and recognizing the hearer's desire for freedom of action, but the close relationship between Geum-

myeong and her parents may reduce the need for extensive mitigation in everyday interaction. When mitigation is needed, it can still appear, as in “Can you please go a little easier on him?”, where the request is softened instead of presented as a direct command.

In summary, the findings show that the language of Geum-myeong and her parents is shaped mostly by familiarity, emotional closeness, and the natural interaction of the family. The Joos analysis shows that casual style makes up the majority of the data at 56.51%, with intimate style accounting for the remaining 43.49%. The Brown and Levinson analysis dominated by positive politeness at 44.67%, followed by off-record strategy at 38.17%. The characters generally use informal communications, but it also involves considerable attention to mutual relationships and emotional connection.

This combination of the two perspectives leads to a broader conclusion: speech style and politeness work as complementary aspects of interpersonal communication in these conversations. The close social relationship between Geum-myeong and her parents is reflected by the dominance of casual and intimate styles, while the dominance of positive politeness shows the importance of maintaining solidarity, affection, and mutual recognition within their relationship. The considerable use of off-record strategy also shows that closeness does not remove indirect communication, especially when they express concerns or sensitive meanings emotionally. The characters’ language choices are not determined only by how formal the situation is. They also deeply reflect the interpersonal relationship and communicative purpose of each interaction. In the selected scenes, informal speech is the dominant linguistic pattern, and politeness strategies operate within that informal setting to maintain family solidarity, express emotional attachment, and communicate sensitive meanings. This shows how useful it is combining Joos’s speech style framework with Brown and Levinson’s politeness

theory to investigate both the linguistic form and the interpersonal function from family’s conversation in *When Life Gives You Tangerines*.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that in *When Life Gives You Tangerines* the conversations between Geum-myeong and her parents are mainly characterized by casual and intimate speech styles, which together account for the entirety of the analyzed data. This reflects that the basic familiar and emotionally grounded nature interaction of family. In the casual style it shows in direct, urging, teasing, spontaneous exchanges, and unguarded questioning, while in the intimate style shows moments of emotional attachment, personal concern and familial identity affirmation. The two styles they shift slowly according to the situational and emotional demands of each exchange. They do not operate in isolation.

A complementary perspective are provides in the politeness analysis. The dominant strategy, adjusting with the frequent expressions of affection, reassurance, and mutual recognition that characterize the parent-child relationship are appeared as the Positive politeness. The significant presence of off-record communication shows that familial closeness does not teach to total explicitness. Sensitive matters, unspoken expectations, financial worries, and emotional needs are often used for communicated indirectly, relying on shared familial knowledge and contextual inference. Bald-on-record strategies, while present function is as natural expressions of familiarity and situational urgency not as markers of distance. Negative politeness are not often appears, consistent with the reduced need for mitigation in highly intimate relationships, though it still appears in moments requiring softened requests.

These patterns of linguistics increase wider significance when situated within the drama’s narrative arc. Geum-myeong’s desire on marrying a man who would protect her as her father protected

her mother, someone willing to stand by her against all pressures, reflects the relational model she absorbed through years of observing and engaging in her parents way of communicative. Her father Gwan-sik are quiet, protective love, are expressed through presence rather than statement, and her mother Ae-sun are fierce determination to give her daughter a life beyond suffering, Geum-myeong's own communicative choices operate together shape the emotional grammar. Even the conflicts, her sharp words, her guilt, the moments she pushes her parents away are themselves products of a relationship so secure that it can tolerate such friction.

Therefore the combination of politeness theory by Joos's speech style framework and Brown and Levinson's reveals that the language of Geum-myeong and her parents is not purely informal, it is navigate emotional complexity, transmit care across generations, and dynamically calibrated to maintain familial solidarity. The flowing movement between directness and indirection, casual interaction and emotional comfort, constitutes the communicative fabric of a relationship defined by closeness, mutual understanding, and enduring emotional attachment.

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