

THE ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS OF GENDER ISSUES IN *BRIDGERTON* TV SERIES ON NETFLIX (2020 & 2022)

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ABSTRAK. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi jenis-jenis tindak tutur ilokusi, memaknai konteksnya melalui kerangka S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G, dan menganalisis performativitas gender dalam tuturan tokoh terkait isu marriage market pada serial *Bridgerton* musim 1 (2020) dan musim 2 (2022) di Netflix. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik dokumentasi, yaitu mengumpulkan data dari transkrip dialog dan subtitle resmi Netflix yang selanjutnya diverifikasi melalui penontonan ulang. Data dianalisis menggunakan teori tindak tutur ilokusi Searle (1979), kerangka etnografi komunikasi S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G oleh Dell Hymes (1972), dan teori performativitas gender Judith Butler (1990). Hasil penelitian menemukan 132 tuturan yang membahas isu marriage market, dengan tindak asertif sebagai jenis paling dominan (103 data), diikuti ekspresif (17), direktif (7), komisif (3), dan deklaratif (2). Analisis S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G menunjukkan bahwa latar, partisipan, dan norma sosial era Regency secara signifikan membentuk kekuatan ilokusi tiap tuturan, dengan tindak direktif didominasi tokoh laki-laki sebagai kekuasaan patriarkal, sementara tindak ekspresif didominasi tokoh perempuan sebagai bentuk resistansi. Dari perspektif Butler, performativitas normatif (69 data) masih lebih dominan dibandingkan performativitas subversif (63 data), meskipun tuturan subversif meningkat signifikan dari musim 1 (29 data) ke musim 2 (34 data). Temuan ini membuktikan bahwa tindak tutur bukan sekadar alat komunikasi transaksional, melainkan mekanisme performatif yang secara aktif mereproduksi sekaligus menantang norma gender patriarkal dalam institusi marriage market yang direpresentasikan dalam media populer.

Kata kunci: tindak tutur ilokusi; kerangka S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G; performativitas gender; marriage market; *Bridgerton*

THE ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS OF GENDER ISSUES IN *BRIDGERTON* TV SERIES ON NETFLIX (2020 & 2022)

ABSTRACT. This study aims to identify the types of illocutionary acts, to contextualize their meaning through S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G framework, and to examine gender performativity in characters' utterances addressing the marriage market issue in *Bridgerton* Season 1 (2020) and Season 2 (2022) on Netflix. Employing a qualitative descriptive method, this research used a documentation technique in which the data were drawn from dialogue transcripts and official Netflix subtitles, and verified by re-watching both seasons. The data were analyzed using Searle's (1979) theory of illocutionary acts, Dell Hymes' (1972) S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G model, and Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity. The findings reveal 132 utterances addressing the marriage market issue, with assertive acts as the most dominant type (103 data), followed by expressive (17), directive (7), commissive (3), and declarative acts (2). The S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G analysis shows that the setting, participants, and prevailing social norms of Regency-era London significantly shape the illocutionary force of each utterance, with directive acts predominantly used by male characters as an instrument of patriarchal authority, while expressive acts are predominantly used by female characters as a form of resistance. From Butler's perspective, normative performativity (69 data) remains more dominant than subversive performativity (63 data), although subversive utterances increase significantly from Season 1 (29 data) to Season 2 (34 data). These findings demonstrate that speech acts function not merely as transactional communicative tools, but as performative mechanisms that actively reproduce and simultaneously resist patriarchal gender norms within the marriage market institution as represented in popular media.

Keywords: illocutionary acts; S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G framework; gender performativity; marriage market; *Bridgerton*

INTRODUCTION

The marriage market refers to a social system in which marriage functions as a form of exchange shaped by status, wealth, gender expectations, and family interest, in which women are typically evaluated through beauty, purity, and reputation, while men are valued through economic stability and title (Beauvoir, 1949). Marriage becomes a gender

issue whenever the preferences and rules that govern this "market" are shaped by patriarchy, stereotype, and unequal power between men and women, a pattern that the United Nations Population Fund explicitly links to gender inequality in many societies. Language plays a central role in sustaining this system, since individuals do not merely exchange information about marriage but also perform social actions such as advising, persuading,

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judging, and regulating marital choices through their utterances (Searle, 1979).

Speech, as Austin (1962) argues in *How to Do Things with Words*, is never merely descriptive; every utterance simultaneously performs an action. Austin distinguishes three dimensions within a single act of speaking: the locutionary act, or the literal act of producing a meaningful sentence; the illocutionary act, the communicative force behind the utterance, such as promising, warning, commanding, or asserting; and the perlocutionary act, the effect that the utterance produces on the hearer. Illocutionary act theory, later systematized by Searle (1976), is the focus of the present study because it captures the actual social deed performed in speaking, rather than the mere structure of a sentence or its unpredictable effect on a listener. Searle refined Austin's broad and overlapping categories into five distinct types of illocutionary acts: assertive, which commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition; directives, which attempt to get the hearer to do something; commissive, which commit the speaker to a future course of action; expressive, which convey the speaker's psychological state; and declaratives, which bring about an immediate change in social reality simply by being uttered by someone with institutional authority. Within a discursive institution such as the marriage market, illocutionary acts are the precise mechanism through which patriarchal norms are issued as commands, defended as beliefs, resisted as protests, or instantly imposed as declarations of a woman's social worth.

This study also draws on Dell Hymes' (1972) S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G framework to analyze speech events in their social and cultural context. The acronym stands for eight interrelated components: Setting and Scene (the physical location and the psychological atmosphere of an interaction); Participants (the speaker, hearer, and their social relationship); Ends (the purposes and outcomes of the exchange); Act Sequence (the form and order of what is said); Key (the tone, manner, or spirit of the delivery); Instrumentalities (the channel and form of communication, whether spoken, written, or mediated); Norms (the social rules that govern who may say what to whom); and Genre (the type of communicative event, such as a decree, a confession, or an argument). Applying these eight components allows an utterance to be read not only for its illocutionary force but also for the contextual conditions that make that force socially meaningful,

thereby reducing the risk of misinterpreting a character's speech.

The third theoretical lens employed in this study is Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, first elaborated in *Gender Trouble*. Butler argues that gender is not an innate essence but an effect produced through the stylized, repeated performance of acts, gestures, and utterances sanctioned by social convention; a person does not simply have a gender but continually does gender through repetition. Because this repetition is never perfectly stable, Butler also theorizes the possibility of subversion, namely the moment when an individual fails, refuses, or deliberately deviates from the expected performance, thereby exposing the constructed rather than natural status of gender norms. Gender performativity theory connects closely with speech act theory because language is one of the principal means through which individuals perform, reproduce, or resist gender identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004); every speech act uttered by a character in a gendered context can be read as either a normative repetition to accept the traditional norms of the marriage market's script or a subversive reject within it.

The Netflix series *Bridgerton* is based on the novels of Julia Quinn, which include a variety of conflicts such as romance, social institutions, social class, gender dynamics, the marriage market, etc. Seasons 1 and 2 were chosen because they set up important topics such as arranged marriages, the debutante presentation and deep-seated patriarchal problems, and to make the linguistic expression of gender ideology relevant for a broader global audience. Indeed, Regency-era England itself saw similar patterns of politically and economically motivated marriage, most famously the marriage of Caroline of Brunswick and George IV, suggesting that the marriage market depicted in *Bridgerton* is representative of actual historical gender arrangements rather than a product of fiction (Fulford, 1967; Clark, 2004).

The theoretical basis for the present investigation has been provided by prior studies, which have also identified gaps to be filled through this study. Putri (2025) employed Searle's (1969) speech act theory and Hymes' (1974) S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G model to analyse Everything Everywhere All at Once and found that assertive acts are dominating but did not relate speech acts to gender norms. The functioning of speech acts as political instruments of persuasion in the public speech of a monarch was

explored by Khater, Altakhaineh, and Dahnous (2024), however, their data was extracted from a monologic speech and not a gendered dialogic setting. Azeharie, Sari, and Irena (2022) analysed *Bridgerton* via a feminist and semiotic lens, identifying patriarchal norms limiting women in the series, however they focused on visual and cultural representation rather than verbal representation. Branicki (2023) discovered processes of gender subversion in the film *Joy*, based on Butler's theory. However, the author used audio-visual semiotic methods, not language analysis.

Zahoor (2024) linked speech act theory with Butler's gender performativity in literary works of Woolf, Shakespeare, Atwood, and Morrison, establishing a close theoretical link between both frameworks, but did not apply this combination to popular media on television. The last analysis by Adriati et al. (2025) which analyzed types of expressive speech acts in a movie called *The Equalizer 3*. These gaps confirm that no previous study has combined Searle's theory of illocutionary acts, Hymes' S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G model and Butler's concept of gender performativity in an effort to investigate how language reproduces and resists gender norms in the specific discursive context of the marriage market. Meanwhile the present study fills this gap by investigating the case of *Bridgerton* by answering research questions; what types of illocutionary acts are used to express gender issues related to the marriage market in characters' utterances, how the illocutionary acts contextualize conflicts of gender surrounding the marriage market, and how the illocutionary acts of characters' utterances reflect Normative and Subversive performativity.

METHOD

This study uses qualitative descriptive methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) to find out the types of speech actions used to represent gender issues in the marriage market in *Bridgerton* Season 1 (2020) and Season 2 (2022). The qualitative approach was selected because it is concerned with the understanding of meaning, patterns, and processes in a social context through systematic analysis rather than numerical measurement (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) which is appropriate for the study focus on how gendered interpretation is constructed through language use.

This study aims at linguistic phenomena of illocutionary speech actions on the intersection of the marriage market as a gender issue in *Bridgerton* series (2020 & 2022). The main data are utterances in the form of words, phrases and sentences uttered by male and female characters discussing the marriage market, including issues of women as commodity and competitive asset, patriarchal authority and transactional power, marital dependency and the redefinition of female worth. The data were retrieved from the dialogue of *Bridgerton* Season 1 and Season 2 as streamed on Netflix with the addition of official Netflix subtitles and transcripts acquired from a dedicated film-transcript repository.

Data collection was done using a documentation technique (Bowen, 2009), with five procedural steps: (1) getting access to both seasons of the series on Netflix; (2) collecting the dialogue transcripts; (3) identifying utterances related to the marriage market issue in the transcripts; (4) re-watching the series to verify each transcript against the actual dialogue, ensuring accuracy and absence of transcription error (Miles et al., 2014); and (5) analysing the confirmed utterances systematically by the three analytical layers of the study, i.e., type of illocutionary act, its contextual meaning and its gender performance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An analysis of both seasons of *Bridgerton* found a total of 132 utterances that touched on the marriage market as a gender issue. Utterances were coded for Searle's (1976) five sorts of illocutionary acts, contextualised using Hymes' (1972) S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G model, and interpreted through Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity. These results are presented in the following sub-sections, in connection to the three research topics of the study.

Types and Distribution of Illocutionary Acts

Table 1 shows that the data are dominated by assertive acts (104 out of 132 utterances), expressive acts (17), directive acts (7), commissive acts (2) and declarative acts (2). An analysis of the two seasons identified 132 utterances related to the marriage market as a gender issue, comprising 69 utterances from Season 1 and 63 from Season 2. Season 1 demonstrated a more varied distribution, with 47 assertive, 13 expressive, 6 directive, 2 commissive, and 1 declarative act. In contrast, Season 2 was

strongly dominated by assertive acts, with 57 of 63 utterances classified as assertive, while expressive, directive, and commissive acts occurred less frequently. These findings indicate that the two seasons differed not primarily in the amount of data identified, but in how the characters employed illocutionary acts to address gender issues within the marriage market. This distribution reveals that male and female characters predominantly employ language to express opinions and to convey social realities related to the marriage market, either to normalize or to dispute its fundamental assumptions.

Table 1. Distribution of Illocutionary Acts by Season

Season	Assertive	Directive	Expressive	Commissive	Declarative	Total
Season 1 (2020)	47	6	13	2	1	69
Season 2 (2022)	57	1	4	0	1	63
Total	104	7	17	2	2	132

Source: Character utterances in *Bridgerton* Season 1 (2020) and Season 2 (2022), Netflix.

1. Assertive Acts

Table 2. Data Analysis of Assertive Acts

Data	Utterance	
Datum 1 S1 EP1 (00:04:15 - 00:04:29)	“Today is a most important day, and for some a terrifying one, for today is the day London's marriage-minded misses are presented to Her Majesty the Queen.”	
Models	Details	Contextual Meaning
S-Setting and scene	Situation	Morning at the Queen's Palace in London. The situation is tense, due to a presentation in front of the Queen.
P-Participant	Speaker	Lady Whistledown

E-Ends	Purpose	To introduce the old tradition of the marriage market.
A-Act	Content	Showing the most important day in London's history, namely the introduction of women who want to marry.
K-Key	Tone	The tone is formal, and a little dramatic.
I-Instrument		In Lady Whistledown paper through Verbal voice-over narration.
N-Norm		The norm is that presentation to the Queen before marriage is an important social ritual.
G-Genre		Narrative commentary (gossip)

Source: Character utterance Analysis in *Bridgerton* Season 1 (2020), Netflix.

The first episode of “*Bridgerton*” opens with Lady Whistledown describing the London marriage market as “a most important day.” Which stresses the pressure on young women to conform to the strict norms of the aristocracy. Lady Whistledown’s labelling of her words as Assertive Acts exposes gender issues, showing the psychological pressures women endure to survive in a high-stakes atmosphere where their future relies on upholding a social norm. The use of “terrifying” indicates the clash between uniqueness and social demands, making women’s social debuts stressful, not festive. To assert means to say something clearly and convincingly, but not in a way that belittles or intimidates others. These behaviours are used by speakers to communicate their point of view, which is deemed to be the truth (Searle, 1979). Here the speaker is able to quietly convince the listener to accept the assertion as fact.

2. Directive Acts

Table 3. Data Analysis of Directive Acts

Data	Utterance	
Datum 36 S1 EP3 (00:04:14 - 00:04:16)	“You shall wed, and you shall do it as soon as possible.”	
Models	Details	Contextual Meaning
S-Setting and scene	Situation	Morning at Marina Thompson’s bedroom. The situation is stressful due to Marina’s pregnancy.
P-Participant	Speaker Addressee	Lady Featherington Marina Thompson
E-Ends	Purpose	To force Marina to marry as soon as possible to avoid scandal.
A-Act	Content	Lady Featherington gave direct and firm instruction that Marina should find a husband and the marriage must take place immediately.
K-Key	Tone	Authoritative and pushy tone.
I-Instrument		Verbally in face-to-face conversation.
N-Norm		Women who got pregnant outside of marriage were seen as ruining the family's prestige in Regency society. Marriage was therefore viewed as an alternative. Women were positioned to deal with these societal consequences due to social standards.
G-Genre		Direct command

Source: Character utterance Analysis in Bridgerton Season 1 (2020), Netflix.

Lady Featherington’s utterance is a good example of the Directive speech act type, because she uses compulsion to order Marina to marry. Searle (1979) describes this speech act as one when the speaker intends to command, question or instruct. Lady Featherington’s remark is emblematic of her position of authority; the way she speaks and the strained expression on her face suggest that she feels she has the right to control Marina’s choice of husband, a perspective informed by Regency Era convention that stigmatises pregnant women and frames marriage as the essential cure. This environment mirrors the gender issues that underlie the marriage market and the elimination of female autonomy. The repetition of “shall” in a legalistic form emphasises the structural tension in which women and younger dependents are cast in transactional roles, serving primarily the social and financial stability of the family. Lady Featherington is the Lady of the house; thus, her instructions and decisions are important and must be done right away to save the family’s reputation. Although his judgement acts not as a command but as an exercise of patriarchal control.

3. Expressive Acts

Table 4. Data Analysis of Expressive Acts

Data	Utterance	
Datum 15 S1 EP2 (00:32:27 - 00:32:35)	“You have no idea what it is to be a woman... what it might feel like to have one's entire life reduced to a single moment. This is all I have been raised for. This... is all I am. I have no other value. ”	
Models	Details	Contextual Meaning
S-Setting and scene	Situation	One morning, while Anthony and Daphne were riding their horses in a London Park during the social season.
P-Participant	Speaker	Daphne Bridgerton Anthony Bridgerton

E-Ends	Purpose	Expressing deep hurt, frustration, and despair stemming from systemic oppression, while simultaneously opening the listener's eyes to the reality of gender inequality.
A-Act	Content	It begins with an empathetic confrontation "You have no idea...", followed by a description of self-reduction "reduced to a single moment", and ends with a tragic confession of a lack of self-worth outside of marriage "This... is all I am. I have no other value."
K-Key	Tone	Deeply emotional, melancholic, despairing, wounded, and filled with profound anguish.
I-Instrument		Face-to-face dialogue.
N-Norm		This phrase is considered as a sincere scream against institutional injustice. For a male audience, it's a critique for their blindness to their own gender privilege.
G-Genre		Emotional lament / Monologue of despair

Source: Character utterance Analysis in Bridgerton Season 1 (2020), Netflix.

In one particularly heart-breaking message to her brother, Daphne Bridgerton expresses her deep existential terror and institutional subjugation: "You have no idea what it is to be a woman... what it might feel like to have one's entire life reduced to a single moment." This statement reflects her internalisation of the trauma of institutionalised misogyny. In this

close confrontation she stresses the toll of female commodification in the marriage market, where women are brought up not as autonomous persons but as transient objects without fundamental value. The statement is an Expressive Act and it reflects the intense patriarchal struggles and the destructive psychological consequences of these gender relations. This expressive speech act shows the emotional dimension of several characters in expressing their feelings while facing the marriage market system, such as feelings of pride in inherited family traditions, or representing moments of disappointment, or emotional confrontation with the marriage market system.

4. Commissive Acts

Table 5. Data Analysis of Commissive Acts

Data		Utterance
Datum 22 S1 EP2 (00:11:25 - 00:11:28)		"I will not marry Nigel Berbrooke."
Models	Details	Contextual Meaning
S-Setting and scene	Situation	It's morning at Aubrey Hall, the Bridgerton residence. The atmosphere is tense, as Daphne is being forced to marry someone she doesn't want.
P-Participant	Speaker Addressee	Daphne Bridgerton Anthony Bridgerton
E-Ends	Goal	To reject a predetermined match.
A-Act	Content	Daphne firmly refuses when Anthony tries to get her to marry Nigel Berbrooke for the sake of the family's reputation.
K-Key	Tone	Firm and full of resistance.

I-Instrument		Verbally, face to face
N-Norm		Daphne rejects the prevailing social norms, where women are obliged to accept a man's proposal.
G-Genre		Arguing with Anthony Bridgerton

Source: Character utterance Analysis in Bridgerton Season 1 (2020), Netflix.

As a commissive speech act based on Searle's (1979) theory, Daphne's remark demonstrates her commitment to a future course of action in the face of familial pressure. Her older sister recommends her marry a man she doesn't want, and Daphne refuses in the middle of a family argument. The use of the word "will not" highlights her refusal, revealing her agency and questioning social norms that force women to accept any kinds of marriage proposals. This illocutionary act, points out the gender difficulties related to arranged marriage and indicates a break from the patriarchal traditions. Daphne's claim of autonomy transforms her from an object to an agency, as she refuses the objectification of her body by her family and advocates for independence in her body and her marriage. What is more, the statement can function as a commitment to either resist or reinforce gender norms, subject to the circumstances in which it is spoken.

5. Declarative Acts

Table 6. Data Analysis of Declarative Acts

Data	Utterance	
Datum 92 S2 EP1 (01:00:46 - 01:00:51)	"Allow it to now be my honor to present to you the season's diamond." "Miss Edwina Sharma."	
Models	Details	Contextual Meaning
S-Setting and scene	Situation	Evening in the ballroom of the royal palace in London.

P-Participant	Speaker Addressee	Queen Charlotte London aristocrats
E-Ends	Goal	To announce the best debutant of the season with the title of 'Diamond.'
A-Act	Content	Queen Charlotte held a ball attended by the royals to announce the Diamond of the season.
K-Key	Tone	Formal and ceremonial tone
I-Instrument		Verbally and formally in public
N-Norm	Interaction	The Queen has full authority in determining the diamond of the season.
G-Genre		Ritual announcement

Source: Character utterance Analysis in Bridgerton Season 2 (2020), Netflix.

This speech of the Queen of London is an example of the Declaration speech act which can change a person's social status. The speech, made at a royal dance intended to find the "diamond of the season," gave Edwina Sharma a formal promotion to a position of prominence as the most desirable woman sought by bachelors. The ceremonial tone is a kind of social legitimisation, helping Edwina to change her status. This event also highlights greater gender issues in the marriage market, including the institutional objectification of women. The metaphor of a "diamond" is used to show how patriarchal systems reduce a woman's identity to a mere economic and social token, therefore robbing her of her individuality as "Miss Edwina Sharma." In this study, a Queen has greater power to determine a woman's worth and value just by her proclamation around society that makes "The Diamond" is more valuable, and is the most attractive and marriage-worthy woman, apart from other ladies in town.

Applying Hymes' (1972) eight components reveals that the illocutionary force of marriage-

market utterances in *Bridgerton* is never arbitrary but is systematically shaped by context. The Setting and Scene component consistently situates these conversations within formal, socially charged spaces, palace ballrooms, family drawing rooms, and evening balls, that historically encode power and amplify the weight of each utterance; Queen Charlotte's declarative act, for instance, derives its transformative force partly from the ceremonial setting of the royal ball itself. The Participants component shows that a speaker's social position directly shapes which speech act is available: Anthony *Bridgerton* speaks as the authoritative head of household, while Daphne, positioned as a dependent sister, is largely restricted to assertive or expressive acts rather than directive ones. In contrast, the conflicts of resistance occurred when female characters such as Daphne and Eloise used expressive acts and commissive of rejection to object to their limited life options and refuse one-sided arranged marriages. Thus, these patterns of verbal engagement provide the backdrop for the tangible clash between the societal push to maintain the institution of the "marriage market" and the subversive endeavours of women seeking control over their own futures.

The Ends component accounts for the question of why certain speech act types are chosen at certain times: Anthony's goal of arranging a desirable marriage drives directive acts, while Daphne's goal of establishing her own position leads her to assertive and expressive acts, as these are the only communicative tools available in the constraints of her social standing. The work Sequence component demonstrates a reoccurring pattern whereby assertive acts, particularly the narrative of Lady Whistledown, work as an initial move that sets the discursive conditions of a scene before directive, expressive, or commissive acts follow in response. The Key component demonstrates that forceful activities that promote the marriage market as normal and inevitable are always accompanied by formal and authoritative tones, directions by commanding tones and expressive by emotionally charged tones.

Gender Performativity: Normative and Subversive Patterns

Read through Butler's (1990) framework, the 132 utterances divide into 69 instances of normative performativity, utterances that reproduce the

marriage market's traditional script, and 63 instances of subversive performativity, utterances that resist or question it, as summarized in Table 7.

Table 7. Reflection of Normative and Subversive Performativity by Speech Act Type

Types of Speech Acts	S1 Normative	S1 Subversive	S2 Normative	S2 Subversive
Assertive	28	19	26	30
Directive	6	0	1	0
Expressive	3	10	0	4
Commissive	2	0	1	0
Declarative	1	0	1	0
Total	40	29	29	34

Source: Character utterances in *Bridgerton* Season 1 (2020) and Season 2 (2022), Netflix.

1. Gender as Normative Performativity

This norm occurs when someone carries out traditional norms expected by society, when a character in the *Bridgerton* series (2020 & 2022) carries out actions in accordance with traditional norms that have been repeatedly believed by the surrounding community, because this is in accordance with Butler's theory (1990), which believes that gender is a form of action, behavior, and norms of society that are repeated.

The Reflection of an Institutional Commodification and Object Valuation

Datum 70

00:02: 55 - 00:03:04

S2 EP1

Prudence Featherington : *"Mr. Finch may very well still change his mind. Particularly when he notices there is still no dowry."*

Viewed through a Butlerian lens, Prudence's words constitute a form of normative performance, reproducing structural anxieties regarding women's "bargaining power." The dowry functions as an instrument of institutional commodification. A man's interest or commitment, specifically that of Mr. Finch that is constructed not upon emotional bonds, but rather as a rational financial transaction.

Should this financial dowry be removed, the woman's value as an object instantly plummets in the eyes of the male consumer.

The Reflection of Enforcement of Marital Contracts and Familial Alliances

Datum 109

00:39: 37 - 00:39: 46

S2 EP5

Lady Sheffield : *"The trust fund we have set up for her. The condition of which clearly states that she must marry a man of good English breeding to inherit."*

In Butlerian terms, the clause embedded in this trust fund contract represents a concrete manifestation of "enforced discourse." To be recognized as an obedient feminine subject entitled to her economic rights for the inheritance, Edwina Sharma is compelled to engage in a performative act that conforms to the racial and class criteria of "good English breeding" established by the preceding generation. This legal contract curtails women's freedom of choice and reduces marriage to a mere prerequisite for accessing capital, serving the ultimate purpose of preserving the purity of the Sheffield family dynasty.

2. Gender as Subversive Performativity.

Several characters in *Bridgerton*, in both the first and second seasons, employ subversive approaches to resist traditions they deem detrimental to women, or to defend themselves and break free from them (Butler, 1990). These 63 utterances are spoken by different characters, each discussing resistance to the traditional marriage market traditions prevalent in the *Bridgerton* series' first and second seasons (2020 and 2022).

The Reflection of a Linguistic Rejection of Marital Dependency

Datum 88

01:05: 50 - 01:05: 57

S2 EP1

Lady Whistledown : *"Should a woman not be valued for so much more than her dancing skills or her comportment?"*

From the perspective of Butlerian performativity, the marriage market demands that women constantly engage in a normative performance mastering artificial talents such as

dancing and rigid etiquette as the primary capital to attract suitors. These skills are deliberately constructed as the yardstick for a woman's "value," determining her success in being "purchased" or married off. The phrase "valued for so much more" radically contests women's reliance on patriarchal standards. Whistledown employs her linguistic authority to assert that women possess far greater intrinsic worth such as intellect and authentic character beyond their function as objects of display subservient to their husbands.

The Reflection of Abdication of Compulsory Market Roles and Expectations

Datum 123

00:58: 01 - 00:58: 15

S2 EP 6

Edwina Sharma : *"I may not know exactly what true love feels like but I certainly know what it is not. It is not deception, or wandering eyes, or a role to be fulfilled."*

As the "Diamond of the Season," Edwina bears the weight of the highest market expectations: she is the lead actor required to carry out the grand marriage spectacle orchestrated by the Queen and the aristocracy. Yet, at the altar, Edwina radically halts this performance of compliance. According to Butler, when an actor refuses to continue their role such as a refusal to repeat the performance, the illusion of the structure collapses. Edwina refuses to diminish her humanity and emotions simply to meet the expectations of the social contract. This act of refusing to marry shatters the entire system of transaction and compliance that upholds the institution of the marriage market.

The data and analysis suggest a considerable association between these illocutionary acts and the gender dynamics of the "marriage market." Illocutionary acts are not simply bearers of literal meaning or information but rather performative devices that actively produce, maintain, and contest the gender norms that regulate the marriage market. Each illocutionary act, which are assertive, directive, expressive, commissive and declarative, exhibits different patterns and functions in representing power relations between male and female characters, either as reinforcing norms (normative performativity) or as resistance to norms (subversive performativity). The following discussion aims to go deeper into the function of the five types of speech acts in the formation of gender roles within the

marriage market in the *Bridgerton* series (2020 & 2022).

Assertive Acts as the Primary Mechanism of Gender Norm Naturalization.

According to Searle (1976), assertive speech acts are useful for expressing the truth of propositions that must align with the speaker's beliefs. Functionally, assertive speech acts work by stating something as a fact, making it a primary tool for normalizing gender construction. The repeated assertive patterns of various characters such as Lady Whistledown, Anthony Bridgerton, and Lady Featherington reflect Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity as regulatory norms. These norms are continually repeated, and through this performative repetition, gender construction appears natural and natural to occur in society.

Directive Acts as a Patriarchal Power

The result shows that directive power in *Bridgerton* does not belong only to men but to anyone who holds a position of authority within the marriage market's structure. Lady Featherington becomes very authoritative because she is frustrated and depressed in facing Marina's condition of being pregnant without a husband, and according to her, marriage is the only way to resolve the scandal. Thus, although patriarchal power is at play, the directive actions in this study are not exclusively tied to male figures possessing high authority. Women, too, wield the power to act as authority figures, provided they hold a title or position superior to the person being instructed. Figures such as Lady Featherington and Lady Danbury, for instance, possess the authority of a "Lady of the House," allowing them to issue orders or direct their children or younger individuals to perform specific tasks.

Expressive Speech Acts as a Resistance Expressed by Female Characters

Expressive speech acts are the second most common type in the dataset and are almost exclusively performed by female characters. Searle (1979) defines expressives as speech acts that convey the speaker's emotional state or reaction. According to Butler (1990), subversion occurs when individuals fail or refuse to repeat normative gender performances. In this dataset, expressives are consistently used by women to express frustration,

pain, questioning, and protest against the marriage market issue, making them the main form of resistance in the data. Expressive speech acts not only function to express positive emotions, but also include the acts of complaining (complaining) and protesting (protesting) in response to unsatisfactory situations (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985).

Commissive Speech Acts as a Commitment Within the Same System

The findings are two types of commissive-normative acts in the first season, and none in the second. This understanding accounts for both utterances in the data, which represent two fundamentally opposite positions toward the marriage market: one that reproduces its demands, and one that resists them. The one is coming from Simon who is actively performing the ideal aristocratic husband role. This reinforces the normative rules of the marriage market, where a woman's well-being and legal custody transition under the active stewardship and responsibility of her husband. On the other hand, Daphne's statement shows that she reflects a gender performance demonstrating that women possess agency, autonomy over themselves, and the courage to defy the regulatory authority of the marriage market in order to uphold their self-worth.

Declarative Speech Acts as a Defining a Woman's Entire Social Worth

This is strongly related to Searle's (1979) and Butler's (1990) speech act theory, which states that declarative sentences uttered by someone with authority can change social reality through the act of speaking. This occurs because, each season, the Queen announces her "Diamond of the Season", identifying the debutante who most captures her attention by possessing both striking beauty and a reputable family background. As this "Diamond" tradition is an annual fixture, the selection process serves as a mandatory yearly assessment of a woman's worth, intended to ensure she attracts numerous suitors from across London. Through Butler's (1990) framework, it is not just what the Queen says, but who holds the power to say it. Daphne cannot declare her own worth. Her family cannot declare it. Only the institution can. Their worth, their status, and their social existence are defined for them by a discursive system that speaks

before they do, and speaks louder than they ever can. This is done repeatedly, forming a dynamic gender expectation, where a woman's value can only be determined by a queen who has higher authority.

Taken together, these findings indicate that while normative performativity remains numerically dominant across both seasons, the marked increase in subversive utterances from Season 1 to Season 2 signals a discursive shift toward resistance. This supports the broader claim advanced by Zahoor (2024) that speech acts function as performative mechanisms that simultaneously reinforce and contest gender roles in literary and media texts, confirming that the marriage market in *Bridgerton* operates not simply as a narrative backdrop but as a discursive institution sustained, and increasingly challenged, through the stylized repetition of speech.

CONCLUSION

This study examined 132 utterances addressing the marriage market as a gender issue across *Bridgerton* Season 1 (2020) and Season 2 (2022). Three conclusions correspond to the study's three research questions. First, characters employ all five of Searle's (1976) illocutionary act types, with assertive acts overwhelmingly dominant (103 of 132 data), indicating that the marriage market is sustained less through directive command than through repeated statements of belief and social fact, particularly via Lady Whistledown's narration. Second, applying Hymes' (1972) S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G framework reveals that setting, participants, and prevailing social norms systematically determine which speech act types are available to which characters, producing an asymmetrical division in which directive and declarative acts function as instruments of institutional and patriarchal power, largely inaccessible to women outside positions of exceptional authority. Third, viewed through Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, normative utterances (69 data) still outnumber subversive ones (63 data), yet subversive performativity rises markedly from Season 1 (29 data) to Season 2 (34 data), carried chiefly through expressive acts of protest, indicating a growing discursive resistance to the marriage market's traditional script.

This study is limited to the verbal dialogue of Seasons 1 and 2 and does not address multimodal elements such as costume, gesture, or cinematography, nor does it examine intersectional

factors such as race, class, or age within the same dataset; transcript-based data collection may also carry a marginal risk of transcription error despite cross-checking against the original broadcast. Future research is therefore encouraged to extend this analytical framework to Season 3 and Season 4, to incorporate multimodal or intersectional analysis.

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