
A Critical Discourse Analysis on The Politeness Strategy in *Sofia The First* by Craig Gerber

Putri Jesika Lumban Raja¹, Jenie Posumah², Delli Sabudu³

^{1,2,3}) English Language & Literature Study Program, Universitas Negeri Manado, Indonesia

¹) Corresponding Author: pujesngl@gmail.com

Article History

Submitted : March 03rd, 2026

Revised : April 09th, 2026

Accepted : April 16th, 2026

KEYWORDS

Critical Discourse Analysis,
Discourse Features,
Character Identity,
Politeness Strategy,
Children's Animation.

ABSTRACT

In everyday life, identity is expressed through language, interaction, and communication patterns. This study investigates how discourse features shape Princess Sofia's identity in *Sofia the First*. This study uses Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Brown and Levinson's Politeness Strategy framework. This study employed a qualitative research method with a discourse analysis design. The researcher selected Episodes 1–10 of Season 1 based on themes of identity formation and language use. The selected episodes were carefully observed to identify scenes that show character interaction, development, and situations related to power and politeness. After identifying relevant scenes, the researcher transcribed the dialogues. It produced around 450 utterances categorized into Bald-on-Record, Positive Politeness, Negative Politeness, and Off-Record strategies. The findings show that Bald-on-Record dominates, reflecting Sofia's assertiveness, leadership, and direct problem-solving style. Positive and Negative Politeness appear when Sofia builds relationships, expresses empathy, and navigates social boundaries, while Off-Record strategies emerge in delicate or indirect situations. Through CDA, Sofia's discourse reveals not only linguistic choices but also the influence of narrative practices and social values such as kindness, equality, responsibility, and emotional awareness. This study contributes to discourse and linguistic studies by showing how politeness strategies in children's animation construct social roles and power relations. It also highlights the role of media language in shaping children's understanding of identity, gender norms, and social values, and provides insights for educators and content creators in developing more meaningful and responsible children's media.

INTRODUCTION

Language plays a crucial role in shaping identity in everyday life. People show who they are through the way they speak, interact, and respond to others, as language reflects personal character (Mustoip et al., 2023). In addition, language also represents social identity and awareness within a community (Martono et al., 2022). Similarly, characters in animated media are shaped not only by their appearance but also by their language and dialogue. One example can be seen in *Sofia the First*, an American animated television series created by Craig Gerber. The series tells the story of Sofia, a girl from a humble background who becomes a princess after her mother marries King Roland II. Through her daily interactions, Sofia's identity as a princess is built step by step, particularly through her use of language such as polite expressions, supportive words, and confident statements.

Identity in children's animation is closely related to social learning, as children often imitate how characters speak and behave. The use of polite, empathetic, and confident language can influence how children understand leadership, friendship, and responsibility (Mustoip et al., 2023). In addition, language reflects social and cultural identity, which helps shape children's awareness of their roles in society (Martono et al., 2022). With the increasing exposure to screen-based media, the language in children's animation plays an important role in shaping how young viewers understand politeness,

power, and social roles. Language allows people to express ideas and identity (Samola, 2023), and linguistic forms reflect social and cultural background (Posumah, 2025). Therefore, analyzing how language constructs identity in children's media is important for linguistic and discourse studies.

To analyze this issue, this study uses qualitative research focusing on understanding phenomena through non-numerical data such as words, texts, and meanings, emphasizing interpretation within a natural context (Abubakar, 2021). This study uses Critical Discourse Analysis proposed by Fairclough (1995). Fairclough explains that discourse is not just language, but also social practices that reflect and shape power relations. He introduces three dimensions of discourse: textual analysis, discursive practices, and social practices. Through this framework, linguistic features such as word choice, forms of address, modality, and speech acts can be examined to understand how identity and authority are constructed. At the textual level, this study also applies Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory to identify how politeness strategies are used by characters. By combining these theories, this study provides a more in-depth analysis of how discourses of power emerge in the interactions between Sofia and other characters.

While much research has addressed discourse analysis and children's media, limited research has focused on discourses of power in children's animated series, specifically *Sofia the First*. Previous discussions have often focused on moral values or general character development, such as in Sabir et al. (2023) which shows how language reflects power, identity, and resistance, especially in portraying the struggle of African people. Marzic Dea (2019), in "Anatomy of a Villain: A Discourse of Villainy," examines how villain characters are constructed through linguistic features, particularly the use of non-American accents to signal foreignness and negative traits. Liando, Ollie, and Andries (2022) analyzed the lyrics of Louis Armstrong's "What a Wonderful World" using Fairclough's CDA framework. They focused on the song lyrics and connected them to the socio-historical context of 1967 America, which was marked by racial conflict and political unrest. However, this study offers novelty by specifically applying Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis to examine how power relations and identities are constructed through Princess Sofia's speech. This study also combines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with Politeness Theory to explore how respect, authority, and social hierarchy are expressed through language strategies. This combination provides a new perspective in analyzing children's animation from both a linguistic and critical perspective.

Based on this background, the research question of this study is: How do discourse features shape the identity of the main character in *Sofia the First*? The purpose of this study is to describe the discourse features that shape Princess Sofia's identity. This research is limited to Season 1, Episodes 1–10, and focuses on Princess Sofia as the main character. By applying Critical Discourse Analysis and Fairclough's Politeness Theory, this study demonstrates the importance of examining how power and identity are constructed through language in *Sofia the First*. Therefore, this study contributes to a better understanding of how children's media influences social meaning and identity formation through discourse.

Discourse

Discourse is an important field in language studies because it helps researchers understand how language operates in real social situations. Discourse examines not only words or sentences, but also how meaning, identity, values, and social norms are created through communication. As explained by Keller, cited in Hulst et al. (2024), humans relate to the world through socially shared symbolic meanings. This suggests that language is not neutral, as it carries ideas, beliefs, and knowledge formed within a society. For this reason, discourse analysis is useful for studying how communication represents social reality and human relationships.

Discourse analysis also provides a systematic way to examine how language expresses ideas, identities, and power in different contexts. Fairclough, as cited in Sabir et al. (2023), explains that discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary approach that studies how language contributes to the construction of knowledge, ideology, and power. This is particularly important in media studies, including children's animation, because language in media can convey social roles, hierarchies, and values. Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a useful framework for this purpose through three levels: text analysis, discourse practice, and social practice. Text analysis examines linguistic features such as vocabulary, grammar, modality, cohesion, and transitivity, while discourse practice examines how texts are produced, distributed, and interpreted in context. Social practice then connects discourse to broader cultural structures, including ideology and power relations. Through these three dimensions, CDA helps researchers understand how discourse reflects and shapes society.

Politeness Theory

Politeness is an essential part of human communication because it helps people maintain good relationships and social harmony. In everyday interactions, people use politeness to demonstrate respect, attention, and consideration for others. Nuraini (2021) states that politeness encourages individuals to behave appropriately in various social and cultural situations. Song et al. (2023) also explain that politeness reflects a speaker's awareness of others' emotional and social needs, particularly when expressing gratitude, apologizing, or disagreeing. Furthermore, Al-Afnan (2022) emphasizes that politeness is demonstrated not only through words but also through nonverbal behavior that reflects cultural values. Therefore, politeness is closely related to social norms, relationships, and how people interact in society.

From a pragmatic perspective, politeness serves as a strategy for maintaining self-esteem and maintaining communication balance. Djalilova (2023) argues that politeness theory demonstrates the relationship between politeness, impoliteness, meaning, and social identity. Daar et al. (2023) further explain that politeness strategies are influenced by culture and reflect notions of respect and hierarchy. Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, as cited in Rajik (2025), provides a useful framework for analyzing politeness in communication through four strategies: bald on record, positive politeness, negative politeness, and off record. Directness is direct and clear, typically used in urgent situations or close relationships. These strategies help researchers understand how speakers manage relationships, express meaning, and avoid conflict in discourse. Nuraini (2021) states that politeness encourages individuals to behave properly in different situations and cultures. In communication, politeness shows respect and consideration for others. Song et al. (2023) explain that politeness reflects the speaker's awareness of other people's emotional and social needs, such as when expressing gratitude, apologies, or disagreement. In addition, AlAfnan (2022) emphasizes that politeness is not only verbal but can also appear in nonverbal behavior that reflects cultural values. Therefore, politeness is closely related to social norms and interpersonal relationships.

Animation

Animation is a technique that creates the illusion of movement by presenting a rapid sequence of still images. Cholodenko (2022) explains that animation can present movement through hand-drawn images, computer graphics, or stop-motion techniques to convey a story visually. This demonstrates that animation is not just a technical process, but also a creative medium for communicating meaning, ideas, and narratives. Mohamed (2020) also states that animation is a hybrid medium that combines art, technology, and storytelling. It encompasses several forms, such as 2D animation, 3D animation, and stop-motion. Each type has different techniques, but all aim to create moving images that are engaging and meaningful to the audience. Animation also utilizes important principles that help make characters and stories appear more natural and expressive. Johnston and Thomas (1981), as cited in Mohamed (2020), introduced twelve basic principles of animation, such as squash and stretch, anticipation, timing, hyperbole, and appeal. These principles help animators create convincing movement and emotional expression, allowing the audience to more clearly understand the characters' feelings and actions. Therefore, animation can be an effective medium for shaping character identities and conveying social messages. One example of children's animation is *Sofia the First*, a Disney production created by Craig Gerber.

METHOD

This study employed qualitative research methods. Qualitative research focuses on understanding phenomena through non-numerical data such as words, texts, and meanings, emphasizing interpretation within a natural context (Abubakar, 2021). The research design employed in this study was discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is a qualitative research design that examines how language is used in texts and contexts to construct meaning, social relationships, and power (Fairclough, 1995).

As Abubakar stated in 2021, the data sources in this study consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data refers to the main object of analysis, while secondary data serves as supporting material. Sabudu et al. (2019) also state primary data referred to the main object of the research, while secondary data were supporting materials such as books and journals. Primary data was obtained from *Sofia the First*, specifically Season 1, episodes 1–10. These episodes were chosen because they introduce the main characters, setting, and communication patterns, thus providing sufficient data for

the analysis. Meanwhile, secondary data included episode transcripts, books, journal articles, and other academic sources that supported the theoretical framework and interpretation of the finding. In collecting the data, the researcher first selected relevant episodes based on themes of identity formation and language use. The researcher watched the selected episodes carefully and identified important scenes that show interaction between characters. The criteria for selection include scenes that highlight character development, varied social interactions, and situations related to power and politeness. After selecting the scenes, the researcher transcribed the dialogues. The transcripts were supported by available scripts from reliable online sources to ensure accuracy. This process helped the researcher organise the data for further analysis.

For data analysis, this study used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) proposed by Fairclough (1995). The analysis followed Fairclough's three-dimensional model. First, textual analysis (description) examines linguistic features such as vocabulary, grammar, forms of address, and modality. At this level, the researcher applies Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory (1987, as cited in Rajik, 2025) to identify politeness strategies used by the main character. This step helped describe how language reflects identity traits such as kindness, confidence, and leadership. Second, discursive practice (interpretation) explores how the dialogues are produced and interpreted within the narrative context, including how language expresses or negotiates power relations. Third, social practice (explanation) analysed the broader social and cultural context, such as gender roles, hierarchy, and social values reflected in the series.

FINDINGS

After watching and analyzing Episodes 1–10 of *Sofia the First*, this section presents the research findings based on Sofia's spoken interactions in the animation. The analysis examines how her language choices help shape her identity as a princess, a friend, and a young member of the royal family. By observing her dialogues in different situations, such as conflict, cooperation, and emotional moments, this study identifies patterns that reflect leadership, kindness, and social awareness. Using Norman Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis framework, the findings explain not only how Sofia speaks, but also how her speech represents social and cultural values in the series.

Textual Analysis

At the text level, this study analyzed the linguistic features of Sofia's speech using Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Strategy framework. A total of approximately 354 utterances were collected from Episodes 1–10 of *Sofia The First*. Here, the data that have been analyzed based Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Strategy framework.

Table 1. Politeness Strategy in *Sofia The First*

No	Politeness Strategy	Total Data	Presentase
1	Bald On Record	291	82%
2	Positive Politeness	32	9%
3	Negative Politenes	22	7%
4	Off-Record	9	2%

The results show that Bald on Record is the most dominant strategy (82%), meaning that most of Sofia's speech is direct and clear without weakening the statement. This pattern often appears in conflict and urgent situations, where a quick response is required. Positive Politeness (9%) and Negative Politeness (7%) appear in relatively balanced amounts. Positive Politeness is used to show kindness and maintain good relationships, for example in expressions of gratitude. Negative Politeness appears in more sensitive situations, especially when Sofia expresses doubt or avoids direct conflict. Off-Record is the least used strategy (2%), indicating that Sofia rarely speaks indirectly and generally prefers clear and straightforward communication.

Bald on Record is the most dominant strategy used by Sofia across the ten episodes. This strategy is characterized by direct, clear, and unmitigated expressions, especially in urgent or emotionally intense situations. Here the example:

Data 1

Princess Sofia : **Fly, Minimus! Hee-yaw!**
Announcer : Prince Hugo takes the early lead with Prince James just behind him.
Princess Amber : Go, Hugo, Go!
Princess Sofia : **Catch him, Minimus!**

(17.25-17.36sec in episode 1)

In this situation, Sofia uses bald-on-record strategy through direct commands to her flying horse. The utterances “Fly, Minimus!” and “Catch him, Minimus!” are clear imperatives without any politeness markers. This shows urgency and high emotional involvement, as she is focused on winning the race. There is no need for mitigation because the context allows directness, especially when speaking to an animal and in a competitive setting. This reflects Sofia’s proactive and determined character.

Data 2

Prince James :[starts juggling again] Okay, now back to the show.
Princess Sofia : **James, what are you doing? Dad said no playing ball in the castle.**

(04.09-04.15sec in Episode 5)

In this dialogue, Sofia directly questions and corrects Prince James. The utterance “What are you doing?” is a straightforward question, followed by a firm reminder of a rule. This shows bald-on-record strategy because Sofia does not soften her words or use indirect language. The context is rule enforcement, where clarity is important. Her directness indicates responsibility and concern for following

Positive Politeness is used by Sofia to build and maintain social relationships. This strategy appears in expressions of gratitude, encouragement, and inclusion. Here the example:

Data 3

Princess Sofia : I have all this sorcery to learn in two days. What am I going to do?
Clover : You need to learn sorcery, why don't you ask a sorcerer?
Princess Sofia : Mr. Ceedric! Of course! **Thanks, Clover!**

(02.27-02.35sec in Episode 4)

In this example, Sofia uses positive politeness through the expression of gratitude. The utterance “Thanks, Clover!” shows appreciation and acknowledges Clover’s help. This strategy helps strengthen their friendship and creates a sense of closeness. In addition, her enthusiastic response (“Of course!”) reflects shared understanding and agreement, which are key features of positive politeness. This shows that Sofia values cooperation and maintains warm interpersonal relationships.

Data 4

Baileywick : Good morning, Princess Sofia.
Princess Sofia : **Good morning, Baileywick.** What's that?

(01.20-01.27 sec in Episode 9)

In this dialogue, Sofia uses positive politeness by returning the greeting and addressing Baileywick by name. The phrase “Good morning, Baileywick” shows friendliness and respect, which helps maintain social harmony. By responding politely and showing interest through the question “What’s that?”, Sofia creates a positive and engaging interaction. This reflects her polite and approachable personality, as she builds rapport even in simple daily conversations. At the discourse level, both examples illustrate that Positive Politeness in Sofia’s utterances is generally used in everyday, low-pressure interactions.

Negative Politeness appears in situations where Sofia needs to be careful, respectful, or avoid imposing on others.

Data 5

Amber : Oh, um, well, us? Oh, oh, well, you know, we're, um, uh...
Sofia : **Pardon me?**
Amber : Well, we're, we're having... It's it's kind of, um, well, it's different.

Sofia :Amber, ***your party's no fun without Ruby and Jade, is it?***

(21.22-21.36 sec in Episode 2)

In this example, Sofia uses negative politeness through indirect questioning. The phrase “*Pardon me?*” is a polite way to ask for clarification without interrupting rudely. In addition, the utterance “*your party's no fun without Ruby and Jade, is it?*” is expressed as a question rather than a direct statement. This softens the message and reduces possible offense. Instead of directly criticizing Amber, Sofia chooses a more careful way to express her opinion, showing sensitivity to Amber’s feelings and maintaining social harmony.

Data 6

Princess Sofia :***I was only trying to help everyone get along. The trolls are aren't like everyone thinks.***

Queen Miranda :*That's one of the things I love about you. You always want to see the good in everyone. We can talk more about it in the morning, but for now, you need to get some sleep. I love you. Good night.*

(15.45-16.01 secc in Episode 3)

In this dialogue, Sofia uses negative politeness by softening her statement with “*I was only trying to help.*” The word “only” functions as a minimizer, which reduces the force of her action and avoids sounding defensive or imposing. This shows that Sofia is aware of possible misunderstanding and tries to explain herself in a careful and respectful way. Her statement reflects consideration for others’ perspectives, which is an important feature of negative politeness.

Off-Record is the least frequently used strategy. It appears when Sofia communicates indirectly, allowing the listener to interpret the meaning. Here the example

Data 7

Princess Sofia :***Oh, I hope we're not late!***

Prince James :*We'd already be there if Amber didn't take so long to get ready.*

(00.58-01.02sec in Episode 1)

In this example, Sofia uses an off-record strategy through the utterance “*I hope we're not late.*” This expression is not a direct complaint or accusation, but it implies concern about their delay. Instead of blaming someone directly, Sofia leaves the meaning open for interpretation. This allows the hearer to understand the situation without feeling attacked. The indirectness helps reduce possible conflict and maintains politeness in a sensitive situation.

Data 8

Sofia :***I told Jade and Ruby to act more like the princesses. I was trying to help them fit in, but I just made them feel bad.***

Miranda : *It seems to me the only one who needs to act more like a princess is you*

(18.12-18.24 in episode 2)

In this dialogue, the off-record strategy is shown through Queen Miranda’s utterance “It seems to me the only one who needs to act more like a princess is you.” Although the message is directed at Sofia, it is expressed indirectly using the phrase “it seems to me.” This softens the criticism and allows Sofia to interpret the meaning herself. The indirect form avoids direct blame while still delivering an important lesson. This reflects how off-record strategy can be used to give advice or criticism in a more polite and less face-threatening way.

Discursive Practice

The discursive practice of Sofia the First shows how language is produced and interpreted within specific social and situational contexts. Based on the textual analysis, Bald-on-Record emerges as the most dominant strategy used by Princess Sofia across the ten episodes. This strategy is produced in moments that require quick action, clarity, and strong emotional expression.

Data 1

Princess Sofia : **Fly, Minimus! Hee-yaw!**
Announcer : Prince Hugo takes the early lead with Prince James just behind him.
Princess Amber : Go, Hugo, Go!
Princess Sofia : **Catch him, Minimus!**

(17.25-17.36sec in episode 1)

For example Sofia uses direct commands such as “Fly, Minimus!” and “Catch him, Minimus!” during a race. These utterances are produced in a competitive setting where urgency is important, and therefore they are distributed as clear and immediate instructions rather than softened expressions.

Data 2

Prince James :[starts juggling again] Okay, now back to the show.
Princess Sofia : **James, what are you doing? Dad said no playing ball in the castle.**

(04.09-04.15sec in Episode 5)

Similarly, in Episode 5 (04:09–04:15), Sofia directly questions Prince James by saying, “What are you doing? Dad said no playing ball in the castle.” This utterance is produced in a rule-based context, where clarity and authority are necessary to maintain order.

These direct utterances are easily understood by other characters and the audience, especially children, as they clearly convey intention without ambiguity. The use of Bald-on-Record allows Sofia to position herself as a decisive and responsible character who can take control of situations when needed. In addition, the repetition of this strategy across different contexts such as competition and rule enforcement shows a consistent pattern in how her character is constructed through discourse. This demonstrates that Sofia’s language use is not random, but shaped by the situational demands and social roles within the narrative. Therefore, the dominance of Bald-on-Record in the discursive practice reinforces her identity as a proactive, action-oriented, and authoritative main character in the series.

Positive Politeness in the discursive practice of Sofia the First is produced in friendly and low-pressure interactions where Princess Sofia aims to build closeness with others.

Data 3

Princess Sofia : I have all this sorcery to learn in two days. What am I going to do?
Clover : You need to learn sorcery, why don't you ask a sorcerer?
Princess Sofia : Mr. Ceedric! Of course! **Thanks, Clover!**

(02.27-02.35sec in Episode 4)

In Episode 4, Sofia says “Thanks, Clover!” after receiving advice. This utterance is produced as a response to Clover’s suggestion, showing that Sofia accepts and values his help. The discourse is collaborative because one participant gives a solution and the other responds with appreciation.

Data 4

Baileywick : Good morning, Princess Sofia.
Princess Sofia : **Good morning, Baileywick.** What's that?

(01.20-01.27 sec in Episode 9)

In Episode 9, Sofia says “Good morning, Baileywick. What’s that?” after Baileywick greets her. This utterance is produced as part of a routine social exchange, where greeting is followed by a polite response and a question to continue the interaction. From the distribution perspective, these utterances are presented in everyday and non-conflict situations, making them simple and repeatable forms of polite interaction within the narrative. From the consumption perspective, both the characters and the audience can easily understand these expressions as signals of friendliness and respect. The audience, especially children, can recognize these patterns as appropriate social behavior, such as saying “thank you” and responding to greetings politely.

Negative Politeness is produced in more sensitive situations where Sofia needs to be careful with others' feelings.

Data 5

Amber :Oh, um, well, us? Oh, oh, well, you know, we're, um, uh...
Sofia :**Pardon me?**
Amber : Well, we're, we're having... It's it's kind of, um, well, it's different.
Sofia :**Amber, your party's no fun without Ruby and Jade, is it?**

(21.22-21.36 sec in Episode 2)

In Episode 2 (21:22–21:36), the interaction with Amber shows hesitation and uncertainty before Sofia speaks. Amber's unclear explanation creates a context where Sofia must respond carefully. Sofia's utterances "Pardon me?" and "your party's no fun without Ruby and Jade, is it?" are shaped by this situation, as she avoids direct criticism. The discourse becomes a negotiation of meaning, where Sofia balances honesty and politeness. From the consumption side, these interactions teach the audience how to express disagreement or explanation politely. Thus, Negative Politeness in Sofia's discourse reflects her awareness of social norms and her effort to maintain respect and harmony.

Data 6

Princess Sofia :**Oh, I hope we're not late!**
Prince James :We'd already be there if Amber didn't take so long to get ready.

(00.58-01.02sec in Episode 1)

Off-Record strategy is produced in situations where meanings are implied rather than directly stated. In Episode 1, Sofia says, "I hope we're not late," which is followed by James's response blaming Amber. This shows that Sofia's indirect utterance allows another participant to interpret and extend the meaning. The discourse here is co-constructed, as the implied message becomes explicit through James's reply. From the audience's perspective, this type of discourse encourages interpretation and reflection. It teaches that messages can be understood without being directly stated. Therefore, Off-Record in the discursive practice highlights how Sofia participates in both producing and interpreting indirect meanings within social interaction.

These patterns show that Sofia's language use is shaped by different communicative purposes and social contexts. The production and interpretation of her utterances, as well as responses from other characters, create a dynamic discourse that supports her character development. Through these strategies, Sofia is constructed not only as a decisive character but also as polite, empathetic, and socially competent within the narrative.

Social Practice

At the level of social practice, the language used by Princess Sofia in Sofia the First reflects broader social values, norms, and ideologies, especially those related to children's education, moral behavior, and social roles. Sofia's use of different politeness strategies shows how she is constructed not only as a character in a story, but also as a model of appropriate behavior for young audiences. Her utterances to others represent how individuals should act in different social situations, such as giving commands, showing respect, expressing gratitude, and managing conflict.

Data 1

Princess Sofia : **Fly, Minimus! Hee-yaw!**
Announcer : Prince Hugo takes the early lead with Prince James just behind him.
Princess Amber : Go, Hugo, Go!
Princess Sofia : **Catch him, Minimus!**

(17.25-17.36sec in episode 1)

The dominance of Bald-on-Record strategy in Sofia's speech reflects a social expectation that a good leader should be decisive, clear, and responsible. In situations like the race "Fly, Minimus!" and "Catch

him, *Minimus!*”. At the social level, this suggests that children, especially those in leadership roles, are encouraged to speak clearly and take action when needed. However, this authority is not shown as controlling or negative, but as responsible and situational. This reflects an ideology that values assertiveness when it is used for good purposes, such as helping others or maintaining order.

Data 2

Princess Sofia	: I have all this sorcery to learn in two days. What am I going to do?
Clover	: You need to learn sorcery, why don't you ask a sorcerer?
Princess Sofia	: Mr. Ceedric! Of course! Thanks, Clover!

(02.27-02.35sec in Episode 4)

Data 3

Baileywick	: Good morning, Princess Sofia.
Princess Sofia	: Good morning, Baileywick. What's that?

(01.20-01.27 sec in Episode 9)

The use of Positive Politeness by Princess Sofia reflects not only kindness and friendliness, but also a broader social expectation about how individuals should maintain harmonious relationships in everyday life. Utterances such as “*Thanks, Clover!*” and “*Good morning, Baileywick*” are simple, but they carry important social meanings. These expressions show that respect and appreciation are not optional, but expected behaviors in social interaction. Through these repeated patterns, the discourse constructs politeness as a normal and necessary part of daily communication. This means that Sofia’s language is shaped by a social norm where being friendly and respectful is considered the correct and appropriate way to interact with others.

In Sofia the First, these polite expressions function as a form of social learning for the audience, especially children. The repetition of greetings, gratitude, and friendly responses creates a model of behavior that viewers can imitate in real life. This reflects an educational ideology in children’s media, where language is used to teach moral values such as empathy, cooperation, and respect. Sofia’s utterances to others position her as an ideal character who not only follows social norms but also actively maintains positive relationships. Therefore, Positive Politeness in Sofia’s discourse does not only build interpersonal closeness, but also reinforces cultural values about how a responsible and socially accepted individual should behave.

Data 4

Amber	: Oh, um, well, us? Oh, oh, well, you know, we're, um, uh...
Sofia	: Pardon me?
Amber	: Well, we're, we're having... It's it's kind of, um, well, it's different.
Sofia	: Amber, your party's no fun without Ruby and Jade, is it?

(21.22-21.36 sec in Episode 2)

Negative Politeness and Off-Record strategies used by Princess Sofia reflect more complex social values related not only to politeness, but also to power, sensitivity, and emotional control in interaction. When Sofia says “*Pardon me?*” and “*your party’s no fun without Ruby and Jade, is it?*”, she does not express her opinion in a direct and imposing way. Instead, she reduces the force of her words to protect the hearer’s feelings. This shows that in certain social contexts especially when speaking to others of equal or higher status like Princess Amber there is an expectation to be careful and respectful. At a deeper level, this reflects a social norm where maintaining others’ “face” is important, and where direct criticism may be seen as inappropriate or rude.

Data 5

Princess Sofia	: Oh, I hope we're not late!
Prince James	: We'd already be there if Amber didn't take so long to get ready.

(00.58-01.02sec in Episode 1)

Similarly, when Sofia says “*I hope we’re not late,*” she uses an Off-Record strategy that leaves the meaning open to interpretation. This indirect expression allows another character, such as Prince James, to take up and expand the meaning, as seen when he responds by blaming Amber. This shows that meaning in discourse is often co-constructed, not only produced by one speaker. At the social level, this reflects an ideology that values indirect communication as a way to avoid conflict and maintain harmony. It also teaches the audience that being socially competent includes knowing when not to speak directly. Therefore, these strategies position Sofia as a character who is socially aware and emotionally intelligent, able to adjust her language based on the situation. More importantly, they reinforce the idea that good communication is not only about being clear, but also about being considerate, strategic, and sensitive to others in different social contexts.

DISCUSSIONS

Based on the findings, discourse features constructed power and identity in *Sofia the First* by applying Fairclough’s (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis and Brown and Levinson’s (1987) Politeness Theory. The findings showed that Princess Sofia’s language played an important role in shaping her identity as a princess, a friend, and a moral leader. Through textual, discursive, and social dimensions, her speech reflected broader ideas about childhood, empathy, leadership, and authority

At the textual level, power appeared through Sofia’s frequent use of direct and assertive speech. Following Fairclough (1995), power in discourse could be seen in who controlled the topic, who gave instructions, and whose voice directed interaction. Sofia often used imperatives, evaluative statements, and guiding questions. These linguistic choices positioned her as the central decision-maker. By using politeness strategies, she softened her authority, yet she still maintained control of the conversation. This pattern showed that power was not always expressed through domination, but also operated through confident and organized speech. Furthermore, discourse is understood as part of discursive practice. Language functions within a social system (Bloomfield, 2024), and repeated patterns create what Fairclough calls the naturalization of power. In the series, Sofia’s authority is rarely challenged. Other characters usually accept her suggestions and follow her direction. This repetition makes her leadership appear normal and legitimate. Gee (2015) explains that Discourses shape identities and make certain roles desirable. In this case, Sofia is constructed as a modern and active princess. Although she challenges passive stereotypes, her authority remains within the structure of monarchy and hierarchy.

Power in this series can also be identified as benevolent authority. Across episodes, Sofia solves conflicts, gives instructions, and provides reassurance. Muhammad and Al-Bajjari (2025) explain that discourse can create solidarity while reinforcing authority. Similarly, Sofia’s caring tone builds emotional connection, but it also stabilizes her dominant role. From a Foucauldian perspective, power does not only repress but also produces subjects. As Munir and Baig (2025) argue, power shapes how individuals see themselves and others. In this narrative, other characters often depend on Sofia’s decisions, which constructs her as a necessary and legitimate leader.

At the level of production, discourse is shaped by institutional design. Animation, as explained by Cholodenko (2022), functions as a semiotic system that transmits ideology through narrative structure and character roles. Sofia is consistently placed at the center of the story. Dialogue sequencing and resolution patterns highlight her as the final decision-maker. This reflects what Fairclough (1995) calls “power behind discourse,” where institutions influence how authority is represented. Similar to Liando et al. (2022), who find that leadership is constructed through reassuring and directive language in political speech, Sofia’s dialogue reassures others while organizing action. However, in this children’s context, authority is softened through warmth and kindness.

Resistance in the narrative is limited and temporary. Bhoko (2026) states that power becomes visible when resistance appears. In this series, conflicts are quickly resolved, usually through Sofia’s intervention. This limited opposition reduces alternative models of leadership. According to Fairclough (1995), discourse can reproduce dominant social orders. In this case, leadership is centralized, and shared authority is rarely explored. Even when Sofia invites teamwork, she often concludes discussions and determines the final solution. Thus, cooperation appears inclusive, but authority remains structured around her voice.

At the level of social practice, the discourse reflects contemporary cultural expectations about gender and childhood. Sofia represents a confident and expressive female leader, which challenges traditional passive princess stereotypes. However, her authority is still framed within moral goodness and emotional sensitivity. Fairclough (1995) explains that ideology becomes strongest when it appears

as common sense. In this series, it becomes natural to associate leadership with clear speech, moral certainty, and centralized control. While the narrative promotes empowerment and children's agency, it also normalizes inherited royal status as a source of legitimacy. Therefore, the discourse both transforms and maintains social hierarchy.

This study is limited to Sofia the First, specifically Season 1, Episodes 1–10, and focuses only on the main character, Princess Sofia. The analysis is also restricted to discourse features related to power using Fairclough's CDA and Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory. Therefore, the findings may not fully represent other characters, seasons, or broader linguistic aspects such as multimodal elements. Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to expand the data by including more episodes, comparing multiple characters, or analyzing different children's animated series. Further studies may also apply other linguistic approaches, such as Systemic Functional Linguistics or multimodal analysis, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of identity construction.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings from Episodes 1–10 of *Sofia the First*, it can be concluded that Princess Sofia's identity is formed through a combination of direct and polite language strategies. Bald-on-Record is the most dominant strategy, which shows her as confident, brave, and responsible. At the same time, Positive and Negative Politeness reflect her empathy, emotional awareness, and ability to maintain good relationships. Through Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, it is clear that Sofia's speech represents broader social values in children's media, such as leadership, inclusivity, moral responsibility, and respectful communication.

For future research, it is suggested to analyze more episodes or compare Sofia's discourse with other characters or different animated series to gain wider insights into identity construction. Researchers may also apply other linguistic approaches, such as Systemic Functional Linguistics or Speech Act Theory, to understand how language, visuals, and narrative elements work together. These approaches can provide a deeper understanding of how children's media shapes social values and interpersonal behavior.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to thank all individuals who provided encouragement, technical assistance, and helpful discussions during the completion of this article.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

REFERENCES

- Abubakar H.R. (2021). *Pengantar Metodologi Penelitian*. SUKA-Press UIN Sunan Kalijaga
- AlAfnan, M. A. (2022). Politeness as a nonverbal communication Behavior: An investigation into driving habits in Asia. *Studies in Media and Communication*, 10(1), 112-123. <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v10i1.5455>
- Amorós-Negre, C., & Costa-Carreras, J. (2022). Presentation of special issue: variation and change in language norms in Languages. *Languages*, 7(2), 145. <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages7020145>
- Ato, R. A. (2025). Language and Power: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Political Speeches in English. *Journal of Asian Multicultural Research for Social Sciences Study*, 6(3), 67-82. <https://doi.org/10.47616/jamrsss.v6i3.651>
- Bloomfield, L. (2024). *Why A Linguistic Society*. *Language*, 1(1), 1-5 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/409008>.
- Cholodenko, A. (2022). The Animation of Cinema. *Semiotic Review*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.71743/s3p4x084>
- Daar, G. F., Beratha, N. L. S., Suastra, I. M., & Sukarini, N. W. (2023). The Off-Record Politeness Strategy and Cultural Values of the Belis Negotiation Speech Event: A Sociopragmatic Study. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 12(3), 626-636. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v12i3.48746>
- Djalilova, Z. O. (2023). A Discursive Turn in the Theory of Linguistic Politeness: To the Formation of the Theory of Linguistic Impoliteness. *International Journal of Literature and Languages*, 3(02), 15-23. DOI:10.37547/ijll/Volume03Issue02-05

- Fairclough, N., & York, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (No. 0582219809).
- Gee, J. (2015). *Social Linguistics and Literacies Ideology in Discourses* (5th edition, pp. 290-290).
- Liando, N. V., Ollii, S., & Andries, F. (2022). Critical Discourse Analysis in the "What a Wonderful World" Song Lyrics by Louis Armstrong. *JELTEC: Journal of English Language Teaching, Literature and Culture*, Volume 1, (2), 141-147. DOI:10.53682/jeltec.v1i2.6249
- Liando, N. V., Tatipang, D. P., Rorimpandey, R., & Karisi, Y. (2022). Easing the rules of health protocols: A critical discourse analysis of Indonesian president's speech on Covid-19 handling in 2022. *Englisia: Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities*, 10(1), 127-145. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22373/ej.v10i1.13755>
- Maržić, D. (2019). *The Linguistic Anatomy of a Villain: A Discourse of Villainy*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Rijeka. Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:186:521088>
- Martono, M., Dewantara, J. A., Efriani, E., & Prasetyo, W. H. (2022). The national identity on the border: Indonesian language awareness and attitudes through multi-ethnic community involvement. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 50(1), 111-125. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22505>
- Muhammad, T. F., & AL-Bajjari, I. F. H. (2025). Solidarity, Power and Ideology in Selected Iraqi Political Speeches: A Critical Discourse Analysis. *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, 10 (4), 3889-3898. <https://doi.org/10.64753/jcasc.v10i4.3681>
- Mustoip, S., Al Ghozali, M. I., As, U. S., & Sanhaji, S. Y. (2023). Implementation of Character Education through Children's Language Development in Elementary Schools. *IJECA (International Journal of Education and Curriculum Application)*, 6(2), 91-100. <https://doi.org/10.31764/ijeca.v6i2.14192>
- Nuraini. (2021). Universality of Brown and Levinson Politeness Theory in Collective Culture. Redefining Power in Concept Of Face FTIK (Faculty of Teacher Training and Education) IAIN Lhokseumawe. *EJI (English Journal of Indragiri): Studies in Education, Literature, and Linguistics / Articles*, 5 (01). <https://doi.org/10.32520/eji.v5i1.1313>
- Noor, A., & Wasi, A. B. (2025). Language, Ideology and Power: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Pakistani News Headlines on Electronic Media. *Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review*, 3(3), 1726-1741.
- Posumah, J. (2025). *Introduction to Linguistics*. Penerbit Tahta Media.
- Rajik, J. A. (2025). Politeness Strategies in Political Discourse: A Study through the Lens of Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory. *Journal of Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis*, 4(1), 26-33. <https://doi.org/10.32996/jpda>
- Sabir, M., Rauf, A., & Khalid, E. (2023). Norman Fairclough's Model as a Research Tool in the Critical Discourse Analysis of Poem "If You Want to Know Me". *Repertus: Journal of Linguistics, Language Planning and Policy*, Vol. 2, Issue 1. 1-12. <https://rjllp.muett.edu.pk/index.php/repertus/article/view/21>
- Sabudu, D., Husain, S. W., Palengkahu, N., & Yusuf, N. (2025). An Analysis of Friendship in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. *Research in English Linguistics, Literature, and Pedagogy (Really)*, 1(1), 13-20.
- Samola, N. F., Mamentu, A. C., & Kemur, V. C. (2023). An Analysis of English-Indonesian Code-Mixing Used by Marion Jola (pp. 1461-1470). *Atlantis Press*. https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-494069-35-0_176