

# Queen Charlotte's Use of Directive Speech Acts in Netflix's Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story (2023)

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## INFO ARTICLE

### Article History:

Received: August 19, 2025

Revised: October 27, 2025

Approved: December 10, 2025

Available Online: January 1, 2026

### Keywords:

Directive Speech Acts

Power

Black Women Leaders

Queen Charlotte

## ABSTRACT

This study explores how Queen Charlotte's utterances in directive speech acts reflect empowerment as a Black woman leader through Netflix's *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story* (2023). This research used a qualitative method. The source of data in this research consists of six episodes, each featuring a transcript from the movie series. The examination of Queen Charlotte's utterances showed a total of 61 directive speech acts classified by Kreidler (1998): Commands occurred 48 times (78.6%), Requests 11 times (18%), and Suggestions 2 times (3.2%). Using Simpson and Mayr's (2019) categorization of "power and talk," 46 of the 61 directive speech acts were found with power characteristics: Topic Control (71.7%), Enforcing Explicitness (17.3%), and Interruption (10.8%). These findings demonstrate that directive speech acts may appear as a form of power that reflects identity and empowerment, especially in the speech of Black women leaders. Queen Charlotte's speaking patterns effectively convey her power, capability, and resistance to being made invisible.

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## 1. Introduction

In terms of speech acts, Queen Charlotte, as the main character in *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story* (2023), had an interesting point to discuss. Specifically, in how Queen Charlotte's directive speech acts may seem to indicate empowerment. In this regard, Austin (1975) introduced speech acts as an understanding of how utterances functioned beyond mere words. According to Fairclough (1989), communication could assert authority because the way people spoke often reflected their position in society and their ability to influence others. An authority where the speaker aimed to influence the listener's behavior was called directive speech acts (Searle, 1969). As Kreidler (1998) categorized, directives could be divided into commands, requests, and suggestions. This research focused on the speech acts of a queen that were packaged with power, gender, and social expectations.

The British royal family has always been closely tied to tradition and the concept of maintaining social order. It was often seen as a symbol of national pride and unity (Ramona, 2025). As Bogdanor (2019, p. 42) noted, the monarchy played a significant role in reinforcing the social and political norms of the time. During the Regency era, the British aristocracy was overwhelmingly white, and the thought of a Black woman being part of the royal family would have seemed impossible. *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story* (2023) was interesting because the show brought attention to the tension between preserving tradition and pushing for change. Furthermore, throughout her communications with other characters in the series, Queen

Charlotte demonstrated power through her use of directive speech acts that made it important to understand how language shaped empowerment.

Previous studies on directive speech acts in films highlighted how language reflected power and social factors. Aldila et al. (2020) revealed that the frequent use of commands by the Black King, T'Challa, in the Black Panther movie reflects his high authority as the king of Wakanda. In specific contexts, T'Challa also used requests to switch between authority and politeness. The second study by Lim (2021) aims to demonstrate how speech acts are connected with social and psychological factors. The study found that the characters in Game of Thrones frequently used assertive speech acts, followed by commissive, directive, expressive, and declarative speech acts. Characters like soldiers or those with less power or education often displayed more direct and intense intonation patterns, which signal their frustration or desire to assert control.

The third study is by Nuraida & Musyahda (2021). They explored the illocutionary acts in the conversations of the main character in the drama series *Extracurricular*. The study found that directive acts, such as commands and requests, were the most common by accounting for 48% of the character's speech, representative acts made up 42%, and the less frequent are commissive and expressive acts at 8% each. Fourth, a study was conducted by Soegardi & Musyahda (2022) found that the dominance of representative acts highlights each speaker's professional background and dedication to feminist causes. Fifth, a study by Jarudecharata & Worathumrongb (2023) investigated the three Asian characters in the superhero film *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings* in their use of directive speech acts. This study revealed that the characters prefer both direct and indirect speech act strategies, such as Nonsentential, Direct, and Non-Conventionally Indirect/Hint strategies. In urgent situations, the characters tend to use more direct strategies, while in casual moments they lean toward indirect ones.

The important gaps in previous studies of directive speech acts in movies could be identified. Firstly, the studies primarily focused on men in positions of power and did not explore how race and gender influenced the way directives were used. Secondly, some of the studies with female characters were primarily in contemporary settings. Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story presented a different perspective by portraying a Black queen in a historical royal position that was yet to be explored. By analyzing her use of directive speech, the study highlighted how the intersection of power influenced her speech. Therefore, this study highlighted how language reflected empowerment, especially in breaking racial stereotypes, which could lead to acceptance and adaptation by others. Moreover, this study could inform discussions around female empowerment and leadership that could equip future movie reviewers to analyze and critique films effectively.

Based on this background, the problems in this research could be formulated as follows: (1) What are the most frequently used directive speech act types by Queen Charlotte in Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story (2023)?, and (2) What do Queen Charlotte's directive speech acts reveal about her power? The purpose of this study is (1) to identify the most frequently used directive speech act types by Queen Charlotte, and (2) to examine how Queen Charlotte's directive speech acts reflect her use of power.

## **Literature Review**

### **1.1. Speech Acts (Kreidler, 1998)**

Kreidler (1998) built on Austin's theory in *Introducing English Semantics*, emphasizing that every utterance carries a purpose shaped by context. He argued that communication is not just about what is said, but why it is said, how it is delivered, and how it is received. Kreidler (pp. 183–194) classified speech acts into seven categories:

1. Assertives: Express the speaker's belief about the world or share information. Verbs used here include *declare*, *affirm*, *report*, *claim*, *explain*, and *predict*.

2. Performatives: Utterances that carry out an action simply by being said, such as *bet*, *declare*, *baptize*, *name*, and *nominate*.
3. Verdictives: The speaker makes a judgment or evaluation, using verbs such as *assess*, *rank*, or *condone*.
4. Expressives: The speaker's emotional response or acknowledgment of past actions, including *apologize*, *confess*, or *admit*.
5. Directives: An attempt by the speaker to get the hearer to do something. They include commands, requests, and suggestions.
6. Commissives: Commit the speaker to future action, such as *promise*, *pledge*, or *threaten*.
7. Phatics: These are used to maintain social relationships, including greetings, farewells, and polite expressions like "Thank you" or "Excuse me."

### 1.2. Directive Speech Acts

Directive speech acts are a type of speech act that is the speaker's attempt to get the listener to do some action or to refrain from doing an action. Kreidler (1998) refined this by stressing that authority and context are also important. These acts can be expressed in various ways:

1. Commands: These are forceful and often come from someone in a position of authority. The speaker expects compliance, and there may be consequences if the listener refuses. For example:
  - a. "You **must** appear in court next Monday at 10 a.m."
  - b. "Passengers are **required** to keep seat belts fastened when the sign is lit."
2. Requests: These are more polite and do not assume power over the listener. The hearer is free to accept or reject the request. Examples:
  - a. "I **appeal** to you to help as much as you can."
  - b. "The receptionist **asked** the people in the waiting room not to smoke there."
3. Suggestions: These are softer directives that offer advice or recommendations without pressure. The speaker presents a preferred action, but the final choice lies with the listener. Examples:
  - a. "I **advise** you to be prompt; I warn you not to be late."
  - b. "We **suggest** you (should) pay more attention to what you're doing."

### 1.3. Power and Talk (Simpson et al., 2018)

Simpson (2018) explored how language functions for maintaining power in society. They argued that language can be used to establish power relations, depending on who speaks and how they speak within the context of the communication. Language and power could intersect in several ways:

1. Interruptions: A more powerful speaker may interrupt to assert control, redirect the topic, or signal the end of someone else's turn. However, not all interruptions are dominant because some serve as support or engagement.
2. Enforcing Explicitness: Those in positions of power often require clear and direct answers. Subordinates, on the other hand, may avoid explicit responses as a form of resistance or self-protection.
3. Topic Control: The dominant person usually initiates, maintains, redirects, and ends a conversation towards their own goals. A less powerful person who attempts to avoid a question from a dominant speaker often results in the dominant speaker reasserting control over the topic to maintain the relevance and direction of the discussion.

## 2. Method

This research was in the form of qualitative research. According to Kiger and Varpio (2020), qualitative research is a process for understanding social or human issues by gathering detailed descriptions that convey the complexity of human experiences in a natural setting. The data in this research is in the form of content analysis. Therefore, the researcher believed that a qualitative method is more suitable for this study, as it examines the directive speech acts employed by Queen Charlotte in *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story* through detailed linguistic analysis.

As the writer intentionally selects specific scenes that are significant for analyzing Queen Charlotte's use of directive speech acts, purposive sampling is used to analyze scenes featuring Queen Charlotte's interactions with King George, Princess Augusta, Brimsley, Lady Danbury, and Adolphus. The selected scenes are chosen based on their relevance to the study's aims of showcasing a variety of interactions that reveal her directive speeches. The source of data in this research was six episodes with the total duration was six hours.

The methods of data collection used in this study included content analysis techniques. According to Cohen et al. (2017), content analysis is a systematic research method employed to examine texts and other communicative forms to identify patterns, themes, and meanings. Therefore, she did four steps to collect the data, which were outlined as follows: gathering audio recordings and transcripts of selected scenes involving Queen Charlotte; cleaning the irrelevant data of Queen Charlotte's interaction outside the five key characters; dividing Queen Charlotte's conversation with each of the five key characters; and carefully reviewing the transcripts and audio recordings of the selected scenes of Queen Charlotte's dialogue.

The data analysis technique used in this study was pragmatic analysis. According to Podesva and Sharma (2014), pragmatic research investigates the relationship between language and the contextual and social dimensions of communication. Thus, she believes that pragmatic analysis is the most suitable method for this study. The analysis began identifying and highlighting the directive speech acts used by Queen Charlotte using speech act theory (commands, requests, suggestions); dividing the highlighted directive speech acts by their context of the conversation; tabulating into a table and counting to show how many types of directive speech acts appear in the dialogues; she explained each of the directive speech acts used by Queen Charlotte; highlighted and counted the directive speech acts uttered by Queen Charlotte using 'power and talk' theory (interruptions, enforcing explicitness, and topic control); examined how her interactions with key characters may affect her communication strategies; interpreted the findings and drew a conclusion.

## 3. Result and Discussion

### 3.1. Types of Directive Speech Acts

The examination of Queen Charlotte's utterances showed a total of 61 directive speech acts classified by Kreidler (1998). Commands that are the most commonly utilized occurred 48 times (78,6%). Requests came in second with 11 occurrences (18%), and Suggestions came in last with only 2 occurrences (3,2%).

**Table 1. The Frequently Used Directive Speech Acts Types of Queen Charlotte Based on Kreidler (1998)**

Types of Directive Speech Acts	Episodes						Total Count	Frequency (%)
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI		
Commands	11	6	6	2	9	14	48	78,6%
Requests	2	2	2	0	2	3	11	18%

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Suggestions	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	3.2%
	Total						61	100%

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### Commands

(1)

[Charlotte] I do not know a single soul here except for you. I'm completely alone, and you prefer the sky to me. George!

[George] What?

[Charlotte] **Say something!**

[George] I do not want to fight with you.

[Charlotte] **I want to fight with you! Fight with me! Fight for me!**

[George] Go home, Charlotte.

(Episode 2) 00:15:52,117 → 00:16:36,245

Throughout the series, Charlotte consistently uses various linguistic forms to deliver commands that reflect her authoritative role as Queen, her personal emotions, and the dynamics of her relationships. Structurally, her commands often appear in imperative forms, such as in emotionally charged commands (1) “Fight for me!” reveal how she integrates her vulnerability into directives, which she blends personal need with authoritative force. Another imperative structure, such as “Turn the carriage around,” “Stop,” and “Leave us,” indicating direct expressions of power. She also employs modal verbs such as “shall” and “will” to reinforce obligation and assert her authority.

In some instances, her declarative statements function as commands, such as “I command it,” which imply obligation. Even minimal forms like “Softer” function as commands due to her status and the context. Charlotte’s commands are often reinforced with threats, repetition, or emphasis to compel compliance, especially when her authority is resisted. According to Kreidler’s theory, these utterances are felicitous when backed by social hierarchy or institutional roles, both of which Charlotte holds firmly.

### Requests

(2)

[Charlotte] **Please accept my apology.** If I had known that you were you...

[George] You would have what? Not told me that you were trying to escape?

(Episode 1) 00:31:55,038 → 00:32:01,586

In requests, Charlotte consistently employs polite forms of directive speech acts throughout her interactions with key characters. A defining feature of her speech is her frequent use of “please”, which softens the force of her directives. Instead of issuing direct commands, Charlotte often frames her directives as questions (e.g., “Can you please help me?”, “Would you step away?”, “Will you please no longer breathe so very loudly?”). These utterances align with Kreidler’s (1998) concept of requests as directives that allow the listener choice, thereby preserving mutual respect and minimizing imposition.

Her speech also reveals emotional nuance. For example, in moments of vulnerability or crisis, such as when she says “Please, George, come back” or “Can you come out for me?”. Even when she holds a higher status, as with Lady Danbury, Charlotte continues to use softened directives like “Please speak freely” or “Please thank your household,” showing that her position as Queen does not override her choice to maintain respectful or to be considerate with the person she is talking to.

### Suggestions

(3)

[Charlotte] You know, if I grab there... Yes! **You could assist me by lifting me up.**

(Episode 1) 00:30:37,377 → 00:30:41,297



Charlotte's suggestions are structured with modal verbs or performative verbs that emphasize choice over obligation. In both examples, she avoids direct commands and instead frames her directives as optional yet preferable actions. In the third sample (3), she uses the modal "could" ("You could assist me by lifting me up"), which softens the directive and signals that the listener has agency. She also explicitly uses the performative verb "suggest" ("I suggest you shift your fear into faith..."), which clearly marks the utterance as a suggestion. These structures align with Kreidler's (1998) definition of suggestions, where the speaker proposes an opinion about what should be done without asserting authority or attaching consequences.

### 3.2. Directive Speech Acts Related to Power

The author used Simpson and Mayr's (2018) categorization of "power and talk" to further examine how these directive speech acts reflected power. 46 of the 61 directed speech actions were found with Power and Talk classification. According to the analysis, there were 33 occurrences of Topic Control (71,7%), 8 occurrences of Enforcing Explicitness (17,3%), and 5 occurrences of Interruption (10,8%). Thus, Queen Charlotte's most effective approach was Topic Control, whereas her least effective one was Interruption.

**Table 2. Directive Speech Acts Types of Queen Charlotte Related to Power Using Power and Talk Classification by Simpson and Mayr (2018)**

Power and Talk Classification	Episodes						Total Count	Frequency (%)
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI		
Interruption	1	1	0	2	0	1	5	10,8%
Enforcing Explicitness	2	2	1	0	1	2	8	17,3%
Topic Control	8	5	5	0	9	6	33	71,7%
<b>Total</b>							46	100%

#### Interruption

(4)  
 [Brimsley] Your Majesty.  
 [Charlotte] **Brimsley, stop following me.**  
 [Brimsley] I... I beg, Your Ma...  
 [Charlotte] **Brimsley, stop!**  
 (Episode 4) 00:47:34,476 → 00:47:40,065

According to Simpson (2019) interruption is often linked to asserting power and silencing others, and it can also function as an expression of urgency and emotional involvement. Charlotte's interruptions (4) clearly serve to reassert her institutional power, especially when she silences Brimsley to shut him down completely. These interruptions exemplify dominance through hierarchical authority, as discussed by Zimmerman and West (, where the speaker overrides the subordinate's right to speak. In several instances, Charlotte interrupts not to dominate but to reclaim her agency or express emotional stakes, such as when she cuts George off during a moment of frustration. This aligns with Murray's (1987) concept of a cooperative interruption, where the speaker participates actively in the emotional flow of the conversation.

#### Enforcing Explicitness

(5)  
 [Charlotte] You could've told them to choose someone else. Someone stupid enough to want it.  
 [Duke Adolphus] They did not want someone stupid. They wanted you.

[Charlotte] Adolphus, **think!** Why me? He could have anyone! Anyone! And yet they came hunting all the way across the continent for me. There is a reason for that

[Duke Adolphus] You are special

(Episode 1) 00:06:51,577 → 00:07:07,593

Aligning with Simpson's (2019) concept of dominant speakers demanding clarity to reduce ambiguity in discourse, Charlotte's use of enforcing explicitness also extends to deeply personal and emotionally vulnerable moments. In scenes with George, for instance, Charlotte repeatedly demands emotional transparency ("Do you love me?"), refusing to accept his evasive or metaphorical language. This reflects Thomas's (1988) idea of discoursal disambiguation, where a speaker seeks clear answers to unresolved tensions. At other times, such as with Brimsley or Lady Danbury, Charlotte pushes subordinates to speak honestly, revealing her dissatisfaction with the lack of open communication in her court. Interestingly, she sometimes enforces explicitness to foster authentic connection, whether she is urging Brimsley to explain the King's illness or questioning Adolphus's dismissive comments about her pregnancy (5).

### **Topic Control**

(6)

[Charlotte] Brimsley, **I will get my own oranges from now on.**

[Brimsley] Your Majesty.

[Charlotte] It is ridiculous to make someone else pick my orange. **I shall pick my own oranges. There will be no discussion.**

(Episode 3) 00:14:44,967 → 00:14:55,392

Following Simpson and Mayr's (2018) framework, Charlotte introduces, maintains, shifts, and ends topics in ways that assert both her institutional and personal power. Charlotte controls the discourse by prioritizing action over discussion, often using imperatives or final declaratives (6) such as "There will be no discussion." She frequently redirects topics back to her goals (e.g., climbing the garden wall, managing court appearances). Her language includes definitive modal verbs like "can," "will," and "shall," which mark both determination and authority. Even in exchanges where others attempt to take control, such as Brimsley invoking protocol or Princess Augusta overriding her visual representation, Charlotte either maintains or regains conversational dominance.

### **3.3. Discussion**

Black women may embrace their empowerment by speaking up because silence symbolized submission, while a sharp-tongued language is a way to assert power communicatively (Hooks, as cited in Davis, 2018). Thus, it is possible to interpret the discovery that Queen Charlotte frequently used 78,6% Commands and 71,7% Topic Control as an empowerment. This interpretation is supported by previous studies that highlight the use of commands as power. Queen Charlotte's frequent use of commands aligns with findings by Aldila et al. (2020) and Nuraida and Musyahda (2021), who found that dominant figures like the king in *Black Panther* and the main character in *Extracurricular* used commands to assert leadership. Similarly, Charlotte's command use and topic control reflect her high status as monarch in shaping political and social discourse.

The rarity of suggestions shows intentional softness in her approach, especially in her shared racial identity with Lady Danbury. Charlotte's suggestion empowers Lady Danbury to speak freely. As Davis (2018) notes, Black women use "authentic communication" to reassert their presence in spaces that try to render them invisible.

In Regency England, women were expected to be passive. Pramono, Adi, and Rokhman (2024) argue that Black women in patriarchal societies face "psychological oppressions" from both gender and racial inequality. Charlotte's dominance is evident in her high use of Commands

(78.6%) and Requests (18%) to three male characters, who are Brimsley, George, and Duke Adolphus.

The overall results of the conversation with Brimsley (her servant), she never allows topic shifts and maintains strict control over him. With George (her husband), her use of topic control primarily stems from her effort to access his thoughts, which he resists due to the stigma around male vulnerability and mental illness. Meanwhile, with Duke Adolphus (her brother), though he is affectionate and supportive, he still holds patriarchal views that woman's accomplishment was merely by producing an heir. It demonstrates resistance to this invisibility, aligning with Koester's (2015) assertion that power relations are gendered.

Wrong (2017) defines "power over" as authority rooted in knowledge and strength, which Charlotte's directive embodies. Like the characters analyzed by Pramono et al. (2024), she navigates pain and pressure to emerge empowered, using language to reclaim identity as a self-aware Black woman in a patriarchal world.

This mirrors Meghan Markle's feminist presence in the modern monarchy, as discussed by Clancy and Yelin (2021). The monarchy remains tied to colonial and patriarchal control of women's bodies, and Charlotte's experience reflects that of present-day royal women who must assert power in systems that restrict them.

Charlotte's rare use of interruption suggests she does not need to cut others off to dominate. Instead, she sets the agenda and demands obedience. Likewise, her rare use of enforcing explicitness shows her preference for commanding over confronting.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Directive speech acts are a type of speech act that is the speaker's attempt to get the listener to do some action or to refrain from doing an action (Kreidler, 1998). Three types of directives, which are Commands, Requests, and Suggestions, were analyzed to determine how Queen Charlotte's directive speech reflects her empowerment. The most frequently used type by Queen Charlotte is Commands (78,6%). This study has demonstrated that directive speech acts may appear with Topic Control as the most used classification of Power and Talk by Simpson and Mayr (2019). This study demonstrated that the speech of a Black woman leader, such as Queen Charlotte, may reflect empowerment. By analyzing her dialogue in *Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story* through Kreidler's (1998) and Simpson & Mayr's (2018) frameworks, it became evident that Queen Charlotte's speaking patterns effectively convey her power, capability, and resistance to being made invisible.

Her dominance in using Commands (78,6%) and Topic Control (71,7%) illustrates how Black women can assert power in a place that was shaped by patriarchy and racial stereotypes. Most of her used directive speech acts were frequent among the three male characters.

This study reinforces Davis' (2018) concept of Black women "reintroducing their identities into environments that aim to make them invisible" and aligns with Pramono et al. (2024) observations about Black women's transformation through self-determination and resilience. The findings also resonate with contemporary critiques of the monarchy, such as those by Clancy and Yelin (2021), showing how women of color in royal spaces use speech to challenge colonial legacies.

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations are provided for future researchers to provide and optimize the study of speech acts. The writer suggests that the study of directive speech acts can be extended beyond fictional characters to real-life figures, such as in the courtroom, especially in cases where the defendant is a Black American and the prosecutor is a White American. The second one is in political campaigns featuring Black American candidates. The third area is the discourse surrounding sexual harassment cases



involving Black women. The future research could examine how women employ directive speech acts reflecting other than empowerment.

## 5. Acknowledgement

Bagian ini bisa ditulis jika ada pihak-pihak tertentu yang perlu diakui, seperti sponsor penelitian. Pengakuan harus ditulis secara singkat dan jelas. Selain itu, hindari pengakuan hiperbola.

This section can be written in case there are certain parties need to be acknowledged, such as research sponsors. The acknowledgement must be written in brief and clear. In addition, avoid the hyperbole acknowledgment.

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