

Structure of Requests in Award-Winning Films

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Abstract: This study looks at the sentence structures and gender identities expressed in the requests made by male and female lead characters in critically acclaimed movies. Ten Best Picture winners from the Academy Awards between 2014 and 2023 had their demands examined using a descriptive qualitative study design and content analysis. Purposive sampling and a deductive coding scheme based on three sentence forms were used to examine the chosen films: imperative, declarative, and interrogative. Additionally taken into account were nonverbal cues such as hand gestures, body language, eye contact, and facial expressions. A total of 309 requests were found, of which 218 (70.55%) were made by male characters and 91 (29.45%) by female characters. Declarative and interrogative requests were utilized less frequently than imperative demands. While the distribution of interrogative requests was relatively closer between male and female characters, imperative and declarative request patterns were more common among male characters. The results also show that request structures have a role in how gender identities are constructed in movies. In contrast to female characters, who were typically described as strong, relational, emotional, and introspective, male characters were frequently shown as authoritative, domineering, ambitious, and forceful. Overall, the study shows that both conversational situations and enduring cultural expectations surrounding gender roles are reflected in request-making in award-winning films. The results advance knowledge of gender communication, language etiquette, and how gender identities are portrayed in film discourse.

Keywords: Gender Communication; Request Structure; Politeness Strategies; Speech Acts; Gender Identity; Film Discourse; Award-Winning Films.

1. Introduction

Effective communication is fundamental to human interactions. It plays a critical role in both personal and professional contexts. Gender communication describes the individuals' speech patterns, body language, and conversational styles used by people of different genders. Cultural conventions, personal experiences, and society expectations all frequently impact these differences.

Studies have examined into whether men and women often employ distinct communication styles, strategies, and methods. According to Cameron (2007), men use language more competitively, on the other hand, women use it more collaboratively. Compared to men, women are more talkative. Also, women are more fluent in language than men. Men are more focused in taking action, whereas women are more relationship-oriented. Men and women frequently have communication problems because of these variances.

In the study of Baden and Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2018), with an emphasis on text comparison, the study employed a high-resolution algorithmic technique to look into how gender shapes conflict discourse. Their findings revealed that women tend to prioritize precision and professionalism, while men are more inclined to emphasize certainty and provide orientation.

One key area where these gendered communication differences manifest is linguistic politeness, which plays a fundamental role in how requests are made. Politeness strategies serve as a gateway to social interactions, shaping relationships and power dynamics within various contexts. In all cultures and societies, politeness in request is essential for preserving relationships and saving face. While politeness is common to all languages and cultures, there are cultural differences in its implementation and functioning.



Holmes (1995) presents one of the largest collections of data to date, describing how women tend to speak more politely than males do. Furthermore, compared to men, women make more indirect inquiries for information. According to Macaulay (2001), females prefer indirect forms that engage conversation analytically. In contrast, men choose indirect ways that cultivate attunement.

Moreover, males and females differ greatly from one another, particularly when it comes to making requests, and like most nations and civilizations, they are also highly picky about gender issues. In communication, speakers typically use proper techniques to make requests while maintaining a polite conversation. Exploring gender communication and the structure of request even in films offers a captivating glimpse into societal dynamics and character interactions.

In the context of films, requests serve as a critical element of character interaction and narrative development. The portrayal of requests in films not only reveals individual characters' personalities and relationships but also provides insights into societal attitudes and gender dynamics. Films often dramatize or exaggerate request-making to enhance politeness or emphasize conflicts. Thus, a motivation to examine gender communication in films. Through analyzing how characters make and respond to different requests, viewers can acquire a more understanding of the societal values and gender norms that shape communication practices on screen.

Several studies were undertaken to investigate request expressions in interactions. Such studies include the study of Lee (2020) titled, "Speech Acts Redux: Beyond Request-response Interactions." The research indicates that people use communication to share insights about the world, commit to actions in the future, ask others to do things, convey how they are feeling, and change the pragmatic condition of the world.

Furthermore, among these kinds, modern conversational interfaces, such as Siri and Alexa, are primarily made to satisfy human needs, such as reacting to commands instantly. Examining the things that individuals can do with language in conversational encounters is one approach to getting beyond request-response interactions. They can convey commitments, attitudes, feelings, and opinions in addition to sending requests.

Murni (2019) emphasized that individuals employed a variety of terms to convey their politeness. Fillers, greetings, expressions of gratitude, addressing phrases, and apologies are some examples of these utterances. The individuals' vernacular language is also a factor in their expressions. The expressions used in the interactions were separated into two groups: positive and negative politeness.

Interestingly, Sanal and Ortactepe (2019) stated that EFL learners were unable to communicate with the propriety, formality, and civility that native speakers express. Furthermore, their research showed in EFL settings, when there is a lack of genuine social engagement and involvement in a practice community, language learners' experiences with classroom teaching and socialization are linked to their conceptual socialization process.

Alerwi and Alzahrani (2020) used sitcoms which means situational comedy to enhance EFL students' usage of complement response, requests, refusal, and apologies speech acts. The findings of the study revealed that the participants' usage of speech acts improved after the treatment.

Previous studies were undertaken to investigate request expressions and how individuals utilize them in communication. However, limited studies were conducted on the analysis of gender and the structure of requests depicted in films. While previous studies may focus on the gendered structure of requests, there is often a lack of comparative analysis across different genres and cultural contexts. In both Asian and Western cultures, gender roles and expectations often shape communication patterns, including how requests are formulated and conveyed.

Research could benefit from examining how the structure of requests and gender dynamics vary not only between genders but also across different film genres and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, films, as cultural artifacts, provide a unique lens to study evolving gender roles and communication styles. However, the structural and stylistic nuances of requests in cinematic narratives remain underexplored, particularly in terms of genre-specific conventions and cultural differences.

It is within this context that the researcher is driven to investigate the differences in gender and request structure between male and female characters in films. The award-winning films also present a unique opportunity to explore these variations given their broad appeal and varied storytelling styles. Further, exploring the gender and structure of requests that have evolved in award-winning films over different decades could reveal changes in societal attitudes and film trends related to gender roles and communication. The objective of this study is to analyze the structure of requests of male and female lead characters in award-winning films.

2. Literature Review

Al-Abbas (2023) studied children's politeness strategies for age and gender-related demands. The research included subjects in two age groups has the same proportion of girls and boys. The study concluded that by the age of six, children's verbal proficiency includes the idea of politeness. However, it is still unclear how polite remarks are assigned to the right speech act. Further, the study showed that there were not discernible gender variations in the use of politeness strategies. By the time children are ten years old, they are better equipped to make polite requests. In addition, boys favored the direct level of request-making, whereas girls favored the indirect strategies.

Likewise, Masruddin et. al (2023) conducted a study titled Conceptualizing Linguistic Politeness in Light of Age. In order to gather information from respondents and look into how age affects the adoption of politeness strategies, this study employs a descriptive quantitative method using a recently created social relation symmetry model. The findings of the study show that speakers typically use negative politeness and a more deferential variety technique while speaking with elder interlocutors. Nonetheless, speakers typically adopt a more casual tone and use a positive politeness method when interacting with someone their own age. Furthermore, the results of the study indicate that politeness strategies among language and ethnic groups are significantly influenced by age, having the discernment to treat everyone with dignity and acting politely as a crucial component that is transmitted from one generation to the next.

Bashir (2022) conducted an analysis of the age's effects on politeness and identity faithfulness in the Punjabi community of Pakistan. The study aims to investigate the preferred code or language and face-saving strategies while requesting with friends, bosses, and servants. The results of the study indicated that speakers' language choices with friends and subordinates are unaffected by age. However, they change their choice of language when request to their boss or seniors. Furthermore, age has no influence on the request strategy that is used. Additionally, the study found that the age factor has no impact. Seniors are treated with negative politeness, while friends and subordinates are treated with a bald-on strategy.

Cabrera (2022) studied the impact of gender and politeness in romantic comedies using both quantitative and qualitative methods. While concentrating on the speaker's gender, the effect of the listener's gender as well as the screenwriting group's gender on the predicted percentages of politeness indicators were also investigated. In addition, the study's corpus included scripts for 56 romantic comedies that ran from 1977 to 2018. Overall, female characters were more likely than male characters to use indications of politeness; for signs of impoliteness, the opposite is true. Characters addressing the other gender showed a greater estimated proportion of those indicators when statistical significance was found in gender interaction between the speaker and the listener.

Additionally, a thorough analysis of several scenes from three distinct films, each written by a different scriptwriter, was done to assess how well the politeness package portrayed politeness in the text. The findings showed that the study was highly successful in capturing politeness, especially when the language content was the most informative component.

Fitriyani and Andriyanti (2020) also studied the politeness techniques for teachers and students in EFL classroom interactions. The data in the utterances used in this study contained politeness strategies. The data consisted of statements that included politeness strategies. The information was extracted from a 90-minute recorded English class. The study's conclusion showed that a total of thirteen extracts comprised three different politeness strategies: the bal-on-record technique, the negative politeness strategy, and the positive politeness strategy. Furthermore, the teacher controlled the discussions. The classroom interactions' politeness strategies were impacted by a number of characteristics, including age difference, authority, social distance, and institutional status.

In 2020, Ulusoy studied the mother character's family's communication style in modern films. In the study, it is evident that powerful female roles and mother characters are present in the latest Turkish motion pictures. In this way, it is evident that the communication processes inside the family are connected to the mothers' functions as the family's gatherers. By looking at how the mother character is portrayed in movies and Turkish society, the language and discourse of the mother figure in the family communication processes were examined. According to studies, the mother character is primarily employed in television shows by depicting families as binders, healers, fusers, and producers of solutions in family communication processes.

Likewise, Arunrangsiwed (2019) studied the Comparison Between Japanese and Korean Films in Film Structure and Cultural Communication. The objectives of the study are to compare two versions of the films, *Be With You*, the Japanese version (2004) and the Korean version (2018). Textual analysis was used to analyze and compare

both films. The results of the study show that the Korean version consists of more enjoyment and hard-working role of parents, but less cultural communication compared to the Japanese version. Patriarchy and gender inequality are also found in the Korean version, even though it was released in 2018.

3. Method

The objective of this study is to identify the structure of requests of lead male and female characters in award-winning films. To achieve this, the study utilized the descriptive-qualitative research design. The study used content analysis to explore the structure of requests of both male and female characters in films in terms of sentence structures (declarative, interrogative, imperative). Further, the study used content analysis to describe gender identities that can be constructed or deduced based on the findings.

To compare the structure of requests of lead male and female characters in films, the researchers only considered 10 award-winning films that won the Best Picture awards, specifically the Oscars or the Academy Awards from 2014-2023. The films were *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, *CODA*, *Nomadland*, *Parasite*, *Green Book*, *The Shape of Water*, *Moonlight*, *Spotlight*, *Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)*, and *12 Years a Slave*. This study employed the purposive sampling technique. Moreover, the study utilized a checklist to categorize and analyze the structure of requests of lead male and female characters in films. In addition, a deductive coding scheme, particularly a top-down coding approach was implemented to categorize and analyze the structure of requests made by male and female characters in the films. The deductive coding started by developing a code category for sentence types (declarative, interrogative, and imperative). In addition to analyzing the structure of requests of male and female characters in films, non-verbal components such as body language, eye contact, facial expressions, and hand movements were also considered in the analysis. The gender identities of male and female lead characters in films were also constructed based on the findings.

Further, to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings, independent raters or validators proficient in English communication reviewed the data. There were two (2) validators who are also Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree holders who reviewed the paper.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Structure of Requests in Award-Winning Films

Table 1 shows the highlights of the male and female characters' sentence structures. It was classified as whether they are declarative, interrogative, or imperative.

Table 1. Structure of requests of male and female characters in award-winning films.

Sentence Structure	Male		Female		Total
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	
Declarative Requests	63	74.12	22	25.88	85
Interrogative Requests	25	53.19	22	46.81	47
Imperative Requests	130	73.45	47	26.55	177
Total	218	70.55	91	29.45	309

Based on Table 1, there are 309 requests utilized by both male and female characters in award-winning films. Specifically, in terms of sentence structure, there are 117 imperative requests, 85 declarative requests, and 47 interrogative requests. In terms of politeness strategies, there are 72 requests with the politeness marker "Please," while there are 51 requests with the use of modal verbs "Could you" and "Would you." In terms of level of formality, there are 168 indirect requests, while there are 141 direct requests.

For the sentence structure, there are 130 or 73.45% imperative requests used by male characters, while there are 47 or 26.55% used by female characters. For the declarative requests, there are 63 or 74.12% used by male characters, while the female characters used 22 or 25.88% declarative requests. Meanwhile, there are 25 or 53.19% interrogative requests used by male characters, while there are 22 or 46.81% interrogative requests used by female characters.

This implies that male and female characters in films tend to use commanding language more than the use of declarative and interrogative. In addition, the use of declarative and interrogative requests of the male and female characters in films are present in conversations between employee-employee, husband-wife, parent-children, student-student relationships, and casual conversations. Meanwhile, the use of imperative requests is present in conversations between employee-employer, student-teacher, and parent-children relationships. Also, it is observed in the films that

female employers and employees, teachers, and mothers, often used the declarative structure of request. Male employers and employees, teachers, and fathers, on the other hand, are most likely to use the imperative structure of requests.

The result of the study is similar to the study of Gborsong (2016), imperatives were utilized more frequently by men than by women when making requests, with interrogatives being the most common sentence type, particularly among women. Also, women employed more complicated declarative requests while men utilized simple ones. Moreover, the study also revealed that there was no discernible difference in how imperatives were used by men and women when requesting things. Further, women employed interrogative sentences more frequently than men, and men utilized all three types of words when requesting things. Additionally, the study shows that request-making is influenced by the addressee's gender and the context of the conversation.

4.2 Gender Identities of Males and Females in Films

The next concern of the study is to identify the gender identities of the male and female characters in award-winning films. These gender identities are depicted in their structure of requests in terms of sentence structures (declarative, interrogative, and imperative). These identities are reflected in Figure 1.

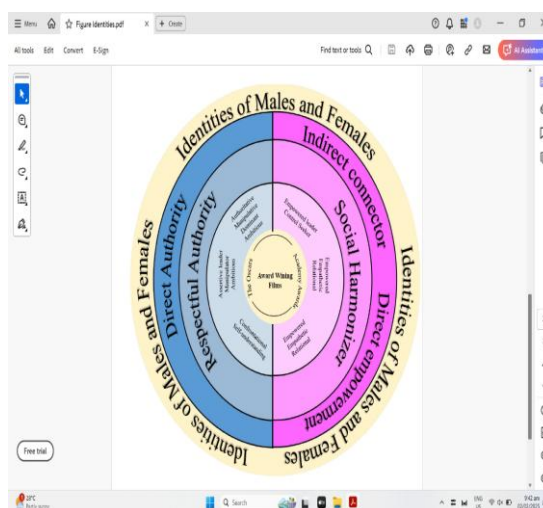


Figure 1. Gender Identities of Male and Female Characters in Award-winning Films.

The male characters in the films use the imperative request structure to emphasize their role as authoritative, manipulative, dominant, and ambitious. This means that male characters establish dominance and demonstrate their control to show authority and power. Such identities are reflected in situations where most of the role of the male characters is in authority. Meanwhile, the female characters in the films use the imperative request structure to show their identity as empowered leaders and control seekers. This means that female characters use requests as a form of resistance to societal constraints. Also, female characters use the imperative request to exhibit their strong leadership qualities and that they are not limited because society expects men to be more dominant than them.

In terms of the use of declarative request structures, male characters in films use it to emphasize their role as an assertive leader, manipulators, and ambitious. This means that male characters in the films are identified to be dominant, and they are shaped by power, control, and leadership. Meanwhile, female characters in the films use declarative requests to emphasize their role as empowered, empathetic, and relational. Their identity in the films revolves around being emotionally understanding and focused more on maintaining connections.

In terms of using the interrogative request sentence structure, male characters in films are identified to be confrontational and self-understanding. This means that male characters also tend to challenge others and questions to understand their own challenges. Meanwhile, female characters in the films are identified to be introspective seekers, relational, and emotional because of their use of the interrogative request sentence structure. This implies that female characters are identified to be shaped by their relationships in the films. They also tend to interact that reflects their emotional struggles or their desire to put solutions to conflicts.

5. Conclusions

Based on the findings, in terms of their structure of requests, male and female characters often use imperative requests rather than declarative and interrogative requests. This means that the characters tend to use commanding or directing language more than other forms. The use of their different sentence types for their requests depends on the context of their conversation and their role in the film. Since the characters are mostly employees, the use of imperative requests implies an emphasis on these characters who are engaged in directive speech that has control.

Moreover, the male characters in the films are identified to be authoritative, manipulative, dominant, ambitious, assertive leader, confrontational, self-understanding, and possessing respectful authority and direct authority. Meanwhile, female characters are identified to be empowered leaders, control seekers, relational, introspective seekers, relational, emotional, social harmonizers, indirect connectors, and direct empowerment. These identities still reflect the truth and reality because male and female roles are often shaped by societal expectations and norms.

In many cultures, men are traditionally viewed and often associated with qualities like dominance and direct authority. Women, on the other hand, have traditionally been seen in roles that emphasized social harmony. This binary dynamic continues to influence how we perceive and portray gender roles in media, even as societies evolve and challenge these norms. Thus, while there is a growing complexity of gender roles, traditional gender expectations persist.

6. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn, the researcher forwards the following:

The findings of the study would be great in the assessment of how the male and female characters in award-winning films construct their requests and how often they use politeness markers when making one. Specifically, the construction of their requests in terms of sentence structures (declarative, interrogative, or imperative), politeness strategies (politeness markers), and level of formality (direct and indirect). Also, the findings of the study would prove to be valuable in identifying what needs to be corrected and done to improve the way males and females construct their sentences whenever they make their requests.

Students should also read the results of the study to identify the gender and structure of requests in award-winning films to understand how to identify the male and female characters' portrayals of different roles. The knowledge they will gain will help them analyze and critique conversations in a more nuanced way as they are provided with results and insights into how gender roles and the structure of requests are portrayed in media.

Teachers can incorporate the results of this research into their curriculum to promote media literacy, critical thinking, and an understanding of gender dynamics in communication. Also, by using films as a teaching tool, teachers can help students analyze how requests and politeness strategies are depicted in films.

School administrators can use the insights from this study to support educational programs such as training for teachers to equip their students to teach media literacy and gender communication. They could include topics in the curriculum where they could provide opportunities for students to explore topics related to gender and language.

Film critics could use the findings of the study as a reference for writing reviews that analyze the social and cultural implications of the films they criticize.

Moreover, other research enthusiasts are encouraged to conduct similar studies on a wider scope to validate the findings of the present study. It is also encouraged that more studies be conducted not only on the gender and structure of requests in award-winning films but also on other factors related to discourse analysis and film-related analysis.

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