

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the fundamental basis of the study. It includes background of the research, statement of problem, research purposes, research significances, and definition of key terms.

1.1 Background of the Research

Communication involving a generational gap is vulnerable to conflict. The generation gap often creates obstacles in communication and building trust, which can ultimately trigger intergenerational conflict (Lestari & Yulianita, 2025). The generation gap is not only about differences in age, but also about differences in mindset, experience, and language. These differences of each generation potentially lead to misperceptions and conflict.

The potential for conflict arising from differences in individual backgrounds is triggered by the concept of "face" inherent in each individual. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), face is the self-image a person wishes to project in social interactions, as well as the individual's desire to be valued and accepted by others. Each individual will strive to protect their "face," given the importance of social recognition and acceptance. Therefore, understanding the Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) becomes a relevant aspect when examining how individuals navigate social interactions.

According to Brown and Levinson (1987), Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) refer to actions or utterances that have the potential to threaten an individual's self-image. When interacting, both the speaker and the listener share an equal vulnerability regarding their face (Slman & Betti, 2020). The notion of face vulnerability highlights the need to analyze how individuals employ strategic communication to manage potential face threats. The changing dynamics of communication, which depend on context, require an approach that can facilitate their understanding. Therefore, a pragmatic approach is chosen as a precautionary tool to guard against face threats.

Pragmatics examines how meaning is formed through context, the speaker's goals, the social relationships between participants, and their shared knowledge (Siregar et al., 2024). Thus, pragmatics provides an understanding that a single expression can be interpreted differently depending on the circumstances and the parties involved in the communication process. The way speakers choose and adjust their utterances becomes crucial, especially when the interaction involves individuals from different backgrounds. Practical management of face threats can be explained through the concept of politeness strategies, which is the focus of the following discussion.

The application of pragmatics requires a practical framework in the form of politeness strategy. Politeness strategy is a framework for understanding how individuals manage social interactions and maintain face in communication (Ricky & Afriana, 2024). The application of appropriate politeness strategies becomes analytically relevant, particularly in interactions shaped by the complex background differences of the generation gap. Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is adopted in this study because its analytical framework aligns with the focus on analyzing how individuals protect their face in this context.

The strength of Brown and Levinson's politeness strategy lies in its systematic, operational analytical framework, based on the universal concept of face, making it easily applicable to various communication contexts. This theory offers a structured mechanism for assessing face-threatening acts (FTA), allowing detailed analysis of how speakers manage face. In addition, this study considers Brown Levinson's politeness theory to be the most relevant theory for examining the subject of this research. Politeness strategies are divided into four types: positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on record, and off record politeness (Brown, 1987, as cited in Alamsyah et al., 2023). The use of Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies in this study will be analyzed from Steve Harvey's utterances on the talk show *Little Big Shots* through the first season.

Little Big Shots is an entertainment show that showcases children's talents in various countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Russia, and others. It features Steve Harvey as United States host and Dawn French

as United Kingdom host. Steve Harvey is known for his warm and humorous personality (Harianja et al., 2025). In another hand, Dawn Roma French is a Welsh comedian, actress, and writer, widely recognized for her work as both performer and scriptwriter in sketch comedy (Maghfiroh, 2024). These characteristics align with Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, which emphasizes analyzing speakers' strategies for managing face through naturally occurring utterances.

Little Big Shots presents interactions between adult hosts and child participants with diverse ages, talents, and cultural backgrounds (Tami & Ambalegin, 2020). In the first and second episodes of *Little Big Shots* US, the child participants range from 4-6 years old and display various talents such as music, dance, animal hypnosis, and conducting choirs. These participants originate from different regions, including the United States, China, and Japan. Similarly, *Little Big Shots* UK features child participants aged 6-12 years old from diverse national and cultural backgrounds, including the UK, Ireland, the Philippines, India, Kazakhstan, and Norway. Their talents include ballroom dancing, piano performance, singing, martial arts, breakdancing, boxing, and ballet.

The wide range of ages, talents, and cultural origins of the child participants highlights the complexity of communication between adult hosts and children. These interactions create a communicative context in which the host must carefully manage face and employ appropriate politeness strategies when addressing children with different linguistic competencies and social backgrounds, thereby justifying the selection of *Little Big Shots* as the data source for this study. The researcher chooses *Little Big Shots* as a data source because it fulfills the research subject criteria related to Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. To place this research within an existing academic context, it is necessary to review previous studies that have examined similar themes.

As a comparative reference, the following are several previous studies relevant to the topic of intergenerational communication and linguistic politeness. Rika Ningsih & Fatmawati (2024) in their journal entitled "The Reality of Gen-Z Language Politeness in the Digital Era" used a qualitative approach using content analysis methods. This study focuses on the reality of politeness of Gen Z students

when communicating with lecturers of different age backgrounds measured based on Leech's politeness theory (1993), obtaining results that Gen Z students pay less attention to politeness of language when communicating with lecturers, because Gen Z students cannot position themselves when communicating via the Whatsapp messaging application. Researchers revealed that this occurs because of the character of Gen Z shaped by digital developments.

Mahmudi, Irawati, & Soleh (2021), a study entitled "Students' Language Politeness in Communicating with Teachers (Pragmatic Study)" using a descriptive qualitative research method. This study focused on analyzing the use of forms of compliance with or violation of the principles of language politeness proposed by Geoffrey Leech. The results of this study indicate that compliance with the principles of language politeness includes the maxims of tact, respect, simplicity, consensus, sympathy, and generosity. Meanwhile, violations of the principles of language politeness include the maxims of tact, respect, generosity, consensus, sympathy, and simplicity.

Fauzi Bin Abdul Majid and E. Sunarto (2025), in a study entitled "Politeness Strategies in NBC's 'Little Big Shots' Program," applied a qualitative descriptive method to analyze the use of Brown and Levinson's politeness strategies in interactions between hosts and child participants. The study identified the application of four politeness strategies: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record.

Previous study on politeness strategies has inadequately explored communication involving a generation gap across different English-speaking country. Current research predominantly examines politeness techniques within a singular English-speaking country context, not focusing the ways in which hosts navigate these strategies when engaging with children in nations that share a common language yet possess distinct social and communicative frameworks. Research on Little Big Shots utilizing Brown and Levinson's framework has delineated the types of politeness methods deployed; however, there has been scant focus on the application of these strategies by hosts in the United States and the United Kingdom. This study examines the politeness methods employed by the

hosts of *Little Big Shots* season one in the US and UK, as well as the factors affecting their application in intergenerational contact.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The problem statement in this study refers to the formulation of the central issue that guides the direction of the research (Kehinde, 2025). This section outlines the gap between the observed linguistic phenomena in a specific communicative context and existing theoretical discussions, particularly regarding the use of politeness strategies in generational gap interaction. The problem statement functions to delimit the scope of the study, provide a clear focus for data collection and analysis, and ensure a systematic research process. Accordingly, it serves as an analytical foundation that explains the relevance of examining the selected phenomenon through an appropriate theoretical framework.

Based on the background in the study above the problem that will be discussed are formulated as follow :

1. What are the politeness strategies applied by the hosts of *Little Big Shots* season one: United States and United Kingdom?
2. What factors determine the choice of politeness strategies by the hosts of *Little Big Shots* season one: United States and United Kingdom?

1.3 Research Purposes

Research purpose refers to a statement that describes what a study aims to achieve through systematic investigation (Barroga & Matanguihan, 2022). It specifies the direction of the research by identifying the aspects to be examined and the outcomes expected from the analysis. Furthermore, research purpose functions as a reference for determining the scope of data collection and analysis (Bakhrudin All Habsy et al., 2024). It ensures that the research activities remain focused on the predetermined objectives and supports consistency throughout the research process. Based on this orientation, the research purposes of this study are formulated as follows:

1. To understand the politeness strategies applied by the hosts of *Little Big Shots* season one: United States and United Kingdom.
2. To analyze factors determine the choice of politeness strategies by the hosts of *Little Big Shots* season one: United States and United Kingdom.

1.4 Research Significances

Research significance refers to the potential contribution of a study to both theoretical development and practical application within a particular field of research (Mohajeri, Mesgari, & Lee, 2020). It explains why the study is worth conducting by clarifying how the findings may extend existing knowledge, address unresolved issues, or offer new perspectives related to the research topic. Through the significance of the study, the relevance of the research is positioned within broader academic discussions.

Theoretical contribution describes how a study adds value to scholarly discussion by engaging with existing theories or conceptual frameworks (Zhou, Shafique, Adeel, Nawaz, & Kumar, 2017). The theoretical contribution of this study aims to make novelty by exploring the linguistic factors to fill the research gap. This research is expected to contribute to the development of knowledge in the field of pragmatics, particularly in the study of politeness. This research also aims at the development of theory and practice in communication among gap generations. The researcher hopes this study to become a relevant reference for future research and strengthen discussions about politeness in applied pragmatics.

Practical contribution explains how the results of a study may be relevant beyond theoretical discussion and applicable to certain real life contexts (Huang, 2025). It outlines the potential use of the research findings for particular groups or settings, emphasizing their possible relevance to practice without presenting prescriptive or evaluative claims. The practical contribution of this research is expected to help the public, especially adults who communicate with children, better understand the importance of maintaining children's face in communication. By understanding how to communicate appropriately, adults can be more aware to children's face, which in turn can improve the quality of gap generational social

relationships. Hopefully this research can be applied in everyday interactions, especially for individuals who frequently communicate with various generations, such as educators, parents, and professionals involved in gap generational communication.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

The following section presents definitions of key terms used in this study to clarify their meanings and ensure consistent interpretation throughout the analysis.

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that focuses on the ways meaning is conveyed and interpreted through language use by taking into account contextual elements that extend beyond the literal interpretation of words.

Politeness Strategies refer to the communicative techniques employed by speakers to manage social relationships and maintain harmonious interaction. There are four types of Brown and Levinson politeness strategies; positive politeness, negative politeness, bald on record, and off record. The following are examples of each types:

1. Bald on Record: Sit down here.
2. Positive Politeness: You're doing great.
3. Negative Politeness: Could you possibly lower your voice for a moment?
4. Off Record: It's a bit cold in here.

Face is an individual's public self image maintained during interaction.

Face Threatening Act (FTA) is an utterance that potentially threatens the speaker's or hearer's face.

Little Big Shots is a talent show featuring children with exceptional abilities, where adult hosts interact directly with children participants.