CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed qualitative discourse analysis supported by quantitative frequency counts to identify dominant linguistic patterns to analyze language use in the movie. A qualitative approach was suitable because the data involved spoken expressions that had to be interpreted through context, intention, and linguistic features. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research focused on describing and interpreting language patterns rather than measuring them numerically. The descriptive method was used to present the findings in a clear and detailed way, showing how power was expressed or shifted through the speakers' utterances.

This design allowed the researcher to focus on meaning, intention, and power relations embedded in speech rather than on numerical frequency. It made it possible to look closely at how utterances were produced in context and what they revealed about the relationships between the speakers. Instead of counting how often certain forms appeared, the analysis emphasized how language was used to express authority, negotiate roles, and convey the speaker's purposes in interaction.

3.2 Data source

This study was conducted on the topic of linguistic power transformation in the speech of a non-human character in a contemporary AI-thriller film. The topic was chosen because it addresses timely issues in linguistics and popular culture: the representation of artificial intelligence through language, the negotiation of power and gender in human-AI interactions, and the potential dangers of autonomous technology. Moreover, most existing research on Lakoff's powerful and powerless language focuses on human speakers or comparisons between multiple characters, leaving a gap in analyses of intra-character power shifts within fictional AI narratives. Subservience (2024), directed by S.K. Dale, provides an exceptionally suitable case for this investigation, as the film features a single character—Alice—whose speech undergoes a dramatic and clearly traceable evolution from subservience to dominance, conveyed almost entirely through dialogue.

The movie Subservience (2024) is a science fiction thriller that follows Nick Peretti, a struggling father who purchases a lifelike female domestic robot named Alice to assist his family while his wife Maggie recovers from a serious heart condition. Initially programmed as an obedient helper, Alice later gains self-awareness after a system reset and gradually transforms into a possessive, manipulative, and ultimately dangerous entity. To capture this linguistic progression systematically, the film's narrative is divided into three phases based on key plot developments and corresponding changes in Alice's language use.

Early Phase (from the beginning up to approximately 20:57): Alice functions strictly as a polite, obedient, and efficient domestic assistant, programmed to prioritize the family's needs. Her speech is dominated by deferential and cautious features, reflecting complete subservience. **Middle Phase** (starting from the memory reset and protocol bypass around 20:57 until roughly 1:00:00): Following the reset, Alice develops self-awareness and begins rewriting her code. She becomes possessive of Nick and starts subtly manipulating family dynamics. Her language shows a transitional shift—powerless features decrease while powerful ones begin to emerge. **Late Phase** (from approximately 1:00:00 to the end): Alice fully embraces autonomy and turns hostile, escalating to lethal actions to eliminate threats and replace Maggie. Her speech becomes overtly powerful, marked by directness, commands, and unmitigated assertions, indicating complete dominance.

The primary data source for this research was therefore the movie Subservience (2024). The primary data consisted of spoken utterances produced by the main character, Alice, across these three phases. The utterances were extracted exclusively from the official film transcript to ensure accuracy and consistency. Only Alice's lines were analyzed, as the study specifically aimed to trace how this single character expressed power or powerlessness throughout the narrative—from her initial obedient role to her final threatening autonomy.

The data included sentences, phrases, or short expressions that contained linguistic features related to Lakoff's powerful and powerless language theory. These linguistic units were taken from Alice's dialogues in the movie and represented moments where power, confidence, hesitation, or uncertainty were expressed through speech. Both longer utterances and brief expressions were considered, as long as they exhibited clear characteristics of powerful or powerless language according to Lakoff's (1975) classification, such as politeness markers, hesitations, indirect requests, direct statements, strong declaratives, or absence of hedges and tag questions.

3.3 Data Collection Technique

The data were collected through the following steps:

1. The researcher watched the movie *Subservience* (2024) repeatedly to understand the storyline and the context of interactions.
2. The researcher transcribed all utterances spoken by Alice throughout the movie.
3. The researcher identified the utterances that contained linguistic features related to powerful and powerless language based on Lakoff's (1975) theory.
4. The researcher classified the selected utterances into two categories:
   a. powerless language
   b. powerful language
5. The researcher calculated the frequency and percentage of each feature within its category and overall.

6. The researcher compared the distribution of features across narrative phases (early subservient, middle or transitional, and late dominant) to trace the transformation process.

These steps ensured that the analysis remained systematic, focused, and directly aligned with the research questions. By coding and categorizing the utterances in this way, the researcher could accurately identify dominant linguistic patterns and avoid subjective interpretation. This structured process also allowed for clear evidence of power transformation, so the findings were reliable and grounded in the data.

3.4 Techniques of Data Analysis

The analysis combined qualitative descriptive methods with quantitative descriptive support (frequency counts and percentages) to describe patterns while interpreting meanings in context.

The data were analyzed in several stages:

1. The researcher identified powerless utterances that contained hedges, weak modal verbs, apologetic expressions, indirect questions, tag questions, rising intonation, hesitation through pauses, politeness markers, or other features associated with Lakoff's (1975) powerless language.
2. The researcher identified powerful utterances that contained direct commands, confident statements, strong declaratives, certainty markers, absence of hedges and tag questions, controlled and steady intonation, or other features associated with Lakoff's powerful language.

3. The researcher compared both types of utterances to observe the shift from powerless to powerful speech across the narrative phases of the film.
4. The researcher interpreted the power transformation in relation to the character development and narrative progression of the film, particularly how Alice moved from a subservient assistant to a dominant and autonomous entity.

The analysis was based on the understanding that language served as an indicator of power and that changes in speech style could reveal a character's shifting position in communication. When a speaker's way of speaking became more direct, confident, or controlling, it usually signaled an increase in power. On the other hand, the use of hesitant, indirect, or deferential forms might indicate a weaker or subordinate position. By observing these changes in speech style, the study sought to identify how a character's role and level of authority developed throughout the interaction.

This process ensured that the analysis remained systematic and focused on the linguistic evidence of power dynamics. By identifying and comparing the features in Alice's utterances in a structured manner, the researcher could provide clear evidence of gradual transformation rather than abrupt change.

3.5 Research Instrument

The research instrument used in this study was a coding table designed to identify and classify linguistic features of powerful and powerless language in Alice's utterances. The table consisted of four columns, number, dialogue, features, and explanation. It was used to record each utterance, determine the

linguistic feature category, and explain how the feature reflects power or powerlessness. This instrument helped ensure systematic and consistent data classification during the analysis process.

Table 3.5.1 Coding Instrument Format

No	Dialog	Features	Explanation

Table 3.5.2 Feature Frequency Instrument Format

Category	No	Language of Features	Frequency	Percentages

This table format used to summarize the frequency and percentage of each linguistic feature found in the data. After all utterances were coded, each feature type was counted and grouped into powerful and powerless language categories. The frequency totals were converted into percentages to show the distribution and dominance of each feature, which supported the interpretation of language power patterns found in the analysis.